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‘The Golden Mean’: Simplicity, Gender, and National Identity in Romantic-Period Women’s Writing

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Le doyen
Pierre Alain Mariaux

Abstract

Building on recent critical discussions of nationalism in literature of the Romantic period and in women's fiction more specifically, this thesis explores the intersections between simplicity, gender and the construction of British national identity in the works of Jane Austen, Frances Burney, and Maria Edgeworth. It argues that simplicity was central to women writers' conception of Britishness, a highly contested term. At a time when the borders of the British state were being redefined following the Act of Union of 1801, simplicity served as an important agent of national cohesion. How did female writers imagine Britishness, and did their representations of simplicity support or challenge contemporary views on national identity? If the abstract concept of the nation, often symbolized in figures such as Britannia or Hibernia, was understood as feminine, the discourse of nationalism insisted on the masculinity of Englishness, and patriotic virtue was articulated through 'manly' values such as courage, discipline, and strength.[1] Through the notion of simplicity, women writers challenged this masculine conception of virtue. The novel allowed women, denied direct political participation, to engage with public debates on the nation and become, in Anne Mellor's phrase, 'mothers of the nation'.[2] By insisting on the notion of character as the foundation of the nation, women writers of the Romantic period destabilised the distinction between the public and private spheres, arguing for the public significance of individual character. Through their examination of simplicity, moreover, Austen, Burney, and Edgeworth contributed to the reputation of the United Kingdom as a paragon of politeness.

[1] Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture, and Imperialism in England, 1715-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 187.
[2] Anne K. Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

Keywords: National identity; Britishness; Romanticism; women's writing; the novel; simplicity; Jane Austen; Frances Burney; Maria Edgeworth

Résumé

Se basant sur les récentes études critiques sur la question du nationalisme dans la littérature de la période romantique et de la fiction écrite par les femmes en particulier, la présente thèse explore les intersections entre la simplicité, le genre, et la construction de l'identité nationale britannique dans les romans de Jane Austen, Frances Burney et Maria Edgeworth. Elle argumente que la simplicité était fondamentale pour les femmes écrivains dans la conception de l'identité britannique, un terme controversé. A un moment où les frontières de l'état britannique étaient redessinées suite à l'Acte d'Union de 1801, la simplicité fut un important facteur de cohésion nationale. Comment les femmes écrivains concevaient-elles l'identité britannique, leurs représentations de la simplicité soutenaient-elles ou défiaient-elles les discours de leurs contemporains ? Si le concept abstrait de la nation, souvent symbolisé par les figures de Britannia ou Hibernia, était conçu comme féminin, le discours nationaliste insistait sur la masculinité de l'identité anglaise et la vertu patriotique se déclinait sous des valeurs masculines telles que le courage, la discipline et la force. Grâce à la notion de simplicité, les femmes écrivains défiaient cette conception masculine de la vertu. Le roman permettait aux femmes qui n'avaient pas de représentation politique directe de participer aux débats sur la nation et de devenir, comme le dit Anne Mellor, « les mères de la nation ». En insistant sur la notion d'individu comme étant le fondement de la nation, les femmes écrivains de la période romantique déstabilisaient la distinction entre les sphères publique et privée, arguant du rôle public de la personne elle-même. De plus, Austen, Burney et Edgeworth, à travers leur examen de la simplicité, contribuèrent à la réputation du Royaume-Uni comme modèle de politesse.

Mots clés : Identité nationale; identité britannique; romantisme; littérature féminine; le roman; simplicité; Jane Austen; Frances Burney; Maria Edgeworth

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Introduction

Simplicity, Gender, and National Identity

In 1813, while Britain was in the throes of the Napoleonic wars and the Bill for Catholic emancipation was first introduced in Ireland, the British press ardently reported on another national crisis: the Princess Caroline affair. The estrangement between the Prince and Princess of Wales was by then public knowledge. After accusations that Caroline had given birth to an illegitimate child in 1806, Parliament launched a 'Delicate Investigation'. In 1813, the Princess issued a plea to her husband for greater access to her daughter, Princess Charlotte, a letter that was reprinted in several newspapers. Its publication won the Princess huge public support. Jane Austen famously commented: 'I suppose all the World is sitting in Judgement upon the Princess of Wales's Letter. Poor Woman, I shall support her as long as I can, because she *is* a Woman, & because I hate her Husband—'.[1] In March, royal exchanges were conducted through the press, the Princess garnering public favour as weeks went by. When Caroline was finally acquitted, the mayor of London read in her presence a Congratulatory Address before a large crowd at Kensington Palace on the 12 April, expressing his 'indignation and abhorrence' of the 'foul and detestable conspiracy' against the Princess.[2] In her final address, Caroline thanked the 'loyal and high-spirited people for their support', hoped that it would strengthen her daughter's 'attachment to the constitution', and concluded by stating that the duty of an English monarch was to

[1] Jane Austen to Martha Lloyd, 16 February 1813, *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 208. Brian Southam suggests Austen read the letter in *The Hampshire Chronicle*. Brian Southam, *Jane Austen and the Navy*, 2nd ed. (London: Hambledon, 2005), p. 237.

[2] *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register* 23:16 (April 17, 1813), p. 580. For contemporary accounts of the events, see also, Spenser Perceval, *A Corrective Narrative of the Parliamentary Proceedings and Various Documents ... Forming a Necessary and Useful Appendix and Companion to 'The Book'*, in *The Genuine Book* (London: Edwards and Lindsell, 1813), pp. 311-72; John Adolphus, *A Royal Exile: Or, Memoirs of the Public and Private Life of her Majesty, Caroline, Queen Consort of Great Britain*, 2 vols., 18th ed. (London: Jones, 1821), I, pp. 444-531.

‘watch over the liberties of the People’. The *Times* noted the ‘affecting’ and ‘delicate’ manner in which she delivered her speech, adding that ‘She was dressed with great neatness and simplicity’.[3] Easily overlooked, this small observation is a telling detail, revealing how the newspaper constructed the German princess as a fitting British consort. The *Times* does not insist only on the Princess’s feminine sensibility. Its focus on the ‘neatness and simplicity’ of her dress emphasises not just modesty but also the Princess’s distinctly British behaviour. By displaying simplicity and highlighting the endurance of the Constitution, the German Princess demonstrated her allegiance to Britain and Britishness.

Building on recent critical discussions of nationalism in literature of the Romantic period and in women’s fiction more specifically, this thesis explores the intersections between simplicity, gender, and the construction of British national identity in the works of Jane Austen, Frances Burney, and Maria Edgeworth. It argues that simplicity was central to women writers’ conception of Britishness, a highly contested term. At a time when the borders of the British state were being redefined following the Act of Union of 1801, simplicity served as an important agent of national cohesion. How did female writers imagine Britishness, and did their representations of simplicity support or challenge contemporary views on national identity? If the abstract concept of the nation, often symbolized in figures such as Britannia or Hibernia, was understood as feminine, the discourse of nationalism insisted on the masculinity of Englishness, and patriotic virtue was articulated through ‘manly’ values such as courage, discipline, and strength.[4] Through the notion of simplicity, women writers of the Romantic period challenged this masculine conception of virtue. The novel in

[3] *The Times*, Monday, April 12, 1813.
[4] Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture, and Imperialism in England, 1715-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 187.

particular allowed women, denied direct political participation, to engage with public debates on the nation and become, in Anne Mellor's phrase, 'mothers of the nation'.[5] By insisting on the notion of character as the foundation of the nation, women writers destabilised the distinction between the public and private spheres, arguing for the public significance of individual character. Through their examination of simplicity, Austen, Burney, and Edgeworth contributed to the reputation of the United Kingdom as a paragon of politeness.

This social and cultural investment in simplicity was not unique to the Romantic period. This thesis traces the origins of the concept to the early eighteenth century, and shows how these three novelists were influenced by Scottish Enlightenment reflections on social progress and the development of national character, as well as by eighteenth-century belletrist texts, which hailed simplicity as the mark of the best kind of writing as well as the sign of a superior understanding.[6] As Paul Langford observes, simplicity is 'one of a cluster of associated words often used of the English both by foreigners and by the English themselves.'[7] While simplicity is rarely treated as an isolated concept and is often accompanied by words such as elegance, refinement, grace, propriety, and modesty, it operates as the overarching framework that guarantees the authenticity and Britishness of the other qualities identified. Simplicity, as I hope to demonstrate, is the golden medium between primitivism and sophistication, nature and culture.

Outcries over the loss of native simplicity were found alongside works that parodied simplicity as a passing fashion. In *Simplicity; Or, Domestic Poems* (1773), for

[5] Anne K. Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).
[6] Raymond D. Havens briefly outlines the prevalence of simplicity in aesthetic, moral, and social discourse of the eighteenth century. For Havens, simplicity is not a fixed concept. 'Simplicity, A Changing Concept', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 14:1 (January 1953), pp. 3-32.
[7] Paul Langford, *Englishness Identified: Manners and Character, 1650-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 27.

example, the anonymous editor complains that 'simplicity is the favourite topic of the present age' and that poets, 'for fear of appearing refined to excess, run into the contrary of a Simplicity disgustingly plain and unadorned.'[8] Three decades later, Francis Jeffrey similarly attacked Wordsworth and Coleridge's 'perverted taste of simplicity' in a scathing review of Robert Southey's *Thalaba* (1802),[9] providing a useful definition of simplicity in the process:

> Their most distinguishing symbol, is undoubtedly an affectation of great simplicity and familiarity of language. […] The followers of simplicity are, therefore, at all times in danger of occasional degradation; but the simplicity of this new school seems intended to ensure it. *Their* simplicity does not consist, by any means, in the rejection of glaring or superfluous ornament,—in the substitution of elegance to splendour,—or in that refinement of art which seeks concealment in its own perfection. It consists, on the contrary, in a very great degree, in the positive and *bona fide* rejection of art altogether, and in the bold use of these rude and negligent expressions, which would be banished by a very little discrimination.[10]

The Lake school's simplicity, seen as a threat to decorum and more generally to neoclassical definitions of art, is rightly understood as part of a middle-class assault on the aristocratic hegemony of taste, indicating how complex and ideologically fraught the term could be. Simplicity was anything but simple. Nor could it be precisely defined except in terms of negatives. As Fiona Stafford argues, '[a]s with so many aspects of British culture in the period, the ideal of native plainness was only identified through

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[8] *Simplicity; Or, Domestic Poems* (1773), pp. 1-2.
[9] Francis Jeffrey, Review of Robert Southey's *Thalaba*, *Edinburgh Review* 1:1 (October 1802), pp. 63-83, p. 65.
[10] *Ibid*., pp. 64-65.

opposition—defined by what it was not.'[11] Simplicity denoted artlessness, and was opposed to adornment, varnish, and polish. The contrary of excess, it was, according to Hugh Blair, essential to true ornament. Most importantly, it was perceived as the contrary of affectation, one of the most criticised social failings. A foil to the French fondness for pomp and ostentation, simplicity thus served as a powerful agent of national self-definition and cohesion.

The eighteenth century is generally acknowledged as witnessing the rise of nationalism in its modern sense. There was a burgeoning field of enquiries into national character, which compared and contrasted European nations. John Moore's *A View of Society and Manners in France, Germany, and Switzerland* (1783) or John Andrews' *Account of the Character and Manners of the French* (1785) are only two of many studies that outlined the differences between national customs, always contrasting English manners with those of other countries. Popular periodicals such as *The Lady's Magazine* or the *Anti-Jacobin* regularly published pieces that aimed to define the differences between the French and English characters. But British audiences also turned to foreign travellers' accounts of their British experiences. In 1810, for example, the orientalist scholar Charles Stewart translated the travel narrative of Mirza Abu Talib, a Persian-speaking collector for the East India Company and man of letters, which recorded 'the laws, manners, and customs of the different countries of Europe', with an emphasis on Britain.

The *Literary Panorama*'s review of the *Travels* and its selection of extracts is particularly revealing of the reviewer's own understanding of Britishness and its superiority over other European nations. London is represented as the leading European

[11] Fiona Stafford, 'Plain Living and Ungarnish'd Stories: Wordsworth and the Survival of Pastoral', *Review of English Studies*, New Series 59:238 (2007), pp. 118-33, p. 119.

metropolis, and, as Khan moves from one European country to another, he gets further and further away from sophistication and refinement in a sort of reverse stadial history. France proves disappointing, as the pleasures of civilised life are denied him.[12] No 'French woman' can rival with 'English ladies', the reviewer's choice of words presenting English women as refined, polite individuals, as opposed to their French counterparts:

> The French women are tall, and more corpulent than the English, but bear no comparison with respect to beauty. They want the simplicity, modesty, and graceful motions of the English damsels. Their fashion of dressing the hair was to me very disgusting, as it exactly resembled the mode practised by the common dancing-girls in India; that is, by dividing the hair into ringlets, two of which hung on the cheeks in an affected careless manner. They were also painted to an excessive degree, were very forward, and great talkers. […] [T]he drapery in front was so scanty as barely to conceal half their bosoms. Although I am by nature amorous, and easily affected at the sight of beauty, and visited every public place in Paris, I never met with a Frenchwoman who interested me.[13]

Such a description comfortably echoes the English construction of the French as affected. Women, in particular, demonstrate an unladylike forwardness. While this passage might suggest that Khan considered the English superior to the French, the paragraph that immediately precedes this extract discusses French men's superiority over the English. The French are presented as a people of indirection, who 'never make

[12] Review of *The Travels of Mirza Abu Khan*, *The Literary Panorama, Being a Review of Books, And Annual Register* 9 (1811), pp. 479-88, p. 485.
[13] *Ibid*., p. 485.

use of the simple words Yes or No, but have always some circuitous phrase'.[14] Yet Khan enthusiastically comments on their superior sociability, in contrast with 'the irritable and surly Englishmen!'[15] The review, however, elides this paragraph, only seeking to prove the superiority of English women.

Women were of course seen as the custodians of the nation's moral purity. Quoting the Anglican reformer Richard Allestree, James Fordyce reminds his female audience that 'All mankind is the pupil and disciple of female institution'.[16] In another conduct manual for young girls, John Bowles urgently declares: 'Female modesty is the last barrier of civilized society.'[17] A seminal text was Hannah More's *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799). More wanted to reform the aristocracy, which she felt had succumbed to the tyranny of fashion, but also to recognize middle-class women as models of behaviour. As Mellor explains, More promulgated 'what we might now call "middle-class" values as normative for the nation as a whole.'[18] Addressing 'British ladies' to 'come forward, and contribute their full and fair proportion towards the saving of their country', she campaigned for 'a patriotism at once firm and feminine for the general good!', demonstrating the important role that women could play in the public sphere.[19]

Historians and literary scholars have revised Jürgen Habermas' influential model of the public sphere as an essentially urban, homosocial enterprise.[20] Lawrence

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[14] *The Travels of Mirza Abu Taleb Khan* (1810), ed. Daniel O'Quinn (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2009), p. 248.
[15] *Ibid*., p. 249.
[16] James Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women*, 2 vols., 3rd ed. (London: Payne, 1766), I, p. 26.
[17] John Bowles, *Remarks on Modern Female Manners, as Distinguished by Indifference to Character and Indecency of Dress* (London: Rivington, 1802), pp. 5, 16.
[18] Mellor, p. 25.
[19] Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, 2 vols. (London: Cadell and Davies, 1799), I, p. 75.
[20] For a recent reexamination of women's presence and active participation in urban public spaces, see the collection of essays *Women and Urban Life in Eighteenth-Century England: 'On the Town'*, ed. Rosemary Sweet and Penelope Lane (London: Routledge, 2017).

Klein, Amanda Vickery, and Harriet Guest, among others, have highlighted the porous nature of the boundary between the two spheres, stressing the importance of sociability.[21] This has expanded our understanding of associative public spaces to include book clubs, assembly rooms, and, significantly, the home and print culture, thus redressing women's participation in sociable or semi-public spaces.[22] Amanda Vickery notes that 'the idea that the home was a refuge from the social world is one that would have perplexed the rural gentry in this period.'[23] Social exchanges within the home served a public function, and the family was, as Sylvana Tomaselli suggests, 'the most public sphere of all'.[24] For Harriet Guest, domesticity is 'the site from which an oppositional discourse can be articulated', noting a larger cultural shift in the 1770s and 1780s, 'characterised by a new emphasis on the values of the private, the domestic, and familial as the basis for public morality, and by the apparent politicisation of those excluded from the public sphere of parliamentary politics'.[25] More recently, Karen O'Brien has traced the development of feminist thinking throughout the long eighteenth century and the different ways in which women writers 'argued against the undue confinement of women to private or domestic spaces', seeing this confinement as 'depriv[ing] society as a whole of women's energising and conciliatory presence.'[26]

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[21] For a succinct exposition, see Lawrence E. Klein, 'Gender and the Public/Private Distinction in the Eighteenth Century: Some Questions about Evidence and Analytic Procedure', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29:1 (1996), pp. 97-109; Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1998); Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).
[22] For a recent insightful investigation of the issue, see *Sociable Spaces: Locating Culture in Romantic-Period Britain*, ed. Kevin Gilmartin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
[23] Vickery, p. 196.
[24] Sylvana Tomaselli, 'The Most Public Sphere of all All: The Family', in *Women, Writing, and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830*, ed. Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Clíona Ó Gallchoir, and Penny Warburton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 239-56.
[25] *Ibid*., pp. 18, 159.
[26] Karen O'Brien, *Women and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 11.

In addition to reassessing our understanding of the separation of the public and private spheres, scholars have shown how women's political agency in the Georgian period went beyond simple parliamentary representation. Elaine Chalus has explored the different ways in which elite women participated in, shaped, and influenced politics. She has, in particular, challenged the view that elite women were 'driven […] out of politics and into the home' after the relentless media attacks on the Duchess of Devonshire in 1784 and of political women during the French Revolution.[27] Likewise, James McCord's study of Lady Jersey's involvement in the Queen Caroline affair of 1820, which resulted in a court case between Lady Jersey and the loyalist newspaper *John Bull*, 'illustrates the direct influence aristocratic women might wield in party politics'.[28] Women could be powerful political agents at the parochial level and through family patronage, investing the domestic with political valence.[29]

Eloquent examples of successfully active women notwithstanding, female political agency remained a deeply contentious issue. Kathryn Gleadle, in particular, has analysed the assumptions characterising women as political agents. She develops the notion of women as 'borderline citizens', a concept that is central to this study's discussion of women writers' construction of British national identity. Gleadle's study is especially valuable for the ways in which it traces the nuances and contradictions of women's position as political agents, sometimes coming from politically engaged women themselves:

> Their status as political actors, as well as their own political subjectivities, were often fragile and contingent. They might be conceptualized (and feel) integral

[27] Elaine Chalus, *Elite Women in English Political Life, c. 1754-1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 3.
[28] James N. McCord, 'Taming the Female Politician in Early-Nineteenth-Century England: *John Bull* versus Lady Jersey', *Journal of Women's History* 13:4 (Winter 2002), pp. 31-53, p. 33.
[29] See Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (eds.), *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representations, and Responsibilities* (London: Longman, 1997), esp. pp. 151-204.

> to the political process at one moment—but this could quickly evaporate in the face of other cultural pressures. […] [W]omen often had a cultural and personal investment in the perpetuation of particular codes of femininity and […] it was common for them to project symbolic conformity to a publicly agreed discourse of women's inferior political acumen.[30]

Women utilised the 'interstices of official channels of power' and influenced politics in concrete ways, especially at the local level, often though patronage.[31] Gleadle's study thus illuminates the sometimes contradictory claims on female politics articulated in women's writing, most evidently in Burney and Edgeworth.

Even when a woman was tolerated as a female politician, in the sense of being knowledgeable in political matters, her sphere of influence remained limited. Amanda Vickery and Linda Colley argue that the ideology of the domestic sphere was 'a conservative response to an unprecedented expansion in the opportunities, ambitions and experience of late Georgian and Victorian women'.[32] In 1789, the year of the French Revolution, the *Lady's Magazine* prefixed a motto that clearly illustrates women's confinement to the domestic sphere:

> Let woman preside in all domestic affairs, and let their judgments be decisive in the appointment of fashions; but suffer the politics of nations to be directed by men, and entrust the agency of warlike matters to hands, by nature more adapted to its roughness.[33]

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[30] Kathryn Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens: Women, Gender, and Political Culture in Britain, 1815-1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 2.

[31] *Ibid*., p. 50.

[32] Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronologies of English Women's History', *Historical Journal* 36:2 (1993), pp. 383-414, p. 400; Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, 3rd rev. ed. (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2009), esp. pp. 237-72.

[33] *The Lady's Magazine; Or, Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex* 20 (May 1789), p. 297.

In its glowing review of Hannah More's *Strictures* (1799), the *Scots Magazine* reminds its readers that 'the sphere for the display of female virtue is the domestic circle', a point that is hammered in throughout the review and in conduct literature in general.[34] As More writes, women should by no means court 'the distinctions of public life and high offices'.[35] Jane West, in her conclusion to *Advantages of Education* (1793), explains that her intention is to oppose the 'fashionable infection' of being 'female politicians and philosophers',[36] whereas More carefully distinguishes the ideal English woman from the female politician:

> [Women should] exert themselves with a patriotism at once firm and feminine for the general good! I am not sounding an alarm to female warriors, or exciting female politicians: I hardly know which of the two is the most disgusting and unnatural character. Propriety is to a woman what the great Roman critic says action is to an orator; it is the first, the second, the third requisite.[37]

Haunted by 'Wollstonecraft's ghost', More castigates female philosophers and politicians as 'unnatural', yet calls on women to act virtuously for the good of the nation.[38]

It was through the dominant model of politeness that women were able to reconfigure political agency and challenge national models of identity as essentially masculine. Vickery observes that '"politeness" was a way of conceptualising an

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[34] Review of Hannah More's *Strictures*, *Scots Magazine* 62 (April 1800), p. 266.
[35] More, *Strictures*, II, p. 38.
[36] Jane West, *The Advantages of Education*, 2 vols. (London: William Lane for the Minerva Press, 1793), II, p. 203.
[37] More, *Strictures*, I, p. 6.
[38] McInnes, *Wollstonecraft's Ghost: The Fate of the Female Philosopher in the Romantic Period* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017). For a detailed examination of the figure of the female philosopher in British fiction, see also Deborah Weiss's recent, *The Female Philosopher and her Afterlives: Mary Wollstonecraft, the British Novel, and the Transformations of Feminism, 1796-1811* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). See also Adriana Craciun, 'Female Philosophers', in *British Women Writers and the French Revolution: Citizens of the World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 27-59.

unofficial public sphere to which privileged women could lay legitimate claim.'[39] Kathleen Wilson similarly argues that 'the discourses of politeness and the cult of sensibility could work to legitimise women's participation in print culture and sociability in ways that washed over into politics.'[40] Politeness was also the taxonomy through which Britain's position as a leading European nation was articulated. As Carey McIntosh notes, it 'meant something more than etiquette. […] It was a matter of civilisation. It measured in part the distance a person or community had come from savagery.'[41] The 'master metaphor' of the eighteenth century, politeness helped define the gentleman and the gentlewoman according to individual qualities as opposed to rank and social status.[42] Because moral character was central to politeness, it also became a founding principle of the nation, granting women greater agency.

Deidre Lynch identifies an investment in the issue of character as a specifically British concern, one that arose in the eighteenth century and coincided with contemporary enquiries into national identity.[43] In the eighteenth-century philosopher Edmund Burke's theory, the English political system, the constitution Princess Caroline hoped her daughter would remain attached to, derives from the nation's character, finding its strength in tradition and in a continuity between past, present, and future. The constitution, which serves as the cornerstone of Burke's thinking and guarantees 'the rights and liberties of the subject', is also based on character:

> The whole [constitution] has emanated from the simplicity of our national character, and from that sort of native plainness and directness of understanding,

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[39] Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 197.
[40] Wilson, *Sense of the People*, pp. 52-53.
[41] Carey McIntosh, *The Evolution of English Prose, 1700-1800: Style, Politeness, and Print Culture* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 160.
[42] Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 8. Scholars of the eighteenth century are hugely indebted to Klein's work.
[43] Deidre Shauna Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 11, 14, 38.

> which for a long time characterized those men who have successively obtained authority amongst us. This disposition remains, at least in the great body of the people.[44]

Simplicity and plainness are thus presented as founding elements of the English nation and the essential features of its national character. Burke, in the opening pages of his treatise, presents himself as a 'plain man' who 'love[s] a manly, moral, regulated liberty', and who becomes, as Tom Furniss remarks, 'an *embodiment* of the English national character'.[45] It is from this position as a 'plain man' that Burke views the language of the Revolution Society as too refined. Discounting rumours that 'we dress our behaviour in the frippery of France', Burke proudly declares: 'we still bear the stamp of our forefathers', that of 'native plainness'.[46] Because the strength of the English nation lies in continuity, it is essential that the native character, as Burke conceives it, be preserved: '[We] derive all we possess as an inheritance from our forefathers. Upon that body and stock of inheritance we have taken care not to inoculate any cyon alien to the original plant.'[47] The image of the 'original plant' suggests a belief in a pure native character, reinforced by the rejection of any foreign elements. Simplicity and plainness must be protected at all costs.

In 1801, *The Anti-Jacobin* riled against the 'infection of French principles and French manners', a corruption that could be opposed by 'the honest simplicity and the pure and blameless manners of former times'.[48] This fear of a loss of native character in the face of a so-called French 'infection' was in fact felt throughout the century.

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[44] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), ed. J. C. D. Clark (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 254.

[45] Burke, *Reflections*, p. 254; Tom Furniss, 'Cementing the Nation: Burke's Reflections on Nationalism and National Identity', in *Edmund Burke's* Reflections on the Revolution in France*: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. John Whale (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 115-44, p. 123.

[46] Burke, *Reflections*, p. 249.

[47] *Ibid*., p. 181.

[48] *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Protestant Advocate* 7 (1801), pp. 132, 134.

Richard Steele, for instance, quotes John Tillotson's 1694 sermon 'Of Sincerity towards God and Man' at length in *Spectator* 103, a sermon that stresses the urgency of the issue:

> The old *English* Plainness and Sincerity […] is in great measure lost among us: There hath been a long Endeavour to transform us into Foreign Manners and Fashions, and to bring us to a servile Imitation of none of the best of our Neighbours, in some of the worst of their Qualities. […] [I]t is still a just Matter of Complaint, that Sincerity and Plainness are out of Fashion, and that our Language is running into a Lie[.][49]

We can see here the early association of plainness, and therefore simplicity, with sincerity. Though not explicitly named, France is the leader of the 'neighbours' Tillotson has in mind. France is the land of polish, of surfaces, artifice, and deception. A hundred years later, social commentators still lamented the loss of native simplicity as the result of the invasion of French fashions, manners, and customs.

Historians and critics such as Linda Colley and Michèle Cohen have argued that Britishness constructed itself in opposition to France. Colley notes that from the 1740s onwards, the fashionable classes were accused of 'corrupting the nation from within by their indolence, luxury, and rampant Francophilia.'[50] For Cohen, the cultural supremacy of France and the French language represented the greatest threat to Britishness. French manners risked corrupting young English minds and transforming English gentlemen into effeminate fops: Frenchified, 'the national fibre was weakened and enervated.'[51] Conservative periodicals such as the *Anti-Jacobin* contributed to this

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[49] Richard Steele, *The Spectator* 103 (1711), in Richard Steele and Joseph Addison, *The Spectator* (1711-12), ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), I, pp. 429-32, pp. 430-31.
[50] Colley, *Britons*, p. 88.
[51] Michèle Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity: National Identity and Language in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 7.

allergy to everything French: ‘To cherish an Anti-Gallican spirit has, in all times, been deemed an effort of genuine patriotism, a mark of that love for one’s country, which distinguishes the true-born Englishman from the mongrel *cosmopolite*.’[52] The ‘destruction’ of this Anti-Gallican spirit would ‘convert us into a degenerate and mongrel race, without a single characteristic feature of Britons, either in body or mind’.[53] Similar feelings were expressed until quite late in the nineteenth century. In 1819, More still urgently denounced the Gallic ‘mania’ that seized the British middle classes after the end of the Napoleonic conflict reopened access to the continent. Alarmed at the ‘excessive continental intercourse’, she exclaims: ‘We are losing our national character. […] [I]n a few years, […] the strong and discriminating English heart and mind will be obliterated’, and ‘the noble simplicity, the ancient rectitude, the sound sense, and the native modesty which have long been the characteristics of the British people’ threatens to dissolve under Gallic influence.[54]

More’s *Moral Sketches* (1819) is a good example of the unstable distinction in the period between England and Britain, and between English and British character. The author apologises in the preface for ‘having shewn herself too exclusively an Englishwoman’, yet her declaration that England is the ‘Queen of Islands’ indicates her sense that it is the dominant force within the United Kingdom.[55] One of the difficulties of determining the extent to which writers really think of ‘Britishness’ as opposed to ‘Englishness’ lies in the instability of the distinction between those terms, and the frequent slippage in their usage. ‘English’ and ‘British’ were often used interchangeably, but, as David M. Higgins observes, ‘sometimes, when they say

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[52] *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* 1, July to December 1798 (1799), p. 107.
[53] *Ibid*., p. 108.
[54] Hannah More, *Moral Sketches of Prevailing Opinions and Manners, Foreign and Domestic* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1819), pp. v, 10, 20.
[55] *Ibid*., pp. x, xi.

"English", they mean just that, and not Scottish, Irish, Welsh, or British.'[56] While opposition to the French was undeniably an important element of the development of Britishness, their presence as Other also served to mask the heterogeneity of the United Kingdom. Even before the 1707 Act of Union, the satirist Daniel Defoe, tracing the bloody history of the British Isles, argued that an Englishman is a 'Het'rogeneous *Thing*'. According to Defoe,

> A *True-Born Englishman*'s a Contradiction,
>
> In Speech an Irony, in Fact a Fiction.
>
> A Banter made to be a test of Fools,
>
> Which those that use it justly ridicules
>
> A metaphor invented to express a Man *a-kin* to all the Universe.[57]

In Defoe's verse, Britons are 'a mongrel half-bred race' that came together by chance—'Fate jumbl'd them together, God knows how'—and through violence.[58] After the Act of Union of 1801, the meaning of 'British' became even more complicated. While it might encompass all four nations, it could also refer to the English, Scottish, and Welsh who formed Great Britain, in distinction to the Irish. As a term that was 'superimposed on an array of internal differences', British could be an uncomfortable reminder of the underlying English supremacy.[59]

Understood as a cornerstone of English, or British national identity, or both, simplicity was deeply connected with truth and sincerity, two qualities also associated

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[56] David M. Higgins, *Romantic Englishness: Local, National, and Global Selves, 1780-1850* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 10.

[57] Daniel Defoe, 'The True-Born Englishman, A Satyr' (1701), in *The True-Born Englishman and Other Writings*, ed. P. N. Furbank (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 36. An 1810 edition of the poem includes this very extract on its title-page. *The True-Born Englishman: A Satire* (London: Auld, Cleugh, 1810).

[58] Defoe, pp. 35, 36.

[59] Colley, p. 6.

with Britishness.[60] For the Scottish Dissenting theologian James Fordyce, simplicity is 'the sister of truth',[61] while Germaine de Staël, in her examination of manners and institutions in Britain, recognised that '[T]ruth, above all, is one of the most distinguished qualities of the English character'.[62] In her 'own moneyspinner anthology' *The Female Reader* (1789), Mary Wollstonecraft selected excerpts from the best 'English' authors 'intended for the improvement of females', with the 'main object' of 'infus[ing] a relish for a pure and simple style'.[63] The endorsement of this style had a clear moral purpose. Wollstonecraft explains that 'Simplicity and sincerity generally go hand in hand, as both proceed from a love of truth'.[64] Capitalising on the trend for such anthologising while promoting 'a distinctly feminized and moralized taste' with a 'particular political identity […] for a Dissenting, and incipiently radical, readership', Wollstonecraft's project reveals the desire to promote a British, as opposed to French, education which is also distinctly middle-class.[65]

Conservatives and radicals alike acknowledged the connection between simplicity, truth, and English/British identity. Wollstonecraft's book insists that her young female reader 'will understand English, and express her sentiments in her native tongue; instead of which our young ladies of fashion write a mixture of French and

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[60] Gerald Newman argues that '"Sincerity" *was* the English National Identity'. *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History, 1740-1830* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1987), p. 66. See his discussion, pp. 129-40.
[61] James Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women*, 2 vols., 3rd ed. (London: Payne, 1766), I, p. 39.
[62] Germaine De Staël, *Considerations on the Principle Events of the French Revolution. Posthumous Works of The Baroness De Staël. Edited by the Duke De Broglie, and the Baron De Staël*, 3 vols. (London: Baldwin, Cradock, Joy, 1818), III, p. 289.
[63] Vivien Jones, 'Mary Wollstonecraft and the literature of advice and instruction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 119-40, p. 130. Wollstonecraft, 'Preface' to *The Female Reader* (1789), in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, gen. ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, 7 vols. (London: Pickering, 1989), IV, p. 55. The preface was signed by 'O.' and the anthology first printed by Joseph Johnson, under the name of 'Mr Cresswick, Teacher of Elocution'. The work was reasonably popular, as it underwent several editions, including a separate Irish edition. It was also reprinted with an entirely different title page in 1792 (*The Lady's Preceptor*).
[64] Wollstonecraft, 'Preface' to *The Female Reader*, p. 55.
[65] Jones, 'Mary Wollstonecraft', p. 132.

Italian, and speak the same jargon.'[66] There is both a national and class argument here. It implies that the English character and English heritage are diluted in the foreign training of the fashionable set, which leads to an incomprehensible speech. Far from suggesting refinement and sophistication, 'jargon' in fact introduces the idea of corruption, a sentiment very similar to Johnson's 'babble' in the 1755 Preface to his *Dictionary*.[67] The language of 'young ladies of fashion' is a hybrid that pollutes and dilutes the native tongue, leading to a mongrel identity. The simplicity Wollstonecraft offers her readers will, on the other hand, secure native identity. More, in a section entitled 'On Sensibility', likewise counsels against 'all deviation from the straight line of truth and simplicity'.[68] Her *Strictures* also underline the gendered aspect of the issue: 'Frankness, truth, and simplicity […] are inexpressibly charming, so are they peculiarly commendable in women'.[69] The nation's security and preservation of its national character hence depend on women's truth and simplicity:

> Seek neither to shine nor to triumph […]. Cultivate true politeness, for it grows out of true principle, and is consistent with the Gospel of Christ[.] […] Remember that the praise of being *amiable* by strangers, may be bought too dear, if it be bought at the expence of truth and simplicity: remember that Simplicity is the first charm in manner, as Truth is in mind; and could Truth make herself visible, she would appear invested in Simplicity.[70]

As the passage indicates, simplicity and sincerity were both central to Protestantism, another important source of British identity.[71] The Scottish minister and literary theorist Hugh Blair, whose sermons were reprinted and presented in abridged form throughout

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[66] Wollstonecraft, 'Preface' to *The Female Reader*, p. 59.
[67] *OED*, 5. 'A barbarous, rude and debased language or variety of speech'.
[68] More, *Strictures*, II, p. 137.
[69] *Ibid*., II, p. 138.
[70] More, *Strictures*, II, p. 89-90.
[71] For Protestantism and Britishness, see Colley, esp. 18-55.

the period, states that 'Sincerity is the basis of every virtue'.[72] He entreats his audience to 'Imitate the uncorrupted simplicity and purity which distinguished his [Christ's] whole life'.[73] In his sermon 'The Witness of our own Spirit', John Wesley clarifies the distinction between simplicity and sincerity with the following: 'Simplicity regards the intention itself, sincerity the execution of it. And this sincerity relates [to] actually hitting the mark which we aim at by simplicity'.[74] The *Magazine of the Wesleyan-Methodist Church* even more directly states that 'simplicity, without exception, is always a companion of sincerity'.[75]

Especially valued by Dissenters, simplicity gained ideological traction as an essential feminine attribute. Conservatives and radicals alike advocated the path of simplicity to women. Hannah More, as mentioned previously, strongly warns against 'all deviations from the strait [sic] line of truth and simplicity', adding that '[f]rankness, truth, and simplicity [...] are peculiarly commendable in women'.[76] The Bluestocking and conduct-book author Hester Chapone similarly states the centrality of simplicity: 'If I was asked which of all the qualities that constitute an amiable character would singly go furthest in gaining my love and admiration, I should answer, without hesitations, *Simplicity*'.[77] The supremacy of this concept is visible in the fact that it is the victim of its own success, as More observes:

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[72] It was for instance included in *The Beauties of Blair: Consisting of Selections from his Work*, ed. Alfred Howard (London: Darwin and Tegg, 1810), p. 136.
[73] Hugh Blair, 'Sermon VIII: On Curiosity concerning the Affairs of Others', in *Sermons*, 5 vols. (London: Cadell, Davies, 1808), IV, p. 160.
[74] John Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions*, new ed. (Leeds: 1799), p. 137-138. Wesley explains the pious nature of simplicity: 'We are then simple of heart, when the eye of our mind is singly fixt on God. [...] This is simplicity; when a steady view, a single intention of promoting his glory, of doing and suffering his blessed will, runs through our whole soul, fills all our heart, and is the constant spring of all our thoughts, desires, and purposes.'
[75] *Magazine of the Wesleyan-Methodist Church*, 1821.
[76] More, *Strictures*, II, pp. 134, 135.
[77] Hester Chapone, *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse, A New Edition* (London: Dilly and Walter, 1777), p. 13.

> The beauty of simplicity is indeed so intimately felt by all how have a true taste for personal, moral, or intellectual beauty, that women of the deepest artifice often find their account in assuming an exterior the most foreign to their character, and by affecting the most studied naïveté. It is curious to see the quantity of art some people put in practice in order to appear natural; and the deep design which is set at work to exhibit simplicity. And indeed this feigned simplicity is the most mischievous because the most engaging of all the Proteus forms which dissimulation can put on.[78]

The passage clearly demonstrates the social currency of simplicity as well as its connection to the natural. The danger of simplicity becoming so fashionable was that women performed it in an overly artificial, unnatural manner.

Conduct manuals and moralists emphasised the sterling weight of simplicity in sartorial matters as the mirror of the individual's superior disposition and understanding. Works such as James Fordyce's *Sermons* (1766), John Gregory's *Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774), or John Burton's *Lectures on Female Education and Manners* (1794), dedicate lengthy sections to dress, which 'distinguishes the civil from the savage state', but should not be 'a load of garments [...] splendidly decorated.'[79] For Burton,

> Nature requires not these studied ornaments. A plain manner is, in general, the greatest embellishment. Beauty and innocence, even in a rustic, but decent garb, will be more pleasing than a form, though handsome, yet rendered ridiculous by a borrowed plumage. And where we observe simplicity of attire, we commonly perceive an invariable neatness.[80]

[78] More, *Strictures*, II, pp. 135-36.
[79] John Burton, *Lectures on Female Education and Manners* (Dublin: Milliken, 1794), p. 130.
[80] Burton, pp. 130-31.

Fordyce similarly recommends ‘an amiable modesty and graceful simplicity of apparel’.[81] In his discussion on the ‘Science’ of dress, he declares that: ‘simplicity is that which everything else touches and delights.’[82]

The 1811 publication of *The Mirror of the Graces; Or, The English Lady’s Costume* (Figure 1) offers a useful compendium of the many of the issues discussed above and in this study. Its crowded front page, a distillation of the ideology of the period, reveals the delicate balancing act of proper femininity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The work of ‘A Lady of Distinction’ who has studied the manners of ‘the most refined Nations of Europe’, thereby positioning British manners within an international frame of reference, the volume promises to offer women a comprehensive system of behaviour focusing on matters of dress, which will enable British women to showcase their character, for dress is the ‘outward expression of our internal thoughts’.[83] The title mirrors the idea of harmony and combination it propounds, through neat pairings and a final triad. Simplicity is placed between modesty and economy, acting as a bridge between moral and practical qualities.

[81] Fordyce, *Sermons*, I, p. 30.
[82] *Ibid*., p. 31.
[83] *The Mirror of the Graces* (London: Crosby and Co., 1811), p. 9.

THE

Mirror of the Graces;

OR,

THE ENGLISH LADY'S COSTUME.

Combining and Harmonizing

TASTE AND JUDGMENT, ELEGANCE AND GRACE,

MODESTY, SIMPLICITY, AND ECONOMY,

WITH FASHION IN DRESS;

And adapting the various Articles of Female Embellishments to different Ages, Forms, and Complexions; to the Seasons of the Year, Rank, and Situation in Life:

WITH USEFUL ADVICE ON

FEMALE ACCOMPLISHMENTS, POLITENESS, AND MANNERS;

The Cultivation of the Mind and the Disposition and Carriage of the Body: offering also the most efficacious Means of preserving

BEAUTY, HEALTH, AND LOVELINESS.

The whole according with

THE GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF NATURE AND RULES OF PROPRIETY.

BY A LADY OF DISTINCTION,

Who has witnessed and attentively studied what is esteemed truly graceful and elegant amongst the most refined Nations of Europe.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR B. CROSBY AND CO.

STATIONERS' COURT, LUDGATE STREET; AND SOLD BY ALL BOOKSELLERS.

1811.

Figure 1: *The Mirror of the Graces* (1811)

The whole is elaborated in accordance with 'The General Principles of Nature and the Rules of Propriety', which reflects the need to balance nature and culture. While its focus on the 'English Lady's Costume' suggests a narrow English readership, the text illustrates the contemporary instability of the distinction between English and British, alternately referring to 'English women' and 'the British fair'. The cultural rivalry that underpins the volume is a means of adding strength to the military forces fighting Napoleon:

> I hope that an amiable ambition will unite in the breasts of the British fair, to be as much superior to their French rivals, in all feminine graces, as our British heroes are to the French on the seas! We shall then see cultivated understandings, unaffected cheerfulness, and manners of an enchantment not to be exceeded by the fairest sorceresses in beauty and grace.[84]

Implicit here is the idea that a correct female behaviour can help oppose Napoleonic invasion. One of the weapons British women should use is simplicity: 'Simplicity is the perfection of form; simplicity is the perfection of dressing; simplicity is the perfection of air and manners.'[85] Because of the connection of dress with surface, the volume rejects 'affectation and extravagance', explaining that 'Nature, in almost every case, is our best guide', that 'simplicity is the soul of all' and 'modesty is grace; simplicity, elegance'.[86] Lastly, the *Mirror* establishes a clear distinction between a '*fine lady*' and an '*elegant woman*'. Slightly invalidating the title's reference to the English lady, the distinction is nevertheless an important comment on attempts in the period to distinguish external performances of feminine propriety, from the unaffected taste and judgment of the superior female character.

[84] *Ibid*., p. 163.
[85] *Ibid*., p. 159.
[86] *Ibid*., pp. 13, 56, 71.

Women Novelists and the Writing of the Nation

The studies of Anne K. Mellor, Miranda Burgess, Angela Keane, Nicola J. Watson, and Adriana Craciun among others have demonstrated the different ways in which women writers of the Romantic period engaged with political debates on the nation through the medium of print.[87] Keane, addressing the 'historical, contested, and discursive character of the nation, and how it is shaped in the interests of different groupings competing for hegemony', analyses the ways in which women writers in the 1790s 'imagined themselves as participating citizens'.[88] One of the ways they did so was through the novel, an important site for the building of the nation. While critics disagree on whether or not female authorship dominated the novelistic market, there was a clear recognition of the novel's power to foster national consciousness as well as of women writers' central contribution to the genre.[89] In his preface to *St Ronan's Well*, Walter Scott writes that the novel is 'intended, in a word—*celebrare domestica facta*—to give an imitation of the shifting manners of our own time', making it the literary prerogative of women:

> The ladies, in particular, gifted by nature with keen powers of observation and light satire, have been so distinguished by these works of talent, that, reckoning from the authoress of Evelina to her of Marriage, a catalogue might be made, including the brilliant and talented names of Edgeworth, Austin [sic], Charlotte

[87] See also Emma Major, *Madam Britannia: Women, Church, and Nation, 1712-1812* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
[88] Angela Keane, *Women Writers and the English Nation in the 1790s: Romantic Belongings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 2, 7.
[89] For an overview of women's growing presence on the novel-market, see, for example, Jane Spencer, 'Women Writers and the Eighteenth-Century Novel', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 212-35.

> Smith, and others, whose success seems to have appropriated this province of the novel as exclusively their own.[90]

Women were particularly active in disseminating a British literary tradition. In 1810, Anna Laetitia Barbauld published the first volumes of her collection *The British Novelists*, which numbered 50 by 1820.[91] Taking into account the taste of subscribers and the restrictions of copyright, Barbauld aimed to present an overview of the state of British novel-writing, 'a series of some of the most approved novels, from the first regular productions of the kind to the present time'. As Claudia Johnson has argued, this project belonged to a process of canon-formation and national construction.[92]

Barbauld's series also demonstrates the belief shared by many critics and writers that there were ways in which the art of the novel, and literature and the arts more generally, could be distinctly English, as opposed to German, Italian, or French. Barbauld entitled her collection *The British Novelists*, as opposed to 'English', a telling decision in the light of her project to 'make the novels of a country'.[93] Outlining the different forms that the novel encompasses, including the epic, dramatic, didactic, and satirical genres, Barbauld underlines that 'They take a tincture from the learning and politics of the times, and are made use of to attack or recommend the prevailing systems of the day.'[94] Novels are cultural products of a specific society, which they reflect, either by opposing or upholding it, an early formulation of what we today call ideology. Barbauld argues that the writings of the best novelists of the eighteenth century did in

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[90] Introduction to *Saint Ronan's Well*, *Introduction and Notes from the Magnum Opus:* Ivanhoe *to* Castle Dangerous, *The Waverley Edition*, ed. J. H. Alexander with P. D. Garside and Claire Lamont (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 333.

[91] Similarly, Elizabeth Inchbald entitled her twenty-five-volume collection of plays *The British Theatre* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1808).

[92] Claudia L. Johnson, '"Let Me Make the Novels of a Country": Barbauld's *The British Novelists* (1810/1820)', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 34 (Spring 2001), pp. 163-79, p. 166.

[93] Anna Laetitia Barbauld, 'On the Origin and Progress of Novel Writing', in *The British Novelists* (London: F. C. and J. Rivington, 1810), I, pp. 1-62, p. 62.

[94] *Ibid*., p. 2.

fact contribute to altering the national character: '[P]erhaps it is not too much to say, that much of the softness of our present manners, much of that tincture of humanity so conspicuous amidst all our vices, is owing to the bias given by our dramatic writings and fictitious stories.'[95] By the beginning of the nineteenth century, therefore, the novel was not only seen as a source of pleasure, but also as a powerful agent of nationalism.

While fiction is not the only literary genre that addressed national questions in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it is important to recognise the role it played in the dissemination and construction of British national identity.[96] Julian Wolfreys, for instance, identifies the novel as the perfect site for the construction of nationhood: 'In being essentially bourgeois media for a bourgeois readership, the essay, the novel, and fiction in general, were the vehicles through which models of national identity could be formed, mediated, questioned, criticised and reformed.'[97] Wolfreys, moreover, insists that

> Narratives of identity need not, *should not*, be unified, absolute and written with the immanence of transcendence. Rather, narratives of identity have to be read for contradiction and with a respect for difference. […] Englishness cannot be thought of as a fixed object. [It is not] fixed, unified, or fully identifiable as such.[98]

Although Wolfreys' study concentrates mainly on Victorian fiction, his idea that novels were the vehicles for models of national identity, and his postmodern articulation of English national identity, were very helpful to my own way of thinking about the

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[95] *Ibid*., p. 49.
[96] Recent studies of nationalism in drama of the Romantic period include, Betsy Bolton, *Women, Nationalism, and the Romantic Stage: Theatre and Politics in Britain, 1780-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Susan Valladares, *Staging the Peninsular War: English Theatres 1807-1815* (Farnham; Burlington: Ashgate, 2015); George Taylor, *The French Revolution and the London Stage, 1789-1805* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
[97] Julian Wolfreys, *Being English: Narratives, Idioms, and Performances of National Identity from Coleridge to Trollope* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 11.
[98] *Ibid*., pp. 3, 4, 5.

dramatization of the issue in Romantic-era novels. Critical studies of the past twenty years have also addressed this issue, in particular Katie Trumpener's *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* and Mellor's *Mothers of the Nation*.[99] More recent work still has focused on the Celtic fringe.[100] Scholars have contested the Anglocentric focus of critical studies, arguing for a 'devolving' of Romantic scholarship, an approach that I also follow in the present study, which contends that neither Englishness nor Britishness were unified or coherent concepts, and that the notion of simplicity helped authors to negotiate their various differences and contradictions. As Leith Davis argues, 'Far from being constituted by a single Act of Union, Britain was forged, in all the various senses of that word, from multiple acts of union and dislocation.'[101] Moreover, Ireland occupies, as Ina Ferris observes, an 'awkward space': 'Ireland stands within the union but outside the unity, ambiguously attached through vague coordination: "and Ireland." Is it an afterthought? An equivocal supplement? A singular difference?'[102] As David Simpson adds, the Irish are the most familiar strangers and, as such, their place in the United Kingdom is always contested, much as women's position always is.[103] The Irish are, to borrow Kathryn Gleadle's term,

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[99] Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

[100] Historically, as Emma Major argues, 'eighteenth-century notions of Englishness often rely tacitly upon the supposedly "savage" traits of the Celtic countries to purify the possibly corrupt but high degree of civilisation claimed for England.' 'Femininity and National Identity: Elizabeth Montagu's Trip to France', *ELH* 72:4 (Winter 2005), pp. 901-18, p. 901. Linda Colley problematically excludes Ireland from her popular and influential study *Britons: Forging the Nation*, on the grounds of religious difference.

[101] Leith Davis, *Acts of Union: Scotland and the Literary Negotiation of the British Nation, 1707-1830* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 1-2. Focusing on Scottish literature, Leith Davis highlights the idea that national identity is a construction, for a nation is 'forged', and, in this sense, Davis is very much indebted to Colley and Benedict Anderson's highly influential study. He also argues that in Britain in the eighteenth century, the concept of national identity was based not on homogeneity but on difference.

[102] Ina Ferris, *The Romantic National Tale and the Question of Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1-2. Important studies of Ireland and Romanticism include, Jim Kelly (ed.), *Ireland and Romanticism: Publics, Nations, and Scenes of Cultural Production* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Claire Connolly, *A Cultural History of the Irish Novel, 1790-1829* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[103] David Simpson, *Romanticism and the Question of the Stranger* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 215.

'borderline citizens'.[104] This study, which covers the period that led to the Act of Union of 1801, therefore, focusing on the work of Maria Edgeworth, explores literary representations of this 'awkward space of union'. I follow Declan Kiberd's contention that the Irish seem particularly sensitive to the fact that 'identity is seldom straightforward and given, more often a matter of negotiation and exchange'.[105]

This thesis does not claim to offer an exhaustive account of representations of Britishness in women's writing of the Romantic period but focuses on three female authors whose writing is treated as both representative as well as strongly idiosyncratic. Jane Austen, Frances Burney, and Maria Edgeworth have been chosen for the following reasons: while it might seem that there can be little to add to the very rich and diverse body of Austen criticism, Austen (1775-1817) features in this study for her current status as 'England's Jane'. A canonical author today, this trajectory was by no means certain in her day. Moreover, Austen writes from the periphery, not from the metropolitan centre. Simplicity is central to her understanding of character and to her analysis of the changes in the fabric of English society at the time. One of the questions, however, is to what extent can we consider Austen has a 'British' consciousness.

An extremely popular writer in her time and a member of leading intellectual and political coteries, Burney (1752-1840) is a fascinating case study partly because of her personal history. Nicknamed 'Fanny Bull' by her relatives, she married a Catholic émigré, with whom she had a son, and lived in France at the height of the Napoleonic wars. Her novels reflect an on-going interest for national character, showing a nuanced understanding of identity as porous and fluid, fully developed in her journals and letters, which are treated as narratives because of their rewriting and sometimes censored

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[104] Kathryn Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens: Women, Gender, and Political Culture in Britain, 1815-1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[105] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* (London: Cape, 1995), p. 1.

nature. In these we can, for instance, observe how she constructs General Alexandre d'Arblay as a pseudo-Englishman by showcasing his simplicity. Burney's fiction, especially her final novel *The Wanderer* (1814), is also a valuable contribution to Romantic-era reflections on national identity. Simplicity emerges as a concept through which Burney negotiates the different national pulls.

Last but not least, Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849), Anglo-Irish by birth, occupying an in-between position, is a key intellectual figure in the contemporary debates on British national identity, both because of her immense popularity at the time and because of the singular and complex ways in which she deals with identity. Edgeworth's fiction, starting with Marilyn Butler's *Literary Biography* and Clíona Ó Gallchoir's seminal study, has enjoyed a recent critical reappraisal.[106] Edgeworth's reception as a 'writer of Ireland' demonstrates the difficulty for writers to be understood as British. Too English for the Irish, too Irish for the English, she is an in-between figure whose reception illustrates the complexities of a British identity. Because of her strong personal connections to Ireland, contemporary reviewers as well as modern critics have tended to pigeonhole Edgeworth as an Irish writer, overlooking some of her subtle and nuanced dramatizations of national identity that challenge a conservative reading of her work. As I hope to show, national identity was in fact a very fraught question for Edgeworth, and her novels offer complex investigations of what it means to be Irish, English, or British, in nuanced ways that modern criticism often simplifies.

The first chapter explores Austen, Burney, and Edgeworth's representations of British anxieties concerning their status as a leading polite European nation, through their use of the figure of the savage. Britain and France are not only military rivals, they

[106] Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); Clíona Ó Gallchoir, *Maria Edgeworth: Women, Enlightenment, and Nation* (Dublin: University College Press, 2005).

are also cultural adversaries, an issue addressed throughout this thesis. The 'savage' and 'wild' often serve the function of othering, providing an illuminating lens through which to examine cultural insecurities and social inequalities. These include Anglo-French rivalry (Burney and Edgeworth), English perceptions of the Irish (Edgeworth), frustrations with modern codes of behaviour (Burney), social mobility (Austen), and, in all three, concerns about female behaviour. All three express misgivings about British 'civilisation' while recognising the impossibility of its alternative, the Rousseauvian return to primitive nature.

Building on the discussion of the British as a civilised people, the second chapter, which focuses on Austen, examines the issue of language as an important index of social, moral, and national identity. Language, the mirror of character and manners, was considered an important measure of a society's civilised state. Many commentators feared that the English language had been contaminated and corrupted by foreign idioms, especially French, and has lost its native vigour. Simplicity was an important means of preserving the Englishness of English and avoiding the pitfalls of affectation and excess of luxury. Austen's fiction champions simplicity as a corrective to contemporary anxieties concerning the performativity of conversation and as a sign of true gentility. Simplicity, the defining characteristic of the English language, was, moreover, frequently associated with masculinity, which placed additional pressures on women's speech. Enjoined to practise simplicity, this very same attribute could cast their behaviour as unfeminine. Austen's fiction illustrates the paradoxes that governed women's language in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries.

Language is an equally important measure of character in Edgeworth's fiction, but, as an Anglo-Irish author, Edgeworth was highly aware of the fact that English was not the native language of the Irish. While the English language is arguably a means of

uniting the four nations, it is also a reminder of England's domination. This third chapter examines Edgeworth's reflections on the English language and the different ways in which her fiction challenges English hegemony, by demonstrating that the English language itself is heterogeneous. Like Austen, Edgeworth upholds simplicity as a measure of true gentility. This allows her to campaign for an equal partnership between Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom. Edgeworth also argues through the category of simplicity for women's participation in the construction of Britishness. Edgeworth, more than Austen and Burney, explores the porousness of the boundary between the public and private spheres, the domestic sphere seen an important space from which to remodel the public sphere.

Especially after her marriage, Burney became, like Edgeworth, an in-between figure, caught between her loyalty to her native country and her new ties to Britain's enemy. Identified by reviewers as an 'English' novelist, many critics scrutinised her writing for signs of a loss of national identity. Burney's writing, both public and private, is conditioned by her awareness of the reception of her work as an English author and as a female author, who should not interfere with politics. This fourth chapter explores the different strategies Burney adopted to conceal the political import of her writing and to present her work as British. In her private writing, for instance, she constructs d'Arblay as a British gentleman, through his practice of simplicity and sincerity. Burney's work also offers powerful instances of the difficulties of articulating the self and national identity. The chapter discusses Burney's representations of a fractured self in her journals and in her final novel, *The Wanderer*.

This study closes on a discussion of Edgeworth's representations of the figure of the female politician and her growing ambivalence towards the renovation of the public sphere through the domestic. As in her other novels, character is an important

foundation for the nation, and simplicity and sincerity are essential to establishing a sense of shared Britishness. In her later fiction, however, Edgeworth is less confident in women's future active participation in national concerns. While *Manoeuvring* dismisses female political intrigue as un-British but continues to see the domestic as the site of renovation of the public sphere, *Helen*, which offers Edgeworth's most sustained exploration of the figure of the female politician, is less hopeful about women's future national role. Simplicity remains the site of moral character, but there is greater ambivalence concerning the renovating power of the domestic sphere and women's ability to participate in this renovation. The 'golden mean' of simplicity is relegated to the domestic sphere, casting a shadow over the possibility of social change.

Chapter 1

'She really looked almost wild'[1]: Wildness, Women, and Britain

In August 1802, Maria Edgeworth declared to her cousin Sophy Ruxton that she preferred reading an account of a French wild boy found in the Aveyron than the Swiss novelist Isabelle de Charrière's fictional *Letters from Lausanne*.[2] Comparing the two texts, Edgeworth states:

> The Savage of the Aveyron is a thousand times more interesting to me than Caliste [the main figure of Charrière's sentimental educational epistolary novel]. I have not read anything for years that interested me so much. Mr. Chenevix will be here in a few days, when we will cross-question him about this savage, upon whom the eyes of civilized Europe have been fixed.[3]

The 'sauvage de l'Aveyron', a young feral child christened Victor, was discovered in that French region in 1798. The French account, published in 1801, was translated into English in 1802.[4] Edgeworth read it hot off the press and her excitement is palpable in this letter, which draws a clear separation between Victor and 'civilized Europe', conveying confidence that Europe had reached the final stage of social progress, without lingering traces of primitivism. Yet the presence of this wild boy, discovered not in the New World, among the Iroquois or Tahitian peoples, but across the Channel from Britain, represented an uncomfortable reminder that European civilisation was, as Mary Wollstonecraft had argued, only 'partial'.[5] Such an observation challenged

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[1] Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), ed. Pat Rogers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 39. All further references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text.

[2] The *Letters* were first published in 1786 and translated into English in 1799.

[3] *The Life and Letters of Maria Edgeworth*, ed. Augustus D. Hare, 2 vols. (London: Edward Arnold, 1894), I, pp. 168-69.

[4] Jean Marc Gaspard Itard, *An Historical Account of the Discovery and Education of a Savage Man, or of the First Developments, Physical and Moral, of the Young Savage caught in the woods near Aveyron, in the year 1798* (London: Richard Phillips, 1802).

[5] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), ed. Janet Todd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 8, 71, 77.

eighteenth-century narratives of progress which situated Britain in the final stage of social evolution. The notorious cases of Peter the Wild Boy, found in Germany in 1725, and Marie-Angélique Leblanc, a young girl found in 1731 in the Champagne region, were reprinted throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, revealing the uncomfortable fascination the savage exerted over the British public imagination.[6] The lasting impact of Peter, Marie-Angélique, and Victor's histories tapped into Britain's insecurities as a modern nation.[7]At the heart of these interrogations was the negotiation of simplicity.

If the 'savage' seemed clearly identifiable, the 'civilised' was a more ambiguous category. In 1825, an exasperated writer in the *London Magazine* expressed his annoyance at the lack of a clear definition of the ubiquitous word 'civilisation':

> We hear not a little of civilized nations, of the progress of civilized nations, of savage nations, of barbarous ones, of refinement, and of morals, institutions, improvement, retrogradation, and much more. All this appears abundantly clear and easy. It has found food for dancing-masters, and politicians, and moralists, and play-wrights; it has found occupation for the pens of poets and historians; it is a matter for every day remark, and every day conversation; and yet, what is civilization?—where is it—what does it consist in—by what means is it

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[6] There were several accounts of European savages discovered in the course of the eighteenth century, which still circulated at the beginning of the nineteenth century. 'Peter the Wild Boy', or Peter of Hanover, was found in Germany in 1724 and transported to the court of George I in 1726. He died in England in 1785. He was regularly mentioned in reviews and anthologies of 'remarkable persons' in the 1820s and later in the nineteenth century; see Henry Wilson, *Wonderful Characters*, 3 vols. (London: J. Robins, 1821-22), II, pp. 152-60. Edgeworth's *Practical Education* (1798) describes the experiments she and her father performed on Peter. Julia Douthwaite, *The Wild Girl, Natural Man, and the Monster: Dangerous Experiments in the Age of Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 21-28, discusses his history and political function. The account of Marie-Angélique's discovery and integration into French society was published in the *Mercure de France* in 1731 but not translated into English until 1768, then reissued in 1800; *An Account of a Savage Girl, caught wild in the woods of Champagne. Translated from the French of Madam H-t. With a preface containing several particulars omitted in the original account* (Edinburgh: Kincaid and Bell, 1768).

[7] For a recent summary of European perceptions of Britain, see Patrick Vincent, 'Europe's Discourse of Britain', in *The Oxford Handbook of European Romanticism*, ed. Paul Hamilton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 807-23.

excluded—where does it commence—where does it end—by what signs is it known—how is it defined—in short, what does it mean?[8]

The series of questions mirrors the indistinctness that surrounds the concept. 'Civilization' appears as no more than a fashionable buzzword that has caused a lot of ink to be spilled for little actual progress. It is a flag for intolerance, for 'all equally pride themselves in politeness and perfection—all despise others'.[9] More problematic are the effects of commerce: 'Trade, commerce, is especially the produce of civilization; it is the strongest evidence of a civilized country and state of things, next to law and the gallows'.[10] The comparison of commerce, Britons' pride and the final stage of a society's progress, with the gallows conveys the violence that lurks behind civilisation. The piece is, moreover, uncompromising when it comes to civilisation used as an argument to justify colonialism.[11] The *London Magazine* nevertheless does not ask for a complete rejection of the products of civilisation.

Austen, Burney, and Edgeworth offer fictional representations of this conundrum. All three, read alongside Mary Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796), express misgivings about British 'civilisation' while recognising the impossibility of its alternative, the Rousseauvian return to primitive nature. This chapter argues that these three writers deploy the category of the savage and wild individual in their analysis of national identity alongside their examination of contemporary social anxieties and British social progress. The 'savage' and 'wild' often serve the function of othering, providing an illuminating lens through which to examine cultural insecurities and social inequalities. These include Anglo-French rivalry (Burney and Edgeworth), English perceptions of

[8] *The London Magazine* New Series 3 (September 1825), p. 207-13, p. 207.
[9] *Ibid*., p. 210.
[10] *Ibid*., p. 209.
[11] *Ibid*., p. 212.

the Irish (Edgeworth), frustrations with modern codes of behaviour (Burney), social mobility (Austen), and, in all three, concerns about female behaviour. Jane Austen has been credited with the first instance of the use of the word 'wild' to mean 'passionately or excitedly desirous *to do* something' (*OED*, 11.b.) in her first published novel, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), which shows the difficulty in the period of distinguishing the 'real' from the metaphorical savage. All three authors explore the porous boundary between the literal and figurative meanings of 'wild' and 'savage', an ambiguity sustained by the fear that a dark, savage disposition laid dormant within polite society.

The wild individual, and, this chapter demonstrates, the wild woman in particular, raised the question of how native simplicity could coincide with endeavours to establish the British as a leading 'polite and commercial people'.[12] While simplicity, as this thesis argues, enabled a shared sense of Britishness, it also marred the British people's position within 'civilized Europe'. How could the British move away from their savage past while preserving their native simplicity? How could native simplicity remain without being a sign of lingering wildness? This issue was at the heart of the cultural rivalry between the British and the French, for whom 'simplicity' was just another word for wild beast. Burney's *Evelina* (1778) and diaries, and Edgeworth's *Leonora* (1806), satirise this sense of cultural inferiority. A common trait between the British Isles, simplicity nevertheless needed to be distinguished from the primitive. Moreover, the newly formed United Kingdom struggled to see itself as a unified, civilised nation: the farther one travelled from sophisticated urban centres towards rural and Celtic peripheries, the closer one came to encountering man in a savage state. As non-metropolitan writers, Austen and Edgeworth satirised the urban centres' views of

[12] I borrow this phrase from Paul Langford's seminal study *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727-1783* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

the peripheries as populated by savage people. The categories of the savage and wild were a powerful tool of cultural, social, and political oppression, granting the 'civilised' individual power over the 'savage' person. In *Pride and Prejudice* (1812), for example, upwardly mobile characters assert their social standing through the opposition between civilised politeness and the unrefined, wild behaviour they detect in those they wish to diminish. Allusions to the savage or wild are a means of othering marginal figures.

'Savage' and 'wild' were often used interchangeably in the late eighteenth century. Samuel Johnson defines 'wild' as 'Not tame; not domestick', 'Propagated by nature; not cultivated', and 'Savage; uncivilized'. 'Wildness' is 'Savageness; brutality' and 'Uncultivated state'. 'Savage' meanwhile signified 'Wild; uncultivated', 'Untamed; cruel', and 'Uncivilized, barbarous, untaught'. 'Gothic', which does not appear in Johnson's *Dictionary*, was sometimes also used to denote a barbarous, rude, and unpolished state. These definitions show the terms were opposed to education or 'cultivation', civil society, as well as progress, and what came to be known as 'civilisation'. The wild individual was incompatible with the codes and expectations of refined polite society. Johnson did not include 'civilisation', but defined the verb 'To civilize' as 'To reclaim from savageness and brutality'. As Jean Starobinski notes, the term 'civilisation' in the sense of 'human cultural, social, and intellectual development when considered to be advanced and progressive in nature' (*OED*) was first used in England in the second half of the eighteenth century.[13] The word quickly gained currency and was often used alongside or in lieu of 'polished' or 'refined', key qualities that denoted human progress, although, as the *London Magazine* illustrates, authors repeatedly questioned the nature of this polite civilisation. Historians argued that the

[13] Jean Starobinski, *Blessings in Disguise; Or, The Morality of Evil*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), pp. 5-6. See also Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 57-60.

United Kingdom was no longer in a primitive state, but, as the discoveries of Victor and other wild children attest, the savage was never far away. It troubles Henry Tilney's confidence in *Northanger Abbey* (1818) that, in 'the country and the age in which we live', the bestial 'horror' Catherine Morland encounters in her favourite Gothic novels has not disappeared.[14]

While the fictions of Austen, Burney, and Edgeworth address both male and female wildness, they expose the period's greater concern over wild female behaviour, which some thought threatened the nation's social and political stability. Douthwaite notes that Marie-Angélique continued to capture the British public's attention long after she held any sway over French audiences, her history appearing in various British accounts until the 1830s, which can be read as evidence that female wildness was a specifically British anxiety.[15] As guardians of morality, bearers of national character, and civilising agents, women were scrutinised for signs of wildness, which was synonymous with uncontrolled female sexuality. This justified patriarchal supremacy on the grounds that national security was jeopardised. Women's education can be understood as the taming of unwanted female wildness, or female sexual desire. This is evidenced most clearly in Austen's 'Catharine, or the Bower' and *Northanger Abbey*, and in Edgeworth's *Belinda* and *The Absentee*. Moreover, female education rested on the 'oxymoronic project' of the 'cultivation of simplicity', as Deidre Lynch observes in her discussion of *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park*.[16] 'If women wish to please, they should consider that nothing *can* please long, but the simplicity of nature', the wise John Bennett counselled, yet, as this chapter argues, women's proximity to nature was

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[14] Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (1818), ed. Barbara M. Benedict and Deirdre Le Faye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 203. All further references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text.
[15] Douthwaite, pp. 48-49.
[16] Deidre Shauna Lynch, '"Young Ladies are Delicate Plants": Jane Austen and Greenhouse Romanticism', *ELH* 77:3 (Autumn 2010), pp. 689-729, p. 710.

dangerously close to wildness.[17] The issue of female education allowed female authors to ask the question: what does being civilised in the newly formed United Kingdom mean? Some of their conclusions sit uncomfortably with Whig narratives of progress, especially when it was partly measured through the treatment of women.[18]

Female writers were arguably particularly sensitive to discussions of wildness because they, like other marginal figures, were themselves prey to accusations of wild behaviour through their participation in the public world of print. Female authorship threatened to cross gender lines and was often construed as a wild act. Samuel Johnson in *The Adventurer* likened the growing number of women writers to ‘a generation of Amazons of the pen’ who ‘have set masculine tyranny at defiance’.[19] The figure of the amazon haunted female authors as much as it fascinated them.[20] In his *Memoirs* of Mary Wollstonecraft, Godwin attempted to rescue the author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* from her public reputation as a ‘sturdy, muscular, raw-boned virago’.[21] Vilified by male reviewers, Sydney Owenson defended herself against similar accusations of masculine behaviour. In the preface to *Patriotic Sketches* (1807),

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[17] John Bennett, *Strictures on Female Education* (Norwich: E. Bushnell, 1787), p. 125.

[18] According to Lord Kames, ‘Nations polish by degrees; and from the lowest state to which a human creature can be reduced, women came in time to be restored to their native dignity’. Lord Kames, ‘Progress of the Female Sex’, *Sketches of Man*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Creech; London: Strahan and Cadell, 1774), I, pp. 168-219, p. 188. Women’s elevation from the state of slave was not so they could achieve independence but become adequate companions for men. For a discussion of the position of women in Scottish Enlightenment accounts of social progress see Silvia Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 133-62. See also her chapter in *Women, Gender, and Enlightenment*, ed. Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 75-96, and Sylvana Tomaselli’s discussion of the male writing of female conjectural history in the same volume, pp. 117-35.

[19] Samuel Johnson, *The Adventurer* 115 (1753), *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, ed. W. J. Bate, John M. Bullitt, and L. F. Powell (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), II, p. 458.

[20] G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 351-96.

[21] William Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of* A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (London: Johnson, 1798), p. 83. In the second edition, Godwin changed the phrase for ‘rude, pedantic, dictatorial, virago’, which reveals the need to rescue Wollstonecraft from accusations of masculinity.

published a year after her sensational *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806), Owenson vindicated her literary endeavours as the expression of feminine sensibility:[22]

> But though I meant not to appear on the list of opposition as a fairy amazon, armed with a pebble and a sling, against a host of gigantic prejudices: although to compose a national defence […] was as incompatible with my sex and years, as with my trivial talent, and limited powers; yet I was still aware that in the historic page, recent details, and existing circumstances of Irish story, lived many a record of Irish virtue, Irish genius, and Irish heroism, which the simplicity of truth alone was sufficient to delineate; many a tale of pathos which woman's heart could warmest feel, and truest tell, and many a trait of romantic colouring and chivalrous refinement, which woman's fancy fondest contemplates and best depicts.[23]

As a 'fairy amazon', Owenson belongs to Polwhele's 'unsex'd females'. Yet it is through this category of the wild woman or 'fairy amazon' that women writers were able to challenge the binary opposition between masculine and feminine attributes and expose British social inequalities.

'New-dress'd luxury […] kicks good old Simplicity down stairs':[24] Eighteenth-Century Contexts

Late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century debates on the state of the nation were indebted to the stadial or conjectural model of social progress developed by

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[22] In the twentieth century, Owenson was still criticised for her celebration of 'wilderness' in cultural politics. See Elmer Andrews, 'Aesthetics, Politics, and Identity: Lady Morgan's *The Wild Irish Girl*', *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 13:2 (December 1987), pp. 7-19, p. 11.

[23] Sydney Owenson, *Patriotic Sketches of Ireland, Written in Connaught*, 2 vols. (London: Phillips, 1807), I, pp. v-vii.

[24] *Town Fashions, Or Modern Manners Delineated, A Satirical Dialogue; with James and Mary, A Rural Tale* (Edinburgh: Blackwood; London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1810), p. 28.

Scottish Enlightenment thinkers such as Adam Smith, John Millar, Lord Kames, and Adam Ferguson. Philosophers researching the 'natural history of society' assessed 'mankind in their progress from rudeness and refinement' and recorded the differences between the opposite poles of 'barbarity and civilization'.[25] This theory explained socio-economic development according to modes of subsistence, outlining a four-stage evolution from primitivism to refinement and civilisation, which moved from the hunter-gatherer to the pastoral, the agricultural, and finally to the stage of commerce, coinciding with the spread of luxury.[26] As Paul Langford summarises, '[a] history of luxury and attitudes to luxury would come to being a history of the eighteenth century'.[27] For some, the commerce of goods was synonymous with intellectual exchange and therefore a positive social force, while others, including opposition Whigs and Tories who later came to be known as civic humanists, feared luxury was 'a debilitating and corrosive social evil', a source of moral decay, effeminacy, and eventually national decline.[28] Lord Kames detailed the evils attending luxury:

> Luxury, a never-failing concomitant of wealth, is a slow poison, that debilitates men, and renders them incapable of any great effort: courage, magnanimity, heroism, come to be ranked among the miracles that are supposed never to have existed but in fable; and the fashionable properties of sensuality, avarice,

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[25] *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 4th ed. (Edinburgh: Bell, Constable; London: Vernor, Hood, and Sharpe, 1810), XIX, p. 436.

[26] For a helpful discussion of eighteenth-century stadial history, see Ronald L. Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

[27] Langford, *Polite and Commercial People*, p. 3.

[28] Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger (eds.), *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires, and Delectable Goods* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 2. For a brief overview of the evolution of the debate, see Christopher J. Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), Ch. 6, pp. 126-76. For an elegant account of the role of luxury and consumption in the construction of Britishness, see Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). For a discussion of luxury's effeminizing effects, see Emma. J. Clery, *The Feminization Debate in Eighteenth-Century England: Literature, Commerce, and Luxury* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). For an interdisciplinary account see, Berg and Eger.

> cunning, and dissimulation, engross the mind. In a word, man, by constant prosperity and peace, degenerates into a mean, impotent, and selfish animal; more despicable, if less odious, than an American savage[.][29]

As Kames makes clear, luxury takes British citizens back to primitivism, where man is little better than a savage. More worryingly, luxury compromised native simplicity. One may cite the anonymous author of *Town Fashions* (1810), for example, who regretted that, recently arrived in Edinburgh, 'new-dress'd luxury […] kicks good old Simplicity down stairs'. The author mourns the disappearance of 'rustic plainness' and 'manly, mild *Simplicity*'.[30] Luxury, destroying vigour and simplicity, is the death of British national identity.

To establish itself as a modern civilised nation, especially in its rivalry with France, Britain had to distance itself from its 'rude forefathers' and its 'Gothic' past, which made native simplicity an extremely difficult quality to negotiate.[31] According to Lord Chesterfield, the expert in social 'graces', simplicity was incompatible with polite civilisation:

> [M]ankind has been so long out of a state of nature, and the golden age of native simplicity will never return. Whether for the better or the worse, no matter, but we are refined, and plain manners, plain dress, and plain diction, would as little do in life, as acorns, herbage, and the water of the neighbouring spring, would do at table.[32]

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[29] Lord Kames, *Sketches of Man*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Creech; London: Strahan and Cadell, 1774), I, p. 430.
[30] *Town Fashions*, pp. 28, 50.
[31] The phrase recalls Thomas Gray, 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard', but was otherwise ubiquitous in the period.
[32] Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield, 'Letter CXC, London, November 20, 1753', *Letters Written by the Late Right Honourable Earl of Chesterfield to his Son*, 4 vols., 6th ed. (London: J. Dodsley, 1775), IV, p. 32.

‘Native simplicity’ and plainness are equated with primitivism, irreconcilable with ‘life’, or polite society. Acorns, a metonymy for the hunter-gatherer stage, do not belong at the table, which stands for progress and polite consumption, and places man firmly within doors. Radicals, liberals, and conservatives alike debated the possibility of reconciling native plainness and simplicity with modern civilisation. As discussed in the introduction, Burke for instance claimed that Britain derived its strength from ‘the simplicity of our national character’ and ‘the native plainness and directness of understanding’.[33] Because of its proximity to primitivism, however, this native simplicity marred Britain’s cultural standing. British imperial expansion, as Alok Yadav argues, did not depend on culture alone but ‘imperial stature could not be sanctioned […] without cultural pre-eminence’.[34] Even though ‘Britannia rules the waves’ by the end of the eighteenth century, spreading British culture to the far corners of the earth, the British, often referred to as English, were still perceived as a ‘rude’ people by foreigners. Simplicity always threatened to evoke the bloody history Daniel Defoe rehearsed in *The True-Born Englishman*.

The British always seemed to lose against France in the race for cultural supremacy. In an issue examining ‘the striking difference […] between the national character of the French and the English’, *The Loiterer*, the Austen brothers’ periodical, presents the enduring French prejudice against the English as an uncivilised people:

> [A]n Englishman is a rough, ferocious and uncivilized animal, just one degree above an Ouran Outang, and is most deplorably ignorant of the *agréments* of society, as he can neither fiddle, dance, or laugh.[35]

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[33] Burke, *Reflections*, p. 254.
[34] Alok Yadav, *Before the Empire of English: Literature, Provinciality, and Nationalism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 18.
[35] James Austen, *The Loiterer* (1789-90), 10, Saturday, April 4, 1789, ed. Robert L. Mack (Lewiston, N.Y.; Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), p. 57.

For the French, the English fall short in all aspects of polite living. The opposition between 'rude ancestors' and the present would suggest that Mr Loiterer is confident that Britain has arrived at the final stage of progress, but a struggle for cultural authority remained. Mina Gorji argues that debates about 'rudeness', signifying a lack of education and refinement, 'often mark struggles for cultural authority which erupt at particular points of crisis or social change', which Britain was witnessing in Austen's lifetime.[36] The English middle classes are equally contemptuous of the French '*Mounseers*', 'add[ing] the charge of weakness and effeminacy'.[37] A striking feature of this number is that the Mr Loiterer does not side with either camp but concludes that both could benefit from mutual exchange.

The visual culture of the period supports this French perception of the English as wild beasts. In 1779, James Gillray's satirical print *Politeness* depicts the mutual perception of the French and the English. 'Jack English', beer in hand, legs sporting thick boots and spread wide, a bull-dog under his chair, glares at an equally irate frail wigged Frenchman, with delicate buckled shoes and a snuff-box (Figure 2). To the Englishman's oath 'Monsieur' replies: 'Vous etes une Bete'. While 'Jack' is a beast, the Frenchman is overly refined and effeminate.

In *A Trip to Paris* (1802), Charles Williams' John Bull tells an impeccably dressed and positioned Napoleon that he knows no 'more about Politeness than a cow does a new shilling', only to be rebuked by Hibernia who threatens to send him to Kilkenny 'to larn good breeding' (Figure 3).

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[36] Mina Gorji, 'Introduction', in *Rude Britannia*, ed. Mina Gorji (New York: Routledge; London: Taylor and Francis, 2007), p. 7.
[37] *The Loiterer* 10, p. 57.

Figure 2: Politeness (James Gillray, 1779)

Figure 3: A Trip to Paris (Charles Williams, 1802)

In 1815, an even more portly John Bull in a French print takes lessons in politeness, reflecting the enduring view of the English as a rude and boorish nation (Figure 4). The diploma granted to 'William Dog' conveys the French view of the English as 'just one degree above' animals. From the French perspective, the English know nothing of the refinements of polite society, while from the English point of view, the French are affected, pretentious, and effeminate. This in turn led to the figure of the simpering fop, the caricature of the Englishman trying to ape French manners.[38]

Figure 4: Cours de politesse et de belles manières (Godefroy Engelmann, 1815)

At stake was the fear that making John Bull polite would turn him into a Frenchman without any trace of his native simplicity. In David Fordyce's *Dialogues Concerning Education* (1745-48), Cleora wonders 'may we not be polite and agreeable, without polishing our selves out of our old *British* plainness and sincerity?'[39] 'Old'

[38] See for instance the character of French Clay in Edgeworth's *Patronage* (1814).
[39] David Fordyce, *Dialogues Concerning Education*, 2 vols. (London, 1745-48), I, p. 45-46.

indicates a sense of an original and enduring identity, while 'British' clearly marks plainness and sincerity as qualities inherent to the British people. The question was, 'how could the English gentleman be at once polite and manly?'[40] Simplicity was one of the answers. Opposed to ornament yet the sign of elegance, simplicity allowed the British to be manly and *British*. The *British Critic* in 1815, with Burkean rhetoric, gloated that one of the benefits of France's recent 'hideous change' was that 'it has preserved the purity of our own [nation]; that we return to our native shores with the dignified simplicity of our native character unencumbered with the frippery and frivolity of ancient days, which so ill agreed with the stock on which it was engrafted.'[41] The British have not only resisted Napoleon's forces, they have successfully fended off French 'frippery and frivolity'. Simplicity, the mark of true Britishness, has been restored.

Simplicity should not be confused with a return to nature and primitivism, as Chesterfield for instance claimed. Lois Whitney in 1934 argued that to counteract the degeneration people feared attended luxury, there was 'a renewed burst of enthusiasm for simplicity, the simplicity of life according to nature.'[42] While some primitivists considered that man in state of nature is pure and good, many authors proved the fallacy of this desire. The nature accessible to the gentry and the growing middle classes was a controlled environment, far from the wilds of Canada or even the savage landscapes of the Scottish Highlands or Ireland. Gillray's satirical print *The Three Graces in a high Wind—a Scene taken from Nature, in Kensington Gardens* (1810), a parody of Raphael's *Three Graces*, satirises the artifice and affectation of a return to nature

[40] Michèle Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity: National Identity and Language in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 41.
[41] *The British Critic and Quarterly Theological Review* 3 (May 1815), p. 525.
[42] Lois Whitney, *Primitivism and the Idea of Progress in English Popular Literature of the Eighteenth-Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1934), p. 57, pp. 42-60.

(Figure 5). The women’s ribboned straw bonnets are blown by the wind while their loose-fitting empire line dresses, cling unflatteringly to their lower body. Kensington Gardens, London’s ‘most exclusive green’, was a place of fashionable sociability. It became the epitome of artificial nature after Queen Caroline had it fenced in 1774.[43] For writers such as Austen, Burney, Edgeworth, and even Mary Wollstonecraft, the return to nature is a myth that cannot answer the ills of modernity. Rustic simplicity is an idealised middle-class construction. Nature is in fact second nature. Yet Britain, as the novels discussed in this chapter demonstrate, remained uncertain about how far it had progressed from primitivism and how to accommodate its native simplicity.

Figure 5: The Graces in a high Wind—a Scene taken from Nature, in Kensington Gardens (James Gillray, 1810)

[43] Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 173.

Frances Burney and Mary Wollstonecraft: Man's Perfection in a Civilised State

Burney's fiction, from *Evelina* (1778) to *The Wanderer* (1814), displays an ambivalence towards the civilising effect of politeness with a recognition that its alternative, a return to nature or rural simplicity, is neither a satisfactory solution nor a possibility for the middling classes and the gentry. In *Cecilia* (1782), Mr Monckton argues that politeness exerts a disciplining power that is unavoidable in organised society:

> 'But who is there in the world […] that can pretend to assert, his thoughts, words, and actions, are exempt from controul? […] are we not by mere forms kept standing when tired? made give place to those we despise? and smiles to those we hate? or if we refuse these attentions, are we not regarded as savages, and shut out of society?'[44]

For Monckton, a polite existence is either one of complete surrender to the 'controul' and 'forms' of politeness or an exclusion from social circles and a relegation to the status of beast. Such a definition sits uncomfortably with the Whig notion of liberty, since politeness polices the individual. As 'forms' indicates, politeness is preoccupied with outward signs, close to a system of hypocrisy.[45] The protagonist Belfield, on the other hand, disagrees that 'this pantomimical parade' (735) is incompatible with sincerity, although the phrase recognises the notions of affectation and performance. Belfield reaches this conclusion after his fruitless project to 'lead the life which uncorrupted Nature first presented to man' (660) as a day labourer. His experiment, which 'levelled [him] with a brute' (738), exposes the myth of a return to nature:

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[44] Frances Burney, *Cecilia; Or, Memoirs of an Heiress* (1782), ed. Margaret Anne Doody and Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 735. All further references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text.

[45] See Jenny Davidson, *Hypocrisy and the Politics of Politeness: Manners and Morals from Locke to Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

> 'I am come from a region in the first rude state of nature, to civilization and refinement! the life I led at the cottage was the life of a savage; no intercourse with society, no consolation from books; my mind locked up, every source dried of intellectual delight, and no enjoyment in my power but from sleep and from food.' (738)

Rural life is not idyllic artless simplicity but savage primitivism. This attempt is moreover futile since 'customs long established, and habits long indulged, assume an empire despotic […] Opposing them is vain' (734). 'Customs' are second nature, an argument that anticipates Burke's later formulation in *Reflections*.

Burney's characters are caught between the poles of polite 'forms' and uncultivated primitivism. All of Burney's heroines experience physical and psychological violence in polite society, which challenges the newly formed United Kingdom's position as a civilised country. They, however, do not necessarily encounter a more innocent and benevolent human nature in rustic simplicity. In *The Wanderer*, the heroine Juliet Granville realises that 'dishonest cupidity' also finds its place in 'the bosom of retired and beautiful rusticity'.[46] Juliet 'had always connected the idea of rusticity with innocence, and of rural of life with felicity' (705), but her experience in the New Forest forces her to re-evaluate this belief. As she seeks refuge in the woods, Juliet finds compassion in the 'simplicity and goodness' (714) of Dame Fairfield yet is repulsed by her husband's illegal activities.[47] Burney's characters are therefore caught between abusive urban polite society and an uncultivated rural existence.

What can seem a conservative position in favour of civilisation was a conundrum that radical writers also encountered. Mary Wollstonecraft, who admired

[46] Frances Burney, *The Wanderer; Or, Female Difficulties* (1814), ed. Margaret Anne Doody, Robert L. Mack, and Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 718. All further references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text.
[47] Juliet initially fears he is a murderer then discovers he and his accomplices are poachers.

Cecilia, expressed a similar ambivalence concerning polite civilisation.[48] In *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796), Wollstonecraft criticised 'over-acted civility' for exerting 'a continual restraint on all your actions', an echo of Monckton's 'controul', yet reached Belfield's conclusion that she needed the refinement of polished civilisation.[49] An advocate for simplicity and artlessness, 'the intrepid champion of her sex' was not a champion of primitivism.[50] *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* attacked Rousseau for 'throwing the wheat with the chaff' when he should have 'darted forward to contemplate the perfection of man in the establishment of true civilization, instead of taking his ferocious flight back to the night of sensual ignorance.'[51] For Wollstonecraft, there is nothing noble about the state of nature. In the *Letters*, she returned to 'Rousseau's golden age of stupidity' while disparaging the 'commercial spirit' she believed resulted in a 'stamp of meanness' and 'poverty of conception'.[52] A deep ambivalence therefore characterises Wollstonecraft's Scandinavian *Letters* as is the case with Burney's *Cecilia*.

The *Letters* reveal the ambiguity that surrounds simplicity's position within civilised society. In line with Enlightenment stadial theory, the *Letters* demonstrate the benefits of 'general polish' and progress. '[T]he cultivation of the arts and sciences' has pride of place since they 'lift man so far above his first state'.[53] Wollstonecraft notes positively that, in Sweden, 'Amongst the peasantry, there is […] so much of the

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[48] Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 147.
[49] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (London: Johnson, 1796), p. 22. The *Letters* are not just a travel memoir but love letters addressed to an anonymous beloved, Gilbert Imlay. Wollstonecraft travelled to Scandinavia to act as Imlay's agent after he left France. The letters were written in London after her return. The *Letters* are a gendered critique of Adam Smith's theory of free enterprise. See Angela Keane, pp. 122-24; Miranda Burgess, *British Fiction and the Production of Social Order, 1740-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 113-49.
[50] Richard Polwhele, *Unsex'd Females*.
[51] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, pp. 79-80, 83.
[52] Wollstonecraft, *Letters*, p. 116, p. 158.
[53] *Ibid*., pp. 59, 115.

simplicity of the golden age', but admits that '[her] fancy has probably, when disgusted with artificial manners, solaced itself by joining the advantages of cultivation with the interesting sincerity of innocence, forgetting the lassitude that ignorance will naturally produce.'[54] However frustrated she may be with modern manners, Wollstonecraft clearly supports the superiority of civilised society, and as such shares more with conservative thinking than one might think. Wollstonecraft nevertheless expresses reservations concerning the effects of social progress. She is, for instance, relieved to note that Norwegian 'cultivation has not smoothed into insipidity all its originality of character' (34), which echoes contemporary debates about the loss of vigour and native character polish could cause more generally.[55] When she meets the wife of the Grand Bailiff of Christiana, she values the fact that, 'in acquiring the easy politeness which distinguishes people of quality, she had preserved her norwegian [sic] simplicity'.[56] The Grand Bailiff's wife has managed to not polish herself out of her native character and simplicity.

The small Scandinavian countries Wollstonecraft tours serve as counter-examples to the sophistication England had reached. The volume oscillates between retired rusticity and the advantages of polite social intercourse, placing Wollstonecraft in a similar position to Burney's Belfield and Juliet. This ambivalence is most salient as she travels through Norway:

> I am interested by the simplicity of manners which reigns around me. Still nothing so soon wearies out the feelings as unmarked simplicity. I am, therefore, half convinced, that I could not live very comfortably exiled from the countries where mankind are so much further advanced in knowledge, imperfect as it is,

[54] *Ibid.*, p. 41.
[55] *Ibid.*, p. 34.
[56] *Ibid.*, p. 156.

> and unsatisfactory to the thinking mind. Even now I begin to long to hear what you are doing in England and France. My thoughts fly from this wilderness to the polished circles of the world, till recollecting its vices and follies, I bury myself in the woods, but find it necessary to emerge again, that I may not lose sight of the wisdom and virtue which exalts my nature.[57]

This passage, which reflects the tensions in Wollstonecraft's mind, is a more sophisticated version of Belfield's disgust with rustic living. 'Polished circles' are places of 'vices and follies', a familiar comment, but it is also there that Wollstonecraft finds 'wisdom and virtue'. Like Burney's Juliet, the woods cannot satisfy her educated mind. The English are implicitly more civilised. In Wollstonecraft's text, France and England are placed at the same stage of progress, although England sometimes fares unfavourably in comparison with its Gallic neighbour. As Jan Wellington notes, the *Letters* are 'a re-evaluation (revaluation) of the effeminate French character'.[58] The *Letters* therefore bare the trace of the scramble for cultural supremacy between England and France, as well as internal British rivalries. Wollstonecraft was keen to highlight that 'the country girls of Ireland and Wales equally feel the first impulse of nature, which, restrained in England, by fear or delicacy, proves that society is there in a more advanced state.'[59] As in the works discussed in this thesis, female behaviour is a measure of a people's civilised state. It should, moreover, be unquestionably distanced from man's first state of nature. For Wollstonecraft, mankind's perfection rests in 'polished circles'.

[57] *Ibid*., pp. 116-17.
[58] Jan Wellington, 'Blurring the Borders of Nation and Gender: Mary Wollstonecraft's Character (R)evolution', in *Rebellious Hearts: British Women Writers and the French Revolution*, ed. Adriana Craciun and Kari E. Lokke (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), pp. 33-61, p. 49, pp. 49-52.
[59] Wollstonecraft, *Letters*, p. 39.

Frances Burney: A British 'parcel of brutes' and the 'Gothic *anglaise*'[60]

In *Evelina*, Burney's first novel, London is a wilderness the heroine must learn to navigate. Critics have long noted the rampant violence the novel represents.[61] Juliet Shields argues *Evelina* is a 'national romance' which engages with reflections on Britishness, a point often superseded by readings of the novel as a Bildungsroman.[62] Britain's social elites often exhibited their knowledge of the French language and French manners to justify their position in the fashionable world. The foppish Mr Lovel, the leader of 'the *ton* in the *beau monde*' (393), uses French to assert his social superiority over others. What Burney condemns, however, is the affectation of French ways as opposed to French customs themselves. The most extreme example of misguided self-fashioning through a cultivation of French manners is Madame Duval, an Englishwoman who creates an entirely fake French identity to cement the social elevation she achieved through marriage and to separate herself from 'common people' (53). This aping of French manners only serves to reveal her commonness. Nicknamed 'Madam French', her performance of Frenchness is a caricature of French attitudes towards the English, whom she views as wild and uncivilised. According to Madame Duval, 'there's no nation under the sun can beat the English for ill-politeness' (52) and the English are 'a parcel of brutes' (52), an accusation reminiscent of the Frenchman's claim in Gillray's print that the Englishman is a 'bete'.

The 'brute' Madame Duval encounters is Captain Mirvan, a figure of jingoistic nationalism. The Captain asserts his Englishness through his Francophobia and a

[60] Frances Burney, *Evelina* (1778), ed. Edward A. Bloom, with an Introduction and Notes by Vivien Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 52. All further references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text. Burney, 'To Miss Planta, Paris, April 27, 1802', *J&L*, V, p. 290.

[61] Doody, *Frances Burney*; Julia Epstein, *The Iron Pen: Frances Burney and the Politics of Women's Writing* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1989); Kristina Straub, *Divided Fictions: Fanny Burney and Feminine Strategy* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1987).

[62] Juliet Shields, *Sentimental Literature and Anglo-Scottish Identity, 1745-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 96.

conscious self-presentation as a '*barbare*' Englishman (170). His favourite pastime is to torment Madame Duval by exaggerating his performance of the 'filthy, beastly *Englishman*' (76). His Englishness is, as Shields notes, one of 'aggressive masculinity'.[63] English identity is defined as savage and unrefined, but it is paradoxically a self-assured cultivated savagery. The Captain is confident in the strength of the British empire. The English, he claims, have 'enough of other nations to pick our pockets already' (52). The imperial expansion that secured British supremacy appears as a violent act of commercial appropriation. The Captain's 'savage conduct' is, moreover, rampant across London. Violence is found in *Evelina* in all sections of society and among those self-proclaimed representatives of 'civilized society', as Burney herself experienced.

In Burney's letters, the British occasionally appear as a 'parcel of brutes' to French onlookers. Like so many other British citizens, Burney seized the opportunity granted by the Treaty of Amiens in 1802 to join her husband General Alexandre d'Arblay in Paris. Travelling from London to Dover, Burney encountered the beastliness of '*messire anglois*'. As she is about to board the coach, her travelling companion Adrienne de Chavagnac informs her an English gentleman is about to take the best seat:

> '[V]oici un monsieur Anglois, qui surement va *prendre* la meilleure!'—:&, *en effet,* ce monsieur Anglois did not disappoint her expectations—or much raise mine; for he not only took the best place, but contrived still to ameliorate it by the little scruple with which he made every other worse, through the unbridled

[63] Shields, p. 99.

> expansion in which he indulged his dear person by jutting out his Elbows against his next, & his knees & feet against his opposite Neighbour.[64]

Not only does the offender secure the best seat, he also takes great pleasure in increasing his companions' discomfort. The traveller's posture recalls the depictions of John Bull, often portrayed with arms and legs spread wide. Burney's tableau is similar to Charles Williams' satirical print *A Trip to Paris* (1802), in which a lean Napoleon faces a bulky John Bull and Hibernia (see discussion above). As the incident demonstrates, John Bullish attitudes were prevalent across the British Isles. This 'monsieur Anglois' is in fact a native of Scotland, whom Burney identifies as a Highland Chief. Her conclusion regarding his character is uncompromising: he is 'a Gentleman BORN, though not gently bred', implying birth does not automatically confer gentility, a theme regularly discussed in the literature of the period.[65] The episode also illustrates the difficulty for foreigners to distinguish between English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish. Abroad, the British citizen is always '*Messire Anglois*'.

The coach scene develops the national stereotypes that surfaced at the beginning of the journey. A disagreement between the Highlander and a French 'gouvernante' over the closing or opening of the carriage window leads to an exchange worthy of the squabbles between Captain Mirvan and Madame Duval. The 'gouvernante' calls the Scot a 'rude Man' and a 'Brute' twice, threatening to take him to the Municipality, while the Chieftain disputes her claim that she is a 'lady'.[66] While Burney agrees that the man's behaviour is rude, the prospect that French authorities will become involved awakens Burney's own sense of national identity, which had remained dormant until that point. 'English, too, myself, to appear against a Member

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[64] To Dr Burney, Journal for 15 April 1802, *J&L*, V, pp. 217-18. 'Here is an English gentleman who will surely *take* the best [seat]' (translation mine).
[65] *Ibid*., p. 218.
[66] To Dr Burney, Journal for 15-19 April 1802, *J&L*, V, pp. 236-37.

of our United Kingdom' she writes, a rare instance of direct reference to the recently formed political unity of the British nations.[67] The Highlander disappears at Chantilly, never to return. The passage remains striking for its similarity with *Evelina*, although this time the brute is Scottish, not English, but the difference is indiscernible to the French eye. It would therefore seem that the British are really a 'parcel of brutes'.

The British, 'a sullen, unsocial, cold, unpleasant race of men' were often perceived as savage by the French because of their reported lack of polite sociability.[68] Alexandre d'Arblay was especially sensitive to his wife's tendency to retreat: 'Il n'y a qu'un seul point que je ne puis approuver, et que même je condamne. C'est ta *sauvagerie*.'[69] The letters record repeated accusations of 'sauvagerie', a term Burney adopts and in the process re-appropriates. It is used to characterise her crippling shyness and preference for intimate gatherings rather than larger social assemblies. In 1802, she was pleased to tell Mrs Locke that 'we have made known our general habits, and my particular *sauvagerie* with great success'.[70] During the period of her mastectomy, she opened her doors to numerous friends, 'contrarily to my usual mode of *sauvagerie*'.[71] Burney, however, made a distinction between the French perception of the English as '*sauvage*' and the use of 'savage' in English. She and d'Arblay affectionately referred to their son as 'our sauvage', which does not imply he is a feral creature. She informs Mrs Waddington that knowing her kindness 'would frighten the poor *sauvage*—not *savage*—100 miles away', a distinction which suggests 'savage' is not an adequate

[67] *Ibid*., p. 237.
[68] Edmund Burke, 'Speech in the Impeachment of Warren Hastings' (1788), cited in Paul Langford, *Englishness Identified: Manners and Character, 1650-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 226, and pp. 175-98, 226-58 for an overview of English taciturnity and reserve.
[69] Alexandre d'Arblay, 10 December 1801, *J&L*, V, p. 84. 'There is only point I cannot approve of, and even condemn. It is your *sauvagerie*.' (Translation mine)
[70] Frances Burney, To Mrs Locke, 28 December 1802, *J&L*, V, p. 406.
[71] Frances Burney, To Esther Burney, of 30 September 1811, *J&L*, VI, p. 601.

translation for 'sauvage'.[72] This distinction rejects French accusations while upholding a native wildness that cannot be contaminated by French accusations.

The same year that Edgeworth marvelled at the savage of the Aveyron, Burney was confronted with her exposure as a wild English woman in Paris. Her position eventually dictated that she leave her nest on the rue Miromesnil and step into Parisian society. This she felt would require a complete transformation:

> My own stupendous wardrobe to refit, and my own poor exterior to reorganize! […] I found all that I possessed seemed so hideously old fashioned, or so comically rustic, that as soon as it was decreed I must make my appearance in the *grand monde*, hopeless of exhibiting myself in the *costume francais* [sic], I gave over the attempt, & ventured to come forth as a Gothic *anglaise*, who had never heard of, or never heeded, the reigning metamorphoses.[73]

The 'Gothic' and 'rustic' dress is not only old-fashioned, it also denotes an unambiguous lack of polish. Burney, however, owns this identity as she decides to brave Parisian stares with her English clothes. Her inability to adopt the '*costume francais*' reflects her strong identification as an English woman and a sense that this identity is unalterable. Burney's clothes are a political act. Contrasted with French 'metamorphoses', the English wardrobe is imbued with a sense of permanence that can be interpreted as reflecting national politics. The adjective 'reigning' confers political significance to fashion. French fashion changes mirror the country's political instability. By contrast, the English Gothic costume, like the English constitution, endures. The Gothic dress then becomes an act of political defiance: just as English

[72] Frances Burney, To Mrs Waddington, c, 11-17 July 1814, *J&L*, VII, p. 398.
[73] Frances Burney, To Miss Planta, Paris, April 27, 1802, *J&L*, V, p. 290.

fashion will not give in to Gallic trends, England will resist Napoleon's forces. English wildness will stand strong, even if it displeases the elegant 'monsieur'.

Female 'Freke-ishness' and male eccentricity in Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801)

Anxieties about residues of wildness in British society dominate *Belinda* (1801) in various ways. The original title 'At Home and Abroad', while pointing to the opposition between British domesticity and Continental polite sociability, signals a desire for an organised and carefully delineated society. The narrative disrupts this fantasy of clear social, national, racial, and gender boundaries. The obvious outsiders to British civilisation are the West-Indian servant Juba and the Creole, Mr Vincent, whose ambiguous identity blurs the boundaries between English/other.[74] The novel is, however, arguably more concerned with the disruptive presence of female otherness, construed as wildness, which threatens to destabilise Britain's social order. The wild woman also troubles gender binaries. The novel has been read as complicit with conservative patriarchal ideology, Edgeworth 'docilely ventriloquizing' her father's and Thomas Day's ideas.[75] Such readings argue *Belinda* champions a strict separation between the public and private spheres and promotes docile domestic femininity, the narrative expelling or reforming any unwanted monstrous female energy. More recently, Edgeworth scholars have challenged this 'reductive mythology', arguing that

[74] See, for instance, Susan C. Greenfield, '"At Home and Abroad": Sexual Ambiguity, Miscegenation, and Colonial Boundaries in Edgeworth's *Belinda*', *PMLA* 112:2 (March 1997), pp. 214-228, who outlines Lady Delacour's efforts to distinguish the English from West Indians.

[75] Mitzi Myers, 'My Art Belongs to Daddy? Thomas Day, Maria Edgeworth, and the Pre-Texts of *Belinda*: Women Writers and Patriarchal Authority', in *Revising Women: Eighteenth-Century 'Women's Fiction' and Social Engagement*, ed. Paula Backscheider (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), pp. 104-46, p. 105. See Eve Kowaleski-Wallace, *Their Fathers' Daughters: Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth, and Patriarchal Complicity* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

Edgeworth's 'first feminocentric novel' dismantles 'patriarchal romances of femininity', most clearly in 'her attack on her culture's debilitating gender codes'.[76]

Alternately vilified and romanticised, *Belinda* demonstrates how the figure of the wild woman is wielded by nationalist discourse to subject women to male authority. It also reveals the myth of uncultivated simplicity. The character of Harriet Freke, a compulsive cross-dresser, recognisable by the 'wild oddity in her countenance', blurs gender boundaries and heterosexual norms.[77] She is painfully maimed before being removed from the narrative altogether, implying *Belinda* defends the regulation of female behaviour. Edgeworth scholars struggle to make sense of this character. She is 'an enigma of which there is no one true reading'.[78] The juxtaposition of Harriet Freke and the orphaned Rachel/Virginia, an English wild child, is part of the novel's criticism of the ideological function of wildness. At stake is the regulation of female desire. The question is whether or not the novel supports the disciplining of female wildness the plot represents.

Harriet Freke embodies the primitivism polite English society so actively repressed. Her name is highly symbolic: as a whim or fancy, a 'freak' denotes an unleashing of passions or primal desires encountered in the first stage of human progress. It is the complete opposite of rational civilised behaviour. Harriet's wildness flies in the face of civilised conduct, best captured in her distinctive 'convulsion of laughter' (46), a blatant breach of polite decorum. Chesterfield condemned laughter as 'the characteristic of folly and ill-manners: […] there is nothing so illiberal, and so ill-

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[76] Myers, pp. 105-06; Deborah Weiss, 'The Extraordinary Ordinary Belinda: Maria Edgeworth's Female Philosopher', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 19:4 (Summer 2007), pp. 441-61, p. 443. Clíona Ó Gallchoir, *Maria Edgeworth: Women, Enlightenment, and Nation* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2004) has reassessed Edgeworth's understanding of women's participation in the public sphere.
[77] Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda* (1801), ed. Kathryn Kirkpatrick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 43. All further references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text.
[78] Siobhan Kilfeather, 'Introduction', in *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, II, p. xxxiv.

bred, as audible laughter'.[79] As the 'manner' of the 'mob', Harriet's laughter conveys a potentially revolutionary spirit.[80] Laughing was, moreover, considered unladylike. According to Mrs Peddle's *Rudiments of Taste* (1789), 'Loud speaking, and excessive laughter […] are both unbecoming'.[81] The *Lady's Magazine* of 1804 warned that 'it is generally better to smile than laugh out'.[82] Of greater significance, however, was the fact that 'female laughter came to be seen as a menace to society's very foundations'.[83] Harriet, who speaks French and bandies about such radical terms as 'rights' and 'wrongs' and '*liberté*', is part Mary Wollstonecraft and part Mary Hays, 'To Gallic freaks or Gallic faith resign'd'.[84] I agree with Deborah Weiss's argument that Harriet is a 'caricatured version of Wollstonecraft' and that Edgeworth distinguishes the false from the true female philosopher, but the fact remains that contemporary readers would have recognised Harriet as a 'Gallic Freke' and therefore seen her as a menace to British social order.[85] Harriet's wildness must be tamed or excised to guarantee national security.

What is so disconcerting for the novel's fictional characters and critics alike is Harriet's almost excessive masculinity. From her 'stentorean voice' to her '*harum scarum* manners', 'she has nothing feminine about her' (43). The West-Indian servant Juba, who refers to her as a '*man-woman*' (219), is perhaps the closest to understanding who Harriet is: like so many other characters in Edgeworth's work, Harriet is a hybrid

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[79] *Lord Chesterfield's Letters*, ed. David Roberts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 72.
[80] *Ibid*., p. 72.
[81] Mrs M. Peddle, *The Rudiments of Taste.: In a Series of Letters from a mother to her daughters* (London: Dilly, 1789), p. 103.
[82] *The Lady's Magazine, or Entertaining Companion to the Fair Sex* (July 1804), p. 372.
[83] Audrey Bilger, *Laughing Feminism: Subversive Comedy in Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Austen* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), p. 16.
[84] Polwhele, p. 7.
[85] Weiss, p. 445; see also her volume *The Female Philosopher and her Afterlives: Mary Wollstonecraft, the British Novel, and the Transformations of Feminism, 1796-1811* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 173-74, 179-204, and Andrew McInnes, *Wollstonecraft's Ghost: The Fate of the Female Philosopher in the Romantic Period* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), pp. 87-91. McInnes, pp. 92-97, offers a persuasive reading of Lady Delacour as Godwinian mentor.

individual British society struggles to accommodate. This hybridity is encoded in her surname: a ‘freke’ originally meant ‘one eager for fight; a warrior’ (*OED*). Harriet is therefore naturally masculine. The real issue, however, is the martial spirit she displays, which challenges male authority. Her heated arguments with Mr Percival can be read as attempts to unsettle Britain’s political order. The name ‘Percival’ evokes the knight of Arthurian legend, whose estate bears the equally symbolic name of Oakly-park, a home that stands for England. Harriet’s verbal matches are therefore an attack on the nation. Such a reading suggests that Edgeworth, by characterising female wildness as foreign in origin, endorses a patriarchal ideology that views proper British femininity as submissive and domesticated.

Edgeworth developed more viable models of masculine femininity in her later work.[86] Yet I believe Harriet’s presence is precisely intended to unsettle readers, a parody of contemporary anxieties concerning female behaviour. The narrative responds differently to male and female wildness. The hero Clarence Hervey, who fancies himself a man of genius, believes he is ‘entitled to be imprudent, wild, and eccentric’ (14). He too enjoys cross-dressing. His wildness is neither less nor more controlled than Harriet’s, yet he is rewarded with the heroine, whereas Harriet is excised from the narrative. This, however, should not be read as Edgeworth’s blind endorsement of rigid gender boundaries. On the contrary, her critique of ‘debilitating gender codes’ is developed through the Rachel/Virginia plotline, which exposes the myths of the natural woman, Rousseau’s ‘golden age of stupidity’, and the barrenness that results from attempting to carefully seal off ‘home’ from ‘abroad’.

Clarence Hervey’s educational experiment on Rachel/Virginia, a veiled fictionalisation of Thomas Day’s disastrous attempt to raise a model wife,

[86] See the discussion of Esther Clarendon in Chapter 5.

problematizes the themes of natural education and the myths of the noble savage and of the child of nature, which appear as male fantasies.[87] The packet Hervey writes to explain the 'history of his connexion with Virginia St Pierre' can be likened to eighteenth-century accounts of discoveries of Edenic foreign lands and of savage children. This 'history' is the product of a male pen that silences the voice of the female subject. The project's chimerical nature is reflected in the long list of obstacles that impeded Hervey's search for the ideal candidate:

> [I]t was easy to meet with beauty in distress, and ignorance in poverty; but it was difficult to find simplicity without vulgarity, ingenuity without cunning, or even ignorance without prejudice; it was difficult to meet with an understanding totally uncultivated, yet likely to reward the labour of late instruction; a heart wholly unpractised, yet full of sensibility, capable of all the enthusiasm of passion, the delicacy of sentiment, and the firmness of rational constancy. (362)

The tensions within the passage highlight the myth of the state of nature: simplicity requires cultivation. The irony is that Hervey discovers his desired object in the New Forest, a poor substitute for the New World whose climate the refined hero would probably struggle to endure. Like Jane Austen's *Emma*, *Belinda* suggests the nature of gentlemen and ladies is best suited within doors. Edgeworth parodies the journey of an explorer of the new world, setting out for uncharted territories, in 'the most retired part of the forest' where he might meet with all sorts of unknown wild beasts. With 'no path to direct him' Hervey ventures where no other man has dared to go before him. He indeed meets with a wild beast, though in the form of a dog who 'springs from a thicket, barking furiously at his horse' (363). The full passage has all the language of an

[87] RLE and his friend Thomas Day both famously experimented with the principles of education Rousseau formulated in *Émile*, RLE on his own son Richard Junior (died 1796), and Thomas Day on two orphaned young women he attempted to raise as model wives. Neither experiment proved successful.

idealised, bucolic space, untouched by society, with clear signs of civilised existence Hervey refuses to acknowledge. The hero happily overlooks the fact that Rachel is no Marie-Angélique and is not the uncharted territory her rechristening as ‘Virginia’ implies.

Simplicity charms the male observer. Scientific justifications are used unsuccessfully to conceal the male fantasy that underlines Hervey’s plan, which illustrates the ‘oxymoronic project’ of female education. His choice of subject is motivated by sexual attraction rather than intellectual criteria:

> Her simplicity, sensibility, and, perhaps more than he was aware, her beauty, had pleased and touched him extremely. The idea of attaching a perfectly pure, disinterested, unpractised heart, was delightful to his imagination[.] (367)

The ‘child of nature’, the complete opposite to ‘the frivolous sophisticated slaves of art’ (371), is raised in a tightly controlled environment not unlike the regulated spaces of conventional female education. ‘[T]he walls of the garden that belonged to the house in which she lived’ (370) are the confines of Rachel/Virginia’s world. Hervey’s attempt to seclude her from ‘abroad’ is, however, unproductive. This policing is the opposite of Edgeworth’s view of Britishness as fluid and multifaceted. Hervey’s restrictions of Rachel to the home in fact harm the nation.

Harriet Freke and Rachel/Virginia make for an odd pair, yet their treatment shows the pressures and contradictions that surround women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The difficulty of explaining their characters might lie in the fact that Edgeworth presented *Belinda* as ‘a Moral Tale’ (3). That they cannot be treated as realistic characters perhaps reveals the fact that the possibility that such excessive freakishness or uncultivated simplicity cannot be real. Both are myths, created by men to oppress women.

Leonora (1806) and the Hottentot Habits of '*Messire Anglois*'

In *Leonora*, another Anglocentric novel, Edgeworth focuses on another myth, the French construction of the English as a 'parcel of brutes'. Composed in 1803-05, *Leonora* 'situates itself in the context of the renewed hostilities between Britain and France'.[88] The novel registers the paranoia about secret networks colluding with foreign governments.[89] It also addresses the cultural rivalry between the two nations. *Leonora* is a proudly patriotic work that celebrates English simplicity and plain sense over real or imagined French refinement. Like other comedies of manners of the period, the novel also satirises the affectation of fashionable circles, which assert their social and moral superiority by 'apeing' French manners and 'continually railing at our English want *of savoir vivre*', a theme Edgeworth resumed in *Patronage* (1814).[90] It is important to note that Edgeworth's target of criticism is not French politeness as such but the English affectation of French prejudices.[91] This affectation is bolstered by denigrating British plainness and simplicity as primitive, two values which the novel upholds as qualities that elevate the British over the French. *Leonora* debunks the caricature of the English as wild beasts, a criticism the novel itself faced. RLE compared an early draft to a 'promising infant' which, though based on 'nature, truth, sound morality, and religion', nevertheless requires 'polish' to 'sparkle in the regions of moral fashion'.[92]

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[88] Ó Gallchoir, p. 137.

[89] Marilyn Butler discusses the political context, 'Introduction', *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, 12 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto), III: *Leonora* and *Harrington*, ed. Marilyn Butler and Susan Manly, pp. xiii-xvii.

[90] Maria Edgeworth, *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, 12 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto), VI-VII: *Patronage* (1814), ed. Connor Carville and Marilyn Butler, VI, p. 251.

[91] Edgeworth's work does not align itself with the Francophobia encountered in *The Anti-Jacobin*, Hannah More, or Jane West, for examples.

[92] Richard Lovell Edgeworth and Maria Edgeworth, *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth*, 2 vols. (London: R. Hunter, 1820), II, p. 353.

Leonora follows the manoeuvrings of Olivia, a '*frenchified* coquette' who contrives to ruin her friend Leonora's marriage to Mr L—.[93] This courtship symbolises French attempts to gain political ascendancy over England. L—Castle, as Marilyn Butler notes, stands for England, which Olivia threatens to destabilise with French manners and the revolutionary ideas her amateur reading of 'metaphysical books' (23) promotes.[94] The Duchess, Leonora's mother, fears that women's dissemination of philosophical systems will 'effect a revolution in public opinion!' (15) Edgeworth, who drew on Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman* (1798) to create Olivia, tempts her readers, as Susan Manly suggests, to read Olivia as if she were Wollstonecraft, when Edgeworth aligns her anti-heroine with the artificial creatures, slaves to their sensations, Wollstonecraft criticises in *Vindication*.[95] Olivia projects a French femininity the narrative needs to expunge. Analysing the novel's use of the French language, Ó Gallchoir suggests that it functions to 'underline the association between France and a feminised and therefore unstable social and political culture'.[96] By eliminating French speakers, the novel re-establishes social order, thus symbolically securing the nation's borders against a French invasion.

The narrative is confident in British state power. Nicola Watson argues that the interception of Olivia's French correspondence and its subjection to public rereading 'figured in its most extreme form as State officialdom'.[97] The private letter is a matter of national security. Reclaimed by the agents of the Foreign Office, the information Olivia disclosed to foreign forces is safely removed from circulation. The conclusion

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[93] Maria Edgeworth, *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, III: *Leonora* and *Harrington*, ed. Marilyn Butler and Susan Manly, p. 84. All further references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text.
[94] Butler and Manly, 'Introduction' to *Leonora*, p. xiii.
[95] Susan Manly, 'Maria Edgeworth and (Inter)National Intelligence', in *A Companion to Irish Literature*, ed. Julia M. Wright, 2 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), I, pp. 276-91, pp. 280-81.
[96] Ó Gallchoir, p. 138.
[97] Nicola J. Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel, 1790-1825: Intercepted Letters, Interrupted Seductions* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), p. 72. Watson discusses *Leonora*, pp. 78-82.

of the 1806 edition, which Edgeworth later removed, rehearses the familiar view that England simply cannot accommodate such subversive forces:

> Happy the climate in which no venomous creature can exist! More happy the country under whose salutary laws and opinions no exotic vice can flourish.[98] (375)

The reference to laws points to the state apparatus to which the post office also belongs, which places *Leonora* alongside the conservative narratives Miranda Burgess argues disseminated British social order.[99]

With its opposition between the Frenchified anti-heroine and the '*too English*' (27) heroine, *Leonora* participates in the contemporary connection between female behaviour and national security. The Duchess's emphasis on recent 'wonderful changes in female manners' (14) echoes Hannah More's address to women of rank and fortune and her claim that 'this rapid revolution of the manners of the middle class has so far altered the character of the age'.[100] An important aspect of Olivia's character is her cultivation of display, which Leonora's artless simplicity on the other hand never courts. While Leonora has no desire to produce a 'sensation' (28), Olivia, as a 'wom[a]n of feeling', must have '*scènes* and a *coup de théâtre*' (20).[101] The use of French words implies this form of behaviour is alien to the British character. Unaware of her own attributes, Leonora is an early version of the picture of English femininity Edgeworth later developed in the character of Caroline Percy in *Patronage*. Olivia ridicules the Englishness of the '*belle Angloise*' (27) to uphold her own sophistication, when it is precisely the heroine's English qualities that make her a suitable protagonist. *The*

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[98] Edgeworth removed these lines from the revised edition, suggesting she may have wanted to distance herself from such a nationalist view.
[99] Burgess, *British Fiction*.
[100] More, *Strictures*, I, p. 69.
[101] Edgeworth echoes Wollstonecraft here, who imagines a woman 'on a new scene; when, to use an apt French turn of expression, she is going to produce a sensation.' Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, p. 130.

Monthly Magazine and British Register, for example, reviewing *Leonora* stated that 'The character of her [Edgeworth's] heroine affords a just notion of female excellence'.[102] Leonora and her friend Helen's simplicity greatly trouble Olivia. She complains that 'These *simple* characters sometimes baffle all the art of the decipherer' (48). There is a paradox in attempting to decode simplicity, as if simplicity were so antithetical to a French turn of mind that it is hermeneutically sealed off from it. If simplicity is beyond the reach of French understanding, it is protected from it. Helen, on the other hand, takes great pleasure in being 'terribly troublesome to her by my gaiety and my *simplicity*' (49). The italicisation of the word underscores the character's sense that this English quality is especially irksome to French sensibility. Helen, who is a forerunner of Esther Clarendon in *Helen*, discussed in Chapter 5, considers an Englishwoman does not need to 'have crossed the line' (31), that is crossed the Channel, to acquire refined manners. For Olivia, simplicity signifies the English people have no more polish than their 'rude forefathers', but to an English observer it is the surest way of fending off Napoleon's forces. It is paradoxically the sign of greater sophistication.

The Gallic prejudice against the uncivilised English is most neatly encapsulated in Olivia's frustration with the slow progress of her sexual intrigue, construed as a civilising process. To Gabrielle she raves:

> I believe that to an Englishman's ears there is some magic in the words *home* and *wife*. I used to think foreigners ridiculous for associating the ideas of milord Anglois with roast beef and pudding; but I begin to see that they are quite right, and that an Englishman has a certain set of inveterate *homely* prejudices, which are necessary to his well-being, and almost to his existence. You may entice him into the land of sentiment, and for a time keep him there; but refine and

[102] *The Monthly Magazine and British Register* 21 (Part 1, 1806), p. 609.

> polish and enlighten him as you will, he recurs to his own plain sense, as he terms it, on the first convenient opportunity. In short, it is lost labour to civilize him, for sooner or later he will *hot-tentot* again. (104)

Olivia paints the brutish Milord Anglois of satirical prints (see above). According to Olivia, privileging domestic felicity is the epitome of uncivilised behaviour. The triad 'refine', 'polish', 'enlighten' captures the civilising project Olivia believes she is undertaking. Originally referring to the Koekhoe people in the Cape, the term 'Hottentot' was an extremely offensive term to mean 'savage', whose import is now lost. It became shorthand for uncivilised, ill-bred, or unrefined (*OED* B) and a person of inferior intellect (*OED* 2). Because of the fairness of their skin, the Hottentots resisted a clear racial classification and as such troubled the comfortable boundary between 'us' and 'them'. The Hottentots, unlike other indigenous peoples 'worthy' of European improvement, were configured as devoid of reason, separate from the human race.[103] The Englishman is, for Olivia, not even 'one degree above an Ouran Outang'. Mr L—'s plain sense and preference for domesticity are in fact the attributes of a true polite British gentleman. The cultivation of these qualities is the definition of British civilisation. L— identifies as 'a plain Englishman' who writes 'plain prose' (127, 130). As such, Mr L— can belong to the category of 'respectable, enlightened, and useful *country gentleman*' Edgeworth's fiction presents as the ideal, and happiest, British citizen.[104] *Leonora* is thus confident in England's position as a civilised nation.

Olivia's misguided and futile attempt to paint the English as savage beasts is ironically exposed by a French character, her friend Gabrielle. Gabrielle accepts her as 'absolutely a French woman, and a Parisian' (108) until it is clear that she will fail to

[103] Linda E. Merians, 'What They Are, Who We Are: Representations of the "Hottentot" in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Eighteenth-Century Life* 17 (November 1993), pp. 14-39.
[104] *Patronage*, VI, p. 55.

seduce Mr L—. For Gabrielle, there can be no greater insult than to remind Olivia of her Englishness:[105]

> I embrace you tenderly, I was going to say; but I believe, according to your English etiquette, I must now conclude with
>
> I have the honour to be,
>
> Madam,
>
> Your most obedient,
>
> Humble servant,
>
> Gabrielle de P——. (125)

Far from being '*hot-tentot*', this mode of address is if anything overly polished, which the layout emphasises, suggesting the English are obsessed with decorum. The narrative does not support this caricature of English etiquette.

In this Anglocentric novel, written at a critical point in the Napoleonic wars, Edgeworth satirises social affectations that undermine the English understanding of civilisation as based on plainness and simplicity. In other Anglo-Irish works, however, Edgeworth challenges England's confidence in its civilised state. Like the French with the English, the English construct their Celtic neighbours as wild beasts to secure their cultural and political supremacy. Such a rhetoric is paradoxically the more savage act. Irish simplicity, far from primitive, is essential to the construction of British national identity.

England or Ireland: Who is the Real Savage in *The Absentee* (1812)?

The Celtic peripheries were still construed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as wild spaces inhabited by 'savage races', helping to justify

[105] Ó Gallchoir, p. 138, makes a similar point.

English colonialism. In his *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775), Samuel Johnson, for instance, insisted that Scotland owed its progress from the first stage of civilisation to the 1707 Union with England:

> Till the Union made them acquainted with English manners, the culture of their lands was unskilful, and their domestic life unformed; their tables were coarse as the feasts of Eskimeaux, and their houses filthy as the cottages of Hottentots. […] [T]hey must be for ever content to owe to the English that elegance and culture, which, if they had been vigilant and active, perhaps the English might have owed to them.[106]

Johnson implies that, prior to English rule, the Scottish were little better than wild beasts, as 'Hottentot' again suggests. Johnson's comparison participates in the othering essential to English colonial discourse, whereas the English are the agents of civilisation. In an ironic historical twist, Lord Chesterfield, appalled by Johnson's constant 'acts of hostility upon the Graces', labelled him a 'respectable Hottentot'.[107] As this example illustrates, the figure of the savage served to assert social, cultural, and political authority over one's rivals and one's political inferiors.

As the newest member of the United Kingdom and a largely unknown territory, Ireland, like Scotland and Wales beforehand, suffered from the English perception that 'wild Irishmen have wings', fantastical creatures barely out of a state of nature. The late sixteenth century has been identified as a defining moment in the creation of the myth of the Irish as a savage and wild race, a process of othering that shaped England's

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[106] Samuel Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (London: Strahan and Cadell, 1775), p. 57.

[107] *Chesterfield's Letters*, p. 220. Chesterfield's insult was a response to Johnson's claim that the *Letters* 'teach the morals of a whore and the manners of a dancing-master' (James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, 2 vols. [London: C. Dilly, 1791], I, p. 144).

discourse on Ireland and justified its colonisation.[108] The epigraph featured on the title-page of Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* reflects this enduring stigma, which Anglo-Irish authors attempted to redress. According to the Florentine poet Fazio degli Uberti in *Il Dittamondo*, 'This race of men, tho' savage they may seem, | Yet are they sweet to him who tries and tastes them.'[109] The original Italian text places 'selvagea', savage, at the end of the line, which highlights the preconception across Europe of the Irish as a savage people. In Edgeworth's *The Absentee* (1812), the scheming Lady Dashfort declares: 'Barbarians! are we not the civilized English, come to teach them manners and fashions?'[110] As in other instances of accusations of wildness or barbarism, the narrative exposes the speaker's own savageness. Post-Union Irish literature aimed to dispel the English view that the Irish are 'without those graces which distinguish polished society', and instead establish Ireland as a 'palladium' of 'primeval simplicity and primeval virtue'.[111] As this thesis argues, simplicity established a common ground between the different nations of the United Kingdom. In *The Absentee*, the heroine Grace Nugent's simplicity redresses the English perception of Ireland as a nation of 'intemperate, cruel, idle savage[s]' who need to learn 'manners and fashions'.[112] Edgeworth's strategy is different from Owenson's as her concern is less a nostalgic claim that Ireland is the founding place of British history than a demand that Ireland be recognised as England's civilised equal.

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[108] See, for instance, Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* (London: Cape, 1995), pp. 9-10. Joseph Leerssen, *Mere Irish & Fíor-Ghael: Studies in the Idea of Irish Nationality, its Development, and Literary Expression Prior to the Nineteenth Century* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1986), pp. 33-84, traces the history of the oppression of the Irish people on the grounds of savagery and barbarism. Ferris, pp. 18-45, discusses the persistent otherness of Ireland in eighteenth-century travel accounts. See Corbett, pp. 88-113, for the othering of the Irish in nineteenth-century fiction.
[109] Sydney Owenson, *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806), ed. with an introduction and notes by Kathryn Kirkpatrick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 1.
[110] Maria Edgeworth, *The Absentee* (1812), ed. Heidi Van de Veire and Kim Walker, with Marilyn Butler, V, p. 79. All further references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text.
[111] Maria Edgeworth, *An Essay on Irish Bulls*; Owenson, *Wild Irish Girl*, pp. 10, 123.
[112] Owenson, *Wild Irish Girl*, p. 25.

While some authors, as critics following Joseph Leerssen's influential model of 'auto-exoticism' have discussed, romanticised Irish wildness, others endeavoured to dismantle the myth of Irish savagery by showing a local sensitivity to debates about civilisation.[113] This helped to prove the Irish shared the same concern for national progress as the rest of the British people. *Cottage Dialogues among the Irish Peasantry* (1811) by Mary Leadbeater, granddaughter of Edmund Burke, suggests that what the rural Irish lack in sophistication, they make up for in 'prudence and economy, morality and religion', as Maria Edgeworth stated in her preface.[114] The volume was designed to demonstrate the moral soundness of the Irish and their political quiescence. The chapter 'Politicks' for instance reassures readers that Ireland no longer hosts a spirit of rebellion. What were seen as 'important, moral, and prudential lessons' and 'instruction' for the Irish lower classes in fact played on English prejudices in order to surreptitiously manoeuvre powerful lessons in Irish politics.[115]

A comic Irish squabble over the definition of 'savage' conceals a darker social reality the English ignore. Disputing the best cabin arrangements, Tim and Jem quickly find themselves in a debate about what constitutes being a savage, revealing in the process Ireland's internal race for refinement. Tim considers furniture a social affectation, one of the 'dainty notions' people who are 'plaguy nice' hold.[116] For Jem, furniture is, on the other hand, necessary 'for a family that don't wish to live like savages':

Tim. And how do savages live?

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[113] Joseph Leerssen coined this term in his discussion of *The Wild Irish Girl* in *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996). He defines the term pp. 35-38.
[114] Mary Leadbeater, *Cottage Dialogues among the Irish Peasantry. By Mary Leadbeater. With Notes and a Preface by Maria Edgeworth, Author of Castle Rackrent, &c.* (London: J. Johnson, 1811), p. iv.
[115] *The Eclectic Review* (1811), p. 557; *The Christian Observer* 10:4 (April 1811), p. 238.
[116] Leadbeater, p. 74.

> *Jem*. Why, in a mud hovel without a chimney; the parents and children all pig together, on the same wisp— […]
>
> *Tim*. Do you think to pass this on me for savages? why that's the very way they live in the county my father came from, and I hope you don't call them savages?
>
> *Jem*. I call every one a savage, wherever they live, who act like savages, not troubling their heads about providing properly for their families. Sure that's the difference between what they call civilized, and savage life.[117]

Jem's argument is similar to Johnson's description of living conditions in Scotland before the Union. Even within Ireland, regions argue for cultural superiority according to their definition of civilisation. The conversation is also an opportunity for Leadbeater to remind her English readers of the living conditions of the Irish people: according to Jem, 'savages' enjoy 'a better life than some poor people here lead'.[118] The characters' use of non-standard English for comic effect enables Leadbeater to discreetly insert a criticism of English indifference towards Irish economic hardship, since her readers are comforted in their belief in their intellectual superiority. Woven into the text is the fact that the Irish lead the lives of savages because of English rule.

In *The Absentee*, Edgeworth reverses the English construction of the Irish as wild and disorderly to challenge English political oppression. Some critics argue that Edgeworth, 'like Spenser, presented a stereotype of the native Irish, which suited her recipe for the anglicisation of all aspects of Irish life', but I believe these readings do not do justice to the complexity of Edgeworth's work.[119] Edgeworth's contemporary readers recognised *The Absentee*'s pro-Irishness. Richard Brinsley Sheridan predicted the work was too political to be licensed for the stage and that an English audience

[117] *Ibid*., pp. 75-77.
[118] *Ibid*., p. 77.
[119] Tom Dunne, cited in Ó Gallchoir, p. 123. See also Seamus Deane, *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing since 1790* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 30-48.

would not 'sympathise in a picture of the distresses of the lower Irish'.[120] Lady Dashfort, who wilfully misrepresents Ireland as an 'old uneducated race' of cabin-dwellers (85), embodies the colonial discourse that presents English dominion as a civilising force. *The Absentee* represents the complexity of Ireland's position within the United Kingdom through its mysterious heroine Grace Nugent, who stands for Ireland. English by birth, Grace identifies as Irish, demonstrating the plasticity of national identity. *The Absentee*, as Ó Gallchoir contends, 'constructs an Irish identity that is elusive and adaptive'.[121] This elusiveness is particularly troubling to English characters, and is often construed as wild. Fluid and hybrid identities, rather than implying wildness and a threat to the British state, are in Edgeworth's fiction essential to the construction of British national identity. Britishness is the product of multifarious individuals. It must nevertheless coincide with the principles of plainness and simplicity, which Grace exhibits. These in turn help invalidate the anxieties that she is a wild woman.

The stereotype of the Irish was of a volatile, impulsive, and ferocious individual, a primitive person guided by passion rather than reason.[122] The English attempt to tame the wild Irish spirit is captured in its hero Colambre Clonbrony's combination of English and Irish qualities:

> The sobriety of English good sense mixed most advantageously with Irish vivacity; English prudence governed, but did not extinguish his Irish enthusiasm. (9)

The wording troubles the collaboration the passage seemingly upholds. England is aligned with reason, while 'vivacity' and 'enthusiasm' associate Ireland with passion

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[120] Quoted in Edgeworth, *The Novels and Selected Works*, V, p. xii.
[121] Ó Gallchoir, p. 119.
[122] See for instance Horatio M's depiction of the Prince as 'a ferocious savage' (*WIG*, p. 42), Christy O'Donoghue in *Ennui* (1812), King Corny in *Ormond* (1817).

and wildness. ‘Governed’ recalls English political rule, while ‘extinguish’ captures England’s colonialist impulse and exposes the unequal balance that resulted from the union.

Colambre and the English reader must revise their view of Ireland as uncultivated and uncivilised. Despite his attachment to his native country, Colambre is ‘fully sensible of the superior comforts, refinement, and information, of English society’ (9), a prejudice quickly corrected. Upon his arrival in Dublin, the hero finds a very different society from the one his mother had described. Irish elite circles display the expected Irish hospitality while cultivating polite forms of sociability:

> The hospitality of which the father boasted, the son found in all its warmth, but meliorated and refined; less convivial, more social; the fashion of hospitality had improved. To make the stranger eat or drink to excess, to set before him old wine and old plate, was no longer the sum of good breeding. The guest now escaped the pomp of grand entertainments; was allowed to enjoy ease and conversation, and to taste some of that feast of reason and that flow of soul so often talked of, and so seldom enjoyed. Lord Colambre found a spirit of improvement, a desire for knowledge, and a taste for science and literature, in most companies, particularly among gentlemen belonging to the Irish bar[.] (66)

Colambre experiences true politeness in the form of the best conversation, which the passage makes clear is rare. The arts and sciences, which, according to stadial theory, flourish in the final stage of progress, are patronised by Ireland’s ‘polished circles’. These are, moreover, frequented by professional classes, reflecting Edgeworth’s understanding of the changes in British society, in which authority is shared with the old aristocracy.

Irish urban circles may be as sophisticated as English ones but anxieties concerning Irish wildness, especially among its female population, remain. Grace is a dangerous figure in *The Absentee* because of fears that she may come from a wild breed. Colambre hears from Lady Dashfort that the maiden name of Grace's mother was not Reynolds, as he had thought, but 'Saint Omar', which suggests that Grace is an illegitimate child. Miss St Omar might then be one of Burke's 'harpies' who, 'cuckoo-like, adulterously lay their eggs […] and hatch them in the nest of every neighbouring State'.[123] Count O'Halloran tells Colambre that 'a prudent man' will 'look sharp at the mother […] and back to the grandmother too, and among the whole female line of ancestry' when choosing a wife, which implies Grace might have inherited her mother's wild sexuality. Moreover, St Omer, a French Jesuit seminary where English Catholic laity were educated, connects Grace to France and Catholicism, and therefore to Jacobite sympathies. The secrecy and illegitimacy that surround Grace are ultimately lifted when O'Halloran realises the connection between Grace and his friend Captain Reynolds, who had told him 'he was privately married to Miss St Omar'. Mary Jean Corbett argues that this plotline confirms that 'Edgeworth understands the regulation of sexuality—especially feminine sexuality—to be the linchpin of social order', which aligns *The Absentee* with Burkean theory.[124] In Corbett's reading, Ireland is a disorderly society whose reform depends on the restraining of female sexuality.[125] I argue that the novel ultimately vindicates the heroine, who remains fiercely Irish despite the

[123] Edmund Burke, *Letter to a Noble Lord* (1796), cited in Mary Jean Corbett, *Allegories of Union in Irish and English Writing, 1790-1870: Politics, History, and the Family from Edgeworth to Arnold* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 27.

[124] Mary Jean Corbett, 'Public Affections and Familial Politics: Burke, Edgeworth, and the "Common Naturalization" of Great Britain', *ELH* 61:4 (Winter 1994), pp. 877-97, p. 882. Kowaleski-Wallace, pp. 104-05, similarly argues that Edgeworth's work aims to rein in female irrationality and that her plots 'entai[l] the representation of the containment of dangerous, explosive energies associated with the female body by the ruling or restraining force of patriarchy'. See her discussion of *The Absentee*, pp. 176-80.

[125] Corbett, *Allegories*, pp. 71-72 and discussion, pp. 71-79.

revelation of her English heritage. This vindication is not because she is a legitimate child but because of her character, which makes her a suitable British heroine.

Grace's numerous '*metamorphoses*' (186) are representative of the fluidity that Edgeworth demonstrates is the mark of Britishness. Because of her English ancestry, Grace's influence in the Clonbrony household has been seen as part of Edgeworth's 'anglicisation' of Ireland. Thomas Tracy for instance argues that 'Irishness itself' is removed from Grace because of her lineage.[126] There is an alternative way of interpreting Grace's identity. Through her 'metamorphoses', Grace, and therefore Ireland, resist English acts of appropriation which Tracy claims underlie *The Absentee*. As the editors suggest, the 'Absentee' refers not just to the Clonbronys but also to Grace's homecoming. The novel is as much about the return of the absentee landlord as the reinstatement of the Irish female leader. Ó Gallchoir has examined the ways in which Edgeworth rewrites Staël's *Corinne* in *The Absentee*, a reading that invites the possibility that Edgeworth entrusts her heroine rather than her hero with the future of the nation.[127] Like Corinne, '[Grace's] identity is not contained within a unitary national category', which reflects Edgeworth's investment in heterogeneous national identity.[128] Grace identifies herself as 'a friend to Ireland' (59), which shows she does not appropriate its identity but rather respectfully adapts and conforms to its customs. Her decision to keep the surname 'Nugent' on her visiting cards, despite her aunt's advice that 'miss de nogent [...] would have taken off the prejudice of the *Iricism* of Nugent' (16), underlines her strong allegiance to her adoptive country. Unlike Lady Clonbrony, Grace is not ashamed of her Irish connections, nor does she conceal its complicated

[126] Thomas Tracy, *Irishness and Womanhood in Nineteenth-Century British Writing* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 26.
[127] Ó Gallchoir, pp. 119-23. Edgeworth's conclusion is more positive than Staël's since the Anglo-Italian heroine dies at the end of the novel.
[128] Ó Gallchoir, p. 119.

history. The name 'Nugent' introduces a complex web of Jacobite, Catholic, and Gaelic associations, which tie Grace to Ireland's tumultuous history.[129]

Grace is often seen as a less successful character than Owenson's vivacious Glorvina, 'divested of almost all agency outside that of reproducing the patriarchal social order', but the novel arguably places Ireland's future in Grace's hands.[130] The name 'Nugent' in fact makes her the rightful heir to the Clonbrony estate. 'Gracey Nugent' is the title of an aisling poem by the Irish bard Carolan, an openly Jacobite genre that celebrates Ireland as a mythologised female. Gracey was the sister of John Nugent, 'Esq. of Castle-Nugent, Culambre'.[131] 'Mrs Nugent', another song by Carolan, contains the line '*You are heiress to Coolamber, the adornment of its rooms*'.[132] This reverses the power dynamics since the hero Colambre becomes Grace's property. Ireland is not colonised by male English forces, as in Owenson's *Wild Irish Girl*. Irish folklore, moreover, grants Grace more agency than critics allow. Marilyn Butler explains that Grace, 'in Irish Grainne (or Granu), was both a historical woman chieftain and a semisupernatural figure'. Butler further notes that it is Grace who 'delivers the "rousing" call' for the Clonbronys to return to their Irish home.[133] Rather than an appropriation of the aisling theme or an anglicisation of Ireland, *The Absentee* argues against the colonising impulse imputed to Edgeworth and for a balanced union achieved through female agency.

What ultimately vindicates Grace as a suitable heroine and figure for Ireland within the United Kingdom is her simplicity. Tracy claims that 'Colambre never allows

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[129] See Butler, 'Introduction', pp. xxiii-xxvi; Marilyn Butler, 'Edgeworth, the United Irishmen, and "More Intelligent Treason"', in *An Uncomfortable Authority: Maria Edgeworth and her Contexts*, ed. Heidi Kaufman and Chris Fauske (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), pp. 33-61, pp. 52-54.
[130] Tracy, pp. 25-26. Kowaleski-Wallace, pp. 178-79, also sees Grace as a submissive character.
[131] Charlotte Brooke, *Reliques of Irish Poetry* (Dublin: George Bonham, 1789), p. 246.
[132] Cited in W. J. McCormack, 'Introduction', *The Absentee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. xxiv.
[133] Butler, '"More Intelligent Treason"', p. 53.

himself to be seduced by either Isabella or Grace' but this is far from accurate.[134] Colambre wrestles with his strong attraction for Grace throughout the novel, his feelings constantly jostling with suspicions of her wild sexuality. Colambre cannot escape Grace's dangerous charm, which lies in her simplicity. Grace stands in stark contrast with the glare and artifice of London fashionable society and English enclaves in Ireland. At Lady Clonbrony's gala, she appears 'Beautiful—in elegant and dignified simplicity—thoughtless of herself' (25). Like Leonora, she does not seek to produce a 'sensation'. She always behaves towards Colambre 'with perfect ease and simplicity' (36), and cannot dissemble:

> [T]his young lady was quite above all double-dealing; she had no mental reservation—no metaphysical subtleties—but, with plain, unsophisticated morality, in good faith and simple truth, acted as she professed, thought what she said, and was that which she seemed to be. (36)

While this might cast Grace as an 'intellectual cipher', the complete correspondence between her words and actions, and her adherence to plainness, simplicity, and truth mark her as the ideal heroine, regardless of Burkean anxieties about female sexuality.[135] Grace is the complete opposite of the 'counterfeits' (78) Sir James warns Colambre will try to ensnare him. The hero's unwanted feelings 'could not have been done but for her perfect simplicity and innocence' (157). This undeniable simplicity overrides all the doubts others have concerning Grace's character.

The simplicity Grace exhibits foreshadows a greater economic stability for Ireland. She is a suitable co-manager of the Clonbrony estate, which she begins to rejuvenate even before her union with Colambre. The 'natural flowers' (203) she

[134] Tracy, p. 30.
[135] Tracy, p. 28.

introduces are the sign that she will not impose the English 'manners and fashions' Lady Dashfort otherwise wishes to implement. Nor will she bankrupt the estate because of excessive luxury, as her aunt's extravagant London parties had done. Under Grace's guardianship, Ireland can become an equal partner with the rest of the United Kingdom. A friend to Ireland, she is a true British citizen.

Jane Austen and the Indoor 'Nature and Simplicity of Gentlemen and Ladies' (*E*, 386)

> Why do you like Miss Austen so very much? [...] I had not seen *Pride and Prejudice* till I read that sentence of yours, and then I got the book. And what did I find? An accurate daguerreotyped portrait of a commonplace face; a carefully fenced, highly cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers; but no glance of a bright, vivid physiognomy, no open country, no fresh air, no blue hill, no bonny beck. I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen, in their elegant but confined houses.[136]

Charlotte Brontë, famous for her rebellious and unconventional heroines, could not understand George Henry Lewes's enthusiasm for Austen's novels. According to Brontë, Austen has carefully erased any sign of wildness, her characters evolving in a policed, regulated environment, where the simplicity of nature has been replaced with cultivation. The Austen critic David Selwyn claims that 'Jane Austen's world is one of interiors'. Male characters alone enjoy the privilege of outdoor activities, whether these be recreational, such as hunting, or professional, such as farming.[137] As Mr Knightley declares, 'the nature and simplicity of gentleman and ladies […] is best observed within

[136] Charlotte Brontë, 'To George Henry Lewes, 12 January 1848', cited in *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage*, ed. B. C. Southam (London: Routledge, 1968), p. 126.
[137] David Selwyn, *Jane Austen and Leisure* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1999), p. 89.

doors'.[138] Austen's characters are denied the wild landscapes so often associated with Romantic literature and art. Characters' relationship to nature is indeed often mediated in Austen's fiction. When Fanny Price, contemplating a 'twilight scene' (126), exclaims 'Here's harmony! […] Here's repose!' (132), she does so from an open window. In this liminal space, Fanny is neither fully inside nor outside. The open window symbolises the attraction of unbounded nature which is forever withheld from members of the gentry. Her movements in the natural world carefully monitored, Fanny belongs to the 'confined houses' Brontë scorns.

Austen may not have been 'sentimental about wildness', as Tony Tanner claims, but she nevertheless remained sensitive to the savage aspects of polite society, especially in its effects on women.[139] Like other social commentators, Austen had misgivings about the benefits of commerce. But neither was she an advocate for a return to nature. In *Sense and Sensibility*, 'consumer madness' runs wild.[140] During a shopping expedition in Bond Street, Austen stages Marianne Dashwood and Mrs Palmer in a state of abandonment to their passions:

> Wherever they went, she [Marianne] was evidently always on the watch. In Bond Street especially, where much of their business lay, her eyes were in constant inquiry; and in whatever shop the party were engaged, her mind was equally abstracted from every thing actually before them, from all that interested and occupied the others. Restless and dissatisfied every where, her sister could never obtain her opinion of any article of purchase, however it might equally concern them both: she received no pleasure from anything; was only impatient

[138] Jane Austen, *Emma* (1816), ed. Richard Cronin and Dorothy McMillan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 386. All further references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text.
[139] Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), p. 102.
[140] Edward Copeland, *Women Writing about Money: Women's Fiction in England, 1790-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 96.

> to be at home again, and could with difficulty govern her vexation at the tediousness of Mrs. Palmer, whose eye was caught by every thing pretty, expensive, or new; who was wild to buy all, could determine on none, and dawdled away her time in rapture and indecision.[141]

Both women are prey to their passions, although of very different kinds, and neither exercises her reason. Marianne's senses are heightened like an animal on the watch because she is desperate to see Willoughby. In a state of 'rapture', Mrs Palmer is also guided by her passion, her eye caught by every sparkling item of luxury, much in the manner of a magpie. England became a land of shoppers thanks to commerce, the fourth and final stage of social progress. Rather than elevating Mrs Palmer to the height of civilisation, shopping reduces her to a state of primitivism. Yet, like Mary Wollstonecraft, Austen does not suggest a life outside civilisation is viable. Austen thwarts Marianne's desire for spaces 'where there was something more of wildness than in the rest' (346) while simultaneously challenging the civility of Britain's 'polite and commercial people'.

Austen's treatment of Marianne Dashwood's cultivation of wildness should not be confused with an endorsement of Mr Woodhouse's claim in *Emma* that 'young women are delicate plants' (318). Not all of Austen's heroines fall sick or twist their ankles when they walk outdoors or run, nor are the purely indoor creatures such as the sickly Anne De Bourgh presented as satisfying models of femininity. Austen's fiction represents the fraught relationship between nature and the polite gentlemen and ladies of her time. Women's presence within nature was a particular source of national anxiety. According to Hannah More, women firmly belonged to the drawing-room:

[141] Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), ed. Edward Copeland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 186-87. All further references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text.

'The women of this country were not sent into the world to shun society, but to embellish it; they were not designed for wilds and solitudes, but for the amiable and endearing offices of social life.'[142] British women are ornaments unfit for 'wilds and solitudes'. Open spaces are associated with unregulated female sexuality, an alleged threat to national stability, especially after the French Revolution witnessed the unleashing of 'the furies of hell'.[143] Austen's earliest works satirised the contemporary association between unregulated female behaviour and national security. Gary Kelly contends that Austen's fiction 'accords with the widespread view that education could both appropriately restrain and properly direct dangerous desires of all kinds, for which women were supposed to bear particular responsibility'.[144] I argue, however, that Austen criticises the period's over-investment in the regulation of women's 'dangerous desires'.[145]

In 'Catharine, or the Bower', the bigoted Mrs Percival, an overzealous representative of conduct literature, echoes Hannah More in her unwavering belief that 'the welfare of every Nation depends upon the virtue of it's [sic] individuals, and any one who offends in so gross a manner against decorum and propriety, is certainly hastening it's ruin'.[146] Female chastity is Mrs Percival's Holy Grail, which she believes can be secured so long as her niece forsakes her bower for the sanctuary of the drawing-room. John C. Leffel has persuasively argued that Austen's novella 'assails the notion

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[142] Hannah More, *Essays on Various Subjects, Principally Designed for Young Ladies* (London: Wilkie and Cadell, 1777), p. 36.
[143] Burke, *Reflections*, p. 233.
[144] Gary Kelly, 'Education and Accomplishments', in *Jane Austen in Context*, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 252-61, p. 254.
[145] My approach is in part indebted to Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), and Jill Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions: Subversive Laughter, Embodied History* (New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
[146] Jane Austen, 'Catharine, or the Bower', in *Juvenilia*, ed. Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 287. Catharine is dated August 1792 but the reference to More's *Coelebs* and references to Regency dress point to revisions in 1811.

that women's sexuality, if not strictly contained and policed, constituted a revolutionary threat' that imperilled the nation.[147] 'Catharine' objects to the prevalent conception of women as wild creatures who need to be tamed to ensure the nation's security. This is not to suggest that Austen is an advocate for radical and revolutionary forces, but her exploration of female wildness is concerned with the dark underbelly of British civilisation.

Education was often discussed in the late eighteenth century through the metaphor of cultivation, emphasising human agency over natural phenomena. The improvement of mind and manners was likened to the disciplining of a wild organism. In her chapter on sensibility, More claims that 'there is no quality in the female character which will be so likely to endanger the peace, and to expose the virtue of the possessor; so there is none which requires to have its luxuriances more carefully watched, and its wild shoots more closely lopped'.[148] As 'peace' indicates, the careful policing of female 'wild shoots' is a national concern, while 'lopped' conveys the regulation of elements that are considered disorderly. Female education consists in teaching the 'bounds and fences which were intended to confine [sensibility]'.[149] Any wild element should therefore be systematically controlled. John Bowles similarly argues that a person's worth is not in his/her native and natural qualities but in the direction given to these qualities:

> [I]n order to judge of [individuals' qualities] adequately, we should contemplate them as they appear in a state of high cultivation: as the properties of plants, and their excellence and utility, are more fairly appreciated when they have the

[147] John C. Leffel, '"Everything is going to sixes and sevens": Governing the Female Body (Politic) in Jane Austen's "Catharine, or the Bower" (1792)', *Studies in the Novel* 43:2 (Summer 2011), pp. 131-51, p. 132.
[148] Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, 2 vols. (London: Cadell and Davies, 1799), II, p. 99.
[149] *Ibid*., p. 101.

advantages of culture, than when they are left to grow wild—unattended by the hand of man—unassisted by human skill and industry.[150]

Cultivation is synonymous with improvement. 'Wild' properties only have value under human supervision. This process is implicitly under male control, a situation Catherine Morland experiences in *Northanger Abbey* (1818). In Austen's first completed novel, the young heroine is confronted with male endeavours to redirect her 'wild shoots'. The novel questions the benefits of the taming of the wild child and its effects on her natural simplicity alongside reflections on the state of the nation.

Northanger Abbey (1818): Taming the Wild Child

Northanger Abbey, published posthumously, discusses the state of the English nation in two different ways: first, in its interrogation of female education as the removal of undesirable wildness, and, second, in its reflections on women's conditions in England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Like Burney's *Evelina*, *Northanger Abbey* stages a 'heroine's entrée into life' (12), which can be read as Catherine's progress from a state of nature to that of civilisation. One of Austen's youngest heroines, Catherine is on the cusp between childhood and adulthood, a transitional phase which this section argues depends on the regulation of her wildness.[151] The focus on female education is part of an interrogation of the civilising effect of 'high cultivation'.[152] Catherine was not 'born to be a heroine' (5) partly

[150] Bowles, p. 16.
[151] As Deidre Shauna Lynch observes, Catherine, with Fanny Price, is one of the few Austen heroines who has a childhood to grow out of. Lynch, '"Young Ladies are Delicate Plants"', p. 690.
[152] Tony Tanner notes that 'A concern with education is central to Jane Austen's novels', *Jane Austen* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), p. 24, and 24-35. The novel's didacticism has been examined by David Douglas Devlin, *Jane Austen and Education* (London: Macmillan, 1975); Jan Fergus, *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel:* Northanger Abbey*,* Sense and Sensibility*, and* Pride and Prejudice (London: Macmillan, 1983); Laura Mooneyham White, *Romance, Language, and Education in Jane Austen's Novels* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988). See also Rebecca Davies' recent *Written Maternal Authority and Eighteenth-Century Education in Britain: Educating by the Book* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 129-45.

because of her transgression of codes of female propriety. 'Fond of all boys' play', 'she was moreover noisy and wild, hated confinement and cleanliness, and loved nothing so well in the world as rolling down the green slope at the back of the house.' (6-7) Catherine is of course not a feral child like Mademoiselle La Blanche or Victor, but she is a 'wild' child, more comfortable in an unregulated space than in the confines of the parlour. As in Austen's other novels, women's relationship to outdoor and physical activities is deeply fraught and strongly scrutinised.[153] In *Northanger*, to teach is to render 'domestick'. Much of Catherine's education can be read as a form of taming. The novel asks if, and how, Catherine can remain 'wild' in adult years, that is after her marriage with Henry Tilney, whose role as a teacher is to domesticate her into a cultivated creature, to transform her into an English lady. At stake is the fate of Catherine's simplicity. This question is tied to the novel's reflections on women's condition, an issue linked to social progress. As Claudia Johnson observes, 'bullying of various sorts is rampant' in the novel, which predominantly affects women and thus challenges the view of England as a civilised nation.[154]

Catherine must learn to decode and adopt the ways of 'nice young ladies' (109), often at odds with her 'wild' intuitive responses and her natural simplicity. The narrative vindicates her simplicity, while simultaneously representing its vulnerability when confronted with the arbitrary rules of polite society. Having involuntarily broken her appointment with the Tilneys, Catherine reaches Milsom-Street with 'eager steps', only to be told Eleanor is not at home and then see her leave the house with her father. At first angry, Catherine then reflects:

She knew not how such an offence as her's might be classed by the laws of

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[153] The best study on physicality in Austen remains John Wiltshire, *Jane Austen and the Body: 'The Picture of Health'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
[154] Johnson, *Jane Austen*, p. 36.

> worldly politeness, to what a degree of unforgivingness it might with property lead, nor to what rigours of rudeness in return it might justly make her amenable. (91)

The legal language of the passage casts politeness as a judicial system. 'Worldly politeness' is thus part of the state apparatus male characters sustain. Ignorant of its laws, Catherine does not know what the court sanction is. To redress her unintentional rudeness, she follows 'Feelings natural rather than heroic' (92) and meets Henry's detached 'calm politeness' (92) with great agitation and distress. Catherine explains she was 'quite wild to speak to [him], and make [her] apologies' (92). Her flurry of 'artless' (93) statements are far from ladylike but are consistent with her usual 'honest simplicity' (220). Catherine has a natural sympathy and humanity which the novel values even when these might be construed as 'impolite' according to strict rules of propriety. Her wildness is part her natural moral character, for it is the result of what she 'believe[s] to be right' (100). When she realises John Thorpe has lied to the Tilneys, she breaks all rules of decorum and prescribed female behaviour as she 'r[uns] away in a great hurry' (102), hurries past the servants, and bursts into the Tilneys' lodgings unannounced. This disregard for 'ceremony' (102) is the mark of her respect for others' feelings which is not always synonymous with strict propriety. Drawn to Catherine's spontaneity, Henry nevertheless requires that her 'wild shoots' be contained within 'bounds and fences'. She must relinquish her green slopes for a highly cultivated garden to become a proper English lady.

Catherine receives a national education from Henry, whose unwavering confidence in England as a polite, modern, civilised nation the novel challenges. *Northanger*'s parody of gothic romance, a typically Protestant genre that invites comparisons between periods of ignorance, safely located in the past and in foreign

countries, and the allegedly enlightened Englishness of the present age, is part of the novel's exploration of the state of the nation. Ann Radcliffe's romances, the main source of Austen's parody, follow the Whig view of history, celebrating England's distance from its feudal past. As critics have demonstrated, the gothic is a deeply political genre in the Romantic period, which 'fed off the revolutionary anxieties of its readership'.[155] *Northanger Abbey* is a novel of the late 1790s that represents the post-revolutionary anxieties the gothic mirrored.[156]

After discovering that Catherine suspected General Tilney of murdering his wife, Henry virulently upbraids her:

> Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you—Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing; where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay every thing open? Dearest Miss

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[155] Robert Miles, 'The 1790s: The Effulgence of the Gothic', in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 41-62, p. 44. For the politics of the Gothic novel, see Ronald Paulson, 'Gothic Fiction and the French Revolution', *ELH* 48:3 (October 1981), pp. 532-54; James Watt, *Contesting the Gothic: Fiction, Genre, and Cultural Conflict, 1764-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Emma J. Clery discusses *Northanger Abbey* in *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 133-171. See also Angela Keane; Michael Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Toni Wein's *British Identities, Heroic Nationalisms, and the Gothic Novel 1764-1824* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) is the most recent book-length study that specifically examines the issue of nationalism in gothic fiction of the Romantic period.

[156] Beginning with Warren Roberts' recognition of the novel's reflection of 'public fear and political repression' of the time (*Jane Austen and the French Revolution* [London: Athlone Press, 1999]), critics have noted Austen's engagement with revolutionary ideas but disagree on her position. Butler argues Isabella Thorpe is Austen's 'version of the revolutionary character'. *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, p. 180. For the novel as a radical critique of power see Johnson, *Jane Austen*, pp. 32-48.

Morland, what ideas have you been admitting? (203)

Henry's emphasis on 'the country' and 'the age' reveals his complete conviction in the civilisation of the present day. To be English means not being able to commit barbarous acts which the state, represented in the metonymy of its 'laws', prevents. The passage nevertheless encodes the sinister reality of the 1790s, with the series of repressive measures known as the Gagging Acts, designed to quell insurrection. The 'neighbourhood of voluntary spies' symbolises England's response to the threat of a French invasion, which partly consisted in expanding the spy-system, a 'modality of power that Foucault terms "panoptic"'.[157] Newspapers are 'instruments of panoptic power' and part of 'a generalised economy of surveillance'.[158] It introduces the notion of policing and regulation, which Catherine experiences during her stay at Northanger. 'Literary intercourse' stands for England's evolution as a civilised nation, since the cultivation of the arts and sciences coincides with the final stage of social progress. The reference also implies the arts' participation in this nexus of visibility and surveillance. Austen points to literature's function as a vehicle for ideology and an instrument for the state's system of panoptic power. The novels Catherine reads so avidly disseminate a view of England distanced from its gothic, feudal past, which the heroine's experiences in Bath and at Northanger Abbey unsettle. Tony Tanner suggests the General has simply dressed up the Abbey with modern furnishings, a veneer that barely conceals the 'dehumanised consumer-acquisitor' he really is.[159] We can extend this observation to a comment on the state of the English nation: despite the proliferation of the arts and luxury goods, England cannot completely erase its gothic history. It is especially in its efforts to tame female wildness that England appears the most savage.

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[157] Paul Morrison, 'Enclosed in Openness: *Northanger Abbey* and the Domestic Carceral', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 33:1 (Spring 1991), pp. 1-23, p. 11.
[158] *Ibid*., p. 11.
[159] Tanner, p. 65.

The idea of taming the wild child surfaces in the novel's overriding concern with education, often conducted by male characters. It is at times a violent process. When Henry exclaims that 'teacheableness of disposition in a young lady is a great blessing' (179), he voices the dominant male expectation that women be pliable or tameable. Teaching aims to correct the errors of wildness. From his first encounter with Catherine, Henry assigns himself the role of educator. His method is not so much maieutic as dogmatic, as their first exchange during tea at the Lower Rooms, where he introduces Catherine to the codes of conversation between new acquaintances, illustrates.[160] Henry's propensity to dictate as he instructs appears in his dictation of what Catherine should write in her journal if she is to follow the social expectations of 'young ladies' ways' (19). During this playful exchange, Henry already shows his complete confidence in the superiority of education and culture over nature and in his knowledge of the female character. In his view on women's talents as letter-writers for instance, he asserts that '"Nature may have done something, but I am sure it must be essentially assisted by the practice of keeping a journal."' (19) Nature requires the assistance of cultivation, which becomes naturalised, as 'essentially' implies. Henry tends to put forward 'utmost propriety' (109) as his sister wryly remarks and to overwhelm his interlocutors with learning. Like his father, Henry enjoys exercising his authority, although in a more pleasant way. Eleanor's prediction that she and Catherine 'will be overpowered with Johnson and Blair all the rest of the way' (109) if they do not change the topic of conversation is a comic way for Austen to reflect how male 'literary intercourse' dominates women. The codes Catherine learns are largely dictated by men, a cultivation that is sometimes figured as a violent process.

A conversation on the effects of formal education allows the characters to

[160] Chapter 2 develops the novel's discussion of civilised conversation.

discuss the issues of civilisation in general and England's status as a modern civilised nation in particular. To Catherine's protest against the 'torment' (110) that children undergo when reading history, Henry replies: '"That little boys and girls should be tormented […] is what no one at all acquainted with human nature in a civilized state can deny"' (111), which implies he agrees that a certain amount of violence is necessary to educational enterprises. The phrase 'human nature in a civilized state' becomes even more contradictory when one considers that this main source of torment is history, a genre dedicated to recording a nation's evolution and, therefore, a powerful agent of ideology. Catherine's objection that there are 'hardly any women at all' (110) contradicts England's 'civilized state' since women's condition was considered the measure of a nation's progress. By erasing women from its history, England falls short of its claims to politeness. Catherine in fact questions the real improvements of this 'civilized state'. Her personal experience of learning how to read and write is that it makes 'little children […] stupid' (111) as well as being a torment. 'Stupid' should here be understood as 'having one's faculties deadened or dulled' (*OED* A.1.a.), a paradoxical outcome for a didactic endeavour. Austen may also be playing with another meaning of the word, which referred to animals and meant 'irrational' (*OED* 3.c.). This is all the more ironic when one considers that language, and therefore reading and writing, were seen as the ultimate achievement of mankind over its animal nature. Education paradoxically can turn young people not quite into savages, but can reduce them to the state from which education is precisely supposed to elevate them.[161]

This conversation is followed by a 'lecture on the picturesque' (112) as the characters ascend Beechen Cliff, an aesthetic that also aims to domesticate the English

[161] William Wordsworth hints at this paradox in *The Tables Turned*, where books are 'dull and endless strife' and science and art are 'barren leaves', *William Wordsworth: The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, rev. 2000), pp. 130-31, ll. 9, 30.

landscape. The characters' physical ascent mirrors Catherine's 'progress' as a 'scholar' (113), which results in a complete revolution in her appreciation of natural scenery. Echoing the Enlightenment understanding of human and social evolution, the pun on 'progress' suggests that she too is taking steps towards a civilised state. 'Scholar' underlines the idea that Catherine progressively accepts institutionalised forms of knowledge. Nature becomes colonised by the language of picturesque theory, divided into 'fore-grounds, distances, and second distances' (113). The aesthetic dictates since the Tilneys decide on the value of the country before them based on its 'capability of being formed into pictures' (112). Austen puns on 'capability', which recalls Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, one of the leading theorists of the picturesque, whose spirit of improvement was much decried by conservative landscape theorists. Henry's characterisation as a 'capabilist' introduces the question of his management of the Woodston, a point discussed below. The kind of carving Henry performs is reminiscent of Wordsworth's regret in *The Tables Turned* that 'We murder to dissect'. Henry is doing precisely the kind of dissecting Wordsworth criticises. Henry's aesthetic principles transform nature into a manmade product, an idea emphasised by the use of the passive voice. Austen satirises the vogue for the picturesque, as it leaves Catherine feeling that 'a clear blue sky was no longer the proof of a fine day' (112). The target is not so much Catherine's naïve bewilderment as the aesthetic that sometimes defies plain common sense.[162] The picturesque admires wild, rugged nature, but the wildness it celebrates and tolerates is deeply stylised and sanitised.[163] As Simon J. White argues, the distinction between wild, undisturbed nature, and cultivated landscape is a

[162] This point is clearly illustrated in *Sense and Sensibility*, when the 'tame' Edmund Ferrars admits that '[he] know[s] nothing of the picturesque' (112) and is 'not fond of thistles, or nettles, or heath blossoms' (113) and persists in seeing a 'very dirty lane' (102) which Marianne considers a scene of 'grandeur'.
[163] Simon J. White, *Romanticism and the Rural Community* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 2-3.

Romantic myth. Even though it championed roughness and irregularity as expressions of English liberty against the formalism of French gardens and French tyranny, the picturesque required a cultivation of wildness which is a form of policing and disciplining, which Henry imparts to Catherine.

Henry's 'lecture on the picturesque' can be read as an indoctrination in nationalist ideology. It is first of all the embodiment of 'the native landscape itself'.[164] In being trained in the picturesque, Catherine therefore receives a training in Englishness. The taste Henry encourages her to cultivate is specifically English. It is also a political education. Landscape drawing and gardening were not 'ideologically neutral' but 'became the sites of specific ideological attitudes and ambivalences' in the 1790s.[165] More than an aesthetic, 'picturesque landscape became an almost automatic second language of politics' and was an important platform for political debate during the Revolutionary era.[166] The gardener Richard Payne Knight's designs were, for instance, considered the 'Jacobinism of Taste'.[167] The conservative Whig landowner Uvedale Price promoted a taste that aimed to preserve traditional scenery and individual variety, which stood for English liberty. Price strongly attacked the improving and levelling taste of 'Capability' Brown and Humphrey Repton, known for his fashionable prospects, who retaliated by asserting that Price's 'untried theoretical improvement' was nothing less than revolutionary. In his incendiary *Letter to Uvedale Price* (1794),

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[164] Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740-1860* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 57.

[165] Ann Bermingham, 'System, Order, and Abstraction: The Politics of English Landscape Drawing around 1795', in *Landscape and Power*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 77-101, p. 78.

[166] Alan Liu, *Wordsworth: The Sense of History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), p. 113. For the cultural and ideological significance of the picturesque see *The Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, Landscape, and Aesthetic since 1770*, ed. Stephen Copley and Peter Garside (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[167] Anna Seward to Horace Walpole, cited in Liu, p. 111.

Repton outlined a Burkean political theory that stressed the perfect balance of English society between primitivism and the tyranny of form:

> The neatness, simplicity, and elegance of English gardening, have acquired the approbation of the present century, as the happy medium betwixt the wildness of nature and the stiffness of art; in the same manner as the English constitution is the happy medium betwixt the liberty of savages, and the restraint of despotic government; and so long as we enjoy the benefit of these middle degrees betwixt extremes of each, let experiments of untried theoretical improvement be made in some other country.[168]

As in other aspects of human enterprise such as dress or writing, simplicity in gardening achieves the delicate balance between nature and art, which the English form of government also realises. At stake was the perpetuation of the British constitution and British liberty. Aesthetic choices, like personal behaviour, were therefore a shorthand for British national identity.

Picturesque aesthetics were also a matter of social and political power. Land that could be farmed was used to create fashionable landscapes for local elites.[169] The picturesque also secludes the privileged classes from unpleasant realities such as poverty, rural labour, and social outcasts.[170] The picturesque was also an important tool of surveillance. Alan Liu analyses the 'disciplinary undercurrent of the picturesque': according to Liu, 'The picturesque was law and order. It was the imagination of a whole method of managing and ultimately policing the rural landscape'.[171] The picturesque

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[168] Humphry Repton, *Letter to Uvedale Price* (1794), cited in Liu, p. 107.
[169] See, for instance, David Worrall's discussion, 'Agrarians against the Picturesque: ultra-radicalism and the revolutionary politics of land', in *The Politics of the Picturesque*, pp. 240-60.
[170] The exclusion of the lower sections of society is clearly visible in Repton's famous 'Before' and 'After' prints of *View from my Cottage* (1816). See John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting, 1730-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).
[171] Liu, pp. 96, 99. See his discussion pp. 95-103.

was 'a form of social control', 'a ministry out of office, a shadow government'.[172] The lesson Catherine receives is, therefore, not a simple art class: by shaping her appreciation of the landscape, Henry can programme her politically and ideologically and restrain her wildness. She becomes a part of the system of discipline and surveillance implicit in picturesque aesthetic.

Part of Catherine's taming involves a re-programming of her appreciation of her natural surroundings, from undisciplined and uncultivated nature to 'carefully fenced' spaces, where the simplicity of nature gives way to the gardener's art. As a child, Catherine had 'no taste for a garden' (6), an enclosed space, and admits that she is 'naturally indifferent about flowers' (178). Her indifference to gardening reflects her wildness, which Henry progressively renders cultivated. Her announcement that she has 'just learnt to love a hyacinth' (178), a fashionable domesticated plant at home in the hothouse, is a 'cognitive breakthrough' that conveys her internalisation of prescriptions of correct, regulated femininity.[173] As 'learnt' implies, it is the result of a pedagogic process. The flower Catherine first encounters on Milsom-Street in Bath is markedly different from its native state. Loudon's popular *Encyclopaedia of Gardening* comments:

> Ornamental flowers, like culinary vegetables which have been long and highly cultivated, acquire a magnitude, succulence, and conformation of parts which render them widely different from what they are in their natural state. […] A flower so changed by cultivation can no more be compared to the blossom of the same species in its wild state, than a headed cabbage or a broccoli can be compared to the wild cabbage of our sea-shores.[174]

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[172] Liu, p. 90.
[173] Lynch, '"Young Ladies"', p. 714. Lynch's analysis focuses on the heroine's developing sexuality.
[174] John Claudius Loudon, *An Encyclopaedia of Gardening*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1824), p. 828.

The cultivated organism, here presented as superior, can no longer be compared to its original form. *The Young Gardener's Best Companion*, in addition, advised gardeners 'to place [hyacinths] in the hot-house to have a forward bloom'.[175] The hot-house is a powerful instance of the superimposition of culture over nature, the simplicity of natural plants transformed to create over-stimulated organisms in enriched soil. Catherine's acquired pleasure indicates an acceptance of the artificial climate Lynch demonstrates is the paradoxically natural environment of growing girls in Austen's fiction. As a 'greenhouse' woman, Catherine relinquishes her wildness. The question that arises is whether she too will become the 'sickly hothouse plant', which, Mary Wollstonecraft argues, the contemporary artificial system of female education promotes.[176]

Catherine's new love for a hyacinth is an important step in her transformation from wild child to English lady. A taste for flowers is part of the 'lady's taste' (220) the General expects will furnish his son's future home. As a highly developed and socially constructed aesthetic sensibility, 'lady's taste' stands in opposition to the 'honest simplicity' (220) with which Catherine responds to her surroundings. Catherine's love of nature is simple and unmediated: she goes outside for the 'pleasure of walking and breathing fresh air' (178). It is an uncultivated, simple, almost primitive contact with the outside world. As Catherine says, it is 'enough' for her. Her natural desire to be outside conveys her untameableness: she is an outdoor creature, 'never within' (178). Through the hyacinth, however, Catherine indicates she too is ready to be domesticated and placed within the confines of an artificial environment. Her new interest in horticulture also conveys her progress towards becoming the Englishwoman

[175] Samuel Fullner, *The Young Gardener's Best Companion* (London: Scatcherd and Whitaker, 1781), p. 365.
[176] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, p. 204.

Henry wishes her to be. Female gardening was a private activity that could benefit the nation at large. Like dress, the garden was the reflection of character and could function as a patriotic act. As Stephen Bending notes, 'The creation or habitation of a garden offered a bulwark against accusations of being vulgar, or lazy, or dull: to garden was to create a work of art, to transform the physical world into the intellectual world of pastoral, to demonstrate one's distance from boorish rusticity, even to assert one's sense of national responsibility.'[177] Catherine's new horticultural taste can therefore be interpreted as her gradual progress as national heroine.

Northanger, the Tilneys' home, operates on artificial climates, which double as an assertion of social and political power. Following the discussion of her new botanical interest, Catherine is taken on a tour of the grounds of the Abbey. The General showcases his garden and more particularly his hothouses, which are 'unrivalled in the kingdom' (182). Gardening is his 'hobby-horse' (182), which reveals his desire to control the landscape, and by extension exert political power. The hothouses have deep political significance. They symbolise the General's selfishness and unfitness as a landowner. The kitchen-garden, whose function should primarily be utilitarian, is in fact dedicated to luxury and personal gratification, with no consideration for the wellbeing of the local population or the labour required. Its sheer size astounds Catherine: 'The walls seemed countless in number, endless in length; a village of hot-houses seemed to arise among them, and a whole parish to be at work within the inclosure.' (182) The superlatives that characterise the walls reflect the General's

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[177] Stephen Bending, *Green Retreats: Women, Gardens, and Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 6. Gardening was a female accomplishment that nevertheless required careful supervision. For contemporary anxieties about women's horticultural activities, see Samantha George, *Botany, Sexuality, and Women's Writing, 1760-1830: From Modest Shoot to Forward Plant* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007). Hannah More's Lucilla in *Coelebs* gardens under the strict supervision of a watch. See Judith W. Page, 'Reforming Honeysuckles: Hannah More's "Coelebs in Search of a Wife" and the Politics of Women's Gardens', *Keats-Shelley Journal* 55 (2006), pp. 111-36, esp. pp. 119-20.

complete control of the space and those that inhabit it. The phrase 'a village of hot-houses' reflects the displacement of community from the parish to the greenhouses. The General's hothouse plants are given the care and attention the villagers are due. By mobilising the labour of the local community, the General deprives the neighbourhood of much of its resources for his personal gain. It stands in stark contrast with civic humanist principles that posit that 'Private wealth and its accompanying excesses will inevitably result in cowardice and corruption'.[178] This abuse of power is emblematised in the 'inclosures', an appropriation of common land that mostly benefited landowners and large farmers. They are, to borrow John Barrell's phrase, 'the dark side of the landscape'. They are an expression of the General's tyranny, especially in their production of the 'king' of fruits, the pineapple.[179]

The General's pinery is part of the novel's reflections on luxury and the state of the nation. While luxury stimulated the economy, eighteenth-century civic humanism linked it to corruption and effeminacy, a herald of national decline. As a luxury item, the pineapple is a powerful status symbol. Because its leaves resemble a crown, it became 'symbolic of absolute power', an appropriate metonymy for the General's despotism.[180] The General is an avid consumer, whose extravagant taste for the exotic sits awkwardly next to his avowed preference for the 'neat and simple' (179). This he connects to the Staffordshire breakfast set he purchased because he 'thought it right to encourage the manufacture of his country' (179). The General sports his patriotism through consumerism. The pinery may connect England to trade and imperial

[178] Clery, *Feminization Debate*, p. 7.
[179] Diego Saglia, 'Luxury: Making Sense of Excess in Austen's Narratives', in *A Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson and Clara Tuite (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 355-65, pp. 360-61. Peter Knox-Shaw points out the similarities between the General and evil male characters in Charlotte Smith's *Desmond* (1792), in which a lawyer also alters the fabric of the local community to produce pineapples. Peter Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 125-26.
[180] Saglia, p. 361.

expansion but it can also be read as expressive of the General's internal colonialism: as mentioned previously, the General is an encloser whose approach to land and local communities can be likened to enslavement. Alongside the parish of Northanger 'at work within the inclosure', the General is proud to highlight 'the walls surrounding [Woodston, his son's living] which [he] built and stocked [him]self' (180). Critics have noted the importance of boundaries in *Mansfield Park*, but the grounds of Northanger are an equal source of restriction and confinement.[181] The General, 'accustomed on every occasion to give the law in his family' (257), exerts a paternal authority akin to absolute power. One of Catherine's first lessons is that 'the strictest punctuality to the family hours would be observed at Northanger' (166). The General rules his children by 'taking out his watch' (166), which represents his enforcement of discipline. It is also an artificial measurement of a natural phenomenon, a technology used to exert power over the individual. In *Mansfield Park*, the controversial Mary Crawford refuses to be 'dictated to by a watch' (111), a metaphor that underlines the political significance of time and its expression of tyrannical rule.[182] While the General's love of luxury threatens to 'kic[k] good old Simplicity down stairs', as *Town Fashions* lamented, his tyranny begs the question of how advanced England is from its savage state.

By the end of the novel, Catherine is justified in having seen the figure of Radcliffe's Montoni in General Tilney, an 'incomprehensible monster' whose explosive rage unsettles England's position as a civilised nation.[183] His inability to control the anger embedded in the Abbey points to mankind's original state, where

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[181] For *Mansfield Park*'s obsession with boundaries and regulation see Ruth Bernard Yeazall, 'The Boundaries of Mansfield Park', *Representations* 7 (Summer 1984), pp. 133-52; Heydt-Stevenson, '"Slipping into the Ha-Ha": Bawdy Humour and Body Politics in Jane Austen's Novels', *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 55:3 (December 2000), pp. 309-39.
[182] For the terror the General fosters, see Tanner, pp. 43-74; for the General as tyrant see Johnson, *Jane Austen*, pp. 35-36, 40-41, 45-48. See also John A. Dussinger, 'Parents Against Children: General Tilney as Gothic Monster', *Persuasions* 20 (1998), pp. 165-74.
[183] Tanner, p. 43.

passions governed individuals, according to Enlightenment thinker. The General is also a savage in his treatment of women, aligning England with primitive societies. As the narrator remarks, Catherine 'had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty' (256) in believing he murdered his wife. Henry concedes that his mother 'might [...] often have had much to bear' (203) during her marriage.[184] His daughter also lives in dread of her father. Yet it is in his treatment of Catherine once he discovers that she is not the rich heiress he thought that the General's true, savage nature surfaces. He banishes her at the earliest possible hour, without a servant. His own daughter acknowledges that Catherine is 'driven out of the house, without the considerations even of decent civility!' (232) The urgency of the situation may escape the modern reader but in Austen's day, to send a young woman unaccompanied by coach was akin to barbarity. Marilyn Butler argues that 'an act of rudeness is not an act of villainy' but the novel precisely asks that this episode be read that way.[185] Maria Edgeworth's outraged comment on the matter supports this point: 'The behavior of the General in "Northanger Abbey," packing off the young lady without a servant or the common civilities which any bear of a man, not to say gentleman, would have shown, is quite outrageously out of drawing and out of nature.'[186] For Edgeworth, even a bear is a more civilised creature. The General's behaviour illustrates the Gothic side of English society which his son is so eager to conceal.

[184] For Margaret Kirkham, p. 89, there is no doubt the General is an 'irrational tyrant' who imprisoned his wife. See also Eleanor Ty's discussion of female vulnerability and the unreliability of the necessary male protector, 'Catherine's Real and Imagined Fears: what Happens to Female Bodies in Gothic Castles', *Persuasions* 20 (1998), pp. 248-60.

[185] Butler, *Jane Austen*, p. 178.

[186] Maria Edgeworth to Mrs Ruxton, January 24, 1818, *A Memoir of Maria Edgeworth; With a Selection from her Letters*, 3 vols. (London: Joseph Masters, 1867), II, p. 5.

Pride and Prejudice (1813): The Wild Woman Admires the Picturesque

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen deploys the discourse of social progress to satirise the affectation of socially upwardly mobile people acquiring genteel status. Characters whose origins lie in trade invoke the figure of the savage to demonstrate their knowledge of contemporary intellectual debates and stress their own claims to civility. The Bennets' close friend Sir William Lucas, whose 'tolerable fortune' (19) comes from trade, is a city knight, a title bestowed on him in recognition of his mayoralty. 'The distinction had perhaps been felt too strongly' (19), an ironic observation that introduces the novel's wider reflections on the abuse of 'distinction of rank' (182). Sir William, as a tradesman, is a member of the local elite, but aspires to even greater social standing.[187] The new family home in the country, pompously named 'Lucas Lodge', reflects Sir William's social pretentions. There

> [H]e could think with pleasure of his own importance, and unshackled by business, occupy himself solely in being civil to all the world. For though elated by his rank, it did not render him supercilious; on the contrary, he was all attention to everybody. By nature inoffensive, friendly, and obliging, his presentation at St. James's had made him courteous. (19)

'Civil' signals Sir William's determination to assert his gentlemanly status. He acquires the polish of a gentleman as well as the property. Austen puns on the meaning of 'courteous' as both civil and the manners of a courtier, which by the end of the eighteenth century were strongly associated with the figure of Chesterfield. Sir William's connection with the court moreover indicates a misunderstanding of true politeness, which Shaftesbury formulated as 'a true Relish and simplicity in Things and

[187] For a discussion of genteel trades and professional families as local elite and their ambivalent relation to the greater gentry and nobility, see Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*.

Manners' that was opposed to the 'dazzle' of court etiquette.[188] The civility and politeness Austen defends in *Pride and Prejudice* are similarly divorced from court and rank. While manners matter in Austen's fiction, it is important that they coincide with a genuine sociability, which Sir William displays. His affectation nevertheless remains the target of gentle humour.

A conversation on dancing illustrates Sir William's misguided courteousness. To secure his new social position, Sir William parades his familiarity with polite occupations and with contemporary discourse on social progress to those of established social status. At Lucas Lodge, he engages Mr Darcy on the topic of dancing as a civilised art:

> 'What a charming amusement for young people this is, Mr. Darcy!—There is nothing like dancing after all.—I consider it as one of the first refinements of polished societies.'
>
> 'Certainly, Sir;—and it has the advantage also of being in vogue amongst the less polished societies of the world.—Every savage can dance.' (28)

Both characters use the codes of stadial theory to indicate their own civilised status. Sir William seems to have absorbed Lord Chesterfield's *Letters*, which presented dancing as one of the graces needed for courtly life: 'Your exercises of riding, fencing and dancing will civilize and fashion your body and your limbs, and give you, if you will but take it, *l'air d'un honnête homme*.'[189] Darcy may be wittier but he is not necessarily more polite. His tone is not specified but 'Sir' is surely said with a hint of sarcasm.

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[188] Shaftesbury to Pierre Coste, November 15, 1706, cited in Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 175. See Klein's discussion of Shaftesbury's articulation of politeness as criticism of courts and a 'novel cultural-political defence of Whiggism', pp. 175-94, p. 177.

[189] Chesterfield, 'Letter CXXII, London, June the 21st O.S. 1748', *Letters*, II, p. 18.

There is even a touch of affectation in his dismissal of dancing as a 'rude' art. In Burney's *Cecilia*, where the phrase 'pride and prejudice' also appears, the affected Mr Meadows exclaims: 'What dancing? Oh dreadful! how it was ever adopted in a civilized country I cannot find out; 'tis certainly a Barbarian exercise, and of savage origin.'[190] The little-known *Men and Women* (1804) by Reverend Wyndham similarly features a male character fulminating that 'all savages can dance' in an affected attempt to show greater sophistication and thereby claim gentlemanly status.[191] Darcy is of course no Meadows but the narrative does stress his shortcomings as a polite gentleman, in his refusal to dance with Elizabeth at the Meryton assembly and in his reluctance to engage in conversation with Sir William.[192] Not every savage can dance a Regency dance, and Darcy proves to be the greater savage of the two. The category of the savage or wild individual is therefore an important means of self-fashioning.

Female characters in *Pride and Prejudice* also use the taxonomy of the savage to demonstrate their claims to a genteel marriage. It is a strategy of othering typically used by upwardly mobile characters, to which the Bingley sisters belong. Eager to conceal the fact that they owe their fortune to trade, the sisters scrutinise Elizabeth Bennet's conduct for signs of wildness and construct her as a wild creature, unconcerned with polite manners. Having walked five miles between Longbourn and Netherfield to take care of her ailing sister Jane, Elizabeth arrives looking rather dishevelled. Louisa Bingley remarks that 'She really looked almost wild' (39). Caroline agrees, adds that it is '"Very nonsensical! […] Her hair so untidy, so blowsy"' (39), and notes the mud on her petticoat. When the aesthetic argument fails to win Bingley and Darcy over, Caroline underlines the social and moral ramifications: '"It seems to

[190] Burney, *Cecilia*, p. 335.
[191] Reverend Wyndham, *Men and Women, A Novel*, 3 vols. (Bristol: J. Lansdown, 1804), III, p. 139.
[192] For the importance of conversation to politeness, see Chapter 2.

me to shew an abominable sort of conceited independence, a most country town indifference to decorum."' (39) The men simply observe that '"It shews an affection for her sister that is very pleasing"' and that her eyes '"were rather brightened by the exercise"' (39). Caroline constructs Elizabeth as a wild woman to underscore her own 'polite' identity; urban connections are, moreover, invoked as a sign of refinement. The novel invalidates the Bingleys' position, thereby arguing for provincial margins as legitimate centres of politeness and civilisation.

Caroline returns to Elizabeth's 'wild' appearance when she notices that 'She is grown so brown and coarse!' (299) after a few weeks of travelling with her aunt and uncle. Caroline echoes the contemporary female fashion for pale complexions to highlight Elizabeth's unladylike pleasure in outdoor activities. Such views are typically expressed by superficial characters in Austen's fiction. In *Persuasion* (1818), the self-centred Sir Walter Elliot, the embodiment of a decaying aristocracy, expects that Admiral Croft 'will be as orange as the cuffs and capes of [his] livery' because of his time at sea.[193] His wife Sophia Croft exhibits similar signs of outdoor living: 'her weather-beaten complexion, the consequence of her having been almost as much at sea as her husband, made her seem to have lived some years longer in the world than her real eight-and-thirty' (52). In both cases, the characters assert their superior social and moral status through the argument of wildness. The novel, however, does not side with Sir Walter's connection between appearance and character nor with the view that the polite gentleman should not display the need to work outside. Like Burney's comment that the Highland chieftain is a gentleman born but not bred, Austen's fiction argues that true civilisation rests in individual attention to others, not in a superficial adherence

[193] Jane Austen, *Persuasion* (1818), ed. Janet Todd and Antje Bank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 22. All further references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text. Roger Sales notes Sir Walter's unpatriotic wordplay. *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 175.

to signs of gentility. On the contrary, self-appointed arbiters of politeness such as Caroline and Sir Walter are often ruder than the characters they identify as lacking in polite manners.

Austen's 'wild' heroine displays the finest understanding of the rules of politeness as well as a sophisticated understanding of the cultural codes of the period. When she and Mrs Hurst, Caroline's sister, bump into Darcy and Caroline on the Netherfield grounds, Mrs Hurst grabs Darcy's arm, placing them in an awkward Regency predicament. The path cannot accommodate four people, leaving Elizabeth to walk by herself. Only Mr Darcy feels the 'rudeness' (58) of this situation, which implies that the others fall short of the refinement they love to parade. Darcy proposes they move to a different avenue, but Elizabeth politely declines on the grounds that they are 'are charmingly group't, and appear to uncommon advantage. The picturesque would be spoilt by admitting a fourth' (58). Elizabeth demonstrates an easy familiarity with contemporary aesthetics as she can play with its codes, her witty remark possibly lost on her female companions. It can, moreover, be read as Elizabeth's own construction of the Bingleys as wild since the picturesque is based on roughness and wild scenes. Austen's heroine reinscribes the wildness of the English landscape and the nation that the Hursts' misguided sophistication erases. 'She then ran gaily off, rejoicing as she rambled about' (58), an unladylike burst of energy the novel commends. This physicality can be seen as the preservation of native vigour commentators feared Britain had lost. Usually presented as a masculine quality, Austen challenges this gender binary by creating a female character whose masculine energy does not transform her into one of Polwhele's 'unsex'd females'. On the contrary, Elizabeth's wildness coincides with and upholds English simplicity.

The Bingleys' efforts to secure their urban, civilised, position are constantly undermined by Elizabeth's preference for plainness and simplicity, which identify her as an English heroine. Austen introduces this opposition between plainness and refinement when she juxtaposes Mr Hurst's contempt for Elizabeth's enjoyment of a plain dish. He prefers a ragout, a seasoned stew and therefore an elaborate dish, which he sees as a sign of sophistication. '[H]e was an indolent man, who lived only to eat, drink, and play at cards, who when he found her prefer a plain dish to a ragout, had nothing to say to her' (25). The plainness of Elizabeth's preference is emphasised by the contrast between the simple English word 'dish' and the cosmopolitan French ragout, and their difference in preparation: a ragout is a complex, 'highly seasoned dish' (*OED*).[194] The prepossession for a French dish is also significant: characters that reach out for French words in Austen's novels are often guilty of social ambitions, an aim at sophistication that signals their vulgarity. Mr Hurst believes that by choosing a more complex and sophisticated food, it will make him a complex and sophisticated man in the eyes of others. There is also an irony between the associations of this fashionable metropolitan element, and Mr Hurst's basic concern with food: when Elizabeth arrives at Netherfield, '[he] was thinking only of his breakfast' (24). This constant preoccupation with sustenance, a primary focus of primitive societies, is more John Bullish than easy elegance. Elizabeth's simplicity on the other hand is not a lack of sophistication.

With Elizabeth Bennet, Austen constructs a confident and sophisticated wild woman, whose unconventional behaviour challenges gender binaries. Unlike Harriet Freke, Elizabeth's 'masculine' energy is never labelled as such, which argues for

[194] Fiona Stafford also mentions this episode in her discussion of the national implications of Wordsworth's use of the pastoral. 'Plain Living and Ungarnish'd Stories', p. 118.

gender equality. When she confesses 'I dearly love a laugh' (63), Elizabeth defies conduct-book prescriptions of 'right' femininity. Her laughter is a transgressive act that argues for gender equality.[195] Elizabeth is a confident speaker who comes from a long line of eloquent and spirited heroines, such as Bickerstaff's Roxalana and Shakespeare's Beatrice, and may even have been modelled on the scandalous Dorothy Jordan, a leading comic actress and mistress to the Duke of Clarence.[196] While Austen satirises 'the culture's obsession with controlling the female body' and how 'such constraints lead to rebellion and pathology', her wild heroine does not embrace a return to primitive simplicity.[197] No 'fairy amazon', Elizabeth enjoys the 'superior comforts' of polite society, which are characterised by a preference for plainness and simplicity as opposed to an affectation of superior social graces.

Conclusion

While Austen, Burney, and Edgeworth condemn the violence exerted in the name of 'civilisation', they are equally critical of the Rousseauvian myth that a return to nature is the cure to the ills of modernity. This is clearly illustrated in Mr Knightley's rejection of Mrs Elton's plans for a picnic party in *Emma* (1816):

> 'It is to be a morning scheme, you know, Knightley; quite a simple thing. I shall wear a large bonnet, and bring one of my little baskets hanging on my arm. Here,—probably this basket with pink ribbon. Nothing can be more

[195] Bilger, pp. 71-75, argues that laughter in *Pride and Prejudice* functions as the grounds for sexual equality.
[196] Knox-Shaw, pp. 81-82, and Penny Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 73-74, pp. 88-89, discuss Isaac Bickerstaff's farce *The Sultan* (1775). For Austen's reworking of *Much Ado about Nothing* see Jocelyn Harris, *Jane Austen and the Art of Memory* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 109-10, 128; Paula Byrne, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*; Gay, pp. 79-80. Jocelyn Harris suggests Austen 'read' Shakespeare through Dorothy Jordan's performances and had the actress in mind when creating Elizabeth; 'Jane Austen and Celebrity Culture: Shakespeare, Dorothy Jordan, and Elizabeth Bennet', *Shakespeare* 6:4 (December 2010), pp. 410-30.
[197] Jill Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions: Subversive Laughter, Embodied History* (New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 98.

> simple, you see. And Jane will have such another. There is to be no form or parade—a sort of gipsy party. We are to walk about your gardens, and gather the strawberries ourselves, and sit under trees;—and whatever else you may like to provide, it is to be all out of doors—a table spread in the shade, you know. Every thing as natural and simple as possible. Is not that your idea?'
>
> 'Not quite. My idea of the simple and the natural will be to have the table spread in the dining-room. The nature and the simplicity of gentlemen and ladies, with their servants and furniture, I think is best observed by meals within doors. When you are tired of eating strawberries in the garden, there shall be cold meat in the house.' (385-86)

What is natural for gentlemen and ladies is to have lunch indoors, at a table, with a tablecloth and cutlery. Knightley is no Chesterfield, but he would equally frown on acorns although presumably as middle-class parody of natural behaviour. Nature is in fact second nature. Yet Britain, as the novels discussed in this chapter demonstrate, remained uncertain about how far it had progressed from primitivism and how to accommodate its native simplicity.

Austen, Burney, and Edgeworth represent contemporary anxieties concerning Britain's position as a leading polite, and civilised, nation. The reprinting of accounts of the discoveries of European feral children attests that 'wildness' was a particular British concern. As this chapter argued, the British fought with France for cultural supremacy and were often caricatured as wild beasts. This stigma was especially difficult to apprehend because of the understanding that Britishness was founded on simplicity, a quality that had to be distinguished from primitivism. Because female behaviour was aligned with national security, a greater emphasis was placed on female wildness. Austen and Edgeworth in particular expose this myth as a tool of oppression.

In all three writers' works, the rhetoric of wildness is used as a means of cultural, social, and political oppression. All three challenge this assumption, arguing for the recognition of civilised behaviour founded on inner moral values, at times at the expense of strict codes of politeness. In Austen's work in particular, 'rude' characters are given greater agency, as the next chapter examines.

Chapter 2

‘Can I speak plainer?’ (*PP*): Language, Gender, and National Identity in Jane Austen

> [A]mong nations in a civilized state, no art has been cultivated with more care, than that of language, style, and composition. The attention paid to it may, indeed, be assumed as one mark of the progress of society towards its most improved period.[1]

> No literary enquiry can be more interesting to an inhabitant of Great-Britain, than that respecting the history of the English language, and particularly that branch of its history, which many enable us to decide, at what time it has been written and spoken in the greatest purity and perfection. […] He that would write a good style […] must have a decisive and ardent thirst after simplicity. This is the first of all beauties.[2]

In 1754, Elizabeth Carter wrote to her fellow Bluestocking Catherine Talbot to thank her for sharing an Italian sonnet with her, agreeing that it is ‘absolutely untranslatable, at least in our Gothic language’. Carter had ‘lately grown a little out of humour with English’, her translations of the Greek Stoic philosopher Epictetus having ‘helped [her] to discover some very provoking defects in it’. Even an Italian poem cannot compete with the supremacy of the Greek language, but is admired for its simplicity:

[1] Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Creech, 1783), I, p. 2.
[2] William Godwin, ‘Of English Style’, *The Enquirer. Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature*, 2 vols. (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1797), II, p. 368, pp. 479-80.

> [S]implicity is an excellence not often to be met with in any modern compositions, except those of our country, of which I think it is the characteristic. You see whatever uncivil things I have been uttering against the English language, I am perfectly willing to do justice to the English understanding.[3]

Carter's comment, contrasting national literatures and identifying the different qualities peculiar to the genius of a language, reflects her Enlightenment sensibilities. Like the other writers discussed in this study, Carter singles out simplicity as the defining quality of superior works and superior 'understanding'. Her attention to the 'provoking defects' of the English language corresponds to the eighteenth-century obsession with language as 'one mark of the progress of society', as Hugh Blair notes. As a 'Gothic language', English still bears residues of a 'rude' state. Carter's enthusiasm for Greek is an instance of the eighteenth-century revival of Greek literature and architecture, which extolled the 'noble simplicity' of Greek masterpieces.[4] The simplicity of English compositions places them on an equal footing with classical works, a point other eighteenth-century scholars and critics underlined. As Carter's letter and the extracts from Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783) and William Godwin's essay 'Of English Style' (1797) demonstrate, language was an essential topic of eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century debates on the state of the nation. An interest in language was deemed a patriotic act, which, as Godwin's reference to 'an inhabitant of Great-Britain' implies, is a British, not just English, concern. Godwin's focus on 'purity' is, moreover, representative of the period's myth of 'pure English', which

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[3] Elizabeth Carter, *A Series of Letters between Mrs Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catherine Talbot*, 4 vols. (London: Rivington, 1809), II, pp. 175, 176.

[4] The phrase 'noble simplicity' appears in the work of the German art historian Joachim Winckelmann, translated by Henry Fuseli and published in 1765. Blair claimed that there are 'more models of a beautiful Simplicity [among Greek writers] than among the Roman.' *Lectures*, I, p. 392.

‘exalted English into a sacred vessel, an intact virgin needing defence from gross impurities.’[5] Carter and Godwin are an unlikely couple, yet their shared view that simplicity is the characteristic of a superior style, as well as the defining property of English genius, is typical of the period and a central tenet of the texts discussed in this chapter. A simple style is not just elegance and taste, the best and, paradoxically, the most difficult to achieve, it is also a thoroughly English style, which establishes the English vernacular as an idiom that can compete with the supremacy of the French language.

The need to be civilised and appear as a polite nation was, therefore, in constant tension with desires to remain simple, and language was no exception. While Carter’s comments imply English needs additional refinement, other eighteenth-century commentators worried English had departed too much from its native simplicity and vigour. According to Blair, ‘Language is become in modern times, more correct, indeed, and accurate; but however less striking and animated’.[6] More forcefully, Tobias Smollett’s Captain Lismahago grumbles that ‘modern English, from affectation and false refinement, had weakened, and even corrupted their language.’[7] Complaints that the polish of refined language came at the expense of native English simplicity are a commonplace of Romantic language theory. In the second of his *Essays upon Epitaphs* (1810), Wordsworth argued for the need to ‘establish a criterion of sincerity’ in writing and attacked Alexander Pope’s ‘sparkling and tuneful manner’, which ‘corrupted the judgment of the Nation through all ranks of society’.[8] Since ‘the taste, intellectual

[5] Andrew Elfenbein, *Romanticism and the Rise of English* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 21. See his discussion, pp. 18-44.
[6] Blair, I, p. 124. For concerns over loss of feeling in refined language, see, for example, Sorensen, pp. 143-52.
[7] Tobias Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771), ed. Lewis M. Knapp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966, rev. 1984), p. 199.
[8] William Wordsworth, *Essays Upon Epitaphs*, *Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press), II, pp. 70, 75.

power and morals of a country are inseparably linked in mutual dependence', it is therefore crucial to secure a 'criterion' that will preserve the nation's morals.[9] For England to restore its native vigour while remaining polite, it was important that its vernacular meet the criterion of unaffected simplicity.

Language, as the examples above suggest, was 'a crucial index of individual, social, and national identity', the mirror of character, at an individual and collective level.[10] Referring to the proliferation of grammars, dictionaries, and intellectual enquiries, Murray Cohen notes that 'there is more of almost everything linguistic in the second half of the eighteenth century than in the first'.[11] This shift was also, Cohen argues, epistemological. Rather than reflecting nature and the outside world, language usage was understood as reflecting the structure of the mind.[12] According to eighteenth-century philosophers, languages derived their characteristics from the disposition of their speakers:

> Language is generally understood to receive its predominant tincture from the national character of the people who speak it. [...] National character will always have some perceptible influence on the turn of language; and the gaiety and vivacity of the French, and the gravity and thoughtfulness of the English, are sufficiently impressed on their respective tongues.[13]

Individual dispositions mould language, which becomes shorthand for identity. This view was still prevalent in the early nineteenth century. Maria Edgeworth's *Helen*,

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[9] *Ibid*., p. 85.
[10] Jon Mee, 'Language', in *The Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture, 1776-1832*, ed. Iain McCalman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 369-78, p. 369.
[11] Murray Cohen, *Sensible Words: Linguistic Practice in England, 1640-1785* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 78. Some of the best studies include, Janet Sorensen, *The Grammar of Empire in Eighteenth-Century British Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); William Keach, *Arbitrary Power: Romanticism, Language, Politics* (Princeton, N.J; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004); Marcus Tomalin, *Romanticism and Linguistic Theory: William Hazlitt, Language, and Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
[12] *Ibid*., pp. 102-04.
[13] Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Creech, 1783), I, p. 174.

published in 1834, for instance, states that 'the language of every country is, to a certain degree, evidence in record, history of its character and manners.'[14] Language is therefore the repository of a nation's culture.

This chapter, which focuses on Austen's novels, examines the novelist's representation of language as 'a crucial index of individual, social, and national identity' and her representation of simplicity as a defining characteristic of the English language. Conversations are a crucible of character, deviations from standard norms often indicating vulgarity, a lack of education, as well as questionable morals.[15] In the twentieth century, Austen's iconic status became so powerful that her use of English became synonymous with the English language itself. Linguists have used her work to 'illustrate instances of usage in the history of English', which Ingrid Tieken-Boon has recently challenged, demonstrating that Austen's language is not as representative as previous studies inferred.[16] This chapter is concerned not with identifying how representative or idiosyncratic Austen's language is but with determining what Austen understood by 'the English language'. With her focus on simplicity as a central element of the English language, Austen is in that sense extremely representative of her time. Her analysis is influenced by eighteenth-century language theory, conduct manuals' prescriptions on female speech, and by her brothers' satires on language in their short-

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[14] Maria Edgeworth, *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, 12 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999-2003), IX: *Helen* (1834), ed. Susan Manly and Clíona Ó Gallchoir, p. 115.

[15] A number of studies have examined the role of language, and conversation more explicitly, in Austen's novels. Significant contributions include Norman Page, *The Language of Jane Austen*; Howard S. Babb, *Jane Austen's Novels: The Fabric of Dialogue* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1962); John A. Dussinger, *In the Pride of the Moment: Encounters in Jane Austen's World* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990); Bruce Stovel and Lynn Weinlos Gregg (eds.), *The Talk in Austen* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2002); Bharat Tandon, *Jane Austen and the Morality of Conversation* (London: Anthem, 2003). For an analysis of vocabulary, see Myra Stokes, *The Language of Jane Austen* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991). For an analysis of language and gender in Austen, see Patricia Howell Michaelson, *Speaking Volumes: Women, Reading, and Speech in the Age of Austen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

[16] Ingrid Tieken-Boon Van Ostade, *In Search of Jane Austen: The Language of the Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 167.

lived periodical *The Loiterer*, as well as the numerous comedies that satirised the growing middle class's self-fashioning through language, such as Sheridan's *The Rivals* (1775). Conversation was central to eighteenth-century politeness, and as such was understood as a performance, which puts great pressure on the notion of sincerity. The ubiquitous metaphor of language as 'the dress of thought' was an additional obstacle to the ideal of polite conversation.

Austen's fiction champions simplicity as a corrective to contemporary anxieties concerning the performativity of conversation, which could then be duplicitous or meaningless. This emphasis is tied to eighteenth-century studies of the English language, which identified simplicity as its defining characteristic. Simplicity becomes an increasingly more reliable sign of true, English, politeness, less concerned with the forms of decorum than with a desire to be sincere. Even in its lapses of polite conduct, simplicity is the sign of a superior understanding. Austen's focus on language and simplicity is thus central to her examination and redefinition of British politeness and gentility. Language is also important in terms of gender. The most influential works on language in the eighteenth-century often excluded women from their analysis, as the following overview underlines. The development of standard English by a minority of male English writers excluded the majority of British citizens, a point explored in the discussion of Maria Edgeworth's novels in Chapter 3. Among this majority were women, whose position as speakers of English was complicated by the fact that '"Good" English', as Patricia Michaelson argues, 'was gendered male'.[17] Simplicity, the defining characteristic of the English language, was, moreover, frequently associated with masculinity, which placed additional pressures on women's speech.

[17] Patricia Howell Michaelson, *Speaking Volumes: Women, Reading, and Speech in the Age of Austen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 31.

Enjoined to practise simplicity, this very same attribute could cast their behaviour as unfeminine. Austen's fiction illustrates the paradoxes that governed women's language in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

'*Simplex Munditiis*': Eighteenth-Century Language Theories

European nations fought for supremacy through language as much as on the battlefield. As Olivia Smith observes, 'civilisation was largely a linguistic concept, establishing a terrain in which vocabulary and syntax distinguished the refined and the civilised from the vulgar and the savage.'[18] A contribution by William Cowper in *The* C*onnoisseur* (1756) states that 'The rational discourse kept up by conversation, is one of our principal distinctions from brutes.'[19] As with other areas of inquiry, it was essentially an Anglo-French rivalry. French was the polite language *par excellence* among the social elite and the rising middle classes. This was partly due to 'the vast diffusion of their language': French, as John Andrews explained in 1785, 'is now become familiar in every court; is deemed a necessary appendage of polite education, and used for commercial correspondence in every part of Europe.'[20] *The Polite Lady*, a popular conduct manual throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, argued that women ignorant of French 'must make a very awkward figure in polite company.'[21] While moral questions dominated debates about the study of French, there were also concerns that French represented a threat to the English language itself.[22] The

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[18] Olivia Smith, *The Politics of Language, 1791-1819* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. vii.
[19] William Cowper, *The Connoisseur* 138 (1756), in *The Connoisseur. A Corrected Edition ... With a Preface by Alexander Chalmers*, 3 vols. (London: Baldwin, Johnson, et al., 1808), III, pp. 227-31, p. 230.
[20] John Andrews, *A Comparative View of the French and English Nations, in their Manners, Politics, and Literature* (London: Longman, Robinson, 1785), pp. 315, 316-17.
[21] *The Polite Lady*, 2nd ed. (London: Newbury and Carnan, 1769), p. 25.
[22] For anxieties about the corrupting effects of the French language and teachers of French, especially governesses, see Marcus Tomalin, *The French Language and British Literature, 1756-1830* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 58-85, pp. 116-40; Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*.

history of the Roman Empire served as a cautionary tale for those who feared the English language would inevitably decline once it had reached maturity and perfection. In *Sketches of the History of Man* (1774), Lord Kames explained that Latin was 'jostled by Greek out of its place', 'when Greek came to be the fashionable language among people of rank, as French is in Europe at present.'[23] Many considered that, to avoid this unfortunate situation, 'order' and rules' were required to regulate 'the boundless chaos of a living speech'.[24] A 'fluctuating language' was the greatest evil the British nation faced.[25]

The eighteenth century is generally accepted as a period that endeavoured to homogenise and elevate the English language through programmatic attempts of standardisation, which a 'mature print culture' helped disseminate.[26] As Janet Sorensen argues, 'it is not by accident that Johnson's mammoth *Dictionary* appeared in a period dominated by wars over and with colonial sites' and by intense debates about national identity.[27] The preface to the 1755 *Dictionary* is a political manifesto with a clear Tory nationalist agenda.[28] With his focus on the '*wells of English undefiled*', 'the pure sources of genuine diction', Johnson set out in the *Dictionary* to complete the project formulated in the last *Rambler* issue 'to refine our language to grammatical purity, and

[23] Lord Kames, *Sketches of the History of Man*, I, p. 160.
[24] Samuel Johnson, 'Preface', *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), np.
[25] Thomas Sheridan, *British Education: Or, The Sources of the Disorders of Great Britain* (Dublin: Faulkner, 1756), p. vii.
[26] Carey McIntosh, *The Evolution of English Prose, 1700-1800: Style, Politeness, and Print Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 5-7, 34-35. Helpful studies on the process of standardisation in the eighteenth century include, James Milroy and Lesley Milroy, *Authority in Language: Investigating Standard English*, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 2012); Tony Crowley, *Standard English and the Politics of Language*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), esp. Chs. 3 and 4, pp. 77-137.
[27] Sorensen, p. 65.
[28] Whigs and Tories responded very differently to France. Whigs were notoriously Francophile. For an engaging account, see Leslie Mitchell, *The Whig World, 1760-1830* (London; New York: Hambledon and London, 2005), pp. 77-98. See also Robin Eagles, *Francophilia in English Society, 1748-1815* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

to clear it from colloquial barbarisms, licentious idioms, and irregular combinations'.[29] An even greater threat to the English language than a lack of regulation was 'the folly of naturalizing useless foreigners to the injury of the natives'.[30] Foreign words, rather than contributing to the nation, deplete it of its resources. The *Dictionary*'s main objective was to recuperate the Englishness of the English language. 'Our language', writes Johnson, 'for almost a century has [been] deviating towards a *Gallick* structure and phraseology, from which it ought to be our endeavour to recal [sic] it by making our ancient volumes the ground-work of stile'.[31] The *Dictionary* is a call to the nation to resist the invasion of French forces by 'stop[ping] the licence of translatours [sic], whose idleness and ignorance, if it be suffered to proceed, will reduce us to babble a dialect of *France*'.[32] Johnson's greatest concern is that foreign words will infiltrate and corrupt the English language, and therefore turn English citizens into indirect subjects of the French crown. As this and the following chapter demonstrate, Austen and Edgeworth occasionally refuse to 'naturalise' a French word in order to underline the foreignness of the behaviour. If the English language cannot accommodate a French word, then the English character, by extension, cannot assimilate the manner the word vehicles.

Johnson was not alone in the belief that language contact could lead to an alteration, even a complete transformation, of the character and morals of the English people. In his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* delivered in 1762-63, the Scottish philosopher Adam Smith claimed that, to achieve the 'Perspicuity of stile [sic]' which

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[29] Samuel Johnson, 'Preface', *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), np; *The Rambler* 208, ed. W. J. Bate and A. B. Strauss, vols. 3-5 of *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), V, p. 318. Johnson borrowed this phrase from Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, which describes Chaucer's poetry as the 'well of English undefyled'.
[30] Johnson, 'Preface', np.
[31] *Ibid*., np.
[32] *Ibid*., np.

is the primary aim of speech and writing, 'words should be natives […] of the language we speak in.'[33] 'Foreigners' can never have the same 'strength':

> The English language perhaps needs our care in this respect more than any other. New words are continually pushing out our own originall [sic] ones; so that the stock of our own is now become but very small and is still diminishing.[34]

Like a parasite or a cuckoo, the foreign word colonises and cannibalises its host language, depleting the original 'stock'. Contemporary readers echoed Johnson and Smith's concern over the naturalisation of foreign words, perceived as deforming the English language. In 1816, *The Literary Panorama*, welcoming the publication of George Crabb's *English Synonymes*, seized this opportunity to remind its readers of the weakened state of English, a 'medley' with only 'some antient [sic] British words', many Saxon and Norman French, but more worryingly, with 'occasionally the frippery of modern French tarnished yet glittering among the others'.[35] As so often in the period, French is presented as a language of surface rather than depth. The use of French could then discredit speakers as models of language usage. According to *The Literary Panorama*, 'good old English is sought for almost in vain' among social elites because their language 'is intermingled with foreign phrases and foreign idioms'.[36]

The exclusion of social elites as models of 'good old English' shows that language was a highly political question. Whose English was the right English was a deeply contentious issue.[37] Johnson's regulation of the 'boundless variety' of spoken language through the omission of 'inferior' practices reveals the desire to elevate one form of vernacular over another. His selections were ideologically motivated. The

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[33] Adam Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, ed. J. C. Bryce, gnl. ed. A. J. Skinner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 3.
[34] *Ibid*., pp. 3-4.
[35] *The Literary Panorama and National Register*, vol. 5 (1817), p. 741.
[36] *Ibid*., p. 739.
[37] See, in particular, Olivia Smith.

language of ‘the laborious and mercantile part of the people’ is denigrated as a ‘fugitive cant’, ‘always in a state of increase or decay’, and subject to the whims of fashion. By rejecting the speech of that part of the population, it is simply muted. For both Johnson and Adam Smith, the speech of ‘men of rank and breeding’ should set the standard of the English language.[38]

Eighteenth-century grammars, another important field of language analysis, defined correct usage according to the genius of the English tongue, which they argued rested on simplicity, helping to place English alongside classical languages. Joseph Priestley rejoiced in *The Rudiments of English Grammar* (1761) that ‘future grammarians’ would be indebted to him ‘for introducing this uniform simplicity, so well suited to the genius of our language, into the English grammar’.[39] Priestley treats foreign words with caution. They are acceptable because ‘[t]hey have added considerably to the bulk and gracefulness of our language; but have made no alteration in the simplicity of its original form.’[40] Grammar’s main objective is therefore to ensure the preservation of English simplicity. Priestley’s volume shares Johnson’s desire to reverse the influence of ‘*Gallick* structure and phraseology’, showcasing his patriotism: ‘If I have done any essential service to my native tongue, I think it will arise from my detecting in time a great number of *gallicisms*, which have insinuated themselves into the style of many of our most admired writers’.[41] ‘Service’ conveys the idea that Priestley’s grammar is contributing to the nation, while ‘insinuated’ paints English authors as the unsuspecting victims of the French language. It is almost as if the French language has penetrated Britain in the same way that a secret army or spies might. With

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[38] Adam Smith, *Lectures*, p. 4.
[39] Joseph Priestley, *The Rudiments of English Grammar* [1761], 3rd ed. (London: Rivington, Lowndes, Crowder, Becket and Co., Johnson, 1772), p. viii.
[40] *Ibid*., p. xviii.
[41] *Ibid*., p. x.

simplicity, the vigour and strength of the English language is sustained, and consequently so is English masculinity. Robert Lowth, another prominent grammarian, argued in his incredibly popular *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762) that simplicity is the distinguishing feature of English grammar: 'The English language is perhaps of all the present European languages by much the most simple in its form and construction. […] but even [the most ancient language] itself does not equal the English in simplicity'.[42] Because of its simplicity, English is superior to all other European languages and even the classical languages that were the benchmarks of all linguistic, but also stylistic investigations.

Belletristic works were equally, if not more, instrumental in disseminating not just standard English, but the standard of English simplicity. Richard Steele's and Joseph Addison's thrice-weekly *Tatler* (1709-11) and daily *Spectator* (1711-12) were defining texts of British politeness and conversability which influenced debates on language and style throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Steele, anticipating narratives of progress and decline, was adamant that speakers' neglect of simplicity causes 'decay of conversation'.[43] This simplicity is not nostalgia for the golden age but part of the 'Advancement in Glory and Power' of 'the *British* Nation'.[44] Rather than confining Britain to a 'rude' state, simplicity is essential to the continuity of 'the present grandeur of the *British* Nation', the phrase reflecting an early understanding of simplicity as shared cultural capital among the British nations.[45] Simplicity is held as an essential force in Britain's supremacy. Steele returned to the necessity of upholding simplicity in conversation in *Tatler* 230, which answers a complaint against 'the continual Corruption of our *English* Tongue' and includes a

[42] Robert Lowth, *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (London: Millar and Dodsley, 1762), p. iii.
[43] Richard Steele, *The Tatler* 12, ed. Donald F. Bond, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), I, p. 106.
[44] *Ibid*., p. 104.
[45] *Ibid*., p. 104.

second letter illustrating the deleterious effects ‘the late Refinements crept into our Language’ generated.[46] *Tatler* 12 and 230 attack the fashionable cant that is the ‘admirable Pattern of the present polite Way of Writing’ and speaking:

> I should be glad to see you the Instrument of introducing into our Style that Simplicity which is the best and truest Ornament of most Things in Life, which the politer Ages always aimed at in their Building and Dress, (*Simplex Munditiis*) as well as their Productions of Wit. ’Tis manifest, that all new affected Modes of Speech, whether borrowed from the Court, the Town, or the Theatre, are the first perishing Parts in any Language[.][47]

The ideal of ‘*simplex munditiis*’, or freedom from ornament, encompasses the paradox of simplicity in the period as the best ornament. ‘Politer Ages’, referring to ancient Greece and Rome, reveals Steele’s neoclassical outlook. Simplicity is therefore an important feature that connects the nobility of British civilisation to the grandeur of antiquity. The *Tatler*, moreover, suggests the need to find new standards of speech outside of courts and elite centres, an issue relevant to Austen’s fiction, which promotes new models of gentility, based on character, allowing for the inclusion of the lower gentry and the professional classes.

The principles outlined in *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* were picked up by Scottish Enlightenment philosophers and belletrists, who viewed Addison in particular as ‘the most perfect example’ of ‘great elegance, joined with great ease and simplicity’.[48] A focus on style and the specificities of the English language established these writers of the Scottish periphery as leading voices on English literature.[49] In all

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[46] Steele, *The Tatler* 230, III, pp. 191-92.
[47] *Ibid*., pp. 192, 195.
[48] Blair, I, pp. 394-95.
[49] See, in particular, Robert Crawford (ed.), *The Invention of English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), esp. the essays by Ian Duncan and Fiona Stafford.

these works, simplicity is held as the standard of taste. Far from being a straightforward issue, 'There is no Subject in critical Learning more copious than this of the just Mixture of Simplicity and Refinement in Writing', as David Hume claimed in 'Of Simplicity and Refinement'.[50] Hume advocated a happy 'Medium' between the excesses of simplicity and excesses of refinement, which would suggest that he did not privilege one over the other, but, like other writers, believed that:

> Too much Ornament is a Fault in every Kind of Production. […] Besides, 'tis with Books, as with Women, where a certain Plainness of Manner and of Dress is more engaging than that Glare of Paint and Airs and Apparel, which may dazzle the Eye, but reaches not the Affections.'[51]

Plainness is opposed to excessive polish and ornament which overpower the senses but leave the intellect and sympathy unmoved. As in *Tatler* 230, dress and writing should follow the same principles, underlining the centrality of simplicity to English, and British identity.

The Oxford don Vicesimus Knox, whose *Essays* appeared in many editions until the late 1820s, placed simplicity at the heart of moral character. Simplicity is not rusticity or primitivism but the expression of a true, British, politeness that is distinguished from a servile, courtly, and possibly French, politeness, as Knox explained in 'On Goodness of Heart':

> It is, indeed, true, that innocence and integrity are usually accompanied with simplicity; not, however, with that sort of simplicity which is sometimes synonymous with folly; but with an amiable openness of manners, which had rather lose its objects, than obtain them by deceit; which leads the tongue boldly

[50] David Hume, 'Of Simplicity and Refinement', *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary* (1777), ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), p. 193.
[51] *Ibid*., pp. 192, 195.

> to speak, what the heart honestly conceives. If we weigh the satisfactions of an open and upright conduct, of a clear conscience, and of that liberty which we enjoy by thinking, speaking, and acting, without mean and servile restraints, it will, I believe, be found, that simplicity is true wisdom, and that the cunning of the worldly wise is real and egregious imprudence.[52]

Moral character begins and ends with simplicity, which is clearly aligned with the English principles of sincerity and liberty. Simplicity, in fact, almost automatically leads to sincerity. These elements, which are essential to Shaftesbury's conception of politeness, are, moreover, compatible with the amiable or agreeable politeness imagined by Addison and Steele, an issue that is central to Austen's fiction. This theory is put into practice in conversation. Knox's essay 'On the Principles of Conversation' opens by stating that 'An appearance of unaffected simplicity, the genuine effect of nature not of study, is the most captivating charm of conversation'.[53] Prose compositions should similarly be guided by simplicity, which is the mark of true taste, and should avoid 'profuse ornament and unnecessary graces'.[54] Knox then recommends the study of classical literature, where the best models of simplicity are found: 'The antients [sic] have been much imitated in England; and where that is the case, a taste for simplicity will sometimes get the better of prevailing Gothicism. The German manner, it is hoped, will not supplant the Attic.'[55] As in Carter's letter, simplicity is a Grecian principle that places British literary productions alongside the most celebrated works of antiquity.[56]

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[52] Vicesimus Knox, *Essays Moral and Literary*, 2 vols., 6th ed. (London: C. Dilly, 1785), II, pp. 86-87.
[53] Vicesimus Knox, *Essays Moral and Literary*, 2 vols. 2nd ed. (London: C. Dilly, 1779), II, p. 112. The essay intriguingly does not appear in all editions of Knox's *Essays*.
[54] *Ibid*., p. 254.
[55] *Ibid*., pp. 261-63.
[56] It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the complexity of the eighteenth-century and Romantic-period interest in classical literature, and the different associations of Rome and Greece as well as the different political ideals writers disputed. Concise accounts include, Kathleen Wheeler, 'Blake, Coleridge, and Eighteenth-Century Scholarship', *Wordsworth Circle* 30:2 (Spring 1999), pp. 89-94;

One of the most influential works on language and style were Hugh Blair's *Lectures*. Blair's project was 'an endeavour to explode false ornament, to direct attention more towards substance than show, to recommend good sense as the foundation of all good composition and simplicity as essential to all true ornament', and 'to introduce […] a taste for more solid thought, and more manly Simplicity in Style.'[57] 'Manly simplicity' was connected with the perdurance of a nation. The Scotsman James Beattie, for instance, aligned the 'corruption of literature' with the 'corruption of manners', the loss of ancient writers' 'manly simplicity' a direct consequence of Greece and Rome's decay into luxury and effeminacy.[58] Romantic-period writing records various demonstrations of 'manly simplicity'. Coleridge, in the first chapter of *Biographia Literaria* (1817), explains that in his early years he 'reverenced those, who had re-introduced the manly simplicity of the Grecian, and of our own elder poets, with such enthusiasm, as made the hope seem presumptuous of writing successfully in the same style'. He then endeavoured to 'impress on [his] later compositions the 'ease and simplicity' that mark his earliest poems.[59] The cultivation of 'manly simplicity' in writing therefore aligns English literature with the classics.

According to Blair, 'In all beauty, "simplex munditiis," is a capital quality', a formulation very similar to *Tatler* 230.[60] Far from being a sign of inferior literary powers, a simple style is 'a distinguishing excellency in writing', is 'compatible with the highest ornament', yet 'stands opposed to Affectation of Ornament'.[61] Of Milton's

Timothy Webb, 'Romantic Hellenism', in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, ed. Stuart Curran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 148-76; Nicholas Halmi, 'The Greco-Roman Revival', in *The Oxford Handbook of British Romanticism*, ed. David Duff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 661-74.

[57] Blair, *Lectures*, I, p. 3, p. 386.

[58] *Essays, on Poetry and Music, as they Affect the Mind* (Edinburgh: Creech, Dilly, 1776), p. 213.

[59] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria; Or, Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions*, ed. James Engell and W. J. Bate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 8.

[60] Blair, I, p. 365.

[61] *Ibid*., I, p. 389.

style, for instance, Blair writes that 'Simplicity of manner adds the more venerable air'.[62] Most crucially, however, is the observation that the individual is visible in a simple style:

> [Y]ou see, in the [simple] Style, not the writer and his labour, but the man, in his own natural character. […] This is the great advantage of Simplicity of Style, that, like simplicity of manners, it shows us a man's sentiments and turn of mind laid open without disguise. More studied and artificial manners of writing, however beautiful, have always this disadvantage, that they exhibit an author in form, like a man at court, where the splendour of dress, and the ceremonial of behaviour, conceal those peculiarities which distinguish one man from another. But reading an author of Simplicity, is like conversing with a person of distinction at home, and with ease, where we find natural manners, and a marked character.[63]

Simplicity is clearly opposed to form and ceremony, the outward signs of politeness that Burney's Mr Monckton complained exerted 'controul' over the individual. Simplicity generates the ease and familiarity that differentiated English politeness from its French counterpart. The connection between simplicity and an absence of ceremony is also one of the points Austen raises in her novels as part of her redefinition of British politeness.

The different theoretical considerations on language outlined by belletrists and grammarians had practical relevance for the eighteenth-century polite individual, as politeness was measured by behaviour as well as speech. Politeness, the 'master metaphor' of the eighteenth century, was, according to Lawrence Klein, 'a complete

[62] Blair, I, p. 396.
[63] Blair, I, pp. 390-91.

system of manners and conduct based on the arts of conversation'.[64] The historian Amanda Vickery similarly stresses that '[t]he practice at the heart of polite sociability was conversation.'[65] Public and private spaces such as the coffee-house, the club, or the salon, as well as spaces within the home, were adapted to facilitate this social practice.[66] Conversation fashioned all aspects of polite social behaviour.[67] In theory, people from different sections of society could meet on an equal footing, erasing social and gender differences:

> Conversational 'politeness' was the art of pleasing in conversation, the pursuit of verbal agreeableness. Polite conversation assumed the equality of participants and insisted on a reciprocity in which participants were sometimes talkers and sometimes listeners. It provided an opportunity for self-display at the same time that its norms disciplined self-expression for the sake of domestic peace. It was described as a zone of freedom, ease, and naturalness (though these terms assumed highly qualified meanings in so obviously artificial an activity).[68]

Through conversation, women were active participants in the formation of polite British society. As Michèle Cohen summarises, quoting *Spectator* 433, 'by the end of the eighteenth century, it had become a virtual commonplace that "free communication between the sexes" was an index of the refinement and polish of a nation.'[69] Women

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[64] Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 8; Klein, 'Gender and the Public/Private Distinction: Some Questions about Evidence and Analytic Procedure', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29:1 (1995), pp. 97-109, 104.

[65] Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 212.

[66] Klein, for instance, notes the remodelling of the fireplace, 'Politeness and the Interpretation of Eighteenth-Century Britain', *The Historical Journal* 45:4 (December 2002), pp. 869-89, p. 885.

[67] This recognition has generated a number of studies in literary, historical, and cultural research, listed in the introduction.

[68] Klein, *Shaftesbury*, p. 4.

[69] Michèle Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, p. 4. This 'free communication between the sexes', while it refined men, was accompanied by the fear of effeminacy. Cohen, pp. 4-10, 35-37.

facilitated 'pleasing' conversation, their presence serving to polish and refine men's manners, and to position Britain as a civilised nation. Though central to polite conversation, pleasing, as Jon Mee notes, often came into conflict with truth, sincerity, and freedom, qualities the English promoted as the opposite of French servile courtliness.[70]

However much French was descried for being too effeminate, duplicitous, and florid, the English still suffered from the perception at home that their own language and manners fell short of polite expectations of refinement. As late as 1819, Hannah More lamented that 'Foreigners are of the opinion that we want polish.'[71] Shyness, solemnity, and taciturnity plagued the Englishman.[72] The English language itself was considered an obstacle to polite conversation, contemporary commentators frequently noting the superiority of the French language with regards to conversation. In 1817, the *Monthly Magazine* still hypothesised that French is 'perhaps, the happiest language for conversation in the known world'.[73] 'For the gentleman to fashion himself as a "man of conversation"', Cohen remarks, he had 'to imitate the best models of polite conversation—the French.' As a result, '[i]n becoming polite, one risked forfeiting one's identity as English and as a man and becoming "all outside, no inside"'.[74] French, moreover, lacked masculine vigour and robustness and 'could not discipline the mind'.[75] An alternative model of polite conversation was therefore necessary to meet the requirements of politeness while preserving one's Englishness.

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[70] Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community, 1762 to 1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 38-39, 44-47.

[71] Hannah More, *Moral Sketches of Prevailing Opinions and Manners, Foreign and Domestic* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1819), p. 24.

[72] See Langford, *Englishness Identified*, esp. 175-83, 219-66; Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, pp. 33-35, 104-09.

[73] *The Monthly Magazine and British Register* 44 (1817), p. 302.

[74] Cohen, 'Manliness, Effeminacy and the French: Gender and the Construction of National Character in Eighteenth-Century England', in *English Masculinities 1660-1800*, ed. Tim Hitchcock and Michèle Cohen (London: Longman, 1999), pp. 44-61, pp. 50-51.

[75] Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, pp. 88, 92.

One way was gendering the English language as male. Contrasting the two vernaculars, John Andrews presented the issue in the following manner:

> Upon the whole, the French seems to be a language of phrases, the English a language of words. The former, like a person of an artful, insinuating address, deals much in hints and circumlocutions: the latter, like a plain, blunt man, avoids prolixity, and comes to the point at once. The one seems better adapted for company and conversation, the other for business and dispatch.[76]

The passage exemplifies the view that languages receive the 'predominant tincture' from national character, as Blair claimed. While French is gender-neutral, English is unmistakably masculine. The French simpers, the English speaks directly, a distinction captured in the opposition between 'phrases' and 'words'. The former implies a transformation of language, whereas the latter guarantees the absence of superfluous ornaments. Plain words, far from being inferior, are a 'transparent envelop [sic] of our thoughts'.[77] Through the adherence to simplicity, the Englishman could meet the standards of politeness all the while retaining his English identity.

This idea that by preserving its simplicity, English conversation could be superior to French allowed women access to reflections on the nation and the English language, and prove the importance of their presence in those debates. In her poem *The Bas Bleu; Or, Conversation* (1783) Hannah More celebrates the English salons spearheaded by Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Vesey, and Elizabeth Carter, which rescued conversation and taste that 'Lay half-obscur'd in Gothic night'.[78] 'The strong spell of Common Sense' is found among the English Bluestockings, but not in France:

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[76] Andrews, p. 319.

[77] William Godwin, 'Of English Style', *The Enquirer*, 2 vols. (1797), II, p. 370.

[78] Hannah More, *Florio: A Tale, for Fine Gentleman and Fine Ladies: and, The Bas Bleu; Or, Conversation. Two Poems*, 2nd ed. (London: Cadell, 1787), p. 70. The poem first circulated in manuscript form in 1783 and appeared in print in 1786. For a detailed examination of the poem's transitional role in the Bluestockings' acceptance of their public profile, see Moyra Haslett, 'Becoming Bluestockings:

Oh! how unlike the wit that fell,

RAMBOUILLET! at thy quaint Hotel;

Where point, and turn, and equivoque,

Distorted every word they spoke!

All so intolerably bright,

Plain Common Sense was put to flight;

Each speaker, so ingenious ever,

'Twas tiresome to be quite so clever;

There twisted Wit forgot to please,

And Mood and Figure banish'd ease:

No votive altar smok'd to thee,

Chaste Queen, divine Simplicity![79]

More generously provides her readers with the following note: 'The Society at the Hotel de RAMBOUILLET, though composed of the most polite and ingenious persons in France, was much tainted with affectation and false taste'. French conversation is focused on the speaker rather than on the listener, and focuses on form, as 'Figure' implies, which reflects a tendency to cultivate external ornament at the expense of meaning. Without 'Plain Common Sense' and 'divine Simplicity', which distinguish English salons, an easy and agreeable conversation cannot take place. It is therefore in English salons, patronised by women, that one can find true polite conversation, which conforms to the ideal of simplicity. *The Bas Bleu* argues women are instrumental to this process, an important claim since, as analysed above, simplicity was often marked as

Contextualising Hannah More's "The Bas Bleu"', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33:1 (2010), pp. 89-114.

[79] More, *Bas Bleu*, p. 71. Not all editions of the poem include these last two lines.

male. By gendering simplicity as female, More is arguably granting women more agency.

Outside the elite world of the salons, young women were advised to adopt simplicity in their speech. James Fordyce, for example, underscored the centrality of simplicity in conversation in *The Character and Conduct of the Female Sex* (1776). To find a husband, women must adopt a myriad of behaviours, but focus specifically on simplicity:

> Ah, my female friends, did you in particular, did You but know, how deeply the male heart is enchanted with those women, whose conversation presents the picture of simplicity and grace, of ease and politeness, in a groupe [sic][.][80]

Unlike More's *Bas Bleu*, simplicity is not a source of female empowerment but female subservience. Fordyce's volume warns that, should a woman adopt the opposite behaviour, 'Feminality is gone: Nature is transformed'.[81] Hannah More similarly encouraged her readers to 'cultivate true politeness', which only the standard of simplicity could prevent from falling into a system of hypocrisy:

> Remember that the praise of being *amiable* by strangers, may be bought too dear, if it be bought at the expence of truth and simplicity: remember that Simplicity is the first charm in manner, as Truth is in mind; and could Truth make herself visible, she would appear invested in Simplicity.[82]

Simplicity was therefore an important characteristic of female conversation, but also a means of disciplining female manners. Women are conversational facilitators who 'should bring good sense, simplicity, and precision into those common subjects' of

[80] James Fordyce, *The Character and Conduct of the Female Sex*, 2nd ed. (London: Cadell, 1776), pp. 82-83.
[81] *Ibid*., p. 83.
[82] More, *Strictures*, II, pp. 89-90.

conversation.[83] They should, nevertheless, be careful not to utilise conversation as 'a stage for the display of [their] talents'.[84] While this recommendation is typical of texts that recommended female subservience, More also encouraged 'the simple and masculine language of truth'.[85] These two statements seem almost contradictory, one enjoining modesty while the other invites a crossing of gender boundaries. Simplicity was thus a contested term, at times operating as a surprising tool of female empowerment, and at times as a constraint, as Austen's novels illustrate.

Reclaiming Simplicity in *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Pride and Prejudice*

Language is central to Austen's understanding of the self. Her earliest critics recognised the importance of conversation in her narratives and her ability to create different individualised voices. According to the reviewer Henry Lister in 1830, 'Every thing that is said, however short and simple, belongs peculiarly to the person by whom it is uttered, and is indicative of their situation, or turn of mind.'[86] In Austen's novels, language denotes moral, social, and emotional character, representing the contemporary idea that identity is anchored in and constituted by language.[87] Yet, as *Emma*'s narrator observes, 'Seldom, very seldom, does complete truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised, or a little mistaken' (470). While this comment acknowledges the obstacles inherent to human communication, Austen's fiction also exposes the 'nothing-meaning terms' (*E*,

[83] *Ibid*., p. 48.
[84] *Ibid*., p. 66.
[85] *Ibid*., p. 90.
[86] Henry Lister, *Edinburgh Review* (July 1830), in *Critical Heritage*, I, p. 124.
[87] Myra Stokes offers an excellent analysis of the subtleties of how language in Austen's work encompasses a character's social status as well as his/her mental and moral disposition. *The Language of Jane Austen: A Study of Some Aspects of her Vocabulary* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991).

131) or ‘nothing-saying’ (*P*, 178) that result from the constraints politeness places on conversation. As Deidre Lynch argues, Austen ‘makes us contemplate how a commercial culture renders people copies of one another.’[88] Conversation becomes formulaic and mechanical:

> [C]omplying with fashion and the demands of what the Dashwood sisters call ‘general civility’ […] involves recycling the commonplaces that everybody uses and accommodating oneself to customs and linguistic forms that, machine-like, have an impersonal logic of their own. […] Meaningfulness is sacrificed to repetition.[89]

Polite language can also be a screen behind which characters hide, as in Emma’s frustration with Jane Fairfax’s ‘cloak of politeness’ (180). Frustrated with the emptiness and ‘impersonal logic’ of polite conversation, Austen’s characters increasingly rely on simplicity to recover meaningfulness and judge character, thereby confirming Blair’s theory that simplicity ‘shows us a man’s sentiments and turn of mind laid out open without disguise’. Simplicity can therefore act as a sign of benevolence and sincerity amidst ‘nothing-saying’. As an essential personal attribute, simplicity is at the heart of Austen’s reconsideration of gentility and the meaning of true politeness, which is distinct from rank. For Austen, simplicity defines the ‘true English style’ (*E*, 170), away from ceremony, as formulated by Blair. Her English gentlemen are plain and simple, rather than excessively polished. A plain, unsophisticated, yet warm speech is valued over a correct yet cold politeness.

Austen’s examination of language is a complex interweaving of eighteenth-century language theory, belletristic texts, and comedies of manners. Austen was

[88] Lynch, *Economy of Character*, pp. 210-11.
[89] *Ibid*., p. 211.

exposed to eighteenth-century debates on language and the nation from a very young age through *The Loiterer*, her brother's satirical weekly publication. Launched by James Austen while a student at Oxford and modelled on early eighteenth-century periodicals such as *The Spectator* or *The Tatler*, *The Loiterer*, which eschewed 'all Party and Politics', provides a useful compendium of the intellectual context in which Austen developed as a writer.[90] *Loiterer* 2 opens on a parody of the view that the English language is a corrupted instrument in 'this degenerate world':

> Language has been commonly defined by Grammarians to be the Art of expressing our ideas. Nor was the definition a bad one, during those times when our rude ancestors were sufficiently uninformed in the *Ars Rhetorica,* to speak always what they really thought. But since we have wisely banished that absurd custom, I should humbly presume that the aforesaid definition might also be altered, and that from henceforward Language be entitled the Art of concealing our Ideas; and I will venture to assert it is used infinitely oftener for the latter purpose than the former, by all ranks and ages, and at all times and in all places.[91]

The *Loiterer* then presents everyday situations that require an adherence to politeness at odds with truth, placing the individual in a predicament that recalls Monckton's frustration with the 'forms' and 'controul' of politeness. Like Burney's character, Mr Loiterer might be thought a 'brute' if he expresses his feelings truthfully. Rather than enabling honest communication, language paradoxically obstructs meaning. The 'Art of concealing our Ideas' echoes the ubiquitous sartorial metaphor that 'language is the dress of thought'. While dress indicates a form of embellishment and improvement, and

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[90] Short-lived, *The Loiterer* ran from January 1789 to March 1790, when Jane Austen was between the ages of 13 and 14. Austen possibly contributed to *The Loiterer*, under the guise of Sophia Sentiment.
[91] James Austen, *The Loiterer* 2 (1789-90), ed. Robert L. Mack (Lewiston, N.Y.; Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), p. 11.

distinguishes the refined individual from the savage and hunter-gatherer, it also introduces concealment and deceit, as well as the possibility of excessive ornament, as 'art' implies. Romantic writers were especially suspicious of this metaphor. Wordsworth, for example, argues that 'If words be not […] an incarnation of the thought, but only a clothing for it, then surely will they prove an ill gift'.[92] Although satirical, the periodical nevertheless reflects the prevalence of anxieties at the end of the eighteenth century that language was no longer a reliable mode of communication.

After sociable conversation, print is blamed for distorting language, a question *The Loiterer* returns to in its final number. Announcing his impending retirement from the literary scene, *Loiterer* 59 offers readers 'the *Arcana* of my *Art*', a parody of eighteenth-century belles-lettres 'essentials of fine writing'.[93] As in *Loiterer* 2, 'words are an excellent screen to ideas': 'luxuriance of branches diverts the attention from slenderness of stem; and to thicken the foliage will be found the best method of concealing scarcity of fruit'.[94] Ornament is not an improvement but the concealment of serious defects. The recommended 'occult principles of the science of composition' are the exact opposite of what rhetoricians like Blair advocated, whose work Mr Loiterer shuns simply because it is too common.[95] Mr Loiterer's advice essentially leads to the kind of speech we find in a character like Dr Pangloss in George Colman's *The Heir at Law* (1797), one of the plays dismissed in *Mansfield Park*, where 'luxuriance' of speech indeed serves to conceal the barrenness of the original 'stem'. Whereas Blair steadily endeavours to distinguish right ornament, characterised by simplicity, from the 'dazzling lustre' and 'false brilliancy' of 'florid style', Mr Loiterer promotes the

[92] William Wordsworth, *[Essay upon Epitaphs III]*, in *Prose Works*, II, p. 84. The bodily ideal Wordsworth expresses corresponds to the idea in the 1802 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* that 'all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.' [Wordsworth, *The Major Works*, p. 598]
[93] *Loiterer* 59, pp. 334, 330.
[94] *Ibid.*, p. 331.
[95] *Ibid.*, pp. 330, 334.

'indispensable glare of colouring'.[96] Language should be 'swollen', the 'abstruse' favoured over the perspicuous.[97] 'Wherefore', Mr Loiterer asks, 'in the name of common sense, do we consume so many years over Ainsworth and Hederic, if after all we must sit down contentedly to write plain English all our lives?'[98] The underlying point here, however, is that English rhetoric promotes 'plain English', a style of writing and speaking Jane Austen also favoured.

While *The Loiterer* is by no means the only literary influence on Austen, her brother's work nevertheless deserves to be recognised as an important introduction to Enlightenment ideas, as Peter Knox-Shaw has demonstrated, as well as drawing the young Austen's attention to social issues that concerned not just England but Britain as a whole. A topic discussed in *The Loiterer* that Austen examined throughout her writing career is the question of rank and social mobility. *Loiterer* 20 explores in a light-hearted manner the vexed subject of the 'strong-marked line drawn between the *gentle* and *commercial* part of the Kingdom', from the point of view of a member of the higher ranks of English society, a distinction Johnson made in his 'Preface'.[99] The contributor recognises the 'worth [of the commercial part of my fellow countrymen] as individuals, and their value as British subjects', but is eager to stress that they should not 'usurp' the rights of the nobility. As 'British' implies, the issue of gentility is a specifically British concern. The distinction between the '*gentle* and *commercial* part of the Kingdom' is precisely one of the central questions of Austen's novels. All discuss the issue of rank and gentility, with an increasing focus on character as opposed to social origin. Language, as a crucial index of identity, is carefully scrutinised to show that the commercial and other professional parts of the kingdom deserve to be considered as

[96] Blair, I, p. 384; *Loiterer* 59, p. 330.
[97] *Loiterer* 59, pp. 332, 334.
[98] *Ibid*., p. 331.
[99] *Loiterer* 20, p. 111.

'gentle' members of society. The criteria are plainness and simplicity, as opposed to a mechanical performance of polite speech, for men and women alike.

Northanger Abbey's representations of language develops some of the points raised in *The Loiterer*. When Catherine regrets that she 'cannot speak well enough to be unintelligible', Henry exclaims: 'Bravo!—an excellent satire on modern language' (135), echoing *Loiterer* 2. Language is central to Catherine's education, illustrating Lynda Mugglestone's demonstration that language 'plays an integral role in the social and cultural definitions of the "lady" which emerge over the course of the nineteenth century'.[100] Part of the education of Austen's heroine is to recognise the ways in which language reflects character and how it can sometimes be 'a screen to ideas'. Raised in a 'plain matter-of-fact' family (61), Catherine must learn the 'arcana' of polite conversation, sometimes at odds with plain common sense. Part of Henry Tilney's training of Catherine Morland to become an ideal Englishwoman is through language. *Northanger Abbey* exposes the ways in which language is male-dominated.

An important theatrical precedent that stresses the importance of correct speech for women and was hugely influential in regard to Austen's understanding of language as a tool for self-fashioning is Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* (1775) and its unforgettable Mrs Malaprop.[101] *The Rivals*, like *Northanger Abbey*, is set in Bath. Sheridan satirises middle-class aspirations to become 'the very pineapple of politeness' through the adoption of a pseudo-refined and fashionable language, a topic that runs through Austen's novels.[102] Speech is a crucible of character, reflecting class, gender,

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[100] Lynda Mugglestone, *Talking Proper: The Rise of Accent as Social Symbol*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), p. 138. See her chapter 'Ladylike Accents', pp. 135-172. For an interpretation of Catherine's education as linguistic, see Mooneyham-White, pp. 1-25. Her reading differs from mine since she focuses on the 'correct' reading Catherine must learn between fiction and reality.

[101] The Austens staged the play at Steventon in 1784, when Jane Austen was nine years old. Austen's juvenilia makes numerous reference to Sheridan's work.

[102] Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *The Rivals*, (1775), in The School for Scandal *and Other Plays*, ed. Michael Cordner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3.3.23.

and moral disposition. Mrs Malaprop's 'select words so ingeniously misapplied' are, however, spoken 'without being mispronounced', a satire on the fashion for elocution, a growing industry in the eighteenth century that was part of the polite consumption available to the newly affluent middling classes.[103] The aptly named Mrs Malaprop, who prides herself on 'the use of [her] oracular tongue and a nice derangement of epitaphs', appears ignorant of the meaning of her French surname.[104] Yet Mrs Malaprop makes unintentional shrewd observations on the ideological significance of language, especially when it comes to young women's education, which supports Mugglestone's point:

> But above all, Sir Anthony, [a young woman] should be mistress of orthodoxy, that she might not misspell and mispronounce words so shamefully as girls usually do, and likewise that she might reprehend the true meaning of what she is saying.[105]

Aside from the fact that Mrs Malaprop would do well to follow her own advice, she voices her contemporaries' belief that girls are deficient in language, a point expressed by *Northanger Abbey*'s hero.[106] Mrs Malaprop's confusion of 'orthography' for 'orthodoxy' is highly revealing. It is indeed in young women's interest to know the 'orthodoxy' or ideology of their time to gain control over their future. To do so, they must learn the rules of orthography, which are men's purview. Mrs Malaprop's verbal slippage offers another perceptive observation: 'orthography' became 'orthodoxy' over the course of the eighteenth century as one variety of English became the standard. The

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[103] *Ibid*., 1.2.136-37. Sheridan's father, the Irishman Thomas Sheridan, was a famous elocutionist, whose work on language as a means of united the different British nations is discussed in relation to Maria Edgeworth in Chapter 3. For a comprehensive study of growing emphasis on pronunciation and its ideological underpinnings, see Mugglestone, *Talking Proper*.
[104] Sheridan, 3.3.69.
[105] *Ibid*., 1.2.224-29.
[106] For the deficiencies of women's language, see Michaelson, pp. 46-52; Mugglestone, *Talking Proper*, pp. 135-71.

standard marked polite gentlemen and ladies. Mrs Malaprop is, to a certain extent, an accidental feminist.

The topic of girls' linguistic education is central to *Northanger Abbey*. Mrs Morland is often the target of scholars' view that Catherine's education is 'scanty' and 'deficient', especially in matters of language, but her children do appear to receive a standard education for their social position.[107] Even though she 'did not insist in her daughters being accomplished' (6), she nevertheless 'wishe[d] to see her children every thing they ought to be' (7). Given Austen's general view of female accomplishments, it is hard to see this fact as a severe verdict on Mrs Morland.[108] Catherine is not trained to display skills she will set aside the minute she marries. We know Mrs Morland is an involved parent: Catherine notes her mother is very tired at the end of a morning's lessons (111). She follows the principle of simplicity and a 'useful' (249), not ornamental education. Mrs Morland is not, it is true, a skilful conversationalist as she struggles to go beyond 'common remarks about the weather and roads' (251) when Henry Tilney arrives at the Parsonage unexpectedly. But she greets him with 'the simple professions of unaffected benevolence' (251), which is preferable to cold civility, a point developed below in the discussion of *Sense and Sensibility*. The Morland household is a rare example in the Austen corpus of matrimonial and domestic felicity. Catherine has grown up in a nurturing environment, best captured in her return home after her banishment from Northanger. The whole family is gathered 'to welcome her with affectionate eagerness' (241). Warmth and benevolence dominate this scene of family reunion, which is markedly different from the atmosphere of the Abbey.

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[107] Mooneyham-White, pp. 2-3. See also Margaret Anne Doody, 'Turns of Speech and Figures of Mind', in *A Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson and Clara Tuite (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), pp. 165-84, pp. 167-70.

[108] Mrs Morland is one of the few positive maternal figures in Austen's fiction. She is neither dead nor an embarrassment to her daughter.

While Mrs Morland does have shortcomings as an educationalist, she also has qualities seldom noted. She is first of all ‘a very good woman’ (7), ‘of plain useful sense’ (5), and her husband is ‘a very respectable man’ (5). Mrs Morland’s plain good sense manifests itself in her concern that Catherine is ‘growing quite a fine lady’ (249), who favours ‘French-bread’, after her stay at Northanger. This is not a compliment, but a concern that Catherine will also develop ‘refined susceptibilities’, which are often, in Austen’s work, a sign of affectation. In the Morlands’ home, language is not ‘the Art of concealing our Ideas’:

> Her own family were plain matter-of-fact people, who seldom aimed at wit of any kind; her father, at the utmost, being contented with a pun, and her mother with a proverb; they were not in the habit therefore of telling lies to increase their importance, or of asserting at one moment what they would contradict the next. (62)

The Morlands’ plainness is associated with sincerity and consistency. Conversation is not practised as an arena for self-display. This observation is made when Catherine, trapped in John Thorpe’s curricle, is confronted with her companion’s contradictory speech. Thorpe refuses to make ‘those things plain which he had before made ambiguous’ (62), an opposition that does not align plainness with an inferior speech but with a sincere one.

Scholars tend to underappreciate the Morlands as a plain and unsophisticated family, when their unaffected and unostentatious natures are signs of good character. Catherine experiences ‘the common feelings of common life’ rather than ‘refined susceptibilities’ (11). While the latter initially convey the feelings of a ‘proper lady’, Austen’s fiction demonstrates that refinement is often the preoccupation of affected characters. *Northanger Abbey* is, as previously discussed, less confident than its hero

that one meets ‘human nature in a civilized state’ (111) in England. The General may be a patriotic consumer of Staffordshire porcelain but he falls short of the ideal of the polite gentleman in his behaviour towards his young female guest. His cultivation of pineapples, moreover, contradicts any claims to a preference for simplicity. True refinement, and true politeness, are in fact encountered in ‘the common feelings of common life’, which are, furthermore, expressed in ‘plain terms’ (136), Catherine’s usual mode of communication. At no point does the narrative suggest that she should adopt another form of speech. Her grammar is no worse than Isabella Thorpe’s, nor is she in any way affected.

At Bath, Catherine discovers that conversation is often a ‘machine-like’ performance. The ‘laboratory of Georgian sociability’, Bath is the ideal setting for a young woman’s introduction to the theatricality of politeness.[109] Part of the post-Restoration ‘urban Renaissance’, Bath and other leisure towns developed ‘arenas’ for ‘undiluted socializing and personal display’.[110] John Wood, its main architect, designed the city’s spaces and buildings to facilitate the practice of sociability in ‘this theatre of the Polite World’.[111] Catherine’s ‘entrée into life’ (12) resembles that of an actress’s entrance on stage, her hair and clothes arranged for her. She dons the costume of the polite female visitor, entering the Upper Rooms for the first time looking ‘quite as she should do’ (12-13). Catherine may have the dress but she does not have the lines to her part. She gradually learns that polite conversation is a sort of play, with a pre-written script. It is a polite accomplishment that, like music or reading aloud, must be practised.

[109] Gillian Russell, ‘Sociability’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 176-191, p. 182.
[110] Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in The Provincial Town, 1660-1770* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 150. For the development of Bath and assembly rooms, see pp. 31-34, pp. 150-62.
[111] John Wood, *A Description of Bath*, quoted in Simon Varey, *Space and the Eighteenth-Century English Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 102. Varey, pp. 65-136, discusses Bath.

Henry and Catherine's first exchange as they dance in the Lower Rooms, a sociable space and an 'arena' of display, introduces the heroine to the 'forms' politeness can take and its 'words of course', formulaic expressions with no specific message.[112] As with dancing, Austen's heroine must learn the steps of polite conversation. '[F]orming his features into a set smile, and affectedly softening his air' (18), Henry performs the part of the attentive gentleman enquiring after his partner's familiarity with Bath and the details of her stay.[113] Catherine's repressed laughter indicates she is unsure how to read this semi-theatrical situation. Henry explains the rules of conversation that dictate he enquire after the young lady's stay in Bath. His 'affected astonishment' that she has only been here a week for 'some emotion must appear to be raised by [her] reply' (18). 'Now I must give one smirk, and we may be rational again' (18), he concludes. The repetition of 'must' conveys the idea of submission to prescribed rules. Henry introduces Catherine to the idea that polite sociability is a script, the first stage to becoming 'a mistress of orthodoxy'.

Teasing her for the oddities of her speech, such as 'amazingly' (108) and 'nicest' (109), Henry acts as Catherine's language coach. The young man is a 'grammarian' (*E*, 362), obsessed with the niceties of the English language, which, as his sister remarks in a sarcastic pun, makes him 'more nice than wise' (109), showing she is more than his match. Eleanor's declaration that he is 'always finding fault with [her], for some incorrectness of language' (109) echoes the contemporary gendered view of language use which held that women were more prone to grammatical mistakes than men.[114] In his first conversation with Catherine, Henry had jokingly claimed that

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[112] The phrase 'words of course' appears in *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 121, and in *Patronage*, discussed in Chapter 3.
[113] Gay, pp. 65-67, suggests that Bath's theatricality encourages Henry to try out roles that diverge greatly from his position as clergyman.
[114] See, for example, Patricia Howell Michaelson, p. 36-40.

women's letters are deficient in terms of 'subject, a total inattention to stops, and a very frequent ignorance of grammar' (20). Henry is also a prescriptivist. In line with Samuel Johnson's principles, Henry believes language should be fixed. He, for example, rails that 'nice' 'does for every thing. Originally perhaps it was applied only to express neatness, propriety, delicacy, or refinement' (109). A dislike of language evolution reflects a dislike of social change. Henry's outlook conflicts with Austen's overall recognition of England as a society in transition. That Henry should be so upset over the changes of 'nice' as opposed to other words is no accident: being 'nice' means not stepping outside of the rules of propriety. A correct use of language guarantees a proper behaviour, which, especially with regards to women, played an important role in national security.

Eleanor's prediction that she and Catherine will be 'overpowered with Johnson and Blair all the rest of the way' (109) implicitly argues that language is not only men's business, it is also a means of subjecting women. As 'overpowered' implies, language is an area of social struggle. It is no coincidence that Johnson should be invoked in a novel that is so heavily invested in the question of the state of the nation, as discussed in Chapter 1. A parallel can be drawn between Johnson's policing of the English language and the Tilney men's propensity to control and regulate women's movements. As Charlotte Brewer recently demonstrated, Johnson's treatment of women's writing was deeply paradoxical, and often misogynistic.[115] The exchange is of course playful but there is an underlying truth: language, much like the nation, is governed by a select number of male authorities. As a leading voice in the period's print culture, Johnson's *Dictionary* is recognised as an important vehicle for social coercion. Catherine

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[115] Charlotte Brewer, '"A Goose-Quill or a Gander's": Female Writers in Johnson's *Dictionary*', in *Samuel Johnson: The Arc and the Pendulum*, ed. Freya Johnston and Lynda Mugglestone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 120-39.

complains there are ‘hardly women at all’ in history (110), a genre instrumental to ‘a mature print culture’ in disseminating ideology. The language of print, as discussed previously, is also the language of state ideology. Henry reminds Catherine that ‘newspapers lay every thing open’ (203). They are male ‘instruments of panoptic power’: only Mr Allen and the General are known to read them.[116] In the Pump-room, Mr Allen compares newspapers’ ‘accounts’ of ‘the politics of the day’ (68-69) with other gentleman, while ‘the ladies’ are busy decoding countenances and dress. Print, in its various forms, excludes women.

If grammatical errors, colloquialisms, or fashionable terms in *Northanger Abbey*, as elsewhere in Austen’s fiction, reflect a character’s vulgar or morally unsound nature, an excessive fastidiousness with correct language is equally reprehensible. Henry’s greatest fault is not his slightly antiquated approach to language, but the fact that his linguistic policing causes him to act impolitely. As the scene unfolds, Eleanor accuses him in turn of behaving ‘with liberty’ towards Catherine (103), of being ‘impertinent’ (103), and finally hints that he might be ‘intolerably rude’ towards herself (108), verbal instances that do not conform to the codes of politeness.[117] Eleanor implies his freedom in his comments may be disrespectful to Catherine. Henry, moreover, interrupts the flow of conversation, which was an essential element of conversation in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[118] An over-emphasis on linguistic form and correctness are not ‘pleasing’, a central tenet of polite conversation. More importantly, Henry is ‘rude’ to his sister, going so far as to call her ‘stupid’ (108) in front of Catherine, a very recent acquaintance. Concerns over correct speech, which should be ‘one mark of the progress of society’ according to Blair, seem

[116] Morrison, p. 11.
[117] *OED* 2: ‘not pertaining to the subject or matter at hand.’
[118] For the importance of the ‘flow’ of conversation, see, for example, Mee, *Conversable Worlds*, esp. 1-34.

to run contradictory here to the very idea of improvement. Henry also runs the risk of being pedantic and patronising, which goes against the egalitarian principle of politeness. Henry's speech often displays the 'machine-like' qualities Austen criticises.

In *Northanger Abbey*, women are the victims of male speech, whether it is polite or vulgar. John Thorpe, 'the arch male vulgarian', is a 'rattle' (45), whose speech is talk rather than conversation.[119] Thorpe's empty flow of words can, nevertheless, have a detrimental effect, since they spread false information concerning Catherine. Thorpe, who is the source of the General's misconception of Mr Morland's financial situation, claims he was the victim of James's 'rhodomontade' (256), an allegation that is itself a rodomontade. When Thorpe paints the Morlands as 'a forward, bragging, scheming race' (256), he uses the bombastic language implied in 'rhodomontade'. More concerning than Catherine's initial inability to read through Isabella Thorpe's shallowness is the fact that the General, the novel's patriarch, should be so easily duped by such an ineloquent speaker, whose topics of conversation never depart much from the speed of his curricle.

Austen presents an alternative to the scripted and mechanical aspects of polite conversation, based on simplicity. When Catherine and Eleanor meet at the Pump-room, the narrator concedes that 'in all probability not an observation was made, nor an expression used by either which had not been made and used some thousands of times before, under that roof, in every Bath season' (69). This comment at first supports the idea that polite conversation is mechanical and repetitious, 'yet the merit of their being spoken with simplicity and truth, and without personal conceit, might be something uncommon' (69). While 'thousands' captures the impersonal aspect of 'the

[119] Myra Stokes, *The Language of Jane Austen* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), p. 20. For the distinction between conversation and talk in Austen, see *The Talk in Jane Austen*.

Bath season', the 'simplicity and truth' of their conversation counterbalance its well-trodden qualities, guaranteeing the genuine enjoyment of each other's company. Eleanor's simplicity is, unlike Mrs Morland's, that of 'real elegance' (51), yet the novel, as argued above, does not discredit the plainness of the Morland household. Its warmth is valued over the cold and dictatorial propriety of the Abbey. Even though Catherine is at times guilty of using 'women's cant' such as 'horrid' (33), there is no indication that she and Henry 'will remain [linguistically] unequally matched.'[120] On the contrary, it seems that Henry could greatly benefit from Catherine's simplicity.

Austen's later novels develop the importance of simplicity in conversation as a sign of 'the mind laid out open without disguise'. In *Sense and Sensibility*, there is an even greater tension between sincerity and politeness. The novel, like *Northanger Abbey*, examines the sterility of polite conversation, and introduces alternative, plain, at times 'rude' modes of communication that reconfigure the meaning of true politeness and gentility.

As the Dashwood sisters travel to London with Mrs Jennings as their chaperon, Elinor, burdened with Marianne's surliness, takes on 'the whole task of telling lies, when politeness required it' (141), a comment that makes Elinor complicit with the system of hypocrisy many eighteenth-century critics considered politeness facilitated.[121] An advocate of self-command, Elinor works for the preservation of social order in the face of the revolutionary forces her sister represents.[122] Yet Elinor's intention is not to deceive, only to spare Mrs Jennings' feelings, for which Marianne

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[120] Stokes, p. 19, notes that Johnson designated 'horrid' as 'women's cant'. Doody, 'Turns of Speech', p. 170.

[121] For an analysis of the objections to politeness in eighteenth century, see Jenny Davidson, *Hypocrisy and the Politics of Politeness: Manners and Morals from Locke to Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[122] For a classic reading of *Sense and Sensibility* as Anti-Jacobin, see Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, pp. 182-96.

has very little respect. Consideration of others is an important tenet of English politeness, a point developed below in relation to *Emma*. On another occasion, when Elinor discusses the merits of Mr and John Dashwood with Lucy Steele, 'Miss Dashwood's commendation, being only simple and just, came in without any eclat.' (141) 'Eclat' indicates Elinor has no desire to display herself, nor does she adopt foreign manners. On this occasion, politeness and sincerity coincide, through simplicity.

Characters in *Sense and Sensibility* are assessed according to their speech and behaviour, which at first suggests the novel supports a strict adherence to the rules of politeness. As in *Northanger Abbey*, grammatical errors and the use of fashionable cant indicate a want of education and elegance. Even though Lucy Steele is a more refined speaker than her sister Anne, whose 'vulgar freedom' (143) surfaces in her search of 'smart beaux' and ungrammatical 'an't' (142), Lucy's recurrent grammatical slips and empty use of tags such as 'I'm sure' betray attempts to conceal 'her want of real elegance' (143).[123] Elinor disapproves of Willoughby's frequent neglect of 'general politeness' and 'the forms of worldly propriety' (58), a behaviour mirrored in Marianne's 'usual inattention to the forms of general civility' (165).[124] The term 'form' emphasises the idea that politeness has a prescribed structure and is extremely performative, as Catherine discovers in Bath. The mechanical aspect of polite conversation is captured in the terms 'common-place' (36), 'common cant' (55), and 'hackneyed' (113), words that convey an erosion of language. Inattentions to the forms of general civility are, nevertheless, only tolerated when they are accompanied by plainness and simplicity. These are antidotes to the stifling effects of 'form', and allow for slight departures from the strict rules of propriety and decorum.

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[123] Myra Stokes, pp. 21-24, contrasts the Steele sisters' mode of speech.

[124] According to Lawrence Klein, 'politeness' supplanted the term 'civility', but they are used synonymously in *Sense and Sensibility* and Austen's other novels. Klein, 'Politeness and the Interpretation of Eighteenth-Century Britain', p. 873.

The Middletons illustrate the problems inherent to politeness as a social practice and a measure of character. Their surname recalls the importance of finding the right '*ton*' in the period, of setting a standard to establish one's self in society through good taste. 'Ton' however carries associations of affectation, a social phenomenon satirised by comedies of manners.[125] Lady Middleton is the picture of 'elegance' and 'good-breeding' (38), but it is not the reflection of a true elegant mind and taste as one finds in Anne Elliot, for instance. Her concern is only to perform politeness rather than being amiable and easy. This performativity can be connected to Lady Middleton's social origins. Her mother, Mrs Jennings, is, according to John Dashwood, 'the widow of a man who got all his money in a low way' (260), which reflects the strong prejudice against those who had made their fortune through trade.[126] John is surprised that Lady Middleton should be so 'elegant'. '[T]hough perfectly well-bred, she was reserved, cold' (36). Her 'cold insipidity', 'so particularly repulsive' (41), makes her an inadequate and in fact impolite host when the Dashwoods come to dine at Barton.

Sir John, the complete opposite of his wife, often breaks the rules of politeness yet is a much more benevolent character. 'Loud', full of 'boisterous mirth' (41), his manners are, in short, unrefined and unpolished. Sir John is 'very chatty' (36), a term Bruce Stovel argues is the opposite of 'a genuine interchange of ideas' and therefore an obstacle to the ideal of polite conversation, yet, even though Austen's narratives do distinguish between good conversation and chat, Sir John's chattiness is genuine and

[125] See, for instance, David Garrick, *Bon Ton, or High Life Above Stairs* (1775). In Burney's *Cecilia*, characters obsessed with 'the ton' are vulgar and insensitive. Mr Gosport, who provides a taxonomy of the different 'TON' tribes, who in no way facilitate polite conversation. A number of works, often satirical, bare the phrase in the title: Lady Wallace, *The Ton; Or, the Follies of Fashion* (1788); Lady Anne Hamilton, *The Epics of the Ton; Or, the Glories of the Great World, A Poem, In Two Books*, 3rd ed. (1807); *The Ton: Anecdotes, Chit-Chat, Hints and On-Dits; Dedicated to all Gossips* (London, 1819); The *New Bon Ton Magazine, or Telescope of the Times* (1818-21).
[126] Edward Copeland, p. 476n, suggests that Mrs Jennings' inherited supply of Constantia wine, a luxury wine, 'may indicate her husband's position as a prosperous wine merchant, a socially respectable trade'.

welcome.[127] Lacking his wife's outward elegance, he is in fact more truly polite. 'Friendly' is used twice to characterise the style of his letter inviting Mrs Dashwood to rent Barton cottage. Even though Lady Middleton 'had nothing to say for herself beyond the most common-place inquiry or remark', thanks to Sir John, 'conversation however was not wanted' (36) at Norland Park. The narrative is unequivocal that Lady Middleton's elegance 'would have been improved by some share of [her husband's] frankness and warmth' (36). Sir John is in fact the more sociable and polite of the two since he has a real 'satisfaction in society' and is 'a blessing to all the juvenile part of the neighbourhood' (39). Sir John genuinely enjoys being instrumental in promoting sociability by making his house not a private space but a place of sociable gathering. For all his flaws, Sir John is concerned with public good. Sir John's warmth and friendliness are valued over his wife's cold and empty politeness. The contrast between Sir John and his wife's different modes of speech can be read as a representation of the eighteenth-century understanding that, as societies progress towards refinement, they lose warmth and vigour.

The characters of Mrs Jennings, Sir John's sidekick, and her daughter Charlotte Palmer, can be analysed in similar terms. Mrs Jennings can be all too easily dismissed as a loud, vulgar, insensitive busybody, recognisable for her 'common-place raillery' (40), whose only solace in life is match-making, but she is a more benevolent character than her superficially refined daughter. In her eagerness to share gossip with the Dashwood family, Mrs Jennings sidesteps 'the ceremony of knocking at the door' and '[comes] hallooing to the window' (122), in a great flurry of questions. Indicative of the loudness of her voice, to halloo is a hunting term, which also conveys a lack of

[127] Stovel, p. 26.

refinement. Hunting, in conjectural history, belongs to the savage state.[128] Mrs Jennings' hallooing may be uncivilised but it is more acceptable than Lady Middleton's cold insipidity. '[F]ull of jokes and laughter' (40), Mrs Jennings, like Sir John, tries to be a blessing to her young acquaintances. In a narrative where self-centred and mercenary characters abound, Sir John and Mrs Jennings are rare exceptions of generosity. The same is true of Charlotte Palmer:

> The openness and heartiness of her manner, more than atoned for that want of recollection and elegance, which made her often deficient in the forms of politeness; her kindness, recommended by so pretty a face, was engaging; her folly, though evident, was not disgusting, because it was not conceited; and Elinor could have forgiven every thing but her laugh. (344)

'Openness' and 'kindness' are valued over 'forms of politeness'. Whether Elinor cannot forgive Mrs Palmer's laugh because she considers it unladylike or simply too irritating remains open, but the latter is more probable.[129] What is significant is that, unlike her sister, Charlotte Palmer is 'not conceited'. As elsewhere in Austen's fiction, affectation is an unforgivable sin.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen therefore introduces the notion that a genuine cheerfulness is much more acceptable than sullenness and affectation, but does not develop the social ramifications of this observation as fully as in her later novels. Sir John is a landed gentleman, which means his inattentions to ceremony cannot be treated in the same way as someone of lower rank. Similarly, Mrs Jennings and Mrs Palmer, a

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[128] Wordsworth's 'The Idiot Boy' includes the line 'Halloo! halloo! a long halloo!' to elicit sympathy from the reader. *The Major Works*, p. 67.

[129] Mrs Palmer's laughter, unlike Harriet Freke's, is not subversive. Bilger does not discuss her in her study. Heydt-Stevenson gives Mrs Palmer more agency than most critics, arguing that her laughter is the sign that 'she has reimagined the roles of wife, husband, lover, and mother outside of the confines of cultural expectation'. Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, pp. 63-67, p. 64. The level of consciousness this implies for an otherwise flat character is problematic, but the resilience Mrs Palmer displays requires, I believe, further consideration.

widow and a married woman, are socially protected. Their behaviour can have no harmful consequences. Their presence is, nevertheless, an important element of Austen's early re-examination of politeness, which is conducted alongside reflections on national character.

Politeness does not come easy to all of Austen's characters, as is the case for Edward Ferrars, Austen's 'plain hero', a very 'English' hero, a figure she develops more fully in *Mansfield Park* with Edmund Bertram. Unlike the dashing Willoughby, Edward has no 'peculiar graces of person or manners' (18) and is not handsome. More significantly, Edward suffers from that very 'English malady' of social unease that sits uncomfortably with politeness: 'shyness, coldness, reserve' (104) precede Austen's hero.[130] His 'natural aukwardness [sic]' occasionally makes him seem 'negligent' (109), when a polite gentleman should be attentive to others. Because of his 'tame' (20) reading of Cowper and his obstinacy to see the 'very dirty lane' in front of him when she would have him admire the 'grandeur' of the scene (102), Marianne settles that Edward 'has no real taste.' (20) Elinor, on the other hand, considers 'he has an innate propriety and simplicity of taste' (22) which are proofs of the soundness of his character. His practical analysis of Marianne's picturesque landscape is a sign of plain common sense, and, as such, a thoroughly English turn of mind. It is this simplicity that draws Elinor to him and makes him a suitable partner.

Mrs Dashwood makes a similar observation concerning Colonel Brandon. For most of the novel, Mrs Dashwood is dazzled by Willoughby's manners, but events force her to substantially revise her assessment of Colonel Brandon's character and his suitability as Marianne's partner. Discussing his manners with Elinor, she declares that:

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[130] The protagonist of Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer; Or, the Mistakes of a Night* (1773), Marlowe, who shares many commonalities with Edward, calls shyness an 'English malady'. Gay, pp. draws parallels between the two characters.

> ‘Their gentleness, their genuine attention to other people, and their manly unstudied simplicity is much more accordant with her real disposition, than the liveliness—often artificial, and often ill-timed of the other.’ (383)

Mrs Dashwood identifies the kind of simplicity that eighteenth-century and Romantic-period writers considered the proof of good sense and English masculinity. ‘Unstudied’, the Colonel’s simplicity is not performed. Colonel Brandon is the perfect polite gentleman.[131] He is a landowner who, by giving Edmund a living and improving the house for Elinor’s benefit, exercises a patrician civic humanism. If Mrs Dashwood is unconvincing in her claim that she has always thought this way, Elinor’s reminder that his character ‘as an excellent man is well established’ (381) confirms that the Colonel is valued by the community, in part for his ‘manly unstudied simplicity’.

If Brandon, as a military and landed gentleman, has not been hindered by his simplicity, matters are different for Edward. Like Oliver Goldsmith’s Marlowe in *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773), Edward is uncomfortable in genteel society. ‘I have frequently thought’, he confesses, ‘that I must have been intended by nature to be fond of low company, I am so little at my ease among strangers of gentility!’ (109) This shyness affects his professional prospects, on which he and his family, who wish to see him in public office, have radically different views. The law, the army, and the navy are all envisaged because they are ‘smart’, ‘genteel’, or have ‘fashion’, and would allow him to make ‘a very good appearance in the first circles, and dr[i]ve about town in very knowing gigs’ (119). Professions are contemplated as a means of social elevation rather than as means of contributing to the community, a civic humanist approach Austen’s

[131] How truly suited the Colonel and Marianne is a point critics have discussed but is beyond the scope of this study. See for instance Alistair Duckworth’s objection that their union is ‘a gross over-compensation for her misguided sensibility’, *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen’s Novels* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), p. 104.

novels otherwise support.[132] His family only focuses on social status. Edward is after all the eldest son and it is therefore incumbent on him to raise the family's social position. His mother and sister both 'longed to see him distinguished—as—they hardly knew what. They wanted him to make a fine figure in the world in some manner or other. His mother wished to interest him in political concerns, to get him into parliament, or to see him connected with some of the great men of the day' (118). The focus on politics should be a means of exercising public virtue. The profession is, however, irrelevant here, as the pause after 'distinguished' emphasises: what matters are prestige and that Edward make 'a fine figure in the world', in other words display the external signs of a man of rank. 'Fine' also implies a degree of refinement and outward show that sit awkwardly next to Edward's 'simplicity of taste'. Politics and the law, moreover, require strong rhetorical skills and confidence, both of which Edward lacks.[133] Edward's reluctance to pursue a profession that demands public presence reflects his inability to perform. His ambition is quite otherwise, to a lead a plain life 'centred in domestic comfort' (18). Edward becomes a clergyman, a public role that is more parochial than political representation.[134]

Sense and Sensibility demonstrates the value of plainness and simplicity over 'cold civility' and the meaningless 'forms' of polite language. With Sir John Middleton and Mrs Jennings, Austen introduces the idea that what are considered 'rude' utterances according to strict propriety can in fact be the more truly polite behaviour, a point developed most fully in *Persuasion*. By endowing the male protagonists with simplicity, Austen indicates its importance to her conception of English masculinity.

[132] See, for instance, Edmund Bertram's defence of the public role of the clergyman in setting the manners of the nation in *Mansfield Park*, pp. 107-09.
[133] Austen is arguably representing the social convention that measures male success and happiness in terms of public notoriety.
[134] For the role of the clergy in Austen's fiction, see, in particular, Irene Collins, *Jane Austen and the Clergy* (London: Hambledon Press, 1994).

While the heroines of *Sense and Sensibility* appreciate or learn to respect simplicity, the novel does not analyse its relation to gender as is otherwise examined in other novels. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the heroine, Elizabeth Bennet, challenges social hierarchies and gender conventions by practising and advocating a plain form of speech, which was often marked as male.[135] Like her laughter, Elizabeth's plain language attempts to break down gender binaries. Elizabeth subverts the codes of behaviour of the 'fine lady', which she exposes as social constructions.[136]

Whatever Elizabeth does, it is rarely with the intention of staging herself, which is in stark contrast with the Bingley sisters, both 'very fine ladies' (16). They are sticklers for propriety and decorum but have little concern for the feelings of those around them. Their politeness is mere show as opposed to genuine fellow-feeling. Caroline is unmasked as an impostor when she takes up the second volume of the work Darcy is reading. This is merely to display an interest in intellectual pastimes rather that a genuine pleasure in reading, since a second volume makes little sense when one has not read the first. Elizabeth, on the other hand, pursues accomplishments as activities she genuinely enjoys. Her general behaviour thus coincides with simplicity as opposed to affectation. This transpires in her 'easy and unaffected' piano-playing (27) during a neighbourhood gathering, a sign that Elizabeth is not attempting any form of self-display. This, however, does not mean that Elizabeth, like Marianne Dashwood, has little regard for the 'forms of general civility'.

Gender roles are reversed in *Pride and Prejudice* when it comes to lessons in politeness. When Mr Darcy explains that he does not have the talent of 'conversing

[135] Michaelson, p. 66.
[136] Elizabeth Inchbald reportedly claimed it was even more tiring than working: 'The fatigue of being a fine lady […] is too much for any common strength'. Cited in James Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs Inchbald*, II, p. 55, quoted in Catherine Burroughs, *Closet Stages: Joanna Baillie and the Theatre Theory of British Romantic Women Writers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), p. 36.

easily' (196), Elizabeth offers the comparison of her own piano-playing. If she does not have 'the masterly manner' of other female performers, it is simply because she 'would not take the trouble of practising' (197). Elizabeth indirectly reminds Darcy that conversation, like any other sociable activity can, and indeed must, be practised. This is not the first time Elizabeth plays language coach with Mr Darcy. Patricia Michaelson, who argues that *Pride and Prejudice* offers advice on speech practices in fictional form, often through negative examples, sees Darcy's 'reformation' as 'conversational'.[137] His main lesson is learning the importance of civility and what Michaelson calls 'positive politeness', where pleasing and sincerity coincide.[138] I agree with Michaelson that Austen does not reject politeness wholesale, but I read Austen's presentation of the rules of conversation differently. Elizabeth reminds Darcy that he is not doing his share of the conversational work, but also comments on the prescriptiveness of conversation in the social sphere, a lesson Catherine Morland also learns. One can also read the difference between Elizabeth and Darcy as a representation of the differences between Addisonian and Shafestburian politeness, the former privileging sincerity and the latter favouring ease, which the novel attempts to reconcile.

At the Netherfield ball, Darcy surprises the entire assembly by asking Elizabeth to dance. As in *Northanger Abbey*, dancing serves to expose the codification of language that often accompanies polite sociability, where meaning is sacrificed to form. An awkward silence reigns until Elizabeth decides that engaging her partner in conversation would be 'a greater punishment' (102).[139] She then offers her own 'satire on modern language' (*NA*, 135), where words do not have any real meaning and nothing is really communicated. Her instructions concerning the course of their exchange

[137] Michaelson, p. 203.
[138] *Ibid*., pp. 203-04, p. 205.
[139] Michaelson, p. 204, suggests Elizabeth here undertakes the traditional role of women to 'do the conversational work'.

prompts Mr Darcy to ask: 'Do you talk by rule then, while you are dancing?' (102) Referring to 'turns' and 'ought[s]' (102), Elizabeth had indeed supplied him with a readymade script that mirrors the mechanical aspect of social exchanges in semi-public spaces. Her final conclusion that 'for the advantage of *some*, conversation ought to be so arranged as that they may have the trouble of saying as little as possible' (102) suggests that not all members of the social sphere are agreeable conversationalists and that a pre-written script benefits all those involved, an indirect dig at Mr Darcy. Arrangement implies codification, underlining the formulaic nature of polite conversation. Elizabeth's reflections on the performative nature of polite conversation border on incivility themselves, a point she later acknowledges.

As the novel draws to a close, Austen stages a final exchange between the protagonists during which Elizabeth playfully quizzes Mr Darcy on the rise and progress of his feelings, whose origins she locates in the transgressive nature of her speech. She declares that her manner 'was always bordering on the uncivil' (421), a point applicable to her general behaviour. As discussed previously, Elizabeth is Austen's wild English girl, who challenges the social conventions that restrict women's behaviour. She insists that she behaved with 'impertinence', which Darcy reformulates as the more socially acceptable 'liveliness of your mind' (421). Elizabeth freely plays with the borders of propriety and decorum, which she exposes as ideology. She also takes the liberty of speaking *for* Darcy, by telling him: 'The fact is, you were sick of civility, of deference, of officious attention. […] There—I have saved you the trouble of accounting for it' (421-22). Elizabeth appropriates male speech, when it is usually men who speak for women, as Henry Tilney does with Catherine Morland. Elizabeth's language is not one of primitive rudeness, as the Bingley sisters would have it, but challenges social expectations regarding women's language. She is assertive, defiant,

even quarrelsome, with women as with men. She, for instance, stands up to the verbal tyrant Lady Catherine on several occasions with the strategy of the 'direct answer' (187), a mode of speech that is plain and simple.

Mr Collins's marriage proposal offers a comic if clear example of the ideology that constrains female speech. The clergyman privileges a florid style, following every precept outlined in *Loiterer* 59, blissfully unaware of the virtue of '*simplex munditiis*'. His proposal illustrates Henry Tinley's observation that, in dancing as in matrimony, 'man has the advantage of choice, woman only the power of refusal' (74). In some cases, women are not even allowed the power of refusal, as Elizabeth experiences when she first politely declines Mr Collins's proposal. For Collins, 'it is usual with young ladies to reject' a proposal at first, the refusal sometimes 'repeated a second or third time' (120). Elizabeth asserts she is not 'one of those young ladies (if such young ladies there are)' (120), a parenthesis that underlines the ideological nature of this concept rather than a reality in the outside world. Mr Collins, on the other hand, persists in believing Elizabeth is performing the part of the 'young lady':

> 'I know it to be the established custom of your sex to reject a man on the first application […] your refusal of my addresses are merely words of course. […] I shall chuse to attribute it to your wish of increasing my love by suspense, according to the usual practice of elegant females.' (121-22)

'Established custom', 'words of course', and 'usual practice' reveal the mechanical aspect of polite conversation which follows empty rituals. Mr Collins cannot believe an 'elegant female', which he thinks is a compliment, could be sincere in her refusal. Elizabeth reiterates her position, adding:

> 'Can I speak plainer? Do not consider me now as an elegant female intending to plague you, but as a rational creature speaking the truth from her heart.' (122)

The opposition between 'elegant female' and 'rational creature' echoes Mary Wollstonecraft's demonstration of the artificiality of the former category, which reduced women to display.[140] Elizabeth's final counter-argument is to stress the plainness of her speech, which she hopes will prove her sincerity and that she is not performing a part. Michaelson argues that 'Mr Collins and Elizabeth recognise that plain sincerity is more associated with men', but it seems that here, Elizabeth attempts to deconstruct gendered conceptions of language.[141] Her argument is a way to bypass any gender binary: her plain speech is that of a creature, a human being, not a social construction.

Elizabeth challenges male authority through plain speech a second time when she tries to alert her father to the impact Lydia's stay at Brighton will have on the rest of the family. She interrupts her exposé by specifying 'I must speak plainly' (256) before eloquently presenting her case to her father. Her speech is characterised by the sort of directness that is usually acceptable in male speech. Mr Bennet dismisses her concerns but the point remains that she uses the argument of plainness to stress the urgency of her opinion. She takes on the role of leader and patriarch since she outlines all the points her father should be considering. By speaking *for* him, as she does with Darcy, Elizabeth breaks the rules regulating female language. This plainness remains, however, very delicate for women to negotiate.

Just as her meal preferences signal an adherence to plain, unaffected, and therefore English traditions, Elizabeth's habit of speaking plainly and directly match the contemporary conception of the true English style. Determined to pique Darcy, she claims they both only deign to speak when they will 'amaze the whole room, and be

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[140] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 73. Feminist readings of Austen's presentation of women as rational creatures include Margaret Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism, and Fiction* (London: Athlone Press, 1997); Johnson, *Women, Politics, and the Novel,* esp. Ch. 1.
[141] Michaelson, p. 206.

handed down to posterity with all the eclat [sic] of a proverb' (103). The phrase 'eclat of a proverb' is slightly oxymoronic: 'eclat' conveys a witty, sparkling, and original remark, with a sense of flourish and foreign flare designed to dazzle its audience, whereas a proverb vehicles commonly accepted, and possibly hackneyed, truisms, with no attempt to display superior talents. The former is only concerned with polish and 'glare of colouring', while the other is concerned with content: the proverb presents a general truth.[142] There is in fact a complete incompatibility between the two terms, since one is French and the other English, the idea of display embedded in the French term. The proverb has an additional cultural function: it belongs to the English collective unconscious and connects different generations over time. While language evolves, with words coming in and out of fashion, the proverb has an enduring quality. An éclat moreover singles out the speaker, whereas a proverb brings speaker and listener together. There is, nevertheless, a commonness attached to a proverb, which, though not considered vulgar, might mark the speaker as unrefined.

Elizabeth's use of proverbs is deliberate. Before playing the piano at the Lucases, she aims 'a fine old saying' at Mr Darcy, 'which everybody of course is familiar with—keep your breath and cool your porridge' (27). I agree with Margaret Anne Doody that 'breath and base food can also remind Darcy of Elizabeth's physicality', but her words are more than a 'deliberate vulgar challenge to Darcy'.[143] Howard S. Babb suggests that Elizabeth's speech 'puts her individuality on parade', but the emphasis, I believe, lies elsewhere.[144] The stress on 'familiar' suggests that some people might consider themselves superior to common 'fine old sayings', an indirect critique of Darcy's apparent sense of superiority. Punning on the word 'fine',

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[142] *Loiterer* 59, p. 300.
[143] Doody, 'Turns of Speech', p. 174.
[144] Babb, p. 134.

Elizabeth implies proverbs are not beneath a 'gentleman's daughter' (395). Furthermore, Elizabeth proves she is not part of the herd of accomplished, elegant females, for whom language is an arena of display. As Kate Rumbold notes, 'She elegantly turns it into a gesture of unaffected modesty'.[145] It is a way of proudly displaying her plain style, a gesture similar to William Hazlitt's later definition of the familiar style and his opposition between vulgarity and affectation.

Hazlitt's conception of 'real power, real excellence', defined in 'On Vulgarity and Affectation' (1821), is similar to Austen's reconfiguration of gentility.[146] For Hazlitt, an excessive and superficial concern with gentility is the sign of moral, intellectual, and human inferiority. The essay attacks a system based exclusively on social discrimination, embodied in Lady Catherine's 'distinction of rank preserved' (182). Her dread that the 'shades of Pemberley' will be 'polluted' (396) if Elizabeth marries Darcy is, in Hazlitt's view, a sign of vulgarity. For Hazlitt, 'Nothing is vulgar that is natural, spontaneous, unavoidable,' a point that could easily be applied to Elizabeth.[147] The presentation of her language supports the view that 'there is nothing vulgar in the common English idiom. Simplicity is not vulgarity; but the looking to any affectation of any sort for distinction is.'[148] This sentence rings true in each of Austen's novels.

Elizabeth's style is, moreover, Hazlitt's 'genuine familiar style', which, he argues, is the 'truly English style'.[149] With the use of the word 'familiar', Hazlitt shows that quotidian, plain language is the correct style. Even though Hazlitt's reflections on

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[145] Kate Rumbold, *Shakespeare and the Eighteenth-Century Novel: Cultures of Quotation from Samuel Richardson to Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 177.
[146] William Hazlitt, 'On Vulgarity and Affectation', in *Table Talk; Or, Original Essays on Men and Manners* (London: John Warren, 1821), pp. 375-400, p. 378.
[147] *Ibid*., p. 386.
[148] *Ibid*., p. 387.
[149] William Hazlitt, 'On Familiar Style', in *Table Talk; Or, Original Essays on Men and Manners*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (London: Colburn, 1824), II, pp. 185-97, p. 185.

'familiar style' are linked to writing, its underlying principles can be applied to language more generally, since good conversation and good writing followed the same principles. One should 'write as any one would speak in common conversation', as one 'who could discourse with ease, force, and perspicuity, setting aside all pedantic and oratorical flourishes' and 'steer a middle course'.[150] Hazlitt's theory is similar to Hume's and Blair's precepts. As 'force' implies, the 'true English style' is strongly masculine and combative.[151] This point is reinforced when Hazlitt reflects on his own practice:

> Any one may mouth out a passage with a theatrical cadence, or get upon stilts to tell his thoughts; but to write or speak with propriety and simplicity is a more difficult task. […] I am fastidious in this respect, and would almost as soon coin the currency of the realm as counterfeit the King's English. […] As an author I endeavour to use plain words and popular modes of construction, as were I a chapman and dealer, I should common weights and measures.[152]

Through the repeated use of polysyndeton, Hazlitt equates the familiar style with simplicity and propriety, which are clearly opposed to theatricality and self-promotion. The parallel between currency and the English language underlines the deep moral and political significance attached to the English language. The reference to 'common weights and measures' creates a sense of shared community. It also shifts the setting of a standard away from social and intellectual elites, challenging Johnson's and Adam Smith's doctrine. The conspicuous omission of female speakers and writers underlines the difficulty for women to position themselves as plain or simple speakers of English.

[150] *Ibid*., pp. 185, 186.
[151] See, for example, Higgins, p. 109.
[152] Hazlitt, 'On Familiar Style', p. 189.

Taxed with affectation if their speech was too ornamented, a simple language ran the risk of being considered masculine.

Rewriting the Nation in *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1815), and *Persuasion* (1818)

While *Pride and Prejudice* champions Elizabeth's plain speech, challenging the gendered binary of language, *Mansfield Park*, Austen's first Regency novel, shaped by both the ongoing Napoleonic conflict and the Regency Crisis, represents the period's anxieties concerning women's practice of masculine language.[153] Despised as a 'creepmouse' by her cousin Tom, Fanny Price is Austen's quietest heroine.[154] The heroine's rival, Mary Crawford, is, like Elizabeth, a spirited woman, yet her freedom of speech is ultimately curtailed at the end of the novel, which many critics have read as Austen's rejection of urban, amoral, irreligious, and French-speaking egotism.[155] The Great House at Mansfield Park, located in Nottinghamshire, 'the most midland county in the heart of England', stands for the nation.[156] The novel is concerned with individual duty during wartime, as Roger Sales convincingly argues in his opposition between William Price's true heroism and Henry Crawford's pursuit of pleasure and

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[153] Sales, pp. 87-131, offers an illuminating analysis of the novel's representation of the Regency Crisis. See esp. his reading of Tom as Regent, pp. 93-106. The political and social readings of *Mansfield Park* are too numerous to cite. The major studies include Butler, Duckworth, Johnson, Kirkham, Sales, Tuite. Recent works have also examined the novel through a postcolonial lens. See, in particular, Edward Said, 'Jane Austen and Empire', in *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1993), pp. 96-116; Moira Ferguson, '*Mansfield Park*: Slavery, Colonialism, and Gender', *Oxford Literary Review* 13:1 (July 1991), pp. 118-139; Maaja A. Stewart, *Domestic Realities and Imperial Fictions: Jane Austen's Novels in Eighteenth-Century Contexts* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993); You-Me Park and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (eds.), *The Postcolonial Jane Austen* (London: Routledge, 2000).

[154] Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (1814), ed. John Wiltshire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 171. All further references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text

[155] Warren Roberts reads a dichotomy between the 'French' Mary Crawford and the 'English' Fanny Price. *Jane Austen and the French Revolution*, 2nd ed. (London: Athlone Press, 1995), pp. 33-37. For a classic reading of *Mansfield Park* as anti-Jacobin novel and Mary as dangerous figure, see Butler, *War of Ideas*, pp. 219-49, esp. pp. 222-36. For an alternative reading, which argues the fault lies not in the novelty the Crawfords introduce but lies within the great house itself, see Johnson, *Women, Politics, and the Novel*, pp. 94-120.

[156] Marilyn Butler, 'Introduction' to *Mansfield Park* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. xiii.

his acting of the part of soldier in *Lovers' Vows*.[157] William's role in bolstering the English nation is not simply through active military service, it is also through his simplicity, which his sister Fanny, a liminal creature, also displays. Austen promotes plainness and simplicity in *Mansfield Park* as the 'redemptive qualities to a nation in peril'.[158] The novel's preoccupation with the state of the nation is reflected in its interest in the Englishness of the vernacular, which Austen develops in *Emma*, discussed below. With its support of the language of marginal figures like Fanny and William Price, *Mansfield Park* suggests that the English nation, and arguably the British state, depend on members of the periphery, arguing for a greater heterogeneity than is usually associated with Austen's narratives, and for social change.

Literature in *Mansfield Park* is the starting point of Austen's investigation of the English language. A volume of Shakespeare's plays Fanny hastily discarded presents Henry Crawford with the opportunity to exhibit his superior reading abilities and his familiarity with the playwright's work, which, according to Henry, 'is part of an Englishman's constitution' (390-91). Austen is surely punning on 'constitution', suggesting Shakespeare is both foundational to the English character and at the basis of England's political government, which mirrors the contemporary association between language and politics as expressed by Samuel Johnson. The reference to Shakespeare is no accident: by the time Austen started writing her first Regency novel, the early-modern playwright had become a symbol of nationalism and a by-word for Englishness, much like Austen's own novels today.[159] Reading Shakespeare during the

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[157] Sales, pp. 90-91, 106-16. For the meaning of the role of Frederick in *Lovers' Vows*, see also Paula *Jane Austen and the Theatre* (London: Hambledon, 2002), pp.

[158] Stafford, 'Plain Living and Ungarnish'd Stories', pp. 118-133, p. 119.

[159] The eighteenth century witnessed 'the installation of Shakespeare as England's National Poet', Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Authorship, 1660-1769* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 5. See also Jonathan Bate, *Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism, 1730-1830* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). Fiona Ritchie has demonstrated women's active involvement in promoting Shakespeare to the level of national poet. Ritchie, *Women and Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

Napoleonic era was a patriotic act. In his 1813 lecture on *Richard II*, Coleridge claimed that Shakespeare's object is 'to make his countrymen more patriotic; to make Englishmen proud of being Englishmen'.[160] Edmund adds that 'we all talk Shakespeare' (391), reflecting not just the interconnectedness between literature and national identity, but the idea that literary language produces the language a nation speaks, which supports modern critics' view of the role of print in standardisation. The passage does not address standardisation but the view that literature, and print, can create a national language still stands. By reading Shakespeare, characters show their allegiance to the English nation. 'We all' implies a belief in an imagined community and a shared cultural practice. Given the novel's prevalent Anglocentrism, however, who Edmund includes is unclear. Whether he means the members of his class, the English as opposed to the rest of the United Kingdom, or in fact all British citizens, men and women included, remains ambiguous.

Shakespeare's language was heralded for its Englishness, to which simplicity was central. In his eight-volume *Works of Shakespeare*, Hugh Blair quotes a lengthy section of William Guthrie's *Essay upon English Tragedy* (1747) which compares the language and style of Addison's *Cato* with *Hamlet*. Addison was frequently cited as the model of good English writing, Samuel Johnson, for example, claiming that, 'Whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison.'[161] Maria Edgeworth, in *Practical Education* (1798), condenses this quotation, changing 'an

2014). Kate Rumbold has argued for the contribution of fiction, through quotation, to Shakespeare's canonical status. See also Willy Maley and Margaret Tudeau-Clayton (eds.), *This England, That Shakespeare: New Angles on Englishness and the Bard* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

[160] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lecture 5, quoted in Susan Valladares, *Staging the Peninsular War: English Theatres 1807-1815* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), p. 69.

[161] Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets; With Critical Observations on their Works*, 4 vols., ed. Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), III, p. 38.

English style for 'a pure English style', reflecting an investment in the establishment of a national style.[162] Yet, for the Scottish Guthrie and Blair, Shakespeare's language is superior.[163] In *Cato*, one finds 'the language of the porch and academy', while

> Hamlet, on the other hand, speaks that of the human heart, ready to enter upon a deep, a dreadful, a decisive act. His is the real language of mankind, of its highest and lowest order; from the king to the cottager, from the philosopher to the peasant. It is a language which a man may speak without learning; yet no learning can improve, nor philosophy mend it.[164]

Hamlet's language is that of real men, what Hazlitt would call 'familiar style', surpassing any form of cultivation, much like the simplicity advocated in the period. Guthrie's analysis reveals a real belief that the entire nation can be united through the English language, overcoming class. Shakespeare's genius needs no improvement, which implies the genius of the English language equally does not need added refinement. Moreover, just as Scottish authors writing on Shakespeare could share in the national genius and capitalise on his cultural significance, women, even young women such as Fanny Price, participate in the promotion of Britishness through their reading of national texts.

Literary allusions insert *Mansfield Park* into a specifically English canon, showcasing its own national allegiance, which allows Austen to contribute to contemporary debates on the state of the nation. Another important literary authority is the poet William Cowper, credited for a revision of the georgic as 'a specifically

[162] Maria Edgeworth, *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, 12 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999-2003), XI: *Practical Education* (1798), ed. Susan Manly, p. 220.
[163] Neil Rhodes argues that 'the Scottish advocacy of Shakespeare, and the accompanying appeals to manliness and "nature", was a bid for the share in the national genius of the new British state.' Rhodes, 'From Rhetoric to Criticism', in *The Scottish Invention of English Literature*, ed. Robert Crawford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 22-36, p. 33.
[164] Hugh Blair, *The Works of Shakespeare: In which the Beauties Observed by Pope, Warburton, and Dodd Are Pointed Out*, 8 vols. (Edinburgh: Sands, Murray, Cochran, 1753), I, p. lxxi.

English Protestant georgic—a British Georgic georgic'. 'By quoting Cowper as part of her own complex labour Napoleonic georgic nation-formation', Tuite explains, 'Austen invokes a complex social, political, and cultural romance and repertoire of specifically English cultural effects', which positions *Mansfield Park* as a patriotic text.[165] Cowper's work was, moreover, admired for its simplicity and true English style. In the section 'On the Genius and Poetry of Cowper' in his 1835 *Life and Works*, J. W. Cunningham asserts that:

> [H]e was one of our most *simple* and *natural* of all writers. […] He began to be an author when Pope, with his most admirable critic Johnson, had established a taste for all that most ornate, pompous, and complicated in phraseology. […] The simplicity of Cowper as a thinker, examiner, and writer is unquestionably one of his greatest charms. [...] [T]he simplicity of his style is, we believe, considering its strength, without a parallel. No author, perhaps, has done more to recover the language of our country from the grasp and tyranny of a foreign idiom, and to teach English people to speak in English accents. In some instances, it may be granted, that he is somewhat more colloquial and homely than the dignity of his subject warrants. But for offences of this kind he makes the amplest compensation, by leading to those 'wells of undefiled English,' at which he has drunk so deeply and whence alone the pure streams of our national composition are drawn.[166]

Like so many of his contemporaries, Cunningham identifies Pope as the origin of the corruption of English simplicity. Cunningham's prose, marked by a sense of urgency,

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[165] Clara Tuite, *Romantic Austen: Sexual Politics and the Literary Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 120.

[166] *The Life and Works of William Cowper, With an Essay on the Genius and Poetry of Cowper by the Rev. J. W Cunningham*, ed. T. S. Grimshawe (London: Saunders and Oatley, 1835), VI, pp. xxx, xxxii-xxxiii.

is clearly influenced by Johnson's 'Preface', most significantly in the preservation of English against foreign forces and the idea of a pure, untouched vernacular. Through his simplicity, Cowper is a champion of the English language and by extension the English nation. Jon Mee, moreover, observes that 'Cowper aspired to a loose and agreeable style that approximated to conversational ease.'[167] His verse is therefore an appropriate model for conversation. Cowper also played an important role in shaping middle-class ideas of domesticity and exemplified what Higgins calls a 'glocal vision', where the local and the global are intertwined, mirrored in Fanny's own interest in issues that reach beyond the bounds of the estate.[168] As an admirer of Shakespeare and Cowper, Fanny is a distinctly English heroine who studies the best examples of polite conversation.[169]

Women and the lower classes are, however, conspicuously absent from these discussions of the English language. Margaret Kirkham argues that Henry deploys 'a terminology which excludes women', which Edmund's 'rather awkward choice of pronouns' tries to rectify.[170] Kirkham also draws our attention to the fact that *Henry VIII* was Fanny's choice, a point often eclipsed by critics' focus on Henry's powerful reading.[171] Kirkham contends that it is unlikely Fanny was reading Cardinal Wolsey's speech when the young men interrupt her, underlining instead the parallels between Fanny and Queen Katherine. Both characters have gone through a 'trial scene', and the fact that both are busy with needlework, as Kirkham notes, is surely further invitation to compare their situations. The Queen is not a native of England, just as Fanny is not

[167] Mee, *Conversable Worlds*, p. 168.
[168] Higgins, p. 18, and discussion, pp. 17-44. The East Room symbolises Fanny's interest in foreign matters.
[169] Fanny quotes *The Task* (1785), p. 66, and 'Tirocinium' (1785), p. 499.
[170] Margaret Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism, and Fiction* (London: Athlone Press, 1997), pp. 114-15.
[171] For the significance of reading aloud, see, for example, Michaelson, pp. 137-79; Gay, pp. 99-103.

a native of Mansfield, and asks the Cardinal to address her in plain English.[172] That an outsider should ask for language to be simple demonstrates the importance of the margins in shaping the nation. It also complicates the view of a closed national identity. Mansfield, and thereby England, paradoxically needs external, foreign elements for the transmission of national identity, which might be read as the beginnings of a reflection on Britishness.[173]

Positioning Fanny is a delicate business. Born in Portsmouth, she undergoes a 'transplantation to Mansfield' (321) which benefits the estate. Brought up in the Bertram family circle, she is, nevertheless, constantly reminded that 'she is not a *Miss Bertram*' (12). Fanny is on the threshold between childhood and adulthood, the question '[I]s she out, or is she not?' (56) a puzzle to other characters. She is an example of English identities which David Higgins argues are 'apparently highly localised' but in fact deeply connected to the global, leading to identities 'prone to hybridity and porousness'.[174] The marginal heroine connects the homeland to the rest of the empire, as the East Room, Fanny's 'nest of comforts' (179), symbolises. Fanny is both an insider and outsider whose simplicity makes her naturalisation essential to the future of the British nation.

Fanny Price has, arguably, the greatest political conscience of all of Austen's heroines. She is a voracious and capacious reader, with a marked interest for political writing, regardless of genre, which contrasts with the fashionable education her cousins received as young affluent women.[175] Knowledge is for them an opportunity for self-

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[172] Kirkham, p. 115.

[173] While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to fully unravel the position of Empire in the novel, it should nonetheless be noted that the Bertrams owe their fortune in large part from plantations in Antigua. Moreover, Sir Thomas arguably returns transformed after his journey there.

[174] Higgins, *Romantic Englishness*, p. 3.

[175] Here as elsewhere, Austen criticises the focus on fashionable accomplishments and knowledge that is purely ornamental and overlooks girls' moral and personal development. See Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*; Sheila Cordner, *Education in Nineteenth-Century British Literature: Exclusion as Innovation* (London; New York: Routledge, 2016), esp. pp. 36-39.

display. Fanny, on the other hand, follows national and international news closely. She is up-to-date with the latest significant literary productions, including geopolitical texts. The reference to Lord Macartney's embassy in China is often read as refracting the novel's colonial politics, but is rarely noted as evidence of the heroine's political consciousness.[176] She is, after all, the only one curious about the slave-trade. The inclusion of George Crabbe's *Tales* (1812) can be interpreted in a similar way: it is a text that addresses a wide range of pressing social questions, including patronage, religion, and the distinction between 'a Farmer made the Gentleman' and 'a Gentleman, a Farmer made', an issue Austen examines in detail in her following novel *Emma*.[177] Fanny's reading mirrors her civic consciousness, which seems particularly attuned to the meaning of a true, polite, and English character.

The navy's presence in the novel is the most obvious sign of military conflict, but Fanny, too, in a less public way than her brother William, participates in the war effort. *Mansfield Park* follows Vicesimus Knox's civic humanist idea that patriotism and public good are more effective at a local level than through political media.[178] Even though Portsmouth is the more obvious location to wage war against the Napoleonic forces, Austen suggests women play an equally active role. As a penniless young woman, Fanny is denied the usual channels of political activism available to elite women, mainly patronage.[179] She, nevertheless, displays a strong sense of civic duty, exemplified in the recurrent use of 'useful' in free indirect speech, which underscores

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[176] The text most often identified is John Barrow, *Some Account of the Public Life and a Selection from the Unpublished Writings of the Earl of Macartney*, 2 vols. (London: Cadell and Davies, 1804). Susan Allen Ford argues for the possibility of other texts, http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol28no2/ford.htm. See also Stewart, *Domestic Realities*; Joseph Lew, '"That Abominable Traffic": *Mansfield Park* and the Dynamics of Slavery', in *History, Gender, and Eighteenth-Century Literature*, ed. Beth Fowkes Tobin (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), pp. 271-300; Knox-Shaw, pp. 186-89.

[177] George Crabbe, *Tales* (London: J. Hatchard, 1812), p. 44.

[178] Vicesimus Knox, 'An Idea of a Patriot', *Essays*, I, pp. 75-84, esp. 83-84.

[179] See, for instance, Elaine Chalus, *Elite Women in English Political Life, c. 1754-1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

the character's own desire to participate in the public good. This sense of civic duty is most keenly expressed during Fanny's stay at Portsmouth, designed by Sir Thomas to reform her, which coincides with Tom's near-fatal illness. Fanny desperately wishes she were at Mansfield, for 'she might have been of service to every creature in the house' (500), convinced that 'her being there would have been a general good' (500-01). 'House', as mentioned above, stands for nation, supporting the idea that Fanny performs a national service, while 'general good' is in line with Hannah More's exhortation that women 'exert themselves with a patriotism at once firm and feminine, for the general good'.[180] This episode is, moreover, underwritten with the language of war, inviting a reading of the situation as a national crisis. When Fanny reflects that 'the influence of London very much at war with all respectable attachments' (501), the metaphor conjures her sense that the nation is under threat. Fanny emerges as a national hero, much like Nelson, who dominated the press in 1813, when Austen was writing *Mansfield Park*.[181]

Fanny's disposition, especially her natural preference for simplicity, makes her the ideal Englishwoman. When she visits the Grants, she fears her appearance might be 'too fine' (259). Edmund reassures her: 'I see no finery about you; nothing but what is perfectly proper.' (259) This concern is clearly illustrated in her dilemma concerning the necklace she needs to wear the amber cross William gave her, when her uncle organises a ball in her honour. She is aware of the discordance between her usual 'bit of ribbon' and 'rich ornaments' (295) the other female guests will sport. This represents a golden opportunity for Mary Crawford to manoeuvre on her brother's behalf. '[T]hough Fanny would have preferred a longer and plainer chain' (300), she chooses

[180] More, *Strictures*, I, p. 6.
[181] Austen jokingly told Cassandra: 'I am tired of Lives of Nelson, being that I never read any.' Austen, *Letters*, p. 235.

a necklace 'of gold prettily worked' among the collection placed before her, believing it is the one Mary values the least. Fanny's initial preference is revealing: a necklace is a more elaborate and conspicuous ornament than a chain, an opposition reminiscent of Elizabeth's preference for a plain dish over a ragout. Edmund, knowing 'the simplicity of [her] taste' (303), presents Fanny with 'a plain gold chain perfectly simple and neat' (304). Urged by her cousin to wear Mary's gift, the plot saves Fanny, since the necklace proves too large for the cross.

Although the novel clearly values Fanny's simplicity, Mary's presence exposes the contradictions that surround women's practice of simplicity, in particular in language. During the theatricals, Mary is assigned the role of Amelia Wildendaim in *Lovers' Vows* (1798), whom she describes as 'a forward young lady [who] may well frighten the men' (169). This boldness refers to Amelia's assertive language, which crosses gender boundaries. Elizabeth Inchbald anticipated this criticism in the preface to her translation, where she stressed that Amelia was 'a very particular object of [her] solicitude and alteration':

> [A]lmost all the dialogue I have changed: the forward and unequivocal manner, in which she announces her affection to her lover, in the original, would have been revolting to an English audience: […] Amelia's love, by Kotzebue, is indelicately blunt.[182]

Referring to Amelia's forwardness in Act 3, Scene 2, Inchbald underlines the feminine impropriety and un-Englishness of the original dialogue, indicating her own English

[182] Elizabeth Inchbald, 'Preface' to *Lovers' Vows* (1798), in *Five Romantic Plays, 1768-1821*, ed. Paul Baines and Edward Burns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 187. For an analysis of the association of Kotzebue, *Lovers' Vows*, and sentimental drama in general, with radical politics, see Sydney M. Conger, 'Reading *Lovers' Vows*: Jane Austen's Reflections on English Sense and German Sensibility', *Studies in Philology* 85:1 (Winter 1988), pp. 92-113; Colin Pedley, '"Terrific and Unprincipled Compositions": The Reception of *Lovers' Vows* and *Mansfield Park*', *Philological Quarterly* 74:3 (Summer, 1995), pp. 297-316; Margaret Kirkham, pp. 93-98, 110-12, argues that Austen objects to Kotzebue on feminist grounds, not for his anti-Jacobin connection.

sensibility to right conduct. Inchbald makes her character reflect on the appropriateness of her language in lines that do not appear in the German original. Relieved by Anhalt's confusion over her barely concealed declaration of love, Amelia exclaims: 'I was afraid I had spoken too plain.'[183] Amelia's apprehension conveys contemporary discomforts with female outspokenness. Austen, as discussed above, addressed this issue in *Pride and Prejudice*. *Mansfield Park* curtails female outspokenness much more, not so much because it breaks the codes of feminine propriety, but because, in Mary's case, it resembles an attack of the French army.

Like Elizabeth Bennet, Mary does not adopt the recommended feminine position of subservience. Their linguistic powers are strikingly similar, and yet *Pride and Prejudice* endorses female outspokenness, whereas *Mansfield Park* seems more uncomfortable with bold female speech. One essential difference is the disposition of their male partners: Edmund Bertram is much less inclined than Mr Bingley for instance to engage in playful banter. Mary is, however, more aggressive than Elizabeth, and challenges social orthodoxies to a greater extent.[184] Sincerity is not a concern of hers. On the contrary, her treatment of language as a fluid and malleable medium supports *The Loiterer* 2's claim that language is now 'the Art of concealing our Ideas'. In the highly symbolic space of the wilderness at Sotherton, Mary discusses 'the *never* of conversation, which means *not very often*' (107), reflecting her indifference to the distortion of meaning. Mary is not only witty, 'of all the qualities of the female mind

[183] Inchbald, 3.2.81-82, p. 213. In the German original, Amelia says 'Ich liebe Sie' (I love you) and compels Anhalt to ask her hand in marriage: 'Nun, so heiraten Sie mich' (Well, just marry me then). August Von Kotzebue, *Das Kind der Liebe* (Leipzig, 1791), pp. 91-92. Translation mine.
[184] Classic readings of *Mansfield Park* identify the Crawfords' entrance as planting the seed of urban immorality at Mansfield.

that which requires the severest castigation', she also delights in provocative wordplay.[185]

The real concern, however, rests, I believe, in the fact that unlike Fanny, Mary has little consideration for the 'general good' of the nation, illustrated in her selfish mobilisation of carts and horses to have her harp delivered during the harvest season. If the English language is a metonymy for the English Constitution, Mary's 'feminine lawlessness' (110), which surfaces in her redefinition of 'never', represents a threat to the British state. Her petulant outcry 'I know nothing of your furlongs' (109) reflects her refusal to follow British standards. She rejects the 'common weights and measures' that unite the British state in the face of Napoleon's army.

Conversations are a form of warfare for Mary. Her preferred method, which she shares with her brother, is to attack. Her insistence that she has 'forestalled' (109) Edmund reveals a strategizing mindset, mirrored in her vision of marriage as a 'manoeuvring business' (53). Edmund is often wrong-footed in their exchanges. He parries her verbal daringness with a strong English emphasis: 'You need not hurry when the object is only to prevent my saying a bon-mot, for there is not the least wit in my nature. I am a very matter of fact, plain spoken being, and may blunder on the borders of a repartee for half an hour together without striking it out.' (109) Edmund, who is not unlike Edward Ferrars in this instance, proclaims his identity as an Englishman by stressing his inability to utter a 'bon-mot' or a 'repartee'. The French armies are metaphorically kept at bay as French words cannot infiltrate British territory. Mary's threat to the nation appears most clearly in her recourse to French to qualify her brother's extramarital affair with the new Mrs Rushworth, calling it a 'moment's

[185] More, *Strictures*, II, p. 69. For the sexual import of Mary's puns, see Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, pp. 23-24; Brian Southam, '"*Rears*" and "*Vices*" in *Mansfield Park*', *Essays in Criticism* 52:1 (2002), pp. 23-35; Sales, p. 68.

etourderie' (506). The passage follows the view that language is a reflection of character, echoing Hannah More and other conduct writers' belief that the adoption of foreign words and manners leads to an alteration of native character. The transcription of Mary's letter suggests her views cannot be grafted onto the world of Austen's English narrative. It will not naturalise her language, ensuring English speakers will not be reduced to 'babble a dialect of France' as Johnson had feared.

Mansfield Park touches upon a topic *Persuasion* develops more fully: the role of the navy, and the armed professions more generally, in forming English gentlemen.[186] During the ball at Mansfield, William Price finds refuge at his sister's side: '"I am worn out with civility," said he, "I have been talking incessantly all night, and with nothing to say."' (257) William experiences the 'nothing-meaning' terms of conversation which so often frustrate Austen's characters, where 'phrases' matter more than 'words'. William is, on the other hand, a man of words, not phrases. When he visits his sister at Mansfield, Sir Thomas is faced with 'a young man of an open, pleasant countenance, and frank, unstudied, but feeling and respectful manners, and such as confirmed him his friend' (272). Sir Thomas invites his nephew to share his maritime stories, 'to understand the recitor' (275). William's conversation serves as a reflection of his character. Storytelling here matters more for the style than the content: '[Sir Thomas] listened to his clear, simple, spirited details with full satisfaction, seeing in them the proof of good principles, professional knowledge, energy, courage, and cheerfulness, everything that could deserve or promise well.' (275) Sir Thomas values the simplicity of William's language. Intriguingly, the narrative does not transcribe William's speech, as if simple language resisted representation. It might also be a

[186] The most comprehensive account of Austen's detailed knowledge of the navy is Brian Southam, *Jane Austen and the Navy* (London: Hambledon and London, 2000).

comment on class politics: while the nation urgently needs young men and women originating who help to uphold the national character, the novel's difficulty at times to reproduce the speech of this social group suggests the country is not ready to give them equal representation, an issue Austen's second Regency novel, *Emma*, also considers.

With its clearly defined boundaries, general insularity, and suspicion of outsiders, Highbury, the fictional setting of *Emma*, can be interpreted as a model for England and its negotiations of its position within the newly formed United Kingdom. Lionel Trilling was one of the first critics to note Austen's active interest in the state of the nation, observing that '*Emma* is a novel that is touched—lightly but quite certainly—by national feeling.'[187] Literary scholars have since shown that this light touch is a dominant theme. Brian Southam reads *Emma* as a 'national tale', a work in which 'Jane Austen explores the nature of English national identity'.[188] Written at the end of the Napoleonic Wars and published shortly after the Second Treaty of Paris of November 1815, *Emma* glories in the anticipation of the restoration of the peace and displays confidence in the future, concluding on 'the perfect happiness of the union' (528) of the protagonists.[189] The novel, with its analysis of the figure of the gentleman, its celebration of the post-office as a 'wonderful establishment' (320), and its praise of native goods, foregrounds English values and glorifies a new emerging national character, participating in the period's vigorous debates on national identity. As Janine Barchas suggests, '*Emma* may be Austen's most ambitious attempt to define national identity.'[190] While the novel undeniably celebrates Englishness, it also questions the

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[187] Lionel Trilling, *Encounter* 8:6 (June 1957), pp. 49-59, p. 53.

[188] Brian Southam, 'Jane Austen's Englishness: *Emma* as National Tale', *Persuasions* (2008), pp. 187-201, p. 190.

[189] Austen began writing *Emma* in January 1814, delivered it to her publisher John Murray in August or September 1815, who published it in December 1815. For a history of the composition and publication of *Emma*, see Cronin and McMillan (eds.), pp. xxi-xxix.

[190] Janine Barchas, 'Setting and Community', in *The Cambridge Companion to* Emma, ed. Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 120-34, p. 121.

position of socially peripheral characters, arguing for a redefinition of the English gentleman. As in Austen's other novels, simplicity is the measure of character and is instrumental in the reconfiguration of gentility. *Emma* allows for a greater fluidity of identity than might otherwise be expected from such a quintessentially English writer, inviting the novel to be read as a British work.

Language is at the heart of the novel's exploration of national identity. More than other novels it seems, *Emma* is acutely aware of the plasticity of language, which can be both a mirror of and screen to thoughts. Frustrated with Jane Fairfax's incommunicativeness, Emma fumes that Jane is 'wrapt up in a cloak of politeness' (180), a metaphor that recalls the commonplace view of language as 'the dress of thought', a source of much anxiety. Polite language impedes the transparency that is otherwise met with a simple style. Emma herself finds refuge behind the 'nothing-meaning terms' (131) to conceal her real opinion of Mrs Elton, making language 'an excellent screen to ideas', as Mr Loiterer states. In a novel concerned with national belonging, the veiling language operates makes it difficult to distinguish the other. *Emma* is also Austen's most linguistically playful novel, which destabilises the notion of the self.[191] The heroine's disgruntled accusation that Jane Fairfax 'is a riddle, quite a riddle!' (307) underlines the idea that identity is articulated through language yet resists being fixed in *Emma*. While the protagonist Mr Knightley wrestles with this notion, the novel, I believe, endorses a greater instability and heterogeneity more in line with a British, rather than narrowly English, focus. As in Austen's other novels, simplicity acts as an important indicator of sound English, and British, character in an otherwise fluctuating world.

[191] Some of the best discussions of the novel's linguistic playfulness include, Joseph Litvak, 'Reading Characters: Self, Society, and Text in *Emma*', *PMLA* 100:5 (October 1985), pp. 763-73; Grant I. Holly, '*Emma*grammatology', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 19 (1989), pp. 39-51.

The connection to place, which confers either belonging or otherness, plays an important role in the novel's examination of national identity. The narrative is preoccupied with who is a natural member of Highbury, attempting to draw clear distinctions between natives and outsiders, which is sometimes a nebulous issue. Each character's ancestry is outlined, which then secures the individual's position within the community and delimits his or her authority. The clergyman Mr Elton may initially appear fully 'naturalised', but when he affronts Emma by asking her to marry him, she internally reflects that 'the Eltons were nobody. […] Mr. Elton had first entered [the neighbourhood] not two years ago' (147). This last point stresses the importance of ancestry and inheritance. Mr Elton only has his 'civility' to 'recommend him to notice' (147), which, as the previous readings have shown, is not enough in Austen's fiction to determine soundness of character. While the passage underlines Emma's snobbishness, it nonetheless establishes a difference between 'a native of Highbury' (13), such as Mr Weston, and a relative newcomer, a difference that surfaces at times of crisis. Even the legitimacy of the Woodhouse family, 'settled for several generations at Hartfield, the younger branch of a very ancient family', needs validation: 'Hartfield, in spite of its separate lawns and shrubberies and name, did really belong' to Highbury (5).[192] Hartfield's geographical and nominal separation mirrors the separateness of Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, who 'really belong' to the United Kingdom. The harmony between Hartfield and Highbury hints at the possibility for the four nations to enjoy a similar relationship. However, if Highbury stands for England rather than the United Kingdom, *Emma* is also the reminder that British rule is often synonymous with English rule. 'Belong', a word that confers authority onto Highbury, reinforces this idea of subordination. The other nations are the property of England.

[192] Tanner, p. 185, reads Emma as 'ec-centric', insider and outsider.

Emma encodes the recent creation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland through the figure of Miss Campbell, Jane Fairfax's childhood friend, whose personal history symbolises the different chapters of British history. Jane's aunt Miss Bates explains that, having married the Irishman Mr Dixon, Miss Campbell will travel to 'different kingdoms, I was going to say, but different countries' (170), a self-correction that registers recent political changes and the difficulties of accounting for them. 'Kingdom' refers to the political unit of the British nation, while 'countries' implies a narrower, parochial view. At this moment of political unity, cultural differences, as 'different countries' reminds readers, are not erased. Miss Campbell's marriage to Mr Dixon is an Anglo-Irish union, echoing the Union of 1801.[193] Her lineage symbolically traces the history of Great Britain, demonstrating the novel's awareness of past British history: of Scottish descent, her family is now settled in England, her father an army man fighting for the British Crown. The Campbells clearly no longer oppose English rule but participate in safeguarding its sovereignty. The Dixons must, moreover, travel from Holyhead, a Welsh ferry port, to reach Ireland, which again registers the deep interrelations within the United Kingdom. Puzzling over Jane's 'outrée' hairdo, for example, Frank Churchill conjectures it is an 'Irish fashion' (240). Although Frank's comment is intended to ridicule Jane's hairstyle and deflect Emma's notice of his gaze on Jane, it also acknowledges the cultural exchanges between the four nations. In this instance, an Englishwoman is seen adopting Irish ways. Austen therefore suggests that, as Krishan Kumar argues, there is 'no

[193] Novels addressing the Union of 1801 typically followed the motif of the marriage ploy, celebrating unions between English and Irish protagonists, as in Sydney Owenson's *Wild Irish Girl* (1806), in which the English Horatio M. marries the Irish princess Glorvina. For an illuminating study of this issue, see Ina Ferris 2002. See also Robert Tracy, 'Maria Edgeworth and Lady Morgan: Legality versus Legitimacy', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 40:1 (June 1985), pp. 1-22, Corbett, *Allegories of Union*.

“Englishness” by itself’. Englishness is characterised by encounters with other peoples.[194]

Language, through names and naming, can destabilise identity, which makes labelling individuals as same or other more complicated. There seem to be greater anxieties concerning female characters, which can be interpreted as a representation of the contemporary connection between female behaviour and the nation. Harriet Smith, Emma’s unfortunate protégée, as ‘the natural daughter of somebody’ (64), has no patrician name to position her within society. ‘[I]n a legal sense she [Harriet] may be called Nobody’ (65), which, framing the self as a linguistic construction, reflects both women’s dependence upon male authority and English society’s unease at the impossibility of fixing women’s identity. The linguistic instability of female identity is most clearly embodied in the newly married Mrs Weston, Emma’s friend and former governess known as ‘Miss Taylor’. A change in name indicates a change in legal status and identity. ‘Emma was aware that great must be the difference between a Mrs Weston only half a mile from them, and a Miss Taylor in the house.’ (5) Emma thinks of her abstractly, the determiner ‘a’ reifying her friend, as if the change in name gave birth to a new person. Mr Woodhouse’s constant lament ‘Poor Miss Taylor!’ (6) reminds the reader of the character’s past self and asks if, and how, ‘Miss Taylor’ and ‘Mrs Weston’ can coexist. The two names introduce a split in identity that seems irreconcilable. Mr Woodhouse is right, to some extent: ‘Mrs Weston’ must symbolically mourn ‘Miss Taylor’. That identity, encapsulated in the name, has been lost. This raises the thorny question of the correlation between language and character and, by extension, addresses

[194] Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 62.

the limits of language: language struggles to accommodate the fluidity of character as no name can accommodate both parts of Mrs Weston's history.

One element that counters the destabilising of the self through language effects is Mrs Weston's simplicity, which casts her as an English gentlewoman. As the wife of Mr Weston, a native of Highbury, Mrs Weston belongs to the community by association. Yet her simplicity makes her a member of Highbury in her own right. Emma, usually so particular about rank, is aghast that Mrs Elton is 'rather astonished to find [a former governess] so lady-like! But she really is quite the gentlewoman' (300). Deeply offended, Emma retorts:

> 'Mrs. Weston's manners,' said Emma, 'were always particularly good. Their propriety, simplicity, and elegance, would make them the safest model for any young woman.' (300)

Simplicity is aligned with qualities that define correct femininity in the period. Positioned at the centre of the triad, simplicity emerges as the fundamental quality around which all others revolve. Rather than being diminished by her position as governess, Mrs Weston in fact greatly contributed to the nation by imparting simplicity. As discussed in Chapter 1, Mrs Elton recognises the value of simplicity but fails to understand its real meaning. Mrs Weston, on the other hand, offers the best model of true simplicity.

The discussion of models of 'gentle' behaviour is central to the novel's examination of national identity. *Emma* plays with the different meanings of 'gentleman' and its cognates 'gentle', 'genteel', and 'gentility', a playfulness that hints that, rather than being fixed, language is fluid and unstable. With the figure of Mr Knightley, *Emma* argues for a revision of the term 'gentleman'. Mr Knightley does not

have a title, and yet displays all the qualities associated with chivalry.[195] As the undisputed leader of the community, the novel implies that the future of England lies not in the hands of the aristocracy but in those male citizens who, like Mr Knightley, display a strong, 'English' character. Even though the tone of *Emma* is confident and celebratory, its picture of England is not as idyllic and tranquil as it first appears. An examination of the gentleman is in fact a trenchant criticism of the nation's leader, the Prince Regent, whom Austen despised, and who, as Colleen A. Sheehan demonstrates, proclaimed himself the 'first Gentleman in Europe'.[196] The novel is not blindly patriotic. Mr Knightley contradicts Emma in her definition of what constitutes a gentleman: when she rejoices that he arrives at the Coles' dinner party in his carriage rather than on foot or horseback, and exclaims: 'This is coming as you should, […] like a gentleman' (230), Mr Knightley counters that it does not make him 'more of a gentleman than usual.' (231) For Mr Knightley, a gentleman cannot be identified by outward signs of social status. In this sense, titles, and therefore language, can mislead. His view favours virtues that cross the boundaries of rank and birth. Simplicity, for Austen's protagonist, defines the true English gentleman.

Mr Knightley, whose name has considerable symbolic resonance, offers another model of true English gentility. 'George Knightley', as numerous critics have observed, 'seems to combine ideas of a chivalric past with the reassuring stability of agriculture, making it a perfect name for the perfect English gentleman.'[197] Mr Knightley's active involvement in the management of his estate and his knowledge and implementation of modern agrarian practices associate him with George III, 'Farmer George', who 'played

[195] Doody, *Jane Austen's Names: Riddles, Persons, Places* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 162, notes Knightley's absence of title but does not develop the social implications of this authorial decision.
[196] Colleen A. Sheehan, 'Jane Austen's Tribute to the Prince Regent: A Gentleman Riddled with Difficulty', *Persuasions Online* 27:1 (Winter 2006).
[197] Fiona Stafford, 'Introduction', *Emma* (London: Penguin, 1996), p. ix.

up his name, which at its Greek root (*ge-ourgos*) means "farmer" or "worker of land."'[198] 'George' is also the patron saint of England, which highlights Mr Knightley's position as native of the place and guardian of Highbury. His estate of Donwell Abbey, where Emma finds 'English verdure, English culture, English comfort' (391), is, moreover, a metonymy for England. As a dedicated landowner, Knightley oversees the right functioning of his estate and naturally looks after the wellbeing of the local community, illustrated in his regular assistance to the Bates family. Mr Knightley thus embodies the contemporary view that language is an important mirror of the self and national identity.

Unlike Frank Churchill, discussed below, Mr Knightley offers the possibility that the self can be a transparent text. Emma believes that 'one might not see one in a hundred, with *gentleman* so plainly written as in Mr Knightley.' (33) 'Plainly' conveys the directness of simplicity Blair articulated in his *Lectures*. Mr Knightley expresses himself 'in plain, unaffected, gentleman-like English' (489), thus correcting Captain Lismahago's exasperation that modern English is 'weakened' and 'corrupted'. The passage emphasises the absence of ornament and performance. 'Gentleman-like' introduces the idea that gentlemanliness is a matter of behaviour rather than social status. When Emma contemplates the Abbey on a midsummer afternoon, she notes that 'It was just what it ought to be, and it looked what it was' (389). There is a perfect equation between external appearance and inner character. Emma is satisfied that Donwell belongs to 'a family of true gentility, untainted in blood and understanding' (389), which underlines the importance she places on inheritance and tradition. While Emma appears as a true Burkean disciple here, the novel and its hero present an

[198] Doody, *Jane Austen's Names*, p. 57. For Mr Knightley's associations with George III, see Doody, *Jane Austen's Names*, p. 168; Brian Southam, '*Emma*: England, Peace and Patriotism', in *Jane Austen's* Emma*: A Casebook*, ed. Fiona Stafford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 269-91, pp. 281-82; Stafford, 'Introduction', p. ix.

alternative view to this model. While not a politically radical solution, it nevertheless stresses the importance of character over lineage. Elizabeth Fowkes Tobin aligns Austen with her heroine's position, arguing the novelist 'act[s] as an apologist for the landed classes', but, as Alistair Duckworth, who typically reads Austen as a conservative author, points out, Mr Knightley is 'another of Jane Austen's "professionals"', whose investment in his estate matters more than his simple ownership.[199]

Emma and Mr Knightley's strong disagreement over the status of the yeoman Robert Martin illustrates the problem of defining a gentleman at the turn of the nineteenth century. Emma presses upon Harriet the enormity of his 'clownish manner' (57), proof of 'his entire want of gentility' (32), whereas Mr Knightley refers to him as 'a respectable, intelligent gentleman-farmer' (65), whose 'manners have sense, sincerity, and good-humour to recommend them; and his mind has more true gentility than Harriet Smith could understand' (69). Mr Knightley values the young man for his personal qualities. With good 'sense, sincerity, and good-humour', Robert Martin's 'true gentility' coincides with the criteria of true politeness. As in her other novels, Austen demonstrates moral character determines gentility. By contrast, Mr Knightley never applies the term 'gentleman' to Frank Churchill, partly denoting his un-Englishness.

Mr Knightley constructs foreignness through language. As the symbolic keeper of the English language, he secures English values and Englishness. When he and Emma argue over the 'amiable' quality of Frank's letters, Mr Knightley exclaims:

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[199] Beth Fowkes Tobin, 'The Moral and Political Economy of Property in Austen's *Emma*', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 2:3 (April 1990), pp. 229-54, p. 229; Alistair M. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. 155.

> 'No, Emma, your amiable young man can be amiable only in French, not in English. He may be very "aimable," have very good manners, and be very agreeable; but he can have no English delicacy towards the feelings of other people: nothing really amiable about him.' (160-61)

The correlation of this famous passage between behaviour and words within a national frame of reference indicates a belief that language is the repository of national character. The use of French emphasises the incompatibility between French and English politeness. 'Aimable', moreover, introduces the idea of deceit, since Chesterfield encouraged his son to 'Study then and acquire the *aimable*, and you will have everything.'[200] For Mr Knightley, Frank displays 'manœuvring and finessing' (157), French loan-words that imply deception and trickery.[201] Foreign words signal that England cannot accommodate this behaviour, an idea expressed in other novels of the period. In Maria Edgeworth's *Manœuvring* (1809), its scheming protagonist Mrs Belmont is called a '*manœuvrer*' because 'We can't well make an English word of it!'[202] This kind of behaviour can, therefore, not become naturalised since the English language does not admit it.

Frank's position in Highbury, and therefore England, is complex and precarious. As the son of Mr Weston, a long-established family, he is a 'native' of the place and therefore naturally belongs to the community. His adoption by the Churchill family means that he grew up away from Highbury's values and customs. He thus occupies a liminal situation as both native and foreigner, insider and outsider. This ambiguous status complicates the narrative's accommodation of his behaviour, which

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[200] Chesterfield, *Lord Chesterfield's Letters*, p. 218.
[201] For an analysis of the association of 'manœuvring' with foreignness and France, see Brian Southam, '"Manœuvring" in Jane Austen', *Women's Writing* 11:3 (2004), pp. 463-476.
[202] Maria Edgeworth, *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, 12 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999-2003), IV: *Manoeuvring* (1809), ed. Claire Connolly with Marilyn Butler, p. 6.

is not only foreign, but French. Frank, the novel's arch-manœuvrer, is linguistically tied to France. His name first of all identifies him as Gallic, typifying him as England's enemy. He is moreover 'sick of England' (396), a complaint that is daringly unpatriotic, especially during wartime. Duality and contradiction surround Frank, whose name can inversely be interpreted as signalling Englishness, since 'frankness' is an important component of English sincerity.[203] Frank is indeed 'frank' since he never tells an outright lie but leads his interlocutors to believe whichever truth is most agreeable to them. There is an unresolvable duality between the Frank who is English and the one who is French. The English identity that Mr Knightley so firmly represents is tightly sealed, whereas the novel allows for greater fluidity of identity. It tolerates the presence of those who are familiar and different at the same time, which is, arguably, a British, rather than English outlook.

Nonetheless, Frank needs to prove his loyalty to the community by adopting its local language. When Frank declares his '*amor patriae*' (215) for Highbury when purchasing gloves at Ford's, he looks to Emma for a confirmation that this expostulation meets the local customs. His visit to the town's haberdashery is part of his process of (re)naturalisation:

> '[P]ray let us go in, that I may prove myself to belong to the place, to be a true citizen of Highbury. I must buy something at Ford's. It will be taking out my freedom.' (215)

Frank clearly exposes his agenda: his aim is to become a 'true citizen'. This civic humanist vocabulary inserts his speech into a conversation on national identity. By purchasing an item, Frank participates in the local economy and speaks its language, as

[203] Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History, 1740-1830* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1987), p. 131. For Newman, p. 66, '"Sincerity" *was* the English National Identity'. See his discussion, pp. 129-40.

he is using, to borrow Hazlitt's phrase, 'the currency of the realm'. James Kinsley explains that 'Frank is alluding to a tradition dating back to medieval London, in which "freemen" […] were eligible to be admitted to the freedom of the city—full citizenship—through completion of [a] […] purchase or gift'.[204] The purchase, championed as a civic act, becomes a metonymy for his national affiliation, underlining the importance of proving one's national allegiance and patriotism. In so doing he dispels the image of himself as other. The image of the gloves, on the other hand, denotes an attempt to conceal: they will prevent other characters from identifying which hand, French or English, true or false, he is playing. This speech is therefore intended to both reveal and conceal the truth, which ties in with Frank's ambiguous status as native and foreigner.

Frank acts as a 'true citizen' when he secures the borders of Highbury by rescuing Harriet and her friend Miss Bickerton from a party of gypsies they encountered on 'the Richmond road', '[a]bout half a mile beyond Highbury' (361). *Emma*, as national tale, is preoccupied with boundaries, movements, and infiltration, which are constantly policed. Miss Bickerton escapes but Harriet cannot run and finds herself 'followed, or rather surrounded, by the whole gang' (361). Symbolising the fear of the other, the gypsies' otherness is clearly marked by their physical location, outside of the limits of Highbury, and their physical difference. As Michael Kramp summarises in his analysis of Harriet's overlooked 'national importance', '[i]n the early nineteenth century, the gypsies are imagined as both biologically and culturally "Black", existing as the inversion of the native English citizen.'[205] In this episode, Frank symbolically

[204] James Kinsley, *Emma*, p. 397n.

[205] Michael Kramp, 'The Woman, the Gypsies, and England: Harriet Smith's National Role', *College Literature* 31:1 (Winter 2004), pp. 147-68, p. 151. Sarah Houghton-Walker offers a different reading, arguing the gypsies are not foreign. *Representations of the Gypsy in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 155-85.

protects his country, aligning himself with its guardian Mr Knightley. This chivalrous act is also self-serving: it allows Frank to give further proof of his loyalty to the community and hence to claim citizenship. The outsider becomes insider by keeping at bay other alien elements, thereby deflecting interest from his own activities. No one in the narrative questions what he himself was doing on the outskirts of Highbury. His stroll on the margins can be seen as representing a threat to Highbury, but it can also be read as the character's confidence in his liminal state. He is both English and not, like so many other British men in the period.

Another boundary Frank enjoys exploiting is that between word and meaning, a significant inclination in a novel where language defines identity. Frank displays a shrewd understanding of the contemporary correlation between language and character by expressing the hope that he may 'not be thought extravagant in [his] terms' (207) when praising his new mother-in-law, Mrs Weston, which shows an awareness that language constructs identity. Much of the suspicion around Frank indeed concerns his manipulation of language, which reflects his understanding of identity as malleable. Mr Knightley believes he is faced with '[d]isingenuousness and double-dealing' (377) during the game of puzzle, in which letters are shuffled to create new words. Language obscures meaning through word-play, but also allows for the possibility of new meaning. According to Duckworth, games for Austen are antisocial, placing the player outside of the laws of society, yet this playfulness is also creative.[206] It endorses a fluidity that some of its characters struggle with. This playful creativity can be read as the novel's suggestion that Highbury, and therefore England, needs to be renewed and open its borders.[207] In that sense, Frank and Mr Knightley share more in their approach

[206] Duckworth, p. 165.

[207] Critics have noted the claustrophobia of the narrative. See, for instance, Tanner, pp. 189-90; Watson,

to English society than at first appears. This scene contains a central paradox, for, while Frank does withhold meaning in the game, he also conveys a true private message to Jane: the word he forms is ‘blunder’, which alludes to his earlier indiscretion, one that threatened to jeopardise his and Jane’s secret engagement. Frank misleads Emma but does not lie to her: when he assures her that, after their attempt to identify the sender of Jane’s new pianoforte, ‘[he] can see it in no other light than as an offering of love’ (236), he is in fact telling the truth since he is the gift-giver. Frank therefore exploits the resources of language and its power to simultaneously reveal and conceal. His ‘double-dealing’ introduces a multiplicity of interpretations, leading to the impossibility of fixing language and meaning. It implicitly suggests that Englishness is itself a puzzle, constantly reshuffled and reinvented.

Yet the narrative cannot accommodate Frank’s extravagance since it is strongly opposed to simplicity. Frank is ‘extravagant’ in more ways than one: extravagance etymologically signals the idea of moving out of bounds, which ties Frank to anxieties about the safety of the nation.[208] As the gypsy incident demonstrates, Frank is comfortable with crossing borders and occupying a liminal position. His extravagance, which is tied to secrecy, takes place outside the boundaries of Highbury. Frank may not appear like a simpering fop of the likes of Frances Burney’s Sir Clement Willoughby or Maria Edgeworth’s Sir Philip Baddely, but, as Roger Sales argues, he displays many of the traits of the Regency dandy.[209] Even Emma, who brushes over his use of French words when she scorns Mrs Elton’s ‘*cara sposos*’, is forced to admit that his sudden decision to travel to London for a haircut has ‘an air of foppery and nonsense’ (221). This implies affectation and a focus on external appearance, which goes against the

[208] ‘Extravagant’ comes from the Latin *extra* ‘outside’ and *vagare* ‘to wander’.
[209] Sales, pp. 144-45.

ideal seen at Donwell Abbey, where appearance and reality coincide. While most critics have focused on the inconsistency this trip represents, Robert D. Hume has highlighted the extravagance of the expense, whose total should include transport: 'The present-day equivalent would be a minimum of £80 for the horses, plus food, drink, the hairdresser and the Broadwood "square" pianoforte he ordered for Jane.'[210] The narrative identifies this expense as un-English in its excess and opposition to simplicity. Mr Knightley by contrast doubles the use of his horses in the fields and on the road. The Gallic extravagance is opposed to English common sense and simplicity, which make it impossible for Frank to be considered a gentleman.

The narrative's resistance to accommodating Frank's behaviour appears in the character's final confession.[211] This letter, which supports the idea that language articulates identity, is reproduced in full, occupying most part of Volume III, Chapter 14. Nothing is withheld it seems, as its purpose is specifically to uncover the truth of his actions. Mr Knightley still detects that 'he trifles here' (485). The choice of word is significant: 'to trifle', combining deception and mockery, behaviours Mr Knightley believes characterise Frank's Gallic side, is of French origin. He cannot allow for the 'truth and sincerity' of Frank's words and construes them as foreign.

It is in the figure of Robert Martin rather than in Frank that the novel locates a 'true English style', a character whose presence forces Emma to re-evaluate her understanding of what constitutes 'very real gentlemen' (32). Plainness and simplicity, as opposed to extravagance, plays an important role in this taxonomy. Emma believes that writing style conveys identity: she reluctantly rejects the hypothesis that Martin's

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[210] Robert D. Hume, 'Money and Rank', in *The Cambridge Companion to* Emma, ed. Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 52-67, p. 53.

[211] For an overview of the significance of letters in *Emma*, see U. C. Knoepflmacher, 'The Importance of Being Frank: Character and Letter-Writing in *Emma'*, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 7:4 (Autumn 1967), pp. 639-58.

sisters helped him on the grounds that 'it is not the style of a woman; no, certainly, it is too strong and concise; not diffuse enough for a woman' (53), which suggests that style, for Emma, reveals one's sex, echoing the period's understanding of language as gendered. She begrudgingly concedes that Robert Martin's marriage proposal to Harriet 'would not have disgraced a gentleman' (53), when she had previously criticised his 'entire want of gentility' (32). The litotes conveys Emma's reluctance to see anything other than country rudeness in Harriet's suitor:

> [T]he language, though plain, was strong and unaffected, and the sentiments conveyed very much to the credit of the writer. It was short, but expressed good sense, warm attachment, liberality, propriety, even delicacy of feeling. (53)

Emma's observations concur with Mr Knightley's conception of the 'amiable' as opposed to 'aimable' gentleman, who displays the 'English delicacy towards the feelings of other people'. The simplicity of Robert Martin's writing, rather than damaging his status, grants him the character of a gentleman. His style is opposed to Frank's 'extravagant words' and 'fine flourishing letters, full of professions and falsehoods' (160) and echoes Mr Knightley's 'plain, unaffected, gentleman-like English'. In this letter, Robert Martin's 'sentiments and turn of mind [are] laid out open without disguise', an openness that is admirable in a narrative otherwise dominated by secrecy.[212] Both Robert Martin and Mr Knightley avoid the 'sparkling' manner Wordsworth sees in Pope, whose style 'corrupted' the nation, as Frank's extravagance threatens to do in Highbury. The novel raises an additional question: how to capture the simplicity of the true English gentleman in the act. Martin's letter is not transcribed, which again implies that his simplicity resists representation. Simplicity, and

[212] For a brief discussion of secrecy in Austen, see, for instance, Linda Bree, '*Emma*: Word Games and Secret Histories', in *A mp to Jane Austen*, pp. 133-42, esp. 135-37. Bree focuses solely on Emma.

Englishness, are immediately recognisable but remain elusive and cannot be reduced to a fixed definition.

The same movement takes place with John Knightley's letter of congratulations on Emma and Mr Knightley's engagement. No suspicion of double-dealing surrounds it; Emma in fact 'honour[s] his sincerity' (506). Mr Knightley nonetheless displays the need to provide Emma with the real meaning of the letter, suggesting that even a plain, sincere, and therefore supposedly transparent text, cannot escape the necessity of further text, which complicates the idea of language as a transparent medium:

> '[John] is no complimenter; and though I well know him to have, likewise, a most brotherly affection for you, he is so far from making flourishes, that any other young woman might think him rather cool in her praise.' (506)

Mr Knightley is establishing a clear comparison between his brother's style and Frank's, whom he criticised for making 'fine flourishing letters' (160), which contribute to the corrupting affectations Captain Lismahago and Wordsworth condemned. The absence of flourish suggests a plain style, which guarantees the sincerity of the utterance and the Englishness of its language and sender. As with Robert Martin's letter, however, the narrative withholds the original writing from the reader. There is therefore an inherent paradox at the heart of *Emma*: the novel does not deny the possibility of a 'true' English self, yet struggles with producing its representation. This impossibility seems further captured in the novel's examination of the 'true English style', which surfaces in the Knightley brothers' way of greeting each other:

> [I]n the true English style, burying under a calmness that seemed all but indifference, the real attachment which would have led either of them, if requisite, to do every thing for the good of the other. (107)

Even the most sincere behaviour is to a certain extent veiled, as 'burying' indicates. This passage paradoxically implies that 'the true English style' can coincide with concealment. Its essence is to remain hidden and resist representation.

Emma therefore argues against a fixed definition of Englishness. While the narrative champions Mr Knightley as a 'true English' gentleman, who polices the nation's borders and its language, it also uncovers the limits of his position. Highbury, and by extension, England, cannot remain tightly sealed. Emma, moreover, eagerly welcomes 'the advantage of such an addition to their confined society in Surry [sic]; the pleasure of looking at some body new' (156) when Frank's visit is announced. However hyperbolic, it nevertheless celebrates the diversity that characterises the United Kingdom. The strength of Englishness comes from the exchanges between the nations. *Emma* thus participates in the construction of the newly formed United Kingdom. While its treatment of class is, like *Mansfield Park*, Austen's final novel, *Persuasion*, argues more clearly for the acknowledgement and inclusion of the professional classes.

Persuasion (1818), Austen's last completed novel, is her most radical reconfiguring of the meaning of gentility. Unlike *Emma* and *Mansfield Park*, the narrative accommodates the voice of the professional classes fully. The connection to place and ancestry, so central to *Emma*, is brushed aside with Sir Walter's self-absorbed and sterile reading of the Baronetage. The novel's hero, Captain Wentworth, is not a landed gentleman but a self-made man, modelled partly on Admiral Nelson.[213] While Wentworth is important to Austen's construction of British masculinity, this final section focuses on equally significant characters, Admiral and Sophia Croft. By

[213] For this reading, see Jocelyn Harris, *A Revolution Almost Beyond Expression: Jane Austen's* Persuasion (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), pp. 91-108. Harris also notes the difference in their 'domestic' character.

entrusting the care of Kellynch Hall, the Elliot family seat, to the Crofts, a couple that challenges assumptions concerning class and gender, Austen offers her most pointed critique of an old world where titles and inheritance must be reconsidered in favour of merit.[214] Even though Admiral Croft's language occasionally breaks the forms of polite conversation and does not always follow standard English, the heroine, Anne Elliot nevertheless enjoys the 'best' (141) conversation with him and his naval friends, in stark contrast with the polite 'nothing-saying' (178) of the Elliot circle. Anne favours 'plain' manners over 'studied politeness' (78). This preference also makes her a model for English women.

The novel represents the transition from an 'old' England based on patrilineage and rank to a 'new' England that recognises individual worth as the good of the nation. With its celebration of the navy, *Persuasion* is clearly marked by Britain's victory over Napoleon's forces. Yet the novel's concluding sentence underlines the importance of individual character over military achievements: the navy is a 'profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance' (275). The navy, moreover, welcomes women's presence, as Sophia's time at sea and her expert driving of the gig attest, which drastically reconfigures the hegemony of politeness and Burkean social order. As Roger Sales points out, Anne is the rightful heir to the Kellynch estate, which suggests a radical reorganisation of British society.[215] When Anne visits the modest lodgings of the Harville family, she is struck by the smallness of the rooms, which 'only those who invite from the heart could think capable of accommodating so many' (106). Yet Anne finds true goodness of heart among Wentworth's friends. The Harvilles' 'uncommon' hospitality has a 'bewitching charm'

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[214] For an engaging discussion of the novel's social commentary, see, for instance, Tanner, pp. 208-49; Sales, pp. 170-99; Harris, *Revolution*.

[215] Sales, pp. 171-79. Sales, pp. 192-97, also sees in the agency given to female gossip an addition radical reconfiguration of society.

which contrasts with the 'dinners of formality and display' Anne usually experiences (105). The use of free indirect speech underlines the heroine's yearning for such unaffected gatherings where friendship prevails over ceremony. The Harvilles' relatively straitened means do not disqualify them from being considered polite: 'Captain Harville, though not equalling Captain Wentworth in manners, was a perfect gentleman, unaffected, warm, and obliging' (105). Gentility is here construed as a lack of affectation and benevolence, which is similar to Mr Knightley's definition of English amiability. 'Anne thought she left great happiness behind her when they quitted the house' (106), having witnessed a 'picture of repose and domestic happiness' (106) absent from the elite Bath dwellings of the Royal Crescent or Queen Square.

As Tony Tanner notes, 'Jane Austen never set great store by *mere* "polish" and by now [*Persuasion*] she clearly distrusts it.'[216] Admiral Croft's anxieties that 'he might not have been civil enough' (138) are brushed aside by the narrative. His manners are 'not quite of the tone to suit Lady Russell, but they delighted Anne. His goodness of heart and simplicity of character were irresistible.' (137) The importance of amiable simplicity appears clearly when Anne spots the Admiral examining a picturesque print on Milsom-Street. The Admiral might not understand the work of 'fine painters', with their subjects more preoccupied with 'rocks and mountains' than the dangers of steering a 'shapeless old cockleshell' (183-84), and he might not always express himself in the most refined way, using colloquial phrases such as 'snug' or expletives such as 'ay' or 'Lord', but his 'usual frankness and good humour' (183) give Anne the genuine warmth and sincerity missing in her family. The naval vocabulary that reveals his profession is not the sign of an inferior mind. The passage appears as a reformulation of Blair's

[216] Tanner, p. 230.

postulation concerning writing that 'So powerful is the charm of Simplicity [….], that it atones for many defects, and reconciles us to many a careless expression.'[217]

The Admiral's simple manners stand in stark opposition to the 'suavity' of Mr Elliot, 'a gentleman, (completely a gentleman in manner)' (112). The parenthesis underlines the performativity of Mr Elliot's gentlemanliness. He is a gentleman in manner alone, unlike Captain Harville who is a truly polite gentleman by virtue of his 'unaffected, warm, and obliging' manners (105). Mr Elliot is associated with polish, which stresses surface and artifice, rather than politeness, which ideally indicates a correspondence between mind and behaviour. The narrative is suspicious of the perfection of Mr Elliot's manners: 'his manners were so exactly what they ought to be, so polished, so easy, so particularly agreeable' (155). The repetition of the intensifier 'so' introduces suspicion. Lady Russell, who disapproved of Admiral Croft's manners, is duped by Mr Elliot's performance: 'Mr Elliot's manners had precisely pleased her in their superiority and correctness, their general politeness and suavity, she had been too quick in receiving them as the certain result of the most correct opinions and well regulated mind.' (271) The most damning argument here is Mr Elliot's 'suavity'. By the time Austen was drafting *Persuasion* in 1815-16, the word no longer simply referred to sweetness but had acquired negative connotations of empty polish, meaning 'The quality or condition of being suave in manner or outside behaviour; bland agreeableness or urbanity' (*OED* 4.a.). 'Suavity' also recalls Chesterfield's advice that '*suaviter in modo* [gentle in manner] is the great secret': this associates Mr Elliot with a figure who by then stood for flattery and deceit.[218]

In *Persuasion*, Austen celebrates simplicity as the sign of true politeness. The

[217] Blair, *Lectures*, I, pp. 392-93.
[218] Chesterfield, *Letters*, III, p. 218.

polish that the old aristocracy, represented by Sir Walter Elliot, values, is no longer the guarantee of true gentility. The 'unaffected' manners of those who have risen through the ranks of society through merit alone are a new model of behaviour that challenges the traditional social order. The novel's heroine is herself is 'only Anne' (6), a sign that individual qualities as opposed to titles and connection to place determine a person's identification as gentleman or gentlewoman. For Juliet Prewitt-Brown, *Persuasion* is 'a novel of disillusion', its heroine moving 'from place to place, disoriented, isolated', evolving in a 'world of social and personal fragmentation'.[219] There is, I believe, a more positive way of interpreting this sense of 'fragmentation'. Far from being fixed, identity is understood as fluid and adaptable. Character takes precedence over ancestry and even local attachment. An unchanging fixture of Austen's fiction, however, is its insistence on simplicity as the anchor of English identity in the face of a rapidly changing world.

Conclusion

As this chapter demonstrated, language is central to identity in Austen's fiction. While her characters evolve in polite circles, Austen increasingly questions the criteria of politeness in determining character. Plainness and simplicity become increasingly more reliable signs of goodness and morality, as 'it shows us a man's sentiments and turn of mind laid open without disguise', as Blair argued. They thus help redefine the notion of gentility as based purely on character. They are, moreover, the qualities of a 'true English style'. An issue Austen's novels also raise is women's frequent exclusion from the definition of this true English style as that of 'manly simplicity'. Even some expressions of 'manly simplicity' resist representation. These are often linked to class,

[219] Julia Prewitt Brown, *Jane Austen's Novels: Social Change and Literary Form* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 127-50, pp. 136, 138.

which reflects resistance to such changes in society, a resistance that is a representation of English society in the early nineteenth century rather than Austen's own belief. Even though Austen's novels are by and large socially conservative and predominantly Anglocentric, one can identify in *Mansfield Park* and *Emma* the beginnings of reflections on Britishness in their representations of the importance of liminal individuals to the future of the nation. One might argue that, as a speaker of the idiom that dominates the British Isles, Austen does not need to reflect on the imperial power of English. The question is, however, a pressing one for the Anglo-Irish Maria Edgeworth.

Chapter 3

'Manly simplicity' and Women's 'Plain replies': Language, Simplicity, and True British Gentility in Maria Edgeworth

The little-known humorous essay 'Thoughts on Bores', first published anonymously in the periodical *Janus; Or, The Edinburgh Literary Almanack* in 1826, and addressed to 'every true friend of literature and conversation, *blues* and *antis*', is an important expression of Edgeworth's investment in true polite conversation, strongly dependent on the practice of plainness and simplicity.[1] At the origin of England's boorishness is its insularity. The essay attacks the bore's hatred of 'stirring from home', a reflection of Edgeworth's cosmopolitan belief in the value of social and cultural exchanges to individual development, a point of great significance for the United Kingdom in the years after the Union.[2] While the essay satirises the speech-practices of the different kinds of bores, ranging from the parliamentarian to the '*infant reciting bore*', Lord Chesterfield is singled out for his detrimental effect on the English language itself:[3]

> In the last age, Lord Chesterfield set the mark of the beast, as he called it, on certain vulgarisms in pronunciation, which he succeeded in banishing from good company. I wish we could set the mark of the bore upon all which has been contaminated by his touch,—all those tainted beauties, which no person of taste would prize. They must be hung up viewless […] to bleach out their stains.[4]

[1] 'Thoughts on Bores', in *Tales and Novels of Maria Edgeworth*, 18 vols. (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1833), XVII, pp. 305-28, p. 327.
[2] *Ibid*., p. 309.
[3] *Ibid*., p. 322.
[4] *Ibid*., p. 327.

The association of beastliness with non-standard pronunciation demonstrates how language is used to deny certain speakers of English the condition of civilised individual. As discussed in the introduction, Chesterfield gloried in the disappearance of plainness and simplicity as a sign of England's status as a polite nation. 'Thoughts on Bores', on the contrary, claims that Chesterfieldian principles, with their focus on a single form of pronunciation, have contaminated the English language. The speaker interrupts himself to recall 'I must write in plain English, if I can', claiming the 'enigmatical style', 'the oracular sublime, has now gone to the gypsies and the conjurors'.[5] 'Plain English' is therefore upheld as the standard that should be practised, in opposition to the Chesterfieldian model of politeness, which focuses on form. By discrediting Chesterfield's views, the essay allows for a greater variety of English. Subsumed in the essay is Edgeworth's cosmopolitan spirit, as well as her awareness of the paradox inherent in the English language: if it serves as a unifying force for Britishness, it is also extremely divisive. As this chapter argues, however, 'plain English' and its companion simplicity in Edgeworth's fiction do offer a much-needed common ground on which to articulate Britishness.

English was both a means of uniting the different nations that form the United Kingdom and the expression of England's colonising power. As Andrew Elfenbein observes, 'What was missing was a language that could, at least at the level of social myth, be common ground for all Britons.'[6] Thomas Sheridan, in his treatise *British Education* (1756), argued that language standardisation was both the most important way of uniting all Britons and the means through which British cultural excellence and supremacy could establish itself, a point already stressed by another Irishman, Jonathan

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 322.
[6] Elfenbein, pp. 21-22.

Swift.[7] Sheridan presented himself as 'as a subject of Great Britain' in his prefatory address to Lord Chesterfield.[8] His suggestion that 'nothing could contribute more to the strength and power of England, than the flourishing state of Ireland', is both an argument for the recognition of Ireland as a force within the United Kingdom, and a hint that this collaboration benefits England first and foremost.[9] Sheridan also acknowledges the specifically British circumstances that require the standardisation of language:

> Add to this, that there were three nations, the Scotch, Irish, and Welch [sic], who made up a considerable part of the British dominions, both in power and extent, who spoke in tongues different from the English, and who were far from being firmly united with them in inclinations, and of course were pursuing different interests. To accomplish an entire union with these people was of the utmost importance to them, to which nothing could have more effectually contributed than the universality of a common language.[10]

Standardisation can help realise this dream of a 'common language'. Sheridan underlines the fact that England itself is divided by numerous dialects, so different 'that persons born and bred in different and distant shires could scarce any more understand each others [sic] speech, than they could that of a foreigner, which is notorious even now.'[11] Establishing a standard was a way of uniting all British citizens, but as language historians have long recognised, it was not without ideological significance. The 'myth of pure English' developed in the eighteenth century as a way to establish English

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[7] Jonathan Swift, *A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue* (1712), discussed in Richard J. Watts, *Language Myths and the History of English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 157-81.
[8] Sheridan, *British Education: Or, the Sources of the Disorders of Great Britain* (Dublin: Faulkner, 1756), p. iv.
[9] *Ibid*., p. x.
[10] *Ibid*., p. 160.
[11] *Ibid*., p. 161.

against French and to assert the political hegemony of the ruling classes and of a metropolitan English over other regional forms.

For Gary Kelly, the novel in particular presented its readers with 'a linguistic model of desired British national identity' which appropriated dialects and sociolects to subordinate non-standard speakers.[12] Critics have often seen Edgeworth's fiction, written in English, as reproducing English political control. Seamus Deane, for instance, argues that Edgeworth's novels should be read as 'documents in the "civilising mission" of the English to the Irish', her fiction 'not an analysis but a symptom of the colonial problem [Ireland] represented.'[13] I disagree with his claim that Edgeworth does not 'query the basis of the colonial relationship itself'. In Deane's account, Edgeworth is an Enlightenment zealot who has found in Ireland a 'missionary opportunity to convert it to Enlightenment faith and rescue it from its "romantic" conditions.'[14] While Edgeworth undeniably displays an Enlightenment ethos, it does not follow that she does not consider Ireland's colonial position nor that she believes England is the seat of unqualified social progress. In an undated note for an unwritten novel about Ireland entitled 'Evils of Ireland', for instance, she stresses a 'union imperfect', while the sheet entitled 'Remedies' includes 'Perfect the Union'.[15] This is only one of Edgeworth's many observations on the unequal terms of the union. Moreover, the Edgeworths firmly believed in literature's ability to participate in establishing an equal partnership. In an incomplete draft of an essay 'On the Education of the Poor' (c.1800), Edgeworth confidently declares: 'The printing press is a more

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[12] Gary Kelly, *English Fiction of the Romantic Period*, p. 16-17.
[13] Seamus Deane, *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing since 1790* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 31, 33.
[14] *Ibid*., p. 32.
[15] MS Eng Misc. c. 897, 50r; MS Eng Misc. c. 897, 51r.

powerful engine in society than the Cannon', revealing her belief in the power of print to effect social change and contribute to the Union between Ireland and Great Britain.[16]

This chapter examines Edgeworth's representation of English as the idiom of the coloniser and a tool of political oppression, then analyses the principles her fiction upholds as a means of achieving greater equality.[17] As in Austen's novels, language is an important index of character. It is, as in Austen, opposed to affectation, revealing a 'man's sentiments and turn of mind laid open without disguise'.[18] Rather than uncritically vindicating the standard, Edgeworth promotes simplicity as an indication of sincerity and therefore moral worth that is, moreover, compatible with a sense of shared Britishness. Simplicity is thus used to challenge English cultural and political hegemony and grants the Irish greater agency. Even though Edgeworth's treatment of the vernacular in her private correspondence is at times denigrating, her published comments on language, especially in *An Essay on Irish Bulls* (1802), offer a radical critique of the political oppression that is effected through the authority or dominance of the standard.[19] As an Anglo-Irish female writer and member of the Protestant Ascendancy, Edgeworth is a liminal British citizen, whose 'uncomfortable authorial position' paradoxically places her in a privileged position to create liminal and hybrid characters that participate in the formation of British national identity along new lines of social behaviour.[20] Her own in-betweenness helps her articulate the fact that Britishness is itself a liminal condition.

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[16] MS Eng. misc. e. 1461, 53r. RLE echoed Edgeworth's words in 1804, stating: 'The printing press is more than a match for the Cannon—'. RLE to ME, 4 August 1804, Edgeworth Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 10,166/7, 420r.

[17] An important study that explores this issue is Susan Manly, *Language, Custom and Nation in the 1790s: Locke, Tooke, Wordsworth, Edgeworth* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 137-84.

[18] Blair, *Lectures*, I, p. 391.

[19] Brian Hollingworth argues that Edgeworth consistently denigrates vernaculars in *Maria Edgeworth's Irish Writing: Language, History, Politic*s (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), esp. 16-25.

[20] Frances R. Botkin, 'The Keener's Cry in *Castle Rackrent*: The Death of Irish Culture?', in *Uncomfortable Authority*, pp. 84-101, p. 95. The title of the essay collection captures the tensions that

As with Austen, the meaning of true gentility is central to Edgeworth's construction of Britishness. Associated with individual qualities as opposed to rank, simplicity helps define polite British gentlemen and gentlewomen. Edgeworth's focus on character, central to true politeness, offers a counter-discourse to the male public sphere, arguing for women's active contribution to the nation.[21] Before discussing *Patronage* (1814) and *Ormond* (1817), two novels that examine the meaning of true gentility, this chapter first analyses the unfinished 'Garry Owen', *Castle Rackrent* (1800), and *An Essay on Irish Bulls* (1802) as key texts in Edgeworth's criticism of the discourse of the male public sphere. By demonstrating the multiplicity that characterises the English language, Edgeworth contests English cultural hegemony. Despite its harsh criticism of the unequal terms of the Union, her fiction offers examples of productive partnerships that shape a sense of shared Britishness. Edgeworth argues for the plasticity of character, a fluidity that is central to her understanding of the self. The figure of the outsider plays, moreover, an important role in the construction of the nation, as women's public participation in *Patronage* and its German hero illustrate. In *Ormond* in particular, the British gentleman is the product of a multiplicity of educations that highlights the hybrid nature of Britishness.

'Garry Owen' (nd); or, English Prejudice Against the Irish Brogue

In an undated and incomplete draft of a children's story entitled 'Garry Owen', Maria Edgeworth addresses the contemporary understanding of language as a reflection of character, with its specific implications for the Irish.[22] The story illustrates the

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surround Edgeworth's work and her attempts to 'reconcile the irreconcilable'. Chris Fauske and Heidi Kaufman, 'Introduction', in *Uncomfortable Authority*, p. 11.

[21] See Ó Gallchoir's study.

[22] This undated manuscript is not the tale 'Garry Owen; Or, The Snow Woman' published in *The Christmas Box* in 1829.

persistent English prejudice against the Irish brogue as well as a more extensive concern over the association of standard English with social rank. This issue is addressed alongside an exploration of what constitutes real gentlemanliness, a topic Edgeworth dramatized in other works and discussed in her private correspondence. 'Garry Owen' offers a useful introduction to Edgeworth's longstanding interest in language. The tale follows the Christmas plans of Gerald, an Anglo-Irish boy torn between his allegiance to his English mother and his deceased Irish father. This hybrid identity is typical of Edgeworth's fiction, signalling her understanding of Britishness as heterogeneous and multi-faceted. The tale is set in Ireland and takes the form of a dialogue between Gerald and his mother, Lady Elizabeth, who is anxious that her son display the outward signs of a true gentleman, which for her is synonymous with being an English gentleman.

Policing her son's friendship with local Irish boys to control his speech habits is the first step to ensuring he grows up a true gentleman. Lady Elizabeth's main concern is that her son is absorbing 'vulgar' Irish ways and catching 'that horrid [Irish] brogue' because of the influence of young Irish O'Mealy. Their friendship is undesirable, 'unless M O—Mealy ~~could~~ had got rid of that horrid brogue & and that his shoulders could be new fashioned for him—', an additional observation that conveys her investment in outward forms of gentility as opposed to morality.[23] For Lady Elizabeth, local accents are a sign of vulgarity. Gerald, on the other hand, innocently observes that 'in Ireland all have it [the brogue] more or leßs'. His mother then argues that rank is a further obstacle to the boys' friendship, since 'O Mealy Corrigan, and their sons' are 'very good creatures in their own way', but they are 'certainly very low', when the Anglo-Irish family 'are very high'.[24] The child does not

[23] MS, Misc. Eng, 897, 27r.
[24] MS, Misc. Eng, 897, 27r.

share his mother's sense of superiority. The acquisition of a new coat leads to reflections on what makes a true gentleman. For Gerald, a new coat does not make a difference 'between man & man',

> but between man & gentleman it sometimes makes all the difference in some people's eyes—
>
> Not in mine said Lady Elizabeth gravely, & coloring a little[25]

The reference to 'man & man' suggests Gerald considers those around him as human beings first and foremost, while the mention of 'some' in relation to the difference between a man and a gentleman reflects his awareness of the value society places on the external signs of gentility, as his mother did when she criticised O'Mealy's 'shoulders'.

If Lady Elizabeth reluctantly concedes that dress does not make a gentleman, her view that standard English is the language of the true gentleman is unshakable. The introduction of Gerald's English friend, Johnny Blaunt, allows Edgeworth to represent contemporary attitudes towards language as a social marker. Having never met the boy, her Ladyship is relieved to find that Johnny has a 'well bred accent and correct pronunciation', 'his language free from provincialisms & cockney-isms', 'his language is so accurate, so well chosen!'[26] Johnny in short speaks standard English. The sentences that describe Johnny's speech are heavily crossed out and revised, which suggests the issue was of particular significance to Edgeworth. Johnny attends 'a great public school', reflecting the growing importance those establishments had in the education of the country's future leading gentlemen.[27] Comparing the boys, Lady

[25] MS, Misc. Eng, 897, 26r.
[26] MS, Misc. Eng, 897, 36r.
[27] See Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, pp. 81-84; Elfenbein, p. 115.

Elizabeth anxiously notes that, while they both look ‘prepossessing’ and ‘gentlemanlike’,

> one had the air & tone of an English the other of an Irish young gentleman, the former composed, cool, reserved, ~~silent~~, and self-possessed—rather proud perhaps—and silent—Gerald warm, off-hand self-confident was perhaps rather too talkative in company.[28]

Lady Elizabeth rehearses the stereotypes of English politeness as taciturn, much like the Knightley brothers, and of the Irish character as warm and spontaneous.

Lady Elizabeth’s prejudice is an eloquent example of the construction of the Irish as other to validate English superiority. To underline her own polite, sophisticated, and English identity, Lady Elizabeth presents the Irish as a terrifying other. She tells Lady Catherine, Johnny’s mother, that she ‘would as soon have let him [Gerald] over to New Zealand among the Cannibals as to Ireland among the wild [barefoot] Irish’.[29] The comparison is a striking and disturbing one, conveying the visceral fear some English people had of the Irish. That cannibals should be safer for children to play with than ‘wild’ Irish boys reflects the extent to which the Irish were construed as uncivilised, and, in this instance, barely human. The Englishwoman overplays the savageness of the Irish to highlight her own social position. There are many instances of equally snobbish and even more cruel Englishwomen in Edgeworth’s novels, such as Lady Dashfort in *The Absentee*, discussed in Chapter 1. As an Englishwoman in Ireland, Lady Elizabeth shares Lady Clonbrony’s shame in her Irish connection and Lady O’Shane’s tenet in *Ormond* that ‘nothing could be right, good, or genteel, that

[28] MS, Misc. Eng, 897, 36r-36v.
[29] MS, Misc. Eng, 897, 38r.

was not English'.[30] Rather than portraying the Irish as lacking in polished manner, Edgeworth's fiction demonstrates the affectation and the misunderstanding of true refinement when it is nationally blinkered.[31]

Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace has argued that Edgeworth similarly endeavoured to 'disassociate' and 'distance herself from the "otherness" on display before her' when in Ireland.[32] I believe that, on the contrary, her fiction exposes the mechanisms by which the Irish were constructed as a terrifying other in order to unite the British nations before the Union of 1801. *The Absentee*, for example, offers an eloquent illustration of the social violence that can be effected through language. The story opens on a conversation between fashionable London ladies, who discuss Lady Clonbrony's upcoming gala. Though born in Oxfordshire, Edgeworth's own birthplace, Lady Clonbrony spent most of her life in Ireland after her marriage and finds herself in the position of the 'other' in her own native country. The first feature that identifies her as non-English is her effort to speak with a standard accent, which the fashionable set ridicule:

> 'If you knew all she endures, to look, speak, move, breathe like an Englishwoman, you would pity her,' said Lady Langdale.
>
> 'Yes, and you *cawnt* conceive the peens she *teekes* to talk of the *teebles* and *cheers*, and to thank *q*, and, with so much *teeste*, to speak pure English,' said Mrs. Dareville.
>
> 'Pure cockney, you mean,' said Lady Langdale.

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[30] Maria Edgeworth, *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, 12 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999-2003), V: *Ormond* (1817), ed. Claire Connolly, p. 7. All further references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text.

[31] See, for instance, English and French Clay in *Patronage*. In *Ormond*, the Irishman White Connal affects to become a Frenchman by constructing the Irish and the English as 'Vandals', 'barbarians who can neither sit, stand, nor speak' (198). Connal echoes contemporary stereotypes, where the polished 'Monsieur' derides 'Milord Anglois', as in Gillray's print (Chapter 1, Figure 2).

[32] Kowaleski-Wallace, p. 159.

> 'But does Lady Clonbrony expect to pass for English?' said the duchess.
>
> 'Oh yes! because she is not quite Irish *bred and born*—only bred, not born,' said Mrs. Dareville. 'And she could not be five minutes in your grace's company before she would tell you, that she was *henglish*, born in *hoxfordshire*.' (5-6)

The hegemonic weight of a single speech form is reflected in the distinction between 'pure English' and 'pure cockney'. The satire anticipates the stigma of the letter 'h' that, Lynda Mugglestone argues, 'was commonly to take pride of place in the popular mythology of "talking proper" which proliferated over the course of the nineteenth century.'[33] It betrayed 'a social origin which the speaker may have left behind'.[34] Lady Clonbrony is not often the object of critical sympathy, since her London habits contribute to the family's financial difficulties, but the lengths she is willing to go to hide her origins are a powerful instance of the effects of social racism and the cruelty of metropolitan elites. The novel, nevertheless, remains critical of 'the constraint, affectation, and indecision' that result from her misguided adoption of an 'English tone' (*Abs*, 8).[35] Affectation is, indeed, Lady Clonbrony's worst failing.

Edgeworth's correspondence supports this condemnation of affectation, which she opposed to politeness. Of all the sins her acquaintances could commit, affectation was the least forgivable. Simplicity, on the other hand, is always enthusiastically noted, because it enables the sincerity, ease, and amiability that characterise true politeness. Discussing Lydia White, who, having appeared at dinner 'like an over rouged weather-beaten cast actress', 'her gestures attitudes & voice—all theatrical and affected to the

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[33] Mugglestone, p. 108.
[34] *Ibid*., p. 209.
[35] Lady Clonbrony is very similar to Charles Macklin's Mrs O'Dogherty in *The True-Born Irishman* (1783) who, having caught the 'London vertigo', attempts to adopt English forms of speech. Charles Macklin, *The True-Born Irishman; Or, The Irish Fine Lady. A Comedy of Two Acts* (Dublin, 1783), p. 8.

extreme', Edgeworth concludes a letter to her sister Honora with the following: 'I never saw such a lesson against affectation as she exhibited'.[36] In another letter commenting on Dr Beddoes' engagement to her sister Anna, Edgeworth declares that 'his manners are not polite but he is sincere and candid'.[37] And, writing to her friend Sophie Ruxton, she notes that Mrs William Beaufort is 'perfectly free from affectation', allowing for the kind of conversation Edgeworth enjoys.[38] We find many similar remarks throughout her correspondence. In 1817, she sent Sophy Ruxton two examples of good and bad letter-writing: 'I send also two letters which are in as perfect contrast to one another as can be well conceived—Lady Davy's and Lady Lansdowne's—[Both kind and well meant but] One involuted & convoluted—& the other perfect simplicity—'[39] As all these different examples reveal, simplicity is associated with sincerity and truth, as well as benevolence.[40] It is the defining characteristic of gentility, which does not always follow 'polished' patterns, as this chapter suggests.

Castle Rackrent (1800): Challenging the Hegemony of Varnished English

Having garnered 'a dazzling array of firsts', *Castle Rackrent*, a unique performance in Edgeworth's career, has been the subject of much critical debate.[41] The work is a 'polyphonic narrative', whose voices, divided between the main narrative and

[36] ME to Honora Edgeworth, 30 November 1809, Edgeworth Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 10,166/7, 719, 3r-v.
[37] ME to Mrs Ruxton, 21 July 1793, Edgeworth Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 10,166/7, 105, 2v.
[38] ME to Sophy Ruxton (?), Edgeworth Papers, National Library of Ireland, 472, 2v.
[39] ME to Sophy Ruxton, 30 July 1817, Edgeworth Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 10,166/7, 1359, 1v.
[40] Similarly, she highlighted 'Mrs Smiths very unaffected very well bred kind manners & Mr Smiths literary & sensible conversation make their house one of the most agreeable I ever saw.' MS Eng. lett. c. 704, 71v. Of Melicena Tuite she wrote: 'Her manners have & always must have one great advantage of ease from her perfect freedom from anxiety about herself & another & no small advantage that prepossessing every goodnatured person in her favor by the genuine and constant expression of benevolent simplicity.' ME to Mrs Waller, Edgeworth Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 10,166/7, 1162, 1r-v.
[41] Kathryn Kirkpatrick, 'Introduction' to *Castle Rackrent*, p. vii.

complex paratext, are often seen as competing rather than collaborating.[42] In these binary readings, the editorial apparatus, often attributed to RLE, is a colonising appropriation of an Irish Catholic voice, a taming of the controversial content of the narrative, which also 'works to construct the superiority of the English domestic reader over the Irish subject'.[43] Susan Glover, for instance, persuasively uncovers the ongoing 'struggle for control of the text' and a 'constant competition for the reader's attention', the editor constantly interrupting and undermining Thady's narrative.[44] Seamus Deane, who reads Edgeworth's fiction as 'an analgesic version of the question of English-Irish relations', views *Castle Rackrent* as 'a work of startling incoherence', which fails to 'reconcile […] organising discourses' of its 'surrounding apparatus'.[45] I believe that Edgeworth did not intend her 'Hibernian Tale' to be a coherent whole but a tale that bore witness to the tensions and indeterminacy that characterised the years leading to the Union.[46] With its separate yet connected Irish and English texts, *Castle Rackrent* posits the Union as the product of writing and is thus part of the 'innovations in textual practice' that were 'potentially productive of an altered political future'.[47]

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[42] Kathryn Kirkpatrick, 'Putting Down the Rebellion: Notes and Glosses on *Castle Rackrent*, 1800', *Éire-Ireland* 30:1 (Spring 1995), pp. 77-90, p. 78. Kirkpatrick, pp. 84-89, analyses the changes between the early and later footnotes Edgeworth made: from an initial 'identification with Thady's dispossessed voice' (p. 84), Edgeworth later distanced herself from her tale, adding material that policed and was unfavourable to the unruly Irish voice.

[43] Mary Jean Corbett, 'Another Tale to Tell: Postcolonial Theory and the Case of *Castle Rackrent*', *Criticism* 36:3 (Summer 1994), pp. 383-400, p. 383. See also *Allegories of Union*, pp. 40-44. For a detailed examination of the glossary as a colonising process, see David O'Shaughnessy, 'Ambivalence in *Castle Rackrent*', *Canadian Journal for Irish Studies* 25:1/2 (July-December 1999), pp. 427-40, pp. 434-39.

[44] Susan Glover, 'Contra-dicting Possession in *Castle Rackrent*', *Studies in Philology* 99:3 (Summer 2002), pp. 295-311, pp. 305, 308.

[45] Deane, *Strange Country*, p. 39.

[46] I here follow Ó Gallchoir's point, p. 63, that tension and indeterminacy are key issues in *Castle Rackrent*.

[47] Claire Connolly, 'Writing the Union', in *Acts of Union: The Causes, Contexts, and Consequences of The Act of Union*, ed. Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), pp. 171-86, p. 171.

Edgeworth's decision to ventriloquize a native Irish voice has been read as an 'act of mimicry' which testifies to Protestant Ascendancy fears of loss of authority.[48] The steward Thady M'Quirk is a character based on the real-life family servant, John Langan, with whose dialect Edgeworth 'became so acquainted' that she 'could think and speak in it'.[49] In 1834, describing the composition process, Edgeworth claimed Thady 'seemed to stand by me and dictate'.[50] This suggestion that Edgeworth acted as an amanuensis for a native Irish figure has rarely been read favourably. Rebecca Shapiro, who identifies Thady's language as non-standard English rather than Hiberno-English, argues that it 'produces prose that supports the Irish while maintaining English predominance and control.'[51] For Susan Egenolf, 'Edgeworth appropriates the voice of the native Irish Thady, and thus performs linguistic blackface for her English and Anglo-Irish readers.'[52] Egenolf, moreover, contends that, by quoting Edmund Spenser's *View of the Present State of Ireland*, Edgeworth aligns herself with his political programme.[53] Susan Manly, on the other hand, demonstrates that Edgeworth counters Spenser's text and offers an alternative interpretation of the use of English:

> Edgeworth's plebeian orators do not speak Irish; but the English they use is presented as one which they have appropriated to reflect the quick-thinking wit and invention, the spirit of enquiry, which Edgeworth associates with a progressive, modern society, reversing the hierarchy that Spenser seeks to naturalize.[54]

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[48] Marilyn Butler, 'General Introduction', I, p. XXXVIII.
[49] ME to Mrs Stark, September 6, 1834, quoted in Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, p. 140.
[50] *Ibid*., p. 141.
[51] Rebecca Shapiro, 'Educating the English: Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* and *Essay on Irish Bulls*', *Women's Writing* 10:1 (2003), pp. 73-92, p. 76.
[52] Susan B. Egenolf, *The Art of Political Fiction in Hamilton, Edgeworth, and Owenson* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 45.
[53] *Ibid*., p. 59.
[54] Manly, *Language, Custom, and the Nation*, p. 162.

Edgeworth, I argue below, reverses the hierarchy further by creating English voices whose authority is questionable. Declan Kiberd suggests that 'Edgeworth's openness to the disruption of English authority by Langan's voice' makes the text 'ambivalent in form as it is undecidable in attitude.'[55] The following analysis develops this 'openness to the disruption of English authority'. As Ó Gallchoir observes, the editorial apparatus merges different voices, complicating binary readings of *Castle Rackrent* as perpetuating English supremacy.[56] Rather than undermining Thady's narrative, I believe the editorial apparatus undermines its own, English, authority.

The tension noted above surfaces in the contradictory function of the Glossary and Notes, since their very existence and purpose of making the Irish more familiar emphasises the foreignness of Irish culture. The editorial apparatus is designed to inform 'the *ignorant* English reader' (4) on points of vocabulary and local customs, a reminder that Ireland is still a foreign land, stressing the distance between the two nations.[57] With its stress on 'the family', *Castle Rackrent* is a bitter admonition that Ireland is a neglected sister. The 'Advertisement' to the Glossary, whose purpose is to make 'intelligible to English readers' Hiberno-English phrases, reminds its audience of the otherness of the Irish, while suggesting this idiom is not a variety of English. *Castle Rackrent* as a whole contests this position, becoming, I argue, a testament to the varieties of English within the United Kingdom. Thady, an exponent of the 'lower Irish' (79), reminds the English of their own otherness. When he first encounters Jessica, Sir Condy's Jewish English wife, she is an other not simply on account of her faith but also because of her speech: Thady considers that 'she spoke a strange kind of English of her

[55] Declan Kiberd, *Irish Classics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 248.
[56] Ó Gallchoir, pp. 62-63.
[57] Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent* (1800), ed. Kathryn Kirkpatrick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 4. All further references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text.

own' (25). This demonstrates that English elites do not have the monopoly over the English language.

Rather than erasing or dominating the local voice, the Glossary and Notes are part of the text's overall contestation of English authority. The editorial material is not an example of sophisticated, perhaps pedantic, yet scholarly enquiry, but is written in a conversational, sometimes colloquial, manner, whose scientific credentials are dubious. The voice of the Glossary is like Thady's, extremely talkative and often idiomatic. Phrases such as 'doffing their caps' (21), 'it is ten to one' (102), or 'By the by' (106) are not part of the vocabulary of the educated, published, writer. The editor mimics the voice of an antiquarian. His limitations are, for example, betrayed in his note '*Kith* from—we know not what' (62). The editor's credentials are further put to the test when 'He demeaned himself greatly' or 'The whole kitchen was out on the stairs' (107) are glossed even though they do not require explanation. The voice appears at times even more naïve than Thady, since the second definition reveals the editor took Thady's words literally rather than recognising that 'kitchen' is a synecdoche for kitchen staff. Nor is it clear that the editor really believes that the banshee, for instance, are imaginary creatures.[58] This therefore greatly qualifies the authority of the editorial English voices. There is also a sense in which *Castle Rackrent* is a tale of Irish resistance to English cultural dominion. The editor's admission that 'Thady's idiom is incapable of translation' (4), suggests that Irish speech and culture withstand appropriation.

The text's view of the union is, at best, ambivalent. The editorial matter itself expresses reservations concerning the union. The preface's prediction 'When Ireland loses her identity with an union with Great Britain' (5) unambiguously posits that the

[58] See the editor's note, p. 17.

union is the death knell of Irish culture. This, however, is the English editor's conclusion, not Thady's. The editor mournfully concludes that 'the few gentlemen of education' Ireland counts 'will resort to England' (97), depriving the nation of valuable members. Again, this prophecy is English rather than Irish. Edgeworth's later fiction worked to prevent this by arguing against absenteeism. Nevertheless, the narrative's final remark presents, as Ó Gallchoir points out, 'a rather disturbing image of union in its question "Did the Warwickshire militia [...] teach the Irish to drink beer, or did they learn from the Irish to drink whiskey?"'[59] Esther Wohlgemut offers a more positive reading, arguing that the question 'opens the possibility of an overlap between the two nations', for 'a cultural "learning" occurs on both sides of the border'.[60] While the overt purpose of the editorial apparatus is to facilitate this cultural learning, the mutual education presented here is of a questionable kind, since the cultural exchanges seem to limit themselves to alcoholic consumption. The sudden reference to the militia is an uncomfortable reminder of the violence that dominated the years leading to the union. *Castle Rackrent* shows its English readers that the Union was the result of military conflict rather than political negotiation. In her father's *Memoirs*, Edgeworth copied out a letter in which RLE, addressing Erasmus Darwin, argued that 'the good people of Ireland should be *persuaded* of this truth [the benefits of the Union], and not be dragooned into submission.'[61] This inclusion twenty years after the Union reveals Edgeworth's own objection to military intervention in political matters. By closing on an open question, the issue of 'union' is, in *Castle Rackrent*, still very much a matter of discussion.

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[59] Ó Gallchoir, p. 63.
[60] Esther Wohlgemut, 'Maria Edgeworth and the Question of National Identity', *SEL* 39:4 (Autumn 1999), pp. 645-658, p. 647.
[61] Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, II, p. 252.

The editor unwittingly gives Thady control of the text when he twice refers to the steward's narrative as 'a plain unvarnished tale' (2). Whereas the editor ostensibly underlines his superior taste, his claim that a plain tale is 'preferable to the most highly ornamented narrative' (2), in line with belletrist principles, undermines his own authority, since a glossary introduces the idea of veneer. Early critics of the novel have read Thady as a naive character whose language is 'transparent and innocent, a straightforward communication.'[62] More recently, Edgeworth scholars have identified Thady as a servile, colonised subject, an astute manipulator whose subservience is merely a pose to fool ignorant English readers.[63] One of the questions this characterisation raises is the editor's intention behind this: is the editor a naive reader of Thady's tale, or are his notes an attempt to reassure English audiences of Irish ingenuousness?

Edgeworth herself did not consider plain writing as the sign of inferior stylistic powers. To 'get down' the *Life* of George Washington that was sticking in her throat, Edgeworth read George Harley's volume on Charles Montfort, finding it 'interesting & highly pathetic—not the pathos of fine writing—but the more irresistible pathos of plain truth'. These reflections led her to conjecture that 'the height of eloquence sometimes consists in delivering "a plain unvarnished tale"—'.[64] The phrase moreover echoes William Shakespeare's *Othello*, whose eponymous protagonist prefaces the highly rhetorical narration of his personal history with this disclaimer. Like Othello, Thady is in fact a skilful manipulator of language. His surname 'Quirk' evokes idiosyncrasy and

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[62] Brian Hollingworth, *Maria Edgeworth's Irish Writing: Language, History, Politic*s (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), p. 93.

[63] For a helpful overview of the two positions, see Michael Neill, 'Mantles, Quirks, and Irish Bulls: Ironic Guise and Colonial Subjectivity in Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent*', *Review of English Studies* 52:205 (February 2001), pp. 76-90. See also, Julie Nash, *Servants and Paternalism in the Works of Maria Edgeworth and Elizabeth Gaskell* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 75-83.

[64] ME to Sophy Ruxton, Christmas 1804, Edgeworth Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 10,166/7, 443, 2r.

unexpectedness, but it also refers to 'a verbal or mental, twist, shift, or evasion; a subtle or cunning argument; a piece of sophistry or chicanery; a trick or subterfuge' (*OED*). Thady's self-presentation as 'honest Thady' is also, as some critics contend, the 'biggest lie of all'.[65] As Murray Pittock notes, 'honest' is a Jacobite codeword, as is 'the family', a reminder of Thady's potential subversiveness.[66] Othello, 'the Moor of Venice', is, like Thady, an outsider. The parallel is a reminder of Thady's otherness, of which the editorial apparatus is a reminder, despite its attempts to bridge the gap between England and Ireland.

Its numerous indeterminacies notwithstanding, *Castle Rackrent* is unambiguous in its elevation of private utterance over public discourse. By claiming that men's 'real characters' are to be discovered not in 'their actions or appearance in public' or works of history but in 'their careless conversations, their half finished sentences' (1), Edgeworth introduces a theme that runs throughout her work: the civic humanist emphasis on the public value of private character. While Edgeworth develops the importance of women's private contribution to the public sphere more fully in her later fiction, *Castle Rackrent* is nonetheless an important statement of her belief in the interconnectedness of the public and private spheres. Moreover, by locating character in verbal utterances, Edgeworth demonstrates her understanding that language is an important locus of identity. History, that field of study dedicated to fashioning narratives that shape national consciousness, cannot fulfil a 'love of truth', unlike 'secret memoirs or private anecdotes' (1). The preface moreover discounts history partly on stylistic grounds: its language is that of excessive ornament, its heroes 'so

[65] Nash, p. 79. See her discussion, pp. 79-83.
[66] Murray Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 174.

decked out by the fine fancy of the professed historian' (1). Private utterances are therefore more reliable and direct records than the historian's whimsical revisitings.

Like *Northanger Abbey*, *Castle Rackrent* exposes history as an arena of male discourse. Edgeworth is bolder than Austen in this challenge to male authority since, not only does she suggest that 'the pen', as Anne Elliot states, 'has always been in [men's] hands' (*P*, 255), she also questions the credentials of the 'professed historian', a phrase that implies the individual granted himself the title of historian as opposed to an institutional validation. The reference to a 'fine fancy' can also be read as an allusion to an affected refinement. 'History' appears as the whimsical expression of a self-appointed few, a presentation that is part of the novel's contestation of 'the enlightened discourse of the male public sphere', which Ó Gallchoir has argued cannot articulate Ireland.[67] On the contrary, Ireland is 'a place which is articulable […] through a highly personal and local voice', whose idiosyncrasies do not invalidate its position as a legitimate representative of Ireland.[68] The control of the voice and language is thus at the heart of Edgeworth's representation of the Union.

An Essay on Irish Bulls (1802): How an Irish Bull Gives Birth to a British Gentleman

Edgeworth's next Irish work, *An Essay on Irish Bulls* is a deeply political and controversial text, which, like *Castle Rackrent*, is shaped by the events and the atmosphere of the 1798 Rebellion and the 1801 Act of Union. It specifically demonstrates 'how politics press down on language in Ireland'.[69] More than a defence of the 'Irish bull', a blunder 'mocked by the English as evidence of the irrationality and

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[67] Ó Gallchoir, p. 64.
[68] Ó Gallchoir, p. 64.
[69] Connolly, *Cultural History*, p. 36.

primitivity of the Irish mind', the *Essay* is an indictment of the English subjugation of the Irish on the grounds of linguistic inferiority.[70] Language, as Susan Manly observes, functions in the *Essay* as both 'an arena for political oppression' and 'a potential field for the contestation of legitimate political and cultural authority.'[71] For Rebecca Shapiro, the *Essay*, 'creating a linguistic and cultural partnership', is more positive than *Castle Rackrent* concerning the existence of Irishness within the United Kingdom.[72] The author's 'sincere wish to conciliate both countries', is, however, as Ó Gallchoir remarks, distinctly at odds with its unrelenting exposition of the unequal Anglo-Irish partnership.[73] Despite its unambiguous criticism of Irish oppression, the *Essay* also includes narratives that imagine an equal partnership between England and Ireland by presenting characters whose personal trajectories can be seen as British rather than exclusively Irish or English.

Edgeworth is more overtly critical of English colonial rule than in *Castle Rackrent*. Her stance is clear: in 1801, she asked Harriet Beaufort to record 'all the English Bulls you can—one English is worth ten Irish Bulls for my purpose—as the essay is to be complimentary to the Irish'.[74] Edgeworth clearly writes from an outsider's perspective, openly admitting she was 'neither *born nor bred* in Ireland' and therefore occupied a liminal position.[75] Rather than an apology, this statement underlines her

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[70] Manly, p. 160.
[71] *Ibid*., pp. 159, 160.
[72] Shapiro, p. 74. See her discussion, pp. 82-88.
[73] *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, 12 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999-2003), I: *Essay on Irish Bulls* (1802), ed. Marilyn Butler, p. 153. All further references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text. Ó Gallchoir, p. 72.
[74] ME to Harriet Beaufort, Spring 1801, Edgeworth Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 10166/7, 271, 2v.
[75] The *Essay* is a collaborative project between Edgeworth and her father but I read the 'we' of the text as referring to the authorial voice rather than a literal. Edgeworth scholars have substantially revised the view that Edgeworth was her father's amanuensis, arguing that even those passages that con be confidently attributed to RLE were most likely edited by Edgeworth. 'In their "partnership"', Butler asserts, 'she was the writer'. Butler, 'General Introduction', p. XI. Clara Tuite, however, argues that the text still bears the 'ineradicable trace of Robert Lovell Edgeworth's presence'. Clara Tuite, 'Late Disturbances: Maria Edgeworth's *An Essay on Irish Bulls*', *Women's History Review* 20:5 (November 2011), pp. 719-43, p. 724.

personal commitment to Ireland. Edgeworth insistently presses on the unequal terms of the union: ‘even Englishmen must allow there was something very like a bull in professing to make a complete identification of the two kingdoms, whilst, at the same time, certain regulations continued in full force to divide the countries by art, even more than the British Channel does by nature’ (138).[76] The Irish bull is a visual symbol for ‘the intractability of the Irish people in the face of English attempts to subdue and silence them’. This is mirrored in the frontispiece and the endpiece, the former representing a charging bull and the latter a bull brought to its knees.[77] The Latin inscription ‘Procumbit humi bos’ drives home the idea of complete subjection. With England’s ‘imperial head’ (153) the final image on which the *Essay* closes, the criticism of English colonial rule is indisputable.

The *Essay*’s originality lies partly in its analysis of the Irish bull and by extension Ireland within British, and not simply English, relationships. As Susan Manly and Clara Tuite observe, the Irish bull is ‘an invention of the English’, a ‘projected construction of Irishness that conceals its English origins’.[78] But the Irish bull is not simply an English invention, it is a British phenomenon, a point over which the English, Scottish, and Welsh meet. Linda Colley, analysing George Macartney’s diplomatic Chinese mission in 1793, which included English, Welsh, and Scots Irishmen, explains this expression of communal Britishness in their encounter with foreigners: ‘In the presence of an alien and contemptuous culture, they felt all of a sudden intensely British, brought together, almost despite themselves, by confrontation with the

[76] Connolly, p. 37, identifies legal articles regarding trade, and Manly, pp. 161-62, a reference to Catholic emancipation.
[77] Manly, pp. 162-66, p. 166. Tuite suggests the bull invokes an analogy with the Roman conquest of Greece. Tuite, ‘Late Disturbances’, pp. 739-39.
[78] Tuite, ‘Late Disturbances’, p. 722; Manly, p. 166.

Other.'[79] That 'every true Briton' laughs at an Irish bull indicates how the otherness of the Irish served to unite the 'born subjects of Great Britain', which pointedly excludes the Irish. The Irish are the original other that helped unite Great Britain. To contest this otherness, Edgeworth does not only educate '*ignorant* English readers' on the matter of Ireland, she also demonstrates that Great Britain is far from homogeneous.

Edgeworth's strategies, this section argues, depart from contemporary defences of Ireland. Unlike Owenson's *Wild Irish Girl*, for instance, the *Essay* rejects the 'high alliance' of 'the remotest antiquity'.[80] While Edgeworth was 'critical of British claims to a monopoly on civilisation', Ó Gallchoir notes, 'she was far less likely to turn to the resources of Ireland's pre-colonial past in order to make this point'.[81] The *Essay*, 'interested in the fate of the present race of its inhabitants' (152) rather than in the historical figures that only appeal to rusty antiquarians, is firmly anchored in the present. History is not revisited to establish Ireland as the original birthplace of Britishness, its people the 'more pure and unmixed British colony'.[82] The narrative voice confidently states: 'we should never break our hearts if it could never satisfactorily be proved that Albion is only another name for Ireland' (152).[83] Edgeworth provides an extensive list of Irish authors which includes not only Steele and Swift, but a great number of more contemporary Irish writers, among them women, such as Charlotte Brooke and Frances Sheridan. All these writers were extremely popular in England, a pointed reminder to English readers of these authors' native Irishness and Ireland's significant contribution to British literary tradition.[84]

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[79] Linda Colley, 'Britishness and Otherness: An Argument', *Journal of British Studies* 31:4 (October 1992), pp. 309-29, p. 311.
[80] Owenson, *The Wild Irish Girl*, p. 128.
[81] Ó Gallchoir, p. 80.
[82] Owenson, *The Wild Irish Girl*, p. 177.
[83] Owenson later argued in *The Wild Irish Girl* for the name's Irish etymology. *The Wild Irish Girl*, p. 177.
[84] Edgeworth lists thirty-five names.

If the Irish are strong contenders in print, they are no less inferior to the English because of their 'brogue'. The narrator feigns surprise that 'Shiboleth [sic] should continue so long a criterion amongst nations' (123), which nonetheless acknowledges language as a means of othering. While Edgeworth concedes that Irish pronunciation 'prepossesses the mind against the speaker' and that 'the Irish *brogue* is a great and shameful defect', she observes that 'in England, almost all of our fifty-two counties have peculiar vulgarisms, dialects, and brogues, unintelligible to their neighbours' (125), a point Sheridan had already made in 1756. England itself is characterised by the diversity of its speakers. The one element that unites even the most deficient speakers in England is the stereotype attached to the Irish:

> Not the half-animated Bond-street lounger, not the bawling native of Billingsgate, no inveterate cockney of high or low degree, between the vast extremes of St James's and St Mary Axe, no guttural man of Cumberland, or Zomerzetshire Zim, or ultimate Northumbrian, can forbear to join in the liberal laugh against the wild Irishman, or refrain from raising in their multifarious dialects the national hue and cry after an Irish bull. (373)

Political oppression is conveyed in the 'hue and cry' aimed at the Irish bull. The Irish bull is again used as a means of uniting those sections of the English population that are otherwise ridiculed for their dialect and speech habits. This passage was excised from the 1808 edition, along with some of the *Essay*'s most polemical points, which suggests Edgeworth might have considered her critique of the English too insulting.

To shorten the third edition of 1808, Edgeworth made substantial cuts which soften some of the work's more contentious material. She intriguingly excised the observation that 'English is not the mother tongue of the natives of Ireland; to them it is a foreign language' (372), an uncomfortable reminder that the English are 'the lords

of the language', enforcing their vernacular on Gaelic Irish.[85] Although Edgeworth's fiction generally endorses the view that language is a reliable reflection of identity, the *Essay* cautions against establishing the idea that 'the language of a people is a just criterion of their progress in civilization' (85), which qualifies the Enlightenment view that language is 'one mark of the progress of society'. Edgeworth objects to the colonial use of that position:

> That species of monopolising pride, which inspires one nation with the belief that all the rest of the world are barbarians, and speak barbarisms, is evidently a very useful prejudice, which the English, with their usual good sense, have condescended to adopt from the Greeks and Romans. They have applied it judiciously in their treatment of France and Ireland. [...] But it is a refinement of this sort of policy, to instill [sic] into a nation the belief, that they are superior in intellectual abilities to their neighbours. (376)

Language is clearly marked as a tool for political oppression, as the connection between 'barbarians' and 'speak barbarisms' implies. 'Refinement' is used ironically, for the misguided beliefs it leads to are manifestations of backwardness and intolerance. Edgeworth moreover dissociates herself from the Francophobia of the period by drawing a parallel between Ireland and France. It also reminds her English readers of the political connection between the two nations. Her decision to remove this controversial comparison was presumably dictated by the unfolding of political events, since the first edition of the *Essay* was published during the brief period of the Treaty of Amiens.

The *Essay* includes more optimistic readings of Anglo-Irish relations. The story of 'Little Dominick', while illustrating the violence of standard English, offers a

[85] Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* (London: Cape, 1995), pp. 11-12.

hopeful resolution that Ireland will be an equal member of the Union. Little Dominick is a young Irish boy sent to boarding school in Wales, to 'learn manners and grammar' (89). This location illustrates the fact that English is also taught outside of England and that language can be an instrument of power and tyranny. The Welsh schoolmaster, Mr Owen ap Davies ap Jenkins ap Jones, constantly humiliates Dominick, referring to him as 'you little Irish plockit' (90), an insult that betrays Jones's non-standard use of English and his own poor 'enclish crammer' (91).[86] The relationship between the Welsh schoolmaster and the Irish pupil reflects the fact that the English language, while uniting the British, is also used as a means of oppression. The schoolmaster keeps a bond that will harm Dominick's friend in his 'crammer', a symbol of the legal power of the English language. Moreover, Jones tells Dominick his mother wrote a letter that explained his return to Ireland was conditional upon his learning English. It seems likely this is the schoolmaster's fabrication, but it is an uncomfortable reminder of Ireland's subservience to England. Dominick resists the schoolmaster's abusive authority by humming a 'good old English song' (91), a Jacobite tune that is a reminder that English sovereignty over Great Britain is precarious.[87] Bullied by other Welsh boys, Dominick finds a friend in Edwards, an English pupil who does not laugh at his Irish idiosyncrasies and attempts to teach him English. The Edwards have a home in England, where Dominick is invited to spend the Christmas holidays. This friendship symbolises the hopes of an equal partnership between England and Ireland.

Dominick's trajectory is that of a young British gentleman, as his personal history is connected to the British Empire. Dominick later becomes secretary to a commander in chief in India and is able to repay the school debts of his English friend

[86] Manly, p. 173, notes the parallel between Little Dominick and RLE.'s experience at school.
[87] Manly, p. 174.

Edwards, who is in debtor's prison when Dominick returns from India. This discovery is made through the newspapers, which also inform Dominick that the O'Reilly estate, his family seat, is for sale. The sale of the estate introduces a conflict between the protagonist's loyalty to his friend and to his native country. The plan to purchase it is abandoned to pay off Edwards' debts and see him out of prison. While his decision proves that a partnership can be established between England and Ireland, the ending raises questions concerning Ireland's future, since the management of the estate is left uncertain. Whereas this plot development suggests '[Irish identity] is secondary to English national identity', Dominick's public and private behaviour demonstrate Ireland's active contribution to the formation of the British state.[88] Dominick has, moreover, acted like a gentleman, an important question for the articulation of Britishness. Dominick's final declaration that 'our Irish blunders are never blunders from the heart' (95) emphasises the idea of character, upon which Edgeworth argues that Britishness rests.

Patronage (1814): A Finessing Courtier, an English Country Gentleman, and an Englishwoman's Simplicity of Manner

Patronage, the 'most conspicuously ignored of Edgeworth's novels', received scathing reviews when first published and is still criticised for being too didactic and formally unsuccessful.[89] Contemporary reviewers were disappointed by Edgeworth's decision to set her novel in England rather than Ireland. John Ward, for instance, lamented that 'There are no Irish characters in "Patronage" […] We are sorry for it', adding that Edgeworth's knowledge of England was too cursory to entitle her to an

[88] Ó Gallchoir, p. 74.
[89] Ó Gallchoir, p. 107.

opinion of English society.[90] Such an assessment highlights the precariousness of Edgeworth's position as an Anglo-Irish writer: too English to be a convincing representative of Gaelic Ireland, she was not English enough to have an opinion on English matters. Furthermore, the novel was considered an improper production from a female pen, since it ventures into the exclusively male field of diplomacy and government. For Sydney Smith in *The Edinburgh Review*, Edgeworth displays a '*manly* understanding' by trespassing into the world of politics.[91] According to Smith, 'the clumsy machinery of majesty, and the cumbrous agency of those superior beings vulgarly known by the name of ministers and favourites, [are] so extremely unlike the simpler and purer taste of Miss Edgeworth's former fables', that the only explanation for it is that the political plotlines are the addition of another, presumably male, hand.[92] What Edgeworth's early reviewers failed to recognise is not that *Patronage* is political, but that the novel locates politics within the domestic sphere. Through its allegorical representation of the nation as woman, with the figure of Caroline Percy standing for England, the novel argues for women's participation in the public life of the nation. *Patronage*, as Ó Gallchoir argues, 'insists on the feminisation of English national character'.[93]

Written between 1809 and 1813, the novel is informed by both the final years of the Napoleonic wars and by social and political issues pertaining to Britain itself, such as press-ganging and corruption, placing Edgeworth in 'a position of extreme liberalism, close to radicalism'.[94] As Ó Gallchoir argues, *Patronage* stresses the need

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[90] *The Quarterly Review* 10:20 (January 1814), pp. 300-22, p. 309.
[91] *The Edinburgh Review* 22:44 (January 1814), pp. 416-34, p. 417. Marilyn Butler identifies Smith as the author of the review, whereas Timothy Webb suggests it is Francis Jeffrey. Butler, 'Introduction' to *Patronage*, p. vii; Timothy Webb, '"A Great Theatre of Outrage and Disorder": Figuring Ireland in the Edinburgh Review', in *British Romanticism and* The Edinburgh Review*: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. Massimiliano Demata and Duncan Wu (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 58-81, p. 67
[92] *The Edinburgh Review* 22:44, pp. 432-33.
[93] Ó Gallchoir, p. 112.
[94] *Ibid*., pp. 109-10, p. 110.

for a reform of the public sphere in England. This reform is initiated within the domestic sphere, which becomes 'a place from which to challenge official ideologies of patriotism and national character.'[95] Women are at the heart of this alternative civic platform and therefore instrumental to the country's political decision-making, challenging the notion of a clear distinction between the public and the private.[96] On the contrary, *Patronage* uncovers the overlap between these two seemingly separate worlds. Diplomatic and political intrigues penetrate the domestic circle of the Percy family from the beginning of the novel, reflecting the porousness of the boundary between these supposedly separate spheres. Language is also the object of the novel's examination of their interconnection. Conversation and correspondence, as Jacqueline Pearson notes in her analysis, are a 'liminal area' that 'mark the threshold between public and private discourses'.[97]

The salon is an alternative space from which public reform can be achieved. As Susanne Schmid has recently argued, British salons were 'veritable hotbeds of political and cultural agitation', the 'bluestocking tradition continu[ing] well into and beyond the Romantic period'.[98] In *Patronage*, Mrs Hungerford's salon operates as a mixed gathering where men and women converse on an equal footing upon such 'manly' topics as politics or science.[99] This section argues that Edgeworth's novel highlights women's active role in selecting and shaping the nation's leaders, not simply through education, but as facilitators and arbitrators of semi-public platforms where character

[95] *Ibid*., p. 106.
[96] My reading is influenced by Ó Gallchoir and Claire Connolly, '"A Big Book about England"? Public and Private Meanings in *Patronage*', in *The Irish Novel in the Nineteenth Century: Facts and Fictions,* ed. Jacqueline Belanger (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), pp. 63-79.
[97] Jacqueline Pearson, '"Arts of Appropriation": Language, Circulation, and Appropriation in the Work of Maria Edgeworth', *Yearbook of English Studies* 28 (1998), pp. 212-34, p. 219.
[98] Susanne Schmid, *British Literary Salons of the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 3, 1.
[99] Edgeworth herself was familiar with Parisian and Swiss salons. See, for instance, Butler, *Literary Biography*.

is assessed. This ability is presented as a public good that concerns both sexes, the novel insisting that 'the power of judging of character' is central to 'the education of a beauty, as of a prince' (VI, 161). Through such a parallel, *Patronage* suggests that female education has the same public impact as that of royal figures and politicians. The novel illustrates the importance of the salon to public life, although never using the term, which can be read as a deliberate reconfiguration of the space of the salon along English, and arguably British, lines. Conversation is the central activity of such assemblies, which become a semi-public platform for individual character. The narrative underlines certain characters' adherence to plainness and simplicity, qualities which, as for Austen, are the mark of true politeness, and that help emphasise personal merit over rank, promoting middle-class values over courtly models.

The importance of conversation as an index of personal identity and the necessity of the correspondence between public and private character is illustrated in Alfred Percy's acquaintance with the Lord Chief Justice. Alfred gains the respect of this judicial representative in conversation, which presents language as a platform through which character is assessed. The Chief Justice, who expresses himself 'with peculiar ease', 'possess[ing] perfect conversational *tact*, with great powers of wit' (VI, 223), is a model of polite conversation. Alfred notes that 'He really conversed; he did not merely tell stories, or make bon-mots, or confine himself to the single combat of close argument, or the flourish of declamation; but he alternately followed and led', speaking not 'from policy, but from benevolence' (VI, 223). The Chief Justice is therefore a polite gentleman in the civic humanist sense, his conversation an amiable interchange of ideas as opposed to 'talk', which is neither a display of combative masculinity nor the undesirable French predilection for witty repartee, as 'bon-mots' implies. Language, for the Chief Justice, is first and foremost a means of transparent

communication. During the discussion of a passage from Burke, the Chief Justice, who considers it 'too rich in ornament', follows eighteenth-century belletrist principles, arguing that excessive refinement in political writing should not 'injure the general effect' (VI, 225). This focus on ornament, which was at the heart of debates on correct style, reflects the character's superior understanding. Implicit in his observation is the preference for simplicity, which the novel presents as a corrective to the corruption of political life. Alfred's initial impressions of this 'resplendent luminary' are confirmed when he sees him with his family, the space where character is ultimately validated.

The Percy family, the clearest example of Edgeworth's emphasis on the domestic sphere as a corrective to the defects of the public sphere, illustrates the correlation between simplicity and superiority of character, which is the mark of true gentility.[100] Edgeworth's private correspondence reveals her attentiveness to the nuances of the term. For Edgeworth, not every man was worthy of the title of gentleman. Of Mr Hardwicke, a family acquaintance, she told Sophy Ruxton that he is 'a gentleman—I don't mean a Gentle=man with a stroke = between it—but a man of a Gentle temper & steady air in his attachment to Richard. But I am sorry he is not a man of Information or abilities—'[101] In this instance, the stroke is the symbol of gentlemanliness, and Edgeworth clearly felt Hardwicke fell short of the intellectual capacities expected of such an individual. In another letter in 1805, she commented on her brother Henry's gentlemanliness, which would accommodate the 'stroke', praising

> your own gentlemanlike spirit—It gives me the most sincere pleasure to see your letters to my father written just as if you were talking to a favorite [sic] friend of your own age & written with that manly simplicity characteristic of

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[100] Butler argues the Percys are 'a stylized representation of the Edgeworth family'. Butler, 'Introduction' to *Patronage*, VI, p. xiv.

[101] ME to Sophy Ruxton, Oct 1795, Edgeworth Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 10,166/7, 133r.

> your mind & manner, from the time you were able to speak.—There is something in this perfect openness & the courage ~~which~~ of daring to be always yourself which attaches more than I can express, more than all the Chesterfieldian arts & graces that ever were practised—[102]

Gentlemanliness is a matter of disposition. The qualities Edgeworth underlines—'manly simplicity', 'openness', and the integrity of his behaviour—are the attributes of the English gentleman. These stand in stark contrast with 'Chesterfieldian arts & graces', which present a polish that has little to do with the principles of sincerity and amiability, a comparison Edgeworth repeatedly makes in her fiction. Like Austen's *Emma*, *Patronage* explores the meaning of true gentlemanliness and finds its ideal embodiment in the 'respectable, enlightened, and useful *country gentleman*' (VI, 55), who teaches the jaded minister Lord Oldborough to value 'the pleasures of domestic life' (VII, 252).[103] Lord Oldborough sees in Mr Percy 'a specimen of a cultivated independent country gentleman' (VII, 14), who is, like Mr Knightley, greatly involved in the management of his estate. Independence, another form of English liberty, is instilled in the next generation, for the Percy sons rise in their professions through hard work and merit rather than nepotism.

Mr Percy's language mirrors his moral principles: it is that of a polite gentleman, combining 'freedom and openness' with the 'respect due' (VI, 19) to his interlocutors. Mr Percy has little regard for 'words of course', which he considers 'the mere *cant* of the polite courtier' (VI, 19). The courtier, in *Patronage* and in *Ormond*,

[102] March 1805 to Henry Edgeworth, Edgeworth Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 10,166/7, 453, 1r.

[103] The Edgeworths themselves held the view that personal, social, and political selves should all be united towards public good. Richard Lovell Edgeworth's position 'as a grand juror, a magistrate, and a country gentleman' motivated him to promote the telegraph system in Ireland in 1796 and 1797. Richard Lovell Edgeworth, *A Letter to the Right Hon. Earl of Charlemont, on the Tellograph, and on the Defence of Ireland* (Dublin: Byrne, 1797), pp. 3-4.

discussed below, is a metonymy for the problems endemic to the public sphere, a criticism that promotes a new ruling class. Although Mr Percy is wrong in this precise instance to doubt Oldborough's sincerity, the courtier stands in the novel as a servile, affected, and manipulative individual, who adopts forms of ceremony, often associated with dissimulation, that obstruct the sincere flow of polite intercourse. Truth and merit are for Mr Percy the badge of 'every honest independent Englishman' (VI, 109). Truth, which 'should always be strong—speaking or acting', is opposed to the 'guarded, qualifying, trimming, mincing, pouncet-box, gentleman-usher mode of speaking truth, [which] makes no sort of impression.' (VI, 108) This distinction assigns masculinity to truth, and implicitly aligns it with simplicity, as it is free from ornament and indirection. Like the Chief Justice, Mr Percy, as well as the rest of his family, practises a sincerity that combines Shaftesburian ease with Addisonian sincerity, offering a politeness that is truthful to English principles while conforming to contemporary notions of refinement and civilisation.

In the opening chapter, a shipwreck interrupts a family evening conversation, introducing the conniving French diplomat Mr de Tourville, whose presence serves to uphold simplicity as a central English quality. This incident illustrates the porousness of the domestic sphere to external political events, since it prompts both a political and a personal intrigue that drive the novel.[104] Having recovered from his ordeal, Tourville appears as 'the very pink of courtesy', in all 'the hypocrisy of politeness' (VI, 11).[105] Tourville is a courtier through and through, his behaviour an affected politeness associated with France, which is opposed to the sincerity of the Percys' plainness and simplicity. This contrast enables Edgeworth, like Austen, to offer a redefinition of

[104] The political intrigue involves Lord Oldborough and the personal intrigue concerns the Percy family.
[105] Recalling Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, *Tatler* 204 applies the phrase to Tom Courtly, a fawning creature who only cares about rank and titles. *Tatler*, III, p. 88.

politeness that accommodates beneficial qualities that might otherwise be termed ‘rude’ and exclude many members of the rising professional classes. This surfaces in Caroline’s comparison between Tourville, ‘always endeavouring to seem, instead of to be’ (VI, 14), with the ‘good English merchant’ Mr Gresham, whom she sees as

> a well-bred, well-informed gentleman, upright, liberal, and benevolent, without singularity or oddities of any sort. His quiet, plain manners, free from ostentation, express so well the kind feelings of his mind, that I prefer them infinitely to what are called polished manners. (VI, 212)

By endowing an English merchant with the qualities that mark a gentleman, Caroline defines politeness along civic humanist lines. Even though the heroine marries an Anglo-German Count as opposed to a middle-class person, which implies a socially conservative position, the recognition of Gresham as a ‘gentleman’ suggests an openness to social change. The correspondence between his manners and his feelings is in this respect significant, as it expresses Edgeworth’s personal understanding of exemplary masculinity. In a letter to Mrs Ruxton, she declared: ‘how much more respectable & amiable a man appears for daring to <u>be</u> what he <u>is</u> than all the dashing airs that ever were assumed’, the stresses mirroring the superiority of sincerity and integrity over a flourished and affected behaviour.[106] That Caroline, a female character, articulates this point demonstrates that women in *Patronage*, through their ability to judge character and identify unaffected simplicity, are instrumental to England’s future, since they reshape gentlemanliness according to personal worth as opposed to social rank or ‘polished manners’.

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[106] ME to Mrs Ruxton, April 1, 1805, Edgeworth Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 10,166/7, 456 2r.

As in many other novels in the period, French is often associated in *Patronage* with cunning and duplicity, while English is the language of simplicity and sincerity.[107] Simplicity is the corrective to the scheming courtier's speech and an effective tool women can utilise against French forces and thus to participate in the ongoing military conflict. When trying to 'draw out [Caroline and Rosamond's] talents for conversation', Tourville is surprised to find 'They did not shut themselves up in stupid and provoking conversation, nor did they make any ostentatious display of their knowledge or abilities' (VI, 13). The Frenchman's anticipation of female speech implies that in European courts and elite circles women use conversation as a parading ground, rather than for true polite exchanges, which the Percy sisters on the other hand exemplify. Caroline, the youngest sibling, is singled out as an embodiment of ideal English femininity:

> Ingenuous, unaffected, and with all the simplicity of youth, there was a certain dignity and graceful self-possession in her manner, which gave the idea of a superior character. She had, perhaps, less of what the French call *esprit*, […] but [Tourville] was the more surprised by the strength and justness of thought which appeared in her plain replies to the *finesse* of some of his questions. (VI, 13)

English plainness, matched with good sense, is opposed to French love of display and polish. Far from being a sign of inferior understanding, Caroline's simplicity and the plainness of her words, like Gresham's 'plain manners, free from ostentation', mark her as an unaffected 'superior character'. The 'strength' of her replies moreover introduces an attribute usually associated with masculinity. Caroline similarly parries

[107] Edgeworth is not anti-French, but the political context in which she wrote *Patronage* dictated, I believe, a certain stereotyping of the French to prove the novel's overall commitment to the British state.

the flattery of the appropriately named Sir James Harcourt, ‘a man of the world and a courtier’ (VI, 150), ‘by simply and steadily adhering to the truth, and going the straight road’ (VI, 161). As mentioned above, truth is marked as masculine, yet Caroline displays this quality without being turned into a Harriet Freke. By endowing a character that is otherwise the epitome of female propriety with masculine attributes, Edgeworth, like Austen in *Pride and Prejudice*, argues for gender equality. An English style is therefore no longer marked as masculine and combative. Unlike Austen, however, Edgeworth also claims an active female contribution to the nation through women’s adherence to simplicity and their assessment of character according to this principle.

Caroline’s plain language symbolically opposes the manoeuvrings of a French ‘chargé d’affaires’ (VI, 9) who will be discovered as the agent of a conspiracy against the minister Lord Oldborough. ‘Finesse’ is not only represented as an attempt to produce the most finely polished and dazzling speech, but also as a manipulation of language that is, in a wartime context, a threat to the state. It is part of those ‘qualities for which there are no precise English words’ (208), according to *Ormond*’s narrator, which suggests the behaviour is foreign to the English character since the English language cannot accommodate it. While ‘finesse’ is not used negatively in *Ormond*, in *Patronage* it represents a threat to Englishness, even to Britishness. Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication*, for example, defined ‘finesse’ as a ‘system of duplicity […] from which naturally flow a polish of manners that injures the substance, by hunting sincerity out of society’.[108] ‘Finesse’ is therefore opposed to the principles on which true British politeness is based. While this suggests an anti-Gallic sentiment, as one might expect from a novel composed during the Napoleonic wars, *Patronage* does not shy away from criticising England, nor is the ideal individual hermetically English,

[108] Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 65.

a point developed below. Nevertheless, simplicity acts as a corrective to English politics' endemic corruption, and offers a symbolic resistance to French armed forces.

Characters' inability to value simplicity in *Patronage*, even though it does not systematically class them as unpatriotic, reflects a lack of understanding of virtue. Titled characters often display this shortcoming, which participates in the novel's argument for the renovation of the ruling classes. When Caroline enters a drawing-room at Hungerford Castle, Lady Angelica Headingham notes Caroline's 'air of simplicity', then expostulates on 'the wonderful charm of simplicity' (VI, 151), only to argue it is inferior to fashion because it is less 'durable' (VI, 152). Conversation is a means of '*exhibiting*' (VI, 157) for Lady Angelica, which goes against the principles of polite sociability. Her Ladyship, moreover, understands simplicity as an aesthetic quality rather than a sign of character. Similarly, the courtier Sir James, to mark his worldly sophistication, deems Caroline 'nothing *marquante*', concluding that 'simplicity had something too *fade* in it, to suit his taste' (VI, 152, 151). Sir James is only concerned with form and ceremony, a courtliness that by the beginning of the nineteenth century no longer stood for Englishness. The use of French to underline his sophistication only serves to emphasise his affected nature. Mr Barclay, who, on the other hand, wishes 'to say something in favor of simplicity', finds himself 'overpowered by wit' (VI, 152), a situation not unlike those experienced by Edward Ferrars or Edmund Bertram. This exchange pits the extravert Lady Angelica and the Frenchified courtier against the more reserved *Milord Anglois*, whose preference for simplicity coincides with his overall 'judgment, prudence, and solid sense' (VI, 166). Despite these qualities, Caroline refuses Barclay's marriage proposal because she does not see in him 'a character at once good and great' (VI, 169), even though his appreciation of Caroline's simplicity marks him as a superior character. While this can

be read as the novel's ultimately conservative position, it can also be read as part of its more daring conception of character, for the heroine's union with the German Count Altenberg 'embodies Edgeworth's preference for a cosmopolitan version of public life', which she carefully negotiates.[109]

Caroline's simplicity therefore makes her the ideal English woman, which generates a certain amount of jealousy among other female characters. Georgiana Falconer, whose ambition is to marry Count Altenberg, is eager to stress that Caroline's 'simplicity of manner' is in fact 'practised' (VII, 47). Georgiana's manoeuvre demonstrates the currency attached to simplicity, on which the Edgeworths themselves placed a high value. In the volume of her father's memoirs that Edgeworth wrote, simplicity appears repeatedly as a sign of superior character. In it she copied a letter from RLE to Thomas Day, in which her father underlined 'the general esteem of mankind, and involuntary respect, which is paid to every virtue that is steadily practised with simplicity'.[110] In the section dedicated to Honora's premature death, Edgeworth declares:

> She was indeed a most uncommon and superior creature. Her beauty was such, that it struck all who saw her. Something of serious simplicity and dignity in her manner added to its effect.[111]

Both extracts demonstrate the superiority of character that simplicity confers on an individual. No virtue, it would seem, is complete without simplicity. It cannot, however, coincide with a sense of performance. To oppose the snide remarks of the condescending Lady Angelica and Sir James, Lady Mary Pembroke rises to Caroline's defence, and exclaims: 'it is the perfection of her accomplishments, that they are never

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[109] Connolly, *Cultural History*, p. 114.
[110] Edgeworth, *Memoirs*, II, p. 100.
[111] *Ibid*., p. 128.

exhibited' (VI, 157). Mrs Hungerford similarly points out that she is 'an uncommon character' because she possesses 'knowledge, understanding, and beauty, without one grain of vanity, affectation, or envy' (VI, 159). Simplicity, which is accompanied with an absence of affectation, is the sign of 'an uncommon character'. Caroline is nicknamed 'the second Honora', underlining her representation of the ideal Englishwoman.[112]

It is precisely Caroline's simplicity that attracts the German hero, Count Altenberg, to her. His attachment supports Hannah More's claim that 'The beauty of simplicity is indeed intimately felt and generally acknowledged by all who have a true taste for personal, moral, or intellectual beauty'.[113] His recognition of Caroline's superiority conversely identifies him as an exemplary figure. His 'high character' is also confirmed by the Countess Christina, who was rescued from the 'labyrinth of the diplomatist' by Altenberg's sincerity (VII, 195), which forwarded her union with the German Prince, thus completing Altenberg's diplomatic duties in the process. 'The plain sincerity of the Count' defeats 'the artful plan of the diplomatist' (VII, 197), who is none other than Tourville. Altenberg is therefore an ideal partner for Caroline, as his practice of 'plain sincerity' marks him as a superior character, whose behaviour is compatible with English principles.

The son of an English mother and a German father, Altenberg has, like many of Edgeworth's protagonists, a hybrid identity. Yet the creation of a European, as opposed to a British, protagonist, is a controversial choice, especially in wartime. As Ó Gallchoir observes, the novel does not elaborate on this hybrid identity and Altenberg is perceived as a foreigner, albeit 'a really polished well bred foreigner' (VII, 36). The narrative

[112] Butler, 'Introduction', VI, p. xiv.
[113] More, *Strictures*, II, p. 132.

regularly demonstrates the hero's allegiance to English values. Altenberg first appears in a letter from Alfred, who records the Count's admiration for 'English law, and British constitution' and his outrage at the practice of press-ganging, an offense to 'English liberty' (VI, 238). The figure of the Count is 'calculated to irritate conservative feeling', since he is 'the embodiment of virtue' and instructs English characters on civic matters.[114] An outsider participates in the renovation of the nation, a controversial point that argues for the recognition of outsider and marginal figures. That England should find its model of the ideal gentleman in a German aristocrat is problematic, especially when his marriage to Caroline introduces the possibility that the heroine might leave the country. His decision to stay in England once his political duties towards Germany are resolved allows Edgeworth to conclude her novel on a hopeful note for the nation: Altenberg will enjoy, 'better than on any spot now in the compass of the civilised world, the blessings of real liberty, and of domestic tranquillity and happiness' (VII, 230). England is still, comfortingly, at the centre of 'the civilised world'.

Despite its many social and political problems, England in *Patronage* is also presented as having the potential to be Europe's leading polite nation. It is indeed to England that Altenberg turns to find his ideal partner. Having stayed at several European courts and encountered many celebrated women, Altenberg never meets one consistent 'with his idea of the perfection of the female character' (VII, 52). Central to this perfection is simplicity:

> In England, where education, institutions, opinion, manners, the habits of society, and of domestic life, happily combine to give the just proportion of all that is attractive, useful, ornamental, and amiable to the female character—in England, Count Altenberg had hopes of finding a woman who, to the noble

[114] Ó Gallchoir, p. 115, pp. 114-15.

> simplicity of character that was once the charm of Swisserland, joined the polish, the elegance, that was once the pride of France; a woman possessing an enlarged, cultivated, embellished understanding, capable of comprehending all his views as a politician and a statesman; yet without any wish for power, or love of political intrigue. Graced with knowledge and taste for literature and science […] yet free from all pedantry, or pretension—with wit, conversational talents, and love of good society, without that desire of exhibition […] without that undefineable, untranslateable French love of *succès de société*, which substitutes a precarious, factitious, intoxicated existence in public, for the safe self-approbation, the sober, the permanent happiness of domestic life. […] Every thing that he had seen of Caroline had confirmed his first hope, and exalted his future expectation. (VII, 52)

Implicit in this extract is the idea that simplicity is now a rare quality in Europe. Simplicity is not inimical to polish, it is in fact the guarantee of a superior polish that is not an exhibition of polite manners but the ideal combination of refinement and an absence of affectation. Sociability is extremely important but must be distinguished from a desire to parade. The use of French '*succès de société*' suggests there are national differences in the understanding of the sociable assemblies that organise the semi-public sphere. As so often in the period, French sociability is associated with dazzle and artifice. Moreover, the Count's definition clearly removes women from the world of politics, even though his ideal partner should have the 'understanding' necessary to master its complexities. This paints a rather passive portrait of women, submissive sounding-boards who should not outshine their partners.

While this distinction might at first suggest *Patronage* argues for women's isolation from the public sphere, the novel in fact challenges this idea by politicising

the home. As Claire Connolly argues, the novel 'endorses a domesticity that can be positively martial in outlook'.[115] This is visible not only in the Falconer household or the 'nocturnal conference' in Lady Trent's apartments (VII, 37) to review strategy and secure a sage 'retreat' (VII, 38), but also within the exemplary Percy domestic circle. The women retire after dinner to 'the female privy council' to discuss Tourville's character, which demonstrates the importance of women's assessment of individuals as civic actions. The metaphor shifts the political terrain into a female setting. In *Patronage*, the salon is as important as a minister's cabinet. It is indeed to Mrs Hungerford's salon, a semi-public space, that Altenberg turns to find his ideal partner. Mrs Hungerford's gatherings are the centre of England's intellectual life. Modelled on the Dublin *salonnière* Lady Moira, who also held the title 'Baroness Hungerford', Mrs Hungerford, 'one who always spoke sincerely' (VI, 133), is noted for her 'domestic virtues', which have ramifications far beyond the home, as well as her preference for sincerity.[116] The narrator outlines her connections which begin with the family and extend outward to encompass 'the affairs of the world' and 'different countries' (VI, 134). Mrs Hungerford's sphere of influence therefore reaches beyond the home. As the words 'relations and connexions' (VI, 134) imply, she is the nexus of the country's social and political comings and goings.

Hungerford Castle functions like Donwell Abbey as an ideal seat of Englishness, a 'fine old place' with 'venerable oaks', an important hub of sociability that can 'accommodate with ease and perfect comfort the *troops of friends* which its owner's beneficent character drew round her' (VI, 149). As discussed in relation to *Sense and Sensibility*, facilitating sociability is an important measure of a character's

[115] Connolly, '"A Big Book about England"?', p. 77.
[116] Amy Prendergast, *Literary Salons Across Britain and Ireland in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 122. See her discussion of Lady Moira, pp. 106-31.

own civic sensibility. The reference to 'troops of friends', a Shakespearean echo, invests friendship and sociability with military force. 'Of noble descent' (VI, 133) and the manager of an estate, Mrs Hungerford nevertheless does not hold a title. The Hungerford family is connected to the army and the navy, one of her sons being a Colonel and the other a Captain, while her daughter is the wife of an Admiral. Mrs Hungerford's concerns for her family are therefore inseparable from concerns for the nation. She is moreover one of the few characters that support the Percy family when they lose Percy Hall. Mrs Hungerford is an example of true politeness, for, in her choice of company, it is 'their conversation, their characters, their merit she looked to' (VI, 135). Mrs Hungerford disapproves of those with 'a little too much affectation' (VI, 135), which emphasises her focus on character as opposed to rank and a superficial polish of manners.

The Hungerford-Mortimer mother-daughter duo, alongside the Percy female circle, offers a positive model of active English femininity, whose role is essential to civic life. Mrs Mortimer's home is an alternative and corrective to the corrupt English public sphere. This younger generation is also the recipient of cultural exchanges, some of which are French: 'In her early youth she had passed some years abroad, and had the vivacity, ease, polish, *tact*, and *esprit de société* of a Frenchwoman, with the solidity of understanding, amiable qualities, domestic tastes, and virtues of an Englishwoman' (VI, 133). Although Edgeworth is careful to assign important English female qualities such as 'domestic tastes', she also underlines more masculine virtues such 'solidity of understanding'. The French continue to be held as models of refinement, which must nevertheless be accompanied by English moral principles:

> Mrs. Mortimer's house in London was the resort of the best company, in the best sense of the word: it was not that dull, dismal, unnatural thing, an English

> *conversazione* […]. This society partook of the nature of the best English and the best French society, judiciously combined: the French mixture of persons of talents and of rank, men of literature and of the world; the French habit of mingling feminine and masculine subjects of conversation, instead of separating the sexes, far as the confines of their prison-room will allow, into hostile parties, dooming one sex to politics, argument, and eternal sense, the other to scandal, dress, and eternal nonsense. Yet with these French manners there were English morals; with this French ease, gaiety, and politeness, English sincerity, confidence, and safety: no *simagrée*, no *espionnage*; no intrigue, political or gallant; none of that profligacy, which not only disgraced, but destroyed the *reality* of pleasure in Parisian society, at its most brilliant era. (VI, 133)

What makes Mrs Mortimer so exceptional is her combination of the best traits of French and English sociability. While the passage assigns morality to the English, it is nevertheless critical of the separation of the sexes in English social gatherings. *Patronage* thus subverts the boundaries between the public and the private, arguing for women's active participation in public life. As in Austen's fiction, the emphasis on character renovates politeness, arguing for a transfer of political power away from elite court circles. The novel also controversially argues for the value of French politeness and sociability. Even though duplicity and cunning are, as in *Emma*, associated with Frenchness, the novel does not reject the benefits of cultural exchanges between the nations, a point Edgeworth developed more fully in her next novel, *Ormond*.

Ormond (1817): Transforming an 'Irish Tom Jones' into a British Gentleman

Ormond, Edgeworth's last Irish novel, creates a British gentleman, the fruit of Gaelic, English, Anglo-Irish, and, most controversially, French educations, thereby

developing her previous representations of a hybrid and polymorphous Britishness, which is fluid and therefore under perpetual construction.[117] Ormond illustrates the fact that 'the terms English, Anglo-Irish, and Irish are not absolute categories, but points upon a cultural continuum with family lineage, religion, class, and political loyalty determining placement.'[118] Written against the clock between January and May 1817, the novel was published a few weeks before her father's death. RLE was nevertheless able to write a preface, in which, addressing 'the British public', he presents *Ormond* as 'the tale of a young gentleman, who is, in some respects, the reverse of Vivian', a character who falls prey to the vices of fashionable life. The address to the 'British public' is a testament to the Edgeworths' commitment to the construction of a shared Britishness. The novel is 'organised as a panoramic, geopolitical bildungsroman' that traces an Anglo-Irish orphan's trajectory 'incorporat[ing] elements of the past into an enlightened future'.[119] The hero's decision to settle on the remote Black Islands with his Anglo-Irish wife, Florence Annaly, is, for some critics, 'an impossible utopia' and 'an appropriation of Gaelic Ireland's cultural past', while, for others, their union invokes an idea of balance between classical republicanism and Gaelic kingship.[120] While this section argues that *Ormond* is a British text, the novel nevertheless encodes Ireland's complex history in order to include the nation's past into British history. 'Ormond' evokes the Butler dukes of Ormond(e), a name that stands for loyalty to the

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[117] For a detailed analysis of the importance of the French language and France to Ormond's development, see Ó Gallchoir's discussion, pp. 132-54.

[118] Julia Anne Miller, 'Acts of Union: Family Violence and National Courtship in Maria Edgeworth's *The Absentee* and Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl*', in *Border Crossings: Irish Women Writers and National Identities*, ed. Kathtyn Kirkpatrick (Tuscaloosa; London: The University of Alabama Press, 2000), pp. 13-37, n. pp. 31-32.

[119] Trumpener, p. 62; Connolly, 'Preface', p. x.

[120] Peter Cosgrove, 'History and Utopia in *Ormond*', in *An Uncomfortable Authority: Maria Edgeworth and her Contexts*, ed. Heidi Kaufman and Christopher J. Fauske (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), pp. 62-83, p. 63; Tracy, *Irishness and Womanhood*, p. 37; Connolly, 'Introduction' to *Ormond*, p. xix. Marilyn Butler offers a more positive interpretation of utopia. Marilyn Butler, 'Edgeworth's Ireland: History, Popular Culture, and Secret Codes', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 34:2 (Spring 2001), pp. 267-92, pp. 286-87.

English crown and for active landlordism as opposed to absenteeism.[121] The name also introduces a 'complex political heritage of a leading Protestant family long identified with the politics of the Catholic interest' and brings back the ghost of Jacobitism.[122] Annaly, 'the medieval and Gaelic name of the Edgeworths' region', recalls the Protestant and Catholic claims to territorial control, and Elizabethan plantation settlements.[123] While some critics argue this marks *Ormond* as a work that legitimises Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, the following discussion suggests the novel is more nuanced.

With its central exploration of what makes the character of a gentleman, an issue Lynch and Solinger have demonstrated was a specifically British concern that coincided with contemporary enquiries into national character, and its examination of women's active participation in forming character, *Ormond* represents a significant contribution to debates on national identity. As in her other works, Edgeworth argues that hybridity and indeterminacy characterise Britishness. Denied 'the education of an estated gentleman' (11), Ormond, who is not the heir to an estate, is a new kind of hero, who displays the 'the common standard of humanity' (28) and thus renovates the figure of the gentleman based on character rather than rank, which allows in part for the emergence of a new ruling class. His identity, as Ó Gallchoir observes, is 'constructed along feminine as well as masculine lines', which suggests that the novel, like *Patronage*, calls for women's active contribution to the public sphere.[124] Edgeworth's novel also celebrates a cosmopolitan outlook, acknowledging 'the special cultural and political circumstances which link Ireland to France', and takes a 'radical approach to the construction of masculine identity, suggesting that the French "art de plaire" still

[121] Tracy, pp. 34-35.
[122] Pittock, p. 180. See also his *Poetry and Jacobite Politics in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 60-62.
[123] Butler, 'More Intelligent Treason', p. 56; Connolly, p. xviii.
[124] Ó Gallchoir, p. 141.

has a role in the perfection of the gentleman', a controversial point even after the end of the Napoleonic wars.[125] British national identity is therefore the result of cultural interactions that go beyond the British Isles. Central to Ormond's development as a gentleman is his ability to distinguish between affected and true politeness, where being and seeming coincide, and simplicity dominates. As in *Patronage*, the gentleman, who favours middle-class values of sincerity and simplicity, is opposed to the courtier, whose focus on outward forms of ceremony, often measured through language, is outdated and harmful to the nation's progress. Like *Patronage*, *Ormond* argues that public good will not be achieved through political reform so much as through the character of citizens, which is assessed according to individuals' politeness, where simplicity and amiability dominate. Women are instrumental to this process, demonstrating their active contribution to the construction of Britishness.

In *Ormond*, Ireland is articulated through its connection to the British Empire. The numerous hybrid identities Edgeworth creates in *Ormond*, as Peter Cosgrove argues, 'complicate the classifications of Irishness and Englishness'.[126] Cosgrove contends that the novel makes a case for Irish hybridity. I would argue that this hybridity is, for Edgeworth, the condition of Britishness. The protagonist receives a number of sometimes competing educations that attest to the plurality that is necessary to the construction of character. Henry Ormond is the son of Captain Ormond, an English officer who left his wife and son behind to make his fortune in India. Born in an Irish cabin, Ormond is first raised by his father's friend the opportunistic Scottish-Irish Protestant Sir Ulick O'Shane, after his mother's death. The two men were in the same regiment, illustrating the power of the army and other national institutions to

[125] *Ibid*., pp. 143, 141,
[126] Cosgrove, p. 62.

assimilate the members of the different nations that form the United Kingdom. Ormond's second guardian is the Catholic Cornelius, otherwise known as 'King Corny', the 'king of the Black Islands' (11), a 'locale of primitive ideality and the practices of ancient landlordism'.[127] Ormond, caught in between these different poles of Irish identity, alternates between his homes at Castle Hermitage and on the Black Islands. As Murray Pittock notes, these estates represent the 'old' and 'new' worlds of Ireland, which mirror Edgeworth's commitment to 'the present race of its inhabitants', as the hero's moral education reaches a 'synthesis of tradition and perfectibility in the Ascendancy'.[128] Young Ormond briefly contemplates a career in the 'British service' (106). Corny confirms his ward will not be joining the Irish brigade, the Irish forces that fought alongside the French in the Austrian succession conflict.[129] This point underlines the novel's commitment to the union between Britain and Ireland. Ormond is further connected to the British Empire when he inherits a small fortune thanks to the deaths of his 'mahogany-coloured step-mother', his father's second wife, and her son, his 'Indian brother' (125). During his formative stay in Paris, Ormond is alternately referred to as '*le bel Anglois*' and '*le bel Irlandois*', which, while it reflects Europeans' inability to differentiate British citizens, also shows Ormond combines, like Colambre Clonbrony, both identities harmoniously. The Irish hero is very much a British hero too.

To construct a British hero, Edgeworth draws on intertextuality to insert her novel within contemporary reflections on the meaning of Britishness. The first text Edgeworth alludes to is Shakespeare's *1 Henry IV*. Ormond is a 'Prince Hal' figure:

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[127] Pittock, p. 181. Corny's death is often read as an elegy to feudal Milesian tradition he represents. See, for example, Trumpener, pp. 62-66. For an alternate reading, see Tracy, pp. 34-38.
[128] Murray Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 181; Trumpener, p. 310, n. 59.
[129] Connolly, *Cultural History*, p. 240, n. 62.

undisciplined in their youths, they both prove themselves suitable national leaders later on.[130] As discussed in relation to *Mansfield Park*, Shakespeare was almost synonymous with Englishness. Shakespearean references are therefore a means for Edgeworth to mark her alliance with English literary tradition and to simultaneously remodel this tradition as British. This concern is evidenced by her focus on her protagonist's development as a gentleman, which is spurred by his reading of English classics, Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749) and Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* (1754-56). Through reading, Ormond learns to appreciate the meaning of being a '*gentleman*' (51), illustrating the importance of literature, and novels in particular, to the construction of British national identity. Ormond first resolves to 'shine forth an Irish Tom Jones' (51), suggesting the need to promote Irish models alongside English ones to achieve a sense of shared national identity. Tom Jones is, however, an inadequate model. It is only when reading *Sir Charles Grandison* that Ormond becomes 'ambitious to be a *gentleman* in the best and highest sense of the word' (56). By connecting her protagonist to popular English literary characters, Edgeworth inserts her novel into the canon, making it not just an Irish, but a British text.

Grandison offers Ormond an example of the need for a gentleman to unite public and private virtues. Ormond finds in Richardson's protagonist 'the character of a man of virtue, as well as a man of honour; a man of cultivated understanding, and accomplished manners', 'fulfilling every duty of his station in society, eminently *useful*, respected and beloved, as brother, friend, master of a family, guardian, and head of a large estate' (56), a description that unites a gentleman's public and private lives. Grandison is the epitome of the polite gentleman, whose private and

[130] Connolly, 'Introduction' to *Ormond*, p. xiv; Hollingworth, p. 198.

public virtues overlap.[131] In 1825, Edgeworth added that 'Ormond has often declared, that sir Charles Grandison did him more good than any fiction he read in his life', which underscores the protagonist's own perception of the novel's formative influence.[132] This book, part of 'an excellent collection' (55) of English and French classics, was sent to Ormond by Lady Annaly. The gift from a female character of literary works vital to Ormond's development as a British gentleman demonstrates the significance of both culture and women's dissemination of it to the construction of British national identity. After reading *Grandison*, Ormond becomes sensitive to 'the perfectibility of man's nature under the tuition of woman' (59), an observation in line with the Enlightenment conception of women's civilising effect.[133] *Ormond*, however, posits an active involvement as opposed to a more passive 'influence', as 'tuition' implies. As seen in *Patronage*, women in Edgeworth's fiction become the arbiters of right character and thus gain public agency.

Lady Annaly and her daughter Florence are instrumental to Ormond's understanding of the meaning of true gentility, and thus actively participate in the construction of British national identity. Lady Annaly is a widow whose character and single-handed management of the family estate 'placed [her] high in public consideration' (9), a phrase that underlines the community's recognition of her private qualities. Although Lady Annaly is no longer officially in charge of the estate, her son Herbert being of age, she and her daughter contribute to the nation by identifying and shaping active citizens. The novel closes on Lady Annaly 'glory[ing] in the full accomplishment of her prophecies' (235), a scene that invites a rereading of the narrative as essentially effected by female agency. As in *Patronage*, women in *Ormond*

[131] Many critics deemed Grandison too perfect and dubbed him 'a faultless monster'.
[132] See *Ormond*, textual variant 56a, p. 247.
[133] Ó Gallchoir, pp. 142-43, makes a similar point.

are arbiters of social and moral worth, a point made clear in their assessment of Ormond's disposition along civic humanist principles. Having met Ormond in Dublin, away from the amoral environment of Castle Hermitage, Lady and Florence Annaly know him to be of 'a generous, good disposition, of natural qualities and talents, which might have made a useful, amiable, and admirable member of society' (23). They do not simply think of Ormond as a good individual but as a 'member of society', the proof that their assessment of character has a public function. That Ormond is 'amiable' is also significant, a point analysed below. Even though Lady Annaly is a titled character, which might indicate the novel's alignment with a strict Ascendancy position, her conception of individual worth is based on merit. This is clearly expressed in her rejection of the notion of fate 'a word that leads us to imagine we are *fated* or doomed to certain fortunes or misfortunes in life' (27), which reveals her view that identity is plastic and character measured in terms of potential. She is, for instance, 'pleased with [Moriarty Carroll's] simplicity and generosity' (26) in his account of the gun wound he received as the result of Ormond's drunken behaviour. While this can be read as Anglo-English condescension toward the native Irish, their 'simplicity' a sign of inferior understanding, in the case of Lady Annaly, it is the recognition of Moriarty's honest disposition.

With its focus on the 'amiable' gentleman, *Ormond* echoes Austen's *Emma*, a novel that similarly analyses in great detail the meaning of true gentility and defines amiability according to clear national lines, as seen in Chapter 2. The heated debate between Emma and Mr Knightley over Frank Churchill's amiability takes place in the final chapter of the first volume, the only volume Edgeworth read.[134] By focusing on a

[134] Austen, who greatly admired Edgeworth's work, famously declaring to her niece Anna Austen 'I have made up my mind to like no Novels really but Miss Edgeworth's, Yours, & my own', sent her a presentation copy of *Emma*. Austen, To Anna Austen, 28 September, 1814, *Letters*, p. 278. Finding that

quality that is associated with Englishness, Edgeworth aligns her characters with English values, which she remodels as British. Edgeworth significantly reworks this scene, setting the discussion of the differences between French and English amiability in a Parisian salon. Having found in Ormond 'much more' than just '*le bel irlandois*' (209), Marmontel is eager to contribute to the young man's Parisian education by encouraging him to believe 'there is such a thing as conjugal fidelity and domestic happiness' (210). Marmontel's voice is given authority through the importance he assigns to domestic happiness, a central feature of Britishness.[135] Debating with the Abbé Morellet where Ormond might find a wife who would share 'his early tastes for simple pleasures and domestic virtues', the two men surmise Ormond will meet his ideal partner 'in his own country' (208-209). Marmontel recalls, in an episode that illustrates the importance of conversation in assessing character:

> '[H]ow eager [Ormond] grew in disputing with Marivaux upon the distinction between *aimable* and *amiable*. His description of an *amiable woman*, according to the English taste, was, I recollect, made *con amore*; and there was a sigh at the close which came from the heart, and which showed the heart was in England or Ireland.' (209)

Even though the narrative, unlike *Emma*, does not clarify the distinction, the emphasis is nevertheless placed on national differences and on the hero's 'English taste'. Edgeworth herself considered amiability was a specifically English characteristic. In an overwritten section in a letter to Mrs Ruxton, Edgeworth explains why she prefers Mrs Ruth to Mrs Power and Mrs Scott: 'I like Mrs Ruth a great deal better than either Mrs Power or Mrs Scott. Mrs Ruth is like an amiable Englishwoman—they like shewy

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there was 'no story in it', Edgeworth abandoned the novel after the first volume, passing on the other two volumes to a friend. Butler, *Literary Biography*, p. 445.

[135] Marmontel, the author of moral tales of domesticity, was an important influence on Edgeworth. RLE possibly met Marmontel. Butler, *Literary Biography*, pp. 155, 60.

agreeable Frenchwomen[.]'[136] Ormond's ability to distinguish between 'aimable' and 'amiable' therefore clearly identifies him as a truly English, and in this case, a truly British gentleman. Marmontel's understanding of Ormond's country as 'England or Ireland' shows that, to an enlightened cosmopolitan mind, the two are interchangeable and equally balanced. While it is important that Ormond ultimately settles in Ireland for a successful representation of Ireland as an equal partner within the United Kingdom, the fact that a foreigner aligns the two argues for fluid mobility between the four nations. Even though French is an important aspect of Ormond's education, the narrative stresses the Britishness of his moral fabric.

It is therefore significant that Lady Annaly refers to reports of his '*success*' (232) in Paris as opposed to '*succès de société*', which, as *Patronage* shows, signifies for Edgeworth a courting of public praise which cannot coincide with a recognition of domestic happiness, an important way in which Englishness, and in *Ormond* Britishness, defines itself. Lady Annaly's use of the English term reveals an understanding that certain traits are culturally specific. The possibility of reconciling domesticity with public matters is, as discussed previously, central to Edgeworth's renovation of the public sphere. To this end, Edgeworth coins in *Ormond* the concept of '*domestic politeness*' (159) to describe the Annaly family, which unites social behaviour, implicit in politeness, with the private sphere:

> He [Ormond] saw the most delicate attentions combined with entire sincerity, perfect ease, and constant respect; the result of the early habits of good-breeding acting upon the feelings of genuine affection. The external polish, which Ormond now admired, was very different from that varnish which often is

[136] ME to Mrs Ruxton, early November 1810, Edgeworth Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 10,166/7, 1r.

hastily applied to hide imperfections. This polish was of the substance itself, to be obtained only by long use; but, once acquired, lasting for ever: not only beautiful, but serviceable, preserving from the injuries of time and from the dangers of familiarity. (160)[137]

Implicit in this description is amiability in its English sense. As 'serviceable' implies, this 'domestic politeness' has public value. The passage, moreover, encapsulates the difficulty of defining true politeness, as the notions of 'polish' and 'varnish' need to be carefully negotiated. As in *Patronage*, a 'noble simplicity' must be joined with 'polish', which must, nevertheless, be in complete correspondence with the internal disposition of the individual. Such is the case of Florence Annaly, whose 'face never expressed any thing but what the mind really felt' and whose countenance is 'so true an index to a noble and cultivated mind' (151). True politeness, therefore, combines manner and feeling. The Annaly family, moreover, illustrates the fact that models of true politeness can be found in Ireland.

The ideal behaviour the Anglo-Irish Annalys represent is not Anglocentric, a position adopted by affected and condescending characters. Lady O'Shane, for example, is the former widow Mrs Scraggs, previously 'confined to London life'; she considers that 'nothing could be right, good, or genteel, that was not English' (7), a prejudice that only serves to stress her vulgarity. *Ormond* contests the English monopoly over gentility, which is often misguided and affected. The novel's criticism of the English is even more pointed in the narrator's explanation that Lady O'Shane had 'been taught to hold [the Irish] in contempt and aversion' (7), a damning proof of the endurance of the English stigmatisation of the Irish. Standing in stark contrast with

[137] Robert Tracy, pp. 46-47, reads this passage as part of 'the racial dimension of her project—the Anglo-Saxon race is substantively different from the Celtic.' While it is undeniable that Ormond is Anglo-Irish and the Annalys are, like the Edgeworths, members of the Protestant Ascendancy, I believe *Ormond* is more sensitive to the Gaelic Irish population than Tracy's reading implies.

the Annalys, Marcus O'Shane, Sir Ulick's son, exemplifies the importance of uniting polish with amiability to coincide with gentlemanly politeness. The negative example of Marcus shows that a productive Anglo-Irish presence does not come at the expense of the local Gaelic population. England, 'a more polished country' according to Ormond, has failed to cure Marcus of his 'cold politeness' (155):

> [T]he external polish he had acquired had not reached the mind: high-bred society had taught him only to be polite to his equals; he was now still more disposed to be insolent to his inferiors, especially to his Irish inferiors. He affected to consider himself as more than half an Englishman; and returning from London in all the distress and disgrace to which he had reduced himself by criminal indulgence in the vices of fashionable, and what he called *refined*, society, he vented his ill-humour on the poor Irish peasants—the *natives*, as he termed them in derision. He spoke to them as if they were slaves—he considered them as savages. (156)

Edgeworth, much like in *An Essay on Irish Bulls*, strongly criticises the abuse of social power exercised in the name of 'refinement'. The misguided education Marcus has received from 'high-bred society' implicitly argues for more socially diverse interactions. Affectation is not Marcus's only fault. His rejection of his Irish heritage clearly argues for the recognition of local culture, which the novel does not equate with primitivism, for the narrative does not support Marcus's view that the Irish are savages.

The practices of the O'Shane family, and Sir Ulick in particular, are those of courtly politeness, which is associated, not only with affectation, but with deceit and therefore an undesirable public presence. Ulick's public actions are, however, self-serving, as he recanted his Catholic faith to advance his political career. A member of the 'courtier tribe' (146), Sir Ulick is driven by ambition, his home at Castle Hermitage

an echo of the home of *The Faerie Queene*'s arch-deceiver Archimago.[138] A 'practised *schemer*' (22), Ulick is an avid reader of Chesterfield's *Letters*, which were synonymous with hypocrisy and immorality. As discussed above, their focus on polish compromises simplicity and distorts language. An 'accomplished courtier' (6), Ulick is a manoeuvrer, a chameleon creature who, 'by bending easily, and being all things to all men, won his courtier way onwards and upwards to the possession of a seat in parliament and the prospect of a peerage' (37). His polish is not 'the substance itself', like the Annalys, but the belief that outward form defines the gentleman. Even though he acknowledges that Marcus is 'terribly dissipated' (127), his character greatly lacking in comparison with the 'warm, generous, grateful temper' and 'natural genius' of 'little Harry Ormond' (11), Ulick 'gloried in the superior polish of his own son' (11). This servitude to a superficial understanding of refinement is even more apparent when, after conceding Marcus is not a gentleman, Ulick says 'but still, when he speaks in parliament, he will make a figure' (127), which illustrates further his investment in polish as opposed to substance. Ulick is not unlike the Ferrars family's desire to see Edmund 'make a fine figure in the world' (*SS*, 118). Public service is a means of self-display, as opposed to civic duty. Ulick's courtliness in fact obstructs polite behaviour. There is, moreover, a 'dearth of conversation' at Castle Hermitage because topics are 'chained up by etiquette' (137). Such an attention to ceremony leads to 'words of course', in contrast with the real conversation of the Annaly circle. Ulick's behaviour is a performance, 'every feature under the courtier's regimen of hypocrisy' (48), which further aligns polish with deception, in a similar way to Mr Elliot's politeness in *Persuasion*.

[138] Hollingworth, p. 199, notes this parallel.

Ulick's polished language is opposed to the simplicity of truth. In a heated exchange between Ulick and Corny, the latter observes that 'the way you parliament gentlemen draw them [acts of parliaments] up, is not always particularly intelligible to plain common sense' (42). Politicians' language is not only deceptive, it is also opposed to a central British principle, that of 'plain common sense'. Discussing the merits of the Cambray sisters, the daughters of a clergyman, Ormond must convince Ulick that he speaks 'the plain truth' (127), a claim that aligns an understanding of conversation as guided by plainness and sincerity. These opposing values are clearly illustrated in the different features of Corny and Ulick's language:

> [N]ow when Sir Ulick and King Corny were left alone together, a dialogue—a sort of single combat, without any object but to try each other's powers and temper—ensued between them; in which the one on the offensive came on with a tomahawk, and the other stood on the defensive parrying with a polished blade of Damascus; and sometimes, when the adversary was off his guard, making a sly cut at an exposed part. (40)

The opposition between the weapons, the tomahawk and the blade of Damascus, the former a native American multi-purpose axe, and the other a carefully designed instrument of combat, symbolises the differences of sophistication between the two men. In terms of eighteenth-century stadial history, Corny is a savage, warm-hearted and impulsive, Ulick a measured, detached, and clear-headed man of the world. While the polished blade at first indicates sophistication, Ulick's use of his weapon is underhanded, as 'sly cut' implies. Corny is a vernacular speaker, in whom some critics see 'an infantilised Gaelic Irish population', the Back Islands a utopia that emanated from 'a coloniser's idealised depiction of a subdued people whom she wishes to keep

in a dependent position.'[139] Yet Corny is also capable of 'a delicacy worthy of the most polished, and little to have been expected from the barbarian mock-monarch' (49), which proves there is more nuance to his character than critics usually allow.

At the heart of Ormond's education as a gentleman is his gradual ability to distinguish between true and affected politeness, in which Corny plays a significant role. Ormond learns to recognise true politeness through language, by contrasting different forms of speech and behaviour that follow the simplicity Blair argues 'shows us a man's sentiments and turn of mind laid open without disguise'. Ormond's stay on the Black Islands is an important preliminary lesson in the meaning of the true politeness that characterises a gentleman. Even though Corny is 'unpolished' (102), he is not 'a relic of the premodern (and not a little ridiculous) Ireland', whose vernacular is a sign of 'backwardness and conservatism' and therefore discredits his speech, but an important voice in the novel's definition of gentility.[140] In his presence, Ormond learns to differentiate between 'that politeness of the heart, which respects and sympathizes with the feelings of others, and that conventional politeness, which is shown merely to gratify the vanity of him by whom it is displayed' (102).

Thanks to Corny, Ormond has 'occasion to compare the real and the fictitious, both in matter and manner' (102). Implicit in this comparison is the opposition between unaffected simplicity and the performance of politeness. This, for instance, surfaces in Corny's belief that his daughter Dora does not need the services of a dancing-master, 'a natural carriage, with native graces, being, in [his] unsophisticated opinion, worth all the dancing-master's positions, contortions, or drillings' (35). Corny is in fact less unsophisticated than he claims. The figure of the dancing-master is a metonymy for a

[139] Tracy, p. 34; Cosgrove, p. 81. See Tracy, pp. 31-49.
[140] Tracy, p. 37; Hollingworth, p. 206.

politeness that is defined by outward show, an image that becomes all the more glaring with Chesterfield's strong presence of in the novel, as noted above, who, according to Samuel Johnson, teaches 'the morals of a whore and the manners of a dancing-master'.[141] Central to the politeness Ormond encounters on the Black Islands is a plain, direct use of language, that guarantees the speaker's sincerity. Corny's 'power of original thinking' and 'power of answering an argument' is opposed to 'throwing old thoughts into new words' and 'the art of evading [an argument] by repartee' (102). 'Repartee' and 'art' both suggest a manipulation of language that aims at sophistication as well as equivocation. The use of French implies Corny's mode of speaking is English, which in the context of the novel, means British.

The 'unpolished' Corny, whom Edgeworth presented as 'a man of extraordinary genius though but half civilized', is paradoxically the unprejudiced arbiter of true British politeness.[142] After meeting Dr Cambray, a Huguenot refugee, Corny, a Catholic, rejoices that the 'sincere minister' is 'a polite gentleman into the bargain' (112):

> Now that's politeness that does not trouble me—that's not for show—that's for *us*, not *himself*, mark!—and conversation! Why that man has conversation for the prince and the peasant—the courtier and the anchorite. […] Now there's a man of the high world that the low world can like[.] (112)

Conversation, acting as a mirror of character, establishes the politeness of the gentleman. Dr Cambray is a true polite gentleman, whose conversation is not 'show' or 'repartee' but adapts itself to its interlocutors, regardless of their station in life, which is radically different from Marcus's condescending attitude towards 'the *natives*'.

[141] See Chapter 1.
[142] ME to Mrs Ruxton, 5 February 1817, quoted in Connolly, 'Introductory Note' to *Ormond*, p. xii.

Moreover, what matters to Corny is not the Doctor's religion or his nationality but that 'this man's a gentleman' (109), underlining the importance of this concept. Such a focus follows the civic humanist principles Edgeworth's fiction represents. It is also a means of redressing Ireland's internal divisions. The Protestant cleric collaborates with the Catholic Father M'Cormuck to manage a school that welcomes both Protestant and Catholic children, like Mr and Mrs Burke's establishment in *The Absentee*. *Ormond* therefore argues for a unity based on character.

The Cambray family are instrumental in Ormond's education as a gentleman. The narrative stresses their amiability, which, as argued above, functions as an important sign of politeness. At Vicar's Dale, Ormond 'soon forgot he was a stranger' (120), a significant point, for it introduces the possibility of redressing one of the 'Evils of Ireland' Edgeworth identified.[143] Ormond had first met the cleric in Dublin and found him 'a very agreeable, respectable, amiable man' (109), qualities he also observes in his daughters, 'both very amiable, very handsome, and very agreeable' (127). Cambray's 'persuasive benevolent politeness' (112) never fails to please the company he is in, 'even those who were of opposing opinions' (112). The Doctor, who becomes Ormond's counsellor after Corny's sudden death, encourages the young man to 'make [himself] something more and something better than [he is]' once he has 'acquired the fortune of a gentleman' (129), which shows his determination that Ormond acquire the character of a gentleman. The Cambrays are drawn to Ormond by his 'simplicity mixed with humour and good sense' (131), traits that convey his potential to be transformed into a gentleman. Although the narrative does not explicitly underline the family's own adherence to simplicity, this quality is implicit in the fact that Dr Cambray is 'one of

[143] The document entitled 'Evils of Ireland' cites 'Difference of religion. Catholics <u>can</u> [inserted] should have equal rights. But must not have a <u>dominant</u> religion.' MS Misc. Eng. 897, 50r-v.

those simple characters' (127-28) that puzzle the courtier Sir Ulick. Rather than suggesting the Doctor's inferiority, this inability to value simplicity reflects Ulick's affected nature and his unsuitability as a tutor for Ormond.[144]

If the title of gentleman bypasses religious differences, it is also distinct from social rank. Moriarty Caroll, whom Ormond wounded in a fit of drink and passion at the beginning of the novel, becomes Ormond's ally and contributes to his education as a gentleman. Even though Moriarty speaks in the vernacular, his observations are not discredited. Like Corny, Moriarty points to the difference between 'the real and the fictitious' when White Connal, 'with the best coat in Christendom, has not the look of a gentleman at-all at-all, nor hasn't in him, inside no more than outside' (65). The coat as a symbol of rank recalls young Garry Owen's comment on the distinction between a man and a gentleman. Moriarty's emphasis on 'inside' reflects the importance of 'substance' to the making of a gentleman. Again, a complete correspondence between internal and external beings is needed to deserve the name of gentleman. White Connal is no 'jantleman' (66) in Moriarty's opinion because ''Tis little the man thought of the country that never thought of anything but himself' (66). While Ormond's correction of Moriarty's English can be read as part of Tracy's identification of Ormond's 'paternalistic relationship towards Carroll' and the novel's overall infantilising of the Gaelic Irish population, the Irishman's response 'No matter—I'm no spaker' (66) can, on the other hand, be interpreted as an autonomous declaration that his language is that of plain truth.[145]

Pittock argues that 'the novel ends on rather a muffled note', seeing in Ormond's return to the remote Black Islands a return into the primitive past the

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[144] *Harrington*, *Ormond*'s companion piece, makes a similar point when Lord Mowbray, a 'man of wit', is 'puzzled and provoked' Miss Montenero, 'a character of genuine simplicity'.
[145] Tracy, p. 39, pp.

narrative extinguished with Corny's death.[146] Yet the protagonist's decision to settle on the Black Islands can be read in a more positive light. Whereas other characters such as the anglicised Marcus O'Shane, 'that thing, half mud, half tinsel, half Irish, half French, miss, or mademoiselle, O'Faley, that jointed doll' (121), or the Frenchified White Connal, spurn their Irish connection in the belief that it elevates them, Ormond does not reject his Irish heritage. Ormond will not be an absentee landlord. Concerned that '[h]e should hurt no one's feelings by this purchase', Ormond's motives are those of a polite amiable gentleman. Whereas the prospect of 'civilizing the people of the Islands' (234) can appear as the expression of colonial rule, Ormond's decision to settle on the Black Islands can also be seen as the belief that a marginal space can become a nodal point for British progress, perhaps renovating the corrupt English public sphere identified in *Patronage*.

Conclusion

Language is for Edgeworth, as for Austen, an important index of character. While the English language is a tool that can unite it remains the language of the coloniser, a point Edgeworth remains highly aware of. Though not a writer of Irish, Edgeworth remains sensitive to the fact that the English language, while a tool that unites the different nations of the United Kingdom, as the 'Bath Coach Conversation' between an Irishman, a Scotsman, and an Englishman in *An Essay on Irish Bulls* illustrates, is not the native language of Irish people. To redress the unequal partnership of the Union, Edgeworth challenges English hegemony over the English language. Having demonstrated the diversity of speakers of English, Edgeworth then convincingly argues for the hybridity of Britishness. Her protagonists are British

[146] Pittock, p. 182.

heroes, defined as such by their practice of plainness and simplicity. For Edgeworth, however, national identity is not hermetically sealed and benefits from the input of outsiders and marginal individuals. Women, as liminal beings, are central to her reformation of the public sphere. Despite her claims to the contrary, Edgeworth did not shy away from the 'machinery' of state, as discussed below in Chapter 5, but criticised its inner workings. By promoting the figure of the gentleman, whose status is granted by internal qualities, over that of the courtier, with women as the arbitrators of character, Edgeworth offers a nuanced and astute critique of British society.

Chapter 4

'Truth & Simplicity': Sole Recommendations of the Stranger Within in Frances Burney's Journals and Fiction

> *Children—Religion*, *Friends*,
>
> *Country*, *Character*—what on *Earth* can compensate for the loss of all these?[1]

In her opening address to 'Nobody', Burney constructs her journal as a space of 'the most unremitting sincerity', for 'No secret *can* I conceal from No-body'.[2] The journal is positioned in opposition to the outside world, governed by secrecy and dissimulation. Even as it posits privacy and complete openness, the journal also betrays an understanding of the vulnerability of the private utterance. Reflecting on the value of her writing, Burney comments:

> How truly does this Journal contain my real & undisguised thoughts—I always write in it according to the humour I am in, & if any stranger was to think it worth reading, how capricious […] I must appear […] No matter! it's [sic] truth & simplicity are it's sole recommendations[.][3]

'Truth & simplicity' are enough to confer merit upon the young Burney's early writing. Yet, the presence of a stranger hovers over the text, a shadow the journals and letters never fully cast away. Ostensibly private, Burney's journals and letters should be treated as deliberate exercises in self-fashioning.[4] She regularly returned to and revised some of her entries, sometimes more than ten or twenty years after the event, which thus demand to be treated as performative and narrativised representations.[5] Memoirs

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[1] Frances Burney to Hester Thrale, quoted in Doody, *Life*, p. 162.
[2] Frances Burney, *Early Journals and Letters*, I, p. 2.
[3] *Ibid*., p. 61.
[4] The first reappraisal of Burney as a diarist, asking that her private writing be read as carefully crafted pieces, Lorna Clark's excellent analysis of the court journals. Lorna Clark, 'Frances Burney's Methods of Narrating the Court Experience', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 40:2 (2017), pp. 223-35.
[5] Analysing Burney's Parisian 'scriblerations', the pocket diaries, notebooks, and exercise books too readily overlooked by critics, Peter Sabor notes their regular revising and reworking. Peter Sabor, 'Journal Letters and Scriblerations: Frances Burney's Life Writing in Paris', in *Women's Life-Writing,*

and private correspondence were frequently published after an author's death, which surely influenced Burney's method in her private writing. Private letters were, moreover, often circulated within social circles, which further complicates their identification as purely private utterances. The journals and letters are a space in which Burney explores her understanding of her identity as an Englishwoman, a question that becomes even more significant after her marriage to the French émigré General Alexandre d'Arblay in 1793 and her ten-year exile in Paris at the height of the Napoleonic wars. Burney's letters from France bare traces of self-censorship, reflecting the fears that private letters contained seditious content or national information. The letters therefore conceal as much as they reveal. To protect herself and her family while expressing her affection and concern for her native country, Burney developed an elaborate way of conveying her and her family's British identity, which she partly articulated through repeated references to simplicity.

Women, Truth, and Simplicity

In 1794, an 'Essay on Taste and Elegance', appeared in both *The Lady's Magazine* and *The Scots Magazine*. Printed with differences only in the paragraphing and the titles, the essay discusses the social benefits of elegance, which connected to 'the feelings of the mind', combines 'polish of manners' and 'humanity of behaviour'.[6] Elegance must, however, be controlled, as it is 'apt to degenerate into 'uxury and dissipation', which caused the Romans to lose 'their ancient simplicity, their liberty,

1700-1850: Gender, Genre, and Authorship, ed. Daniel Cook and Amy Culley (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 71-85.

[6] 'Essay on the Refinements of Taste and Elegance', *The Lady's Magazine; Or, Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex* 25 (April 1794), pp. 183-85, p. 183; 'On Taste and Elegance', *The Scots Magazine* 56 (June 1794), pp. 323-23, p. 322.

their virtue.'[7] The British must 'take care not to lose sight of simplicity'.[8] Ostensibly aimed at women, the essay rehearses a familiar idea in the period: 'Simplicity is the native dress of truth: and a sincere love of the latter is seldom without a taste for the former.'[9] Simplicity is not simply a matter of aesthetics, it is also, as the quotation above illustrates and the previous chapters have demonstrated, a moral and political issue. If truth is strongly connected to simplicity in the British imagination, then secrecy represents a particularly problematic area for simplicity, especially for women. Secrecy obscures the channels of authenticity, requires the true self to be concealed, and therefore risks jeopardising a character's simplicity. Even when they display unaffected simplicity, women are always suspected of duplicity and treachery. The two categories of individuals who blur the channels of sincerity are women and politicians. When a woman is accused of being a politician, she doubly corrupts sincerity. She becomes an other who imperils the nation.

The secret woman is the other who represents the greatest threat to the British state. In his recent study, David Simpson demonstrates the ways in which the figure of the stranger haunts the late Georgian era. The most dangerous other was not the identifiable foreigner but the unsuspected stranger next door: 'The designated enemy of the state was not so much or not only the foreigner but the stranger within, all the more credible for being unseen and unpredictable. […] Categories become confused: domestic and foreign, strange and familiar, friend and enemy, unremarkable and uncanny lose their usefulness in a world where any one of them can look its other or turn into its other.'[10] This is particularly problematic for women who, as Leslie Fiedler

[7] *Ibid*., p. 184; p. 322.
[8] *Ibid*., p. 184; p. 323.
[9] *Ibid*., p. 184; p. 323.
[10] David Simpson, *Romanticism and the Question of the Stranger* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 22.

argues, are ‘the original other’.[11] As such, women represent a threat to the nation and must constantly negotiate this identification as ‘other’ by proving their allegiance to the state. Often synonymous with deceit and concealment, women’s sincerity, that cornerstone of British identity, is continually questioned. Female secrecy, especially problematic when national security is under threat, as in the revolutionary period and the Napoleonic wars, or at times of civil unrest, such as the years leading to the Great Reform Act of 1832, becomes a particular area of controversy, as it escapes state machinery. Women have no recognised political identity, yet are instrumental in implementing national character, which makes them the most vulnerable as well as potentially the most subversive members of society. Women are marginal and liminal entities, ‘borderline citizens’, on the threshold between home and state. To conceal their otherness, women mask their politics by advocating simplicity and sincerity, moral qualities that are fundamental to British identity.

Politics are, in the late Georgian period, associated with deception, cunning, and secrecy, as had been the case in previous eras. Samuel Johnson defined a politician as ‘a man of artifice; one of deep contrivance’.[12] The figure most associated with cunning and dissimulation to achieve political aims is perhaps Lord Chesterfield, whose letters to his son, which provided advice on how to progress through his diplomatic career, became shorthand for hypocrisy. Chesterfield informed his son that, to succeed in ‘the world’, a ‘command […] of our countenance’ should be adopted, as should the maxim ‘*volto sciolto e pensieri stretti*’.[13] The authentic and sincere self is veiled here. Politics imply secrecy and corrupt the channels of sincerity, which threatens Britishness and national cohesion. Women are considered to be naturally deceptive creatures, so any

[11] Fiedler, quoted in Simpson, p. 209.
[12] Samuel Johnson, *Dictionary*.
[13] ‘An open countenance and thoughts restrained’. This is not found in Machiavelli’s *The Prince* but in a letter from Henry Wootton to John Milton, on *Comus*. *Lord Chesterfield’s Letters*, note pp. 398-99.

accusation of political involvement only serves to redouble this image. Women were the most vulnerable when it came to political associations, since they were already charged with deceit. Women's language was often considered artful, and therefore not simple. Jenny Davidson, discussing the ambiguities of '[*Pamela*'s] preoccupation with the ethics of deception', notes in her examination of the heroine's 'neutrali[sation]' of the term 'Intriguer' that Mr B. considers her an 'able politician'.[14] When Richardson's Mr B. is outraged at the thought of being Pamela's 'play-thing', he constructs her as a secret politician who might contaminate the country: 'the *artful Creature* is enough to corrupt a Nation by her seeming Innocence and Simplicity; and she may have got a Party, perhaps'.[15] Simplicity is here a tool that the female politician uses to hoodwink people of her intentions. The female politician compromises the simplicity that is so fundamental to British femininity.

This chapter explores Frances Burney's ambiguous position as a 'borderline citizen', whose personal trajectory required her to adopt the mask of secrecy that compromises simplicity. Burney's writing, both public and private, is conditioned by her awareness of the reception of her work as an English author and as a female author, who should not interfere with politics. Especially after her marriage to the French émigré General Alexandre d'Arblay, Burney is, like Edgeworth, an in-between figure, caught between her loyalty to her native country and her new ties to Britain's enemy. She must therefore mask her allegiances, which she can nevertheless convey through simplicity. Burney's work offers powerful instances of the difficulties of articulating national identity. This chapter discusses Burney's representations of a fractured self in her journals and her final novel *The Wanderer*.

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[14] Davidson, p. 127.

[15] Samuel Richardson, *Pamela; Or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), ed. Thomas Keyner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 162.

‘Fanny Burney’ or ‘Madame d’Arblay’?

When she married d’Arblay in 1793, Burney knew she risked losing ‘Country and Character’ in the process, as she had warned Hester Thrale would be her fate should she marry Gabriel Mario Piozzi, an Italian music master.[16] In her preface to *Evelina* for the *British Novelists* (1810), Barbauld regretted that ‘this lady [Burney] by marriage with a foreigner, and her residence abroad, is in a manner lost to this her native country […] [T]he English public cannot but regret an expatriation which so much lessens the chance of their being again entertained by her’.[17] The preface to the 1833 American edition of the *Memoirs of Doctor Burney* complained that ‘to those who are familiar with her early writings as Miss Burney, it will be a little astonishing to observe the awkward stiffness of her paragraphs’ in the *Memoirs*.[18] It is almost as if Burney lost her literary powers after her marriage to d’Arblay. The union represents a shift in Burney’s understanding of her own identity. It introduces a sense of dislocation, which her private writing, as well as her final novel reflect. The journal-letter of her journey from Brussels to Trèves in 1815, rewritten in 1824-25 as an address to her then dead husband, records ‘the same peremptory demand of who & what I was’, and Burney’s constant and arduous negotiation of her French and English identities. When a Prussian officer in Cologne examined her passport and inquired if she was French, Burney recalls an intense sense of confusion: ‘French, by marriage, though English by birth, I hardly knew which to call myself: I said, however, *“oui.”*’[19] The incident captures Burney’s

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[16] Doody, *Life*, p. 201.

[17] Anna Laetitia Barbauld, ‘Miss Burney’, Preface to *Evelina* in *British Novelists*, XXXVIII, pp. i, xi.

[18] Frances Burney, *Memoirs of Dr Burney* (Philadelphia: Key & Biddle; Boston: Allen & Ticknor, 1833), p. iv.

[19] Journey to Trèves, 1815, *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney (Madame d’Arblay), 1791-1840*, ed. Joyce Hemlow et al., 12 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972-84), VIII, p. 494. All further references to Burney’s journals and letters are to this edition and referenced as *J&L* and by volume.

feeling of in-betweenness and fractured self. The decision to retain the use of French in her response might be a way for her to suggest she had not naturalised this French identity. Her inability to reply is also an act of resistance to male injunctions—in both instances, the requests to identify herself come from male figures of authority—, the suggestion that 'who & what' she is can never be fully fixed.

The extent of Burney's reflection on the process of national identity has not yet been fully examined. This chapter, which discusses Burney's secret politics, argues that Burney's journals and letters, read alongside *Brief Reflections Relative to the Emigrant French Clergy* (1793) and *The Wanderer* (1814), represent an important contribution to the construction of British national identity. While she openly denied any political engagement, Burney's work is invested in how what we today call ideology shapes individuals and how the demands of the state and public life infiltrate the realm of the private self. Burney's journals and letters and her final novel *The Wanderer* (1814) are read as the production of an author conscious of her state as other, first through her gender, and subsequently through her personal history. Burney was a loyal monarchist and a fervent patriot, but her relationship with d'Arblay forced her to question some of her assumptions and transformed her into a 'stranger within'. Her expatriation and marriage to an émigré, as well as the birth of her son Alexander, are additional layers to her status as 'borderline citizen'. Burney's writing, both private and fictional, explores this 'borderline' position, which destabilises the boundaries between the personal and the political, the public and the private. Greater fluidity allows for a greater, and unnoticed, sphere of action, which is why secret female politicians are so dangerous.

Since the revival of interest in Burney's work, modern critics have debated the nature of her politics, seeing her, much like Austen, variously as a conservative or a

progressive writer, or without any 'worries about the French revolution, or the crashing struggle of the Napoleonic wars'.[20] Studies usually address Burney's feminism. Julia Epstein argues for a clear 'feminist ideological critique', while Claudia Johnson is more circumspect, cautious of 'overstat[ing] Burney's confidence as a social critic as if she were Wollstonecraft's ideological sister'.[21] Burney, in Johnson's reading, is 'distinctive precisely for her retreat from the oppositional.'[22] Brian McCrea has more recently contended that politics do not feature in Burney's writing. For McCrea, critics apply a postmodern understanding of the word 'political', arguing that 'the political is the personal', when in Burney's case, 'the personal is the personal'.[23] Deborah Weiss reminds us that Richard Polwhele includes her among the few 'women writers who are not "unsex'd"', suggesting that Burney was not infected by 'the political storm' or the 'phantom-form' of philosophy, thus supporting McCrea's point.[24] Margaret Anne Doody, on the other hand, has always underlined the political nature of Burney's writing. Even though 'in the limited sense sometimes accorded to the word "politics", Burney had none', she, nevertheless, 'as a writer has a deeply political imagination'.[25] It is my contention that Burney not only had a deeply political imagination, but a British one as well. Officially 'Madame d'Arblay' when tensions between Britain and France were at their highest, Burney's writing responds in striking ways to the personal conflicts historical and political events imposed on her.

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[20] Winston Churchill, quoted in *The Cambridge Companion to* Pride and Prejudice, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 177.
[21] Julia Epstein, *The Iron Pen: Frances Burney and the Politics of Women's Writing* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1989), p. 95; Claudia Johnson, *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s, Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Burney, Austen* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 144. See also Joanne Cutting-Gray, *Woman as 'Nobody' and the Novels of Fanny Burney* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1992).
[22] Johnson, *Equivocal Beings*, p. 144.
[23] Brian McCrea, *Frances Burney and Narrative Prior to Ideology* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2013), p. 82.
[24] Deborah Weiss, *The Female Philosopher*, p. 259; Polwhele, *The Unsex'd Females*.
[25] Margaret Anne Doody, 'Frances Burney and Politics', in *The Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney*, ed. Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 93-110, p. 95.

Burney's earliest novel, *Evelina*, reveals an interrogation of the role national identity plays in the development of character and in forming a community. *Evelina* should indeed be read as a more 'British' novel than is usually accepted.[26] As discussed in Chapter 1, the characters of Captain Mirvan and Madame Duval are test cases for the limits of nationalist discourse. Mirvan 'embod[ies] an absolutist mode of patriarchal autocracy, appalling in its primitive tyranny, unfettered and unclouded by any "affectations" of civility and politeness.'[27] As for Madame Duval's Frenchness, it is not the expression of the novel's Francophobia but a satire on middle-class aspirations. 'Rather than simply opposing a debased Frenchness to an idealized Englishness', as Juliet Shields points out, '*Evelina* contrasts these equally parochial and exclusive identities to a more inclusive British identity characterized by complaisance.'[28] *Evelina*, moreover, offers 'one of the earliest sympathetic Scottish characters in a novel by an English author' with the figure of young Macartney, an 'unfortunate North Briton' (190) who is in fact Evelina's relative.[29] The novel is British not simply in its invocation of sympathy as a means of promoting greater understanding between the nations, but also in its demonstration of the interconnections between British citizens. It is the heroine Evelina, the inheritor of an interconnected lineage, who acts as a powerful agent towards forming the British nation. Her 'genuine simplicity' and 'guileless sincerity' (338) mark her as British heroine. Evelina's status as borderline citizen allows her to expose the limits of narrow national attachments. It confers on her a fluidity that can accommodate the multiplicity of Britishness.

[26] Juliet Shields, pp. 95-103, also discusses this overlooked dimension of Burney's novel.
[27] Erin Mackie, *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates: The Making of the Modern Gentleman in the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), p. 159.
[28] Shields, p. 97.
[29] *Ibid*., p. 99. According to Shields, Macartney performs his Scottishness, an obstacle to the complaisance Shields identifies as the bond of Britishness.

Burney's position as a 'British' author needs to be examined further. Her genealogy already predisposed her to think beyond a narrow view of essential Englishness or a simplistic understanding of national identity. Her family history, however, illustrated the cultural and social hegemony of Englishness. Her father Charles Burney was of Scottish descent. Born Macburney, the family dropped the 'Mac', at a time when, as the Victorian editor and first Burney scholar Annie Raine Ellis plainly remarks, '"Macs", whether Scottish or Irish, were anything but popular in an England that was still English'.[30] This decision is arguably part of Dr Burney's self-fashioning as a polite gentleman. Although the Burneys were close to the royal family and moved in high social circles, they belonged to the rising professional middle classes. They were not landed gentry and relied financially on Dr Burney's career as organist, composer, and leading music historian. 'If Charles Burney, the musician, had converted himself into a scholar and thereby made himself a gentleman, his trajectory was representative—a signal of the fluidity and malleability of English society at the end of the eighteenth century and at the same time of how critical was his status on the very cusp of the genteel'.[31] Englishness was central to this genteel self-fashioning. Burney's mother was after all French and her grandmother a 'pious Roman Catholic'. As such, 'Frances was not perfectly English, or rather British'.[32] She later married d'Arblay, an émigré and therefore a Catholic, who had moreover served under Lafayette, a leading military figure of the American War of Independence, at the height of the French Revolution. D'Arblay considered taking on English citizenship but relinquished the plan because of his faith, even though, according to Burney, d'Arblay

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[30] Doody, *Frances Burney*, p. 11; Annie Raine Ellis, 'Introduction' to *Evelina* (London: Bell and sons, 1881), p. vii.
[31] John Wiltshire, '"The Inimitable Miss Larolles": Frances Burney and Jane Austen', in *A Celebration of Frances Burney*, ed. Lorna Clark (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), pp. 218-26, p. 221.
[32] Doody, *Life*, p. 23.

considered the differences between the two religions trifling.[33] Their son Alexander was brought up Protestant: 'it was M. d'Arblay's own wish, since he was an Englishman *born*, he should be an Englishman *bred*'.[34] This is only one of the many instances in which Burney constructs d'Arblay as an Englishman by disposition.

Burney was introduced from a very young age to the world of politics through her father's extensive network. The political was thus real: she was not simply reading Burke's *Reflections*, for instance, she conversed with him on a regular basis as well. One might argue that she uncritically embraced the view of the prominent Tory figures with whom she was acquainted. Burney did declare herself 'always a friend to Burke' but, as Doody observes, her novel *Cecilia*, for instance, argues for political reform.[35] Burney was highly alert to the role women could play in politics. I argue that her friendship with Hester Thrale and her acquaintance with Germaine de Staël awakened her to the 'power of the petticoat'.[36] Her time at court reinforced the idea of the political made flesh and the inseparable connection between the personal and the national. Finally, her marriage to the French émigré Alexandre d'Arblay and the unfolding of conflicts between Britain and France led her to deeply question the meaning of national identity. Burney nevertheless undertook this exploration as a secret female politician.

[33] The other available option was to be naturalised as Irish. See Court Journal for Susanna Phillips, 21-13 February 1798, *J&L*, IV, pp. 77-78. Burney reports a conversation with the Queen on the subject of their son's upbringing and d'Arblay's own views on the subject of religion. Burney might have wanted to downplay d'Arblay's 'Papism'.
[34] Court Journal for Susanna Phillips, 21-13 February 1798, *J&L*, IV, p. 77.
[35] *Ibid*., p. 100.
[36] This phrase is borrowed from Kathryn Gleadle and Sarah Richardson (eds.), *Women in Politics, 1760-1860: The Power of the Petticoat* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

Not ‘a *feminine* subject’: Burney’s Early Lessons in Women’s Political Interference

Frances Burney grew up in a politically active coterie, conversing with figures such as Burke, Samuel Johnson, and Charles Fox, as well as the radical John Wilkes, yet her journals are at times a performance to mask her political curiosity. They record many conversations in which she fiercely objected to any involvement or even the slightest interest in politics, which I believe are a strategy to construct herself as a proper lady and avoid critical censure. As Jocelyn Harris wryly observes, ‘[w]omen writers, especially after the French Revolution, were smartly slapped down for putting their heads above the domestic trench.’[37] There were therefore strong pressures on women (writers) to publicise their apolitical inclinations. In 1789, Burney happily conversed with Wilkes on the French Revolution, ‘a great deal of Ireland, and enlarged my political knowledge abundantly’.[38] On another occasion, she and the reformed democrat Arthur Young ‘spoke only of French politics’.[39] In other entries, however, Burney painstakingly asserts her ignorance and indifference to political matters. Speaking to the Whig MP William Windham in 1790, she was extremely anxious to showcase her bewilderment when receiving the Irish MP John Courtenay’s *Philosophical Reflections on the Late Revolution in France*, insisting ‘I read and inquire so little into politics’, a comment that can only be called disingenuous at best.[40] This outcry occurs after Windham is successively ‘silent’, ‘curious’, then ‘grave’, as if Burney interpreted his non-verbal reactions as expressions of doubt over her stated

[37] Jocelyn Harris, *Satire, Celebrity, and Politics in Jane Austen* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2017), p. 148.
[38] November 1789, *Diary and Letters of Madame D’Arblay*, ed. Charlotte Barrett, 7 vols. (London: Colburn, 1842-46), V, p. 76.
[39] To Susanna Phillips, October 1792, *J&L*, I, p. 233.
[40] Letter to Mrs F---, Queen’s Lodge, June 11, 1790, *Diary and Letters of Madame D’Arblay*, V, p. 140.

opposition to the French Revolution.[41] It is only after Burney, possibly at her wits' end, explains that 'All my fear, […] is that he [Courtenay] thinks me a rebel at heart', that Windham confirms his knowledge that she is not a friend of the Revolution. The hyperbole is surely a display of acceptable femininity, the common tactic of stressing an apolitical disposition that Craciun and Lokke, among others, have identified. Only then does Burney move on to another topic. By narrating this exchange at length, Burney protects her private reputation as non-political. Her performance of female propriety preserves her secret political curiosity.

It was equally important that she screen her published works from suspicions of political content, regardless of their political position. Written in the aftermath of the French Revolution, *Camilla* (1796) is conspicuously silent on contemporary politics. References to France are studiously avoided and there are no French characters, Frenchified fops, or even French dances, which mirrors the tense political atmosphere of the era. As Gary Kelly notes, 'for a novel of 1796 to omit any reference to the events and controversies of this revolutionary decade was not unusual.'[42] There is, however, one allusion to the contemporary political climate in the novel that sheds some light as to why Burney should have been so anxious to publicly display political disengagement. When Camilla is shocked at her brother's swearing, Lionel retorts: 'you would, that mince out all your words as if you were talking treason, and thought every man a spy that heard you'.[43] This refers to the fear of French spies that led to the Gagging Acts of 1795. Lionel's comment can be read as Burney's own anxieties and her sense of 'gagging' her writing. She assured the royal princesses that *Camilla* contained no politics:

[41] *Ibid*., pp. 139, 140.
[42] Kelly, *English Fiction*, p. 47.
[43] Frances Burney, *Camilla; Or, A Picture of Youth* (1796), ed. with an introduction and notes by Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 385.

> I now explained that *Politics* were, *all ways*, left out: that once I had had an idea of bringing in such as suited *me*,—but that, upon second thoughts, I returned to my more native opinion they were not a *feminine* subject for discussion, & that I even believed, should the little work sufficiently succeed to be at all generally read, it would be a better office to general readers to carry them wide of all politics, to their domestic fire sides, than to open new matter of endless debate.[44]

The italics Burney opts for highlight the gender issue of political involvement. This declaration can at first be somewhat depressing to the modern reader: not only does she confess political disengagement, but fiction appears here as a way of numbing the masses, distracting them from social questions. There might, however, be another way of reading Burney's declaration: if one considers that domesticity is at the heart of patriotic politics, then Burney takes on the role of secret politician that many other female writers endorsed. Having reassured her acquaintance that her work is politically 'safe', Burney could then quietly go on with her political agenda.

Burney's entrance into the royal household in 1785 as Second Keeper of the Queen's Robes, a position she occupied until 1791, usually noted by scholars for its psychological and physical cost on the author, also marks a turning point in her understanding of politics and the nation.[45] Britain is no longer an abstract entity but is made incarnate in the royal family, and in the king's body especially. A closer acquaintance with the royal family also taught Burney that public and private matters were strongly interconnected. Two events underline the very real connection between the monarch's body and the body politic, as well as the role women could play in national issues. The first incident was Margaret Nicholson's attempted assassination of

[44] *J&L*, III, pp. 185-86.
[45] Burney was incredibly frank about her experience of the tyranny of court life and the cruelty of the first Keeper of the Queen's Robes, Mrs Schwellenberg. See Doody, Epstein, Thaddeus.

George III in August 1786.[46] Nicholson's attack might have prompted Burney to become more aware of 'the power of the petticoat'. This public incident entered the privacy of the queen's lodgings when her majesty read the newspaper reports at her 'toilette', an intimate space:

> The Queen had her newspapers as usual; & she read aloud, while her Hair was Dressing, several interesting articles, concerning the attack, the noble humanity of the King, his presence of mind, & the blessing to the whole nation arising from his preservation. The spirit of loyalty, warmth, & zeal, with which all the news-papers are just now filled, seemed extremely gratifying to her; she dwelt upon several of the strongest expressions with marked approbation, exclaiming, from time to time, as she read particular praises of his Majesty's worth & importance, "That is true!—That is true, indeed!—" But suddenly, afterwards, coming upon a paragraph beginning with the words of the Coronation Anthem "*Long Live the King! May the King live forever*!—" her Tears flowed so fast that they blinded her,—& to hear Her read such words, was so extremely affecting, that I was obliged to steal behind her Chair to hide myself; while Lady Effingham took out her Handkerchief, & cried in good earnest.[47]

The line between the public and the private is blurred in this scene, public affairs coexisting with the very mundane and private business of hair brushing, in a similar way to Edgeworth's representations of the infiltration of politics into the female cabinet (see Chapter 3). The newspapers introduce national affairs into the heart of the private sphere. Amidst this family tragedy lies the fate of the country: the 'preservation' of the

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[46] Steve Poole demonstrates how the monarchy re-appropriated this event to develop George III's 'fatherly style', 'an interesting conflation of sensibility and bullishness'. Poole, *The Politics of Regicide in England 1760-1850: Troublesome Subjects* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), Ch. 4, esp. pp. 64-74, p. 74.

[47] 17 July-9 August, 1786, *The Court Journals and Letters of Frances Burney*, ed. Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), I, p. 71.

king is also the preservation of 'the whole nation'. The distinction is even more unstable when the queen breaks into tears as she reads the national anthem, a work that celebrates the public figure of the monarch. It is intriguing that Burney hides herself in this moment of intense emotion, when Lady Effingham on the other hand publicly expresses her relief.

The second event was the king's disturbing illness and the ensuing Regency crisis of 1788-89, which highlighted the deep correspondence between political stability and the king's body. The connection between the nation's security and the monarch's health became, for Burney, even more evident during the years of the Terror, when she discovered that the Duc de Liancourt 'had imbibed the *Jacobin notion* that our dear & beloved King is still disordered'.[48] The italics emphasise the idea that reflections on the king's health are not simply a matter of objective reporting but a tool for political propaganda. In 1802, another plan to assassinate the English monarch was hatched, but Burney could no longer communicate her concern as openly as in 1786. Writing from Paris, she expresses great relief at the news of 'the flourishing state of that noble Oak & delicious garden, in the prosperity of which, my whole heart & soul, are interested'.[49] This line is a form of secret patriotism: the emblem of England, the oak becomes a symbol for the king and political stability, an allegiance that in Napoleonic France might have compromised her family. The 'delicious garden' secretly conveys her love of England; Burney's loyalty is present but it is coded and hidden.

McCrea insists that Burney's loyalty to the crown remained non-political, yet, while it is true that she had a very real personal affection for the members of the royal

[48] To Mrs Phillips, October 1792, *J&L*, I, p. 246.
[49] To Miss Planta, 19 December 1802, *J&L*, V, p. 297.

family, she remained aware that this private feeling could not be separated from the political, especially after her marriage to d'Arblay. The journal-letter detailing her return to England after a ten-year absence concludes on the 'Felicity', mixed with uncertainty, of being met with the same 'affectionate' feelings by the queen and her daughters, since Burney never mentioned them directly in her correspondence or communicated with them. External circumstances dictated her silence: 'To have spoken of the Royal Family in Letters sent to France under the Reign of Buonaparte, might have brought Destruction on Him [d'Arblay] for whom I had a thousand times sooner suffered it myself'.[50] In a time of war, the personal is always liable to accusations of conspiracy: the authorities inevitably read the personal as political. However unreserved and uncensored Burney's letters may appear to us today, many of them betray an awareness that officials might intercept the correspondence. In October 1804, d'Arblay concluded a letter announcing he would no longer send his letters through Julien-René Leclerc, following his wife's concern about the man's trustworthiness.[51] As a woman and the wife of a Frenchman, Burney is doubly the other, the stranger within whose private words might make her an enemy of the state. She occupies an in-between position that makes her the object of even greater scrutiny.

The question of Burney's politics mirrors the anxieties that surrounded women's 'borderline' presence in public affairs and politics. Burney records a lengthy exchange with the Duc de Liancourt over her acquaintance with Stéphanie-Félicité de Brûlart, Comtesse De Genlis, known for her children's writing but also for her scandalous relationship with the Duc d'Orléans and for being a pro-revolutionary.

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[50] Journal Dunkirk and Deal, July-August 1812 (written up c. 1825), *J&L*, VI, p. 734.
[51] From d'Arblay to Burney, Joigny 7 October 1804, *J&L*, VI, p. 497.

> ‘Comment! Mademoiselle!—Vous avez connû cette coquine de Brulard?’ And then, he asked me what I had thought of her?
>
> I frankly answered that I had thought her *charming*; gay, intelligent, well-bred, Well-informed, & amiable. […] I immediately continued, that I could now no longer think the same of her, as I could no longer esteem her; but I confessed my surprise had been inexpressible at her duplicity.
>
> He allowed that, some years ago, she might have a better chance than now of captivation—for the deeper she had immersed in politics, the more she had forfeited of feminine attraction. ‘Ah! he cried, with her talents—her knowledge—her parts—had she been modest, reserved, gentle——what a blessing might she have proved to her Country!—but she is devoted to intrigue & cabal, & proves its curse!—’
>
> He then spoke with great asperity against all the *femmes de lettres* now known; he said they were commonly the most *disgusting of their sex*, in France, by their arrogance, boldness, & mauvaises moeurs.[52]

The Duke anticipates Hannah More in his vociferations. Genlis’s involvement with politics tarnishes women’s reputation, even more than her extramarital affairs. Liancourt rehearses a common European ideal in the period, that women best serve the nation from the domestic sphere. How Burney felt is kept silent. By 1792, she was the celebrated though anonymous author of *Evelina* and *Cecilia*, had been encouraged by Johnson and Sheridan to write for the stage, and was yet to embark on her third novel. The reference to ‘*femmes de lettres*’ surely operated as a reminder to Burney of displaying an acceptable femininity to her male interlocutor. By immersing herself in politics, Burney ran the risk of becoming an ‘unsex’d female’.

[52] To Susanna Phillips, October 1792, *J&L*, I, p. 247.

Earlier letters present a different view of Burney, one who sanctions, even celebrates female political agency. Through her acquaintance with Hester Thrale Piozzi, 'so involved in business, Electioneering, Canvassing, Letter Writing', Burney was a first-hand witness of women's active political participation and their influence on political outcomes.[53] As in politics today, elite women in the late Georgian period often campaigned next to their husbands and influenced voters.[54] Thrale actively participated in her husband's 1780 campaign for the Borough of Southwark, a performance Burney reported with enthusiasm and admiration:

> Mrs Thrale met with amazing success at the Borough,—when she went out Canvassing with the greatest Enemy to the Contractors, & one of the richest among their number, what, indeed, might she *not* do? Every thing gave way to her,—her spirit, activity & dexterity made all difficulties sink before her, & the Hothamites will rue the Day they ever projected supplanting Mr Thrale.—Her management during the Canvass, was even *ridiculously* clever[.][55]

There is no disapproval of Thrale's involvement in her husband's campaign or any suggestion of a 'forfei[t] of feminine attraction'. Everything, in fact, suggests that the MP owes a great debt to his wife. Thrale is portrayed as an unstoppable woman, whose 'management' reveals a shrewd politician who won the campaign. Burney became more reserved on the topic of female politicians as the years went by. However, I believe that this change stemmed from her growing awareness of the social perception of political women and of female writers. Rather than becoming more indifferent to politics, Burney needs to showcase her detachment more.

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[53] To Susanna Elisabeth Burney and Charlotte Ann Burney, South Parade, Bath, 24 May, 1780, *Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney, vol. 4, The Streatham Years, part 2, 1780-81*, ed. Betty Rizzo (Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 2003), p. 117.
[54] See Chalus, *Elite Women*.
[55] 21 May 1780, *EJL*, IV, p. 109.

While she never openly stated that women should meddle with politics, Burney praised women who defied social expectations, and there is no indication that she considered '*femmes de lettres*' the curse of their country. She, for instance, admired Germaine de Staël, Europe's most prominent *femme de lettres*. Critics often emphasise Burney's prudishness when she 'dropp[ed] her' following her father's insistence that she distance herself from such a scandalous figure.[56] Burney considered Staël one of the greatest minds she had met since Hester Thrale, 'but she has infinitely more depth, & seems an even *profound* politician & metaphysician'.[57] As discussed in the introduction, those two labels were a 'fashionable infection' British women should avoid at all cost. Burney praised 'the very extraordinary and admirable exertions of Madame de Stael [sic]', who helped save many lives during the French Revolution while heavily pregnant:

> I must here tell you that this lady, who was at that time seven months gone with child, was indefatigable in her efforts to save every one she knew from this dreadful massacre. She walked daily (for carriages were not allowed to pass in the streets) to the Hotel de Ville, and was frequently shut up for five hours together with the horrible wretches that composed the *Comité de Surveillance*, by whom these murders were directed; and by her eloquence, and the consideration demanded by her rank and her talents, she obtained the deliverance of above twenty unfortunate prisoners, some of whom she knew but slightly.[58]

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[56] See Doody, *Life*, p. 199; Douglas D. Devlin, *The Novels and Journals of Fanny Burney* (London: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 7, 102. Angelica Goodden traces Burney and Staël's relationship, offering a more nuanced analysis, noting Burney's conflict. *Madame de Staël: The Dangerous Exile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 41-62.
[57] To Dr Burney, Mickleham, 16-19 February 1793, *J&L*, II, p. 17.
[58] *Diary and Letters*, V, pp. 364-65.

There is no trace of 'intrigue & cabal' in Staël's efforts. The image of the heavily pregnant author tirelessly navigating the streets of Paris is arresting and foregrounds the female body and its impact on politics, in much the same way that the king's illness illustrated the connection of the body to the body politic. As seen in Chapter 1, Burney herself used the female body as a means of expressing her national and political allegiance.

Burney genuinely enjoyed Staël's company and the other members of the Juniper Hall 'colony', where she also encountered d'Arblay.[59] Associating with French people, however, even the most royalist of émigrés, remained problematic. She joked with her friend Frederica Locke that 'I am always exposing myself to the wrath of John Bull when this coterie come in competition.'[60] This playful remark nevertheless reflects Burney's sense of divided loyalties in these friendships.[61] The personal clearly comes into conflict with the political in the shape of John Bull, a figure Burney repeatedly uses to articulate her understanding of herself as an Englishwoman.

1793: Fanny Bull meets a French General

Burney readily associates herself with John Bull, 'a common Englishman, who suffered in the same way that the public suffered' and gradually supplanted 'the increasingly remote and lofty figure of Britannia' in the public imagination.[62] Burney's 'sturdy patriotism' led her brother Charles to nickname her '*Fanny Bull*' and Burney

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[59] It was only after Staël's extramarital affairs became too scandalous that Burney agonised over their acquaintance. It was her private life, not her identity as a *femme de lettres* that Burney objected to. McCrea, p. 87, suggests Staël's revolutionary associations were the reason of Dr Burney's concern.
[60] To Mrs Locke, Mickleham, 14 February 1793, *J&L*, II, p. 14.
[61] She had not yet married d'Arblay by this point. The couple met in February 1793 and married in July that same year.
[62] Tamara L. Hunt, *Defining John Bull: Political Caricature and National Identity in Late Georgian England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 147.

herself regularly noted the 'John Bullish' quality her thoughts could take.[63] She undeniably took pride in her English heritage: when Louis XVIII appeared in London in 1814, she insisted that the 'Crowd […] deserve a better Name than MOB' because she 'never saw him [John Bull] en masse, behave with such impulsive propriety'.[64] There is an implicit comparison with the French crowds of the Revolution, so vividly evoked in Burke's 'mixed mob of ferocious men, and women lost to shame'.[65] While Burney was unquestionably extremely loyal to the royal family and her letters reflect her attachment to her native country, her fiction addresses problems endemic to English society. Her private references to 'John Bullism' thus often similarly carry an embedded reflection on the 'sturdy patriotism' of characters such as Captain Mirvan.

John Bull occasionally sits uncomfortably with the moral principles Burney and other writers considered essential to the British character and elevated it above other nations. An encounter with a party of émigrés seeking shelter in Winchester in 1791 is a telling example of the embarrassing, dehumanising effect patriotism can have:

> We pitied them—but like true daughters of John Bull, we passed them quietly, to take a survey of the City. […] After a little deliberation, we now were touched to shake off a part of the John Bullism that had encrusted us, & to ask them to our sitting Room, to drink Tea.[66]

'John Bullism' conflicts with basic Christian principles such as charity, represented by the simple invitation to drink tea. National sentiment is sometimes at odds with personal intuitions. 'Encrusted' conveys stasis and emotional hardening, which indicates patriotism can go against a nation's progress. Burney would later develop this issue in

[63] Joyce Hemlow, *J&L*, IX, p. 289, n. 5; To H.R.H. Princess Elizabeth, Bath, 6-7 January 1817, *J&L*, IX, p. 298.
[64] Journal entry for 22 April 2814 for Alexander d'Arblay, *J&L*, VII, p. 300.
[65] Burke, *Reflections*, p. 229.
[66] To Dr Burney, 13 August 1791, *J&L*, II, pp. 7-8

The Wanderer, which, as Simpson suggests, explores 'the limits of hospitality and the plausibility of a cosmopolitan culture of welcome'.[67] This episode further demonstrates the ambiguous distinction between the personal and the public. The daughters of John Bull welcome the foreigner in their circle, and thus risk endangering the nation's security.

The arrival of French émigrés marked a turning point in Burney's reflections on national identity and on the interconnection of the personal and the political. As Doody notes, Burney pays particular 'attention to the place and experience of "outsiders", to what it means to be alien or alienated', an experience Simpson has demonstrated is far more pervasive in Romantic writing than is usually recognised, as discussed in the introduction.[68] According to Tony Benis, 'perceptions of the period's exiles played in ongoing debates on a number of questions, including the nature of British identity and women's rights.'[69] Burney is indeed confronted with her John Bullish identity, which dictates she should be hostile to the French. The Winchester episode is therefore an important moment in Burney's questioning of her identification as an Englishwoman. This new population also possibly acted as a mirror of Burney's own position as a 'borderline' citizen.

As a female public figure, writing at a very sensitive time in British history, Burney had to mask her interest in political matters. In 1797, she declined contributing to Mrs Crewe's plan for a new anti-Jacobin periodical for a series of reasons that go beyond a predictable plea for female delicacy: she feared 'PERSONAL abuse' because of the public's knowledge that she resigned from her position as Keeper of the Queen's

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[67] Simpson, p. 230. He adds that some of her characters in *The Wanderer* fail spectacularly at that and Burney was close to that in 1791.
[68] Doody, 'Burney and Politics', p. 95.
[69] Tony R. Benis, *Romantic Diasporas: French Émigrés, British Convicts, and Jews* (New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 2.

Robes while still enjoying 'royal favour'.[70] D'Arblay's constitutional allegiances, discussed below, were a further 'embarrassment'.[71] Burney's letter reveals a keen awareness of her identity in the public imagination as an author, which deterred her from non-fiction writing. Her novels are the work of an authoress, which seems detached from the real Burney, but non-fiction would make it impossible for her to separate her public and private identities:

> Censure of my works I can endure with tolerable firmness: the latter I submit to the public right, by prescription; the former I think authorised by no right, and recoil from with mingled fear and indignation.[72]

Burney had ventured into political writing a few years before with the publication of *Brief Reflections Relative to the Emigrant French Clergy* (1793), a pamphlet that petitioned for Britain's support of the displaced émigrés. The *Brief Reflections*, which can be read as a direct response to the Aliens Act initiated by William Pitt, illuminate Burney's conception of politics, patriotism, and women's position as 'borderline citizens' in remarkable ways. Burney capitalised on her public notoriety, the front-page advertising 'By the Author of *Evelina* and *Cecilia*'. The text was daring on two accounts in terms of Burney's self-fashioning as a British woman. She was, firstly, venturing into political writing and compromising British femininity, according to prescriptive codes of propriety. The second issue was asking for support for French Catholics. Protestantism was indeed a cornerstone of British national identity. Appealing to their audiences as 'Christians' enabled women writers to rally sympathy for French emigrants.[73] Burney, according to Adriana Craciun, is decidedly

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[70] To Dr Burney, [26] February, 1797, *J&L*, III, p. 278.

[71] Justine Crump (ed.), *A Known Scribbler: Frances Burney, A Literary Life* (Peterborough: Broadview, 2002), p. 290.

[72] To Dr Burney, [26] February, 1797, *J&L*, III, p. 278.

[73] Adriana Craciun, *British Women Writers and the French Revolution: : Citizens of the World (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)*, pp. 147-54.

antinationalist in her assertion that we are 'all the creatures of one Creator' and 'took a cosmopolitan approach' in her appeal to Europe as opposed to simply England.[74] One might debate how cosmopolitan Burney's outlook truly is, but the Revolution had a definite, if surprising, effect in bolstering her sense of Britishness, which should not be interpreted as blind jingoism. The *Brief Reflections* remind their audience of Europe's perception of Britain as a modern, enlightened, and humane nation, for the émigrés, as strangers within, reveal the true nature of British character: will the émigrés consider they find themselves in 'some wild, uncultivated spot, where yet not arts had flourished, no civilization been spread?'[75] McCrea asserts that Burney's 'patriotism is English; she stands before, as Linda Colley has described it, the invention of Great Britain',[76] but the *Brief Reflections* were 'Earnestly submitted to the Humane Consideration of the Ladies of Great Britain'.[77] The pamphlet refers to Great Britain consistently throughout, which indicates that Burney imagined women across the British Isles sharing the same moral values, outside of party politics, as 'humane' stresses. This publication thus exemplifies Burney's understanding of Britishness.

Establishing the apolitical nature of the piece was nevertheless essential to its gender politics. In lieu of a preface, Burney composed an 'Apology', as if already anticipating the reception her project would meet with as an instance of a woman meddling with politics. The 'apology', like so many other prefaces penned by women in the period, justifies why she briefly left the parlour to venture into the arena of public affairs:

[74] *Ibid*., pp. 150, 148.
[75] Frances Burney, *Brief Reflections Relative to the Emigrant French Clergy* (London: T. Davison for T. Cadell, 1793), p. 15.
[76] McCrea, p. 25.
[77] Burney, *Brief Reflections*, title page.

> However wide from the allotted boundaries and appointed province of Females may be all interference in public matters, even in the agitating season of general calamity; it does not thence follow that they are exempt from all public claims, or mere passive spectatresses of the moral as well as of the political œconomy of human life.[78]

The language highlights the idea of space and therefore the notion of separate spheres. The pair 'allotted boundaries and appointed province', through its use of past participles, conveys women's relegation to this 'province' as well as their powerlessness. Burney makes a distinction between the political world of 'public matters' and the moral world of 'public claims', but the rhetoric blurs the boundary between the two. Women's involvement is consistent with her view that the Revolution had become a personal issue which transcended questions of national politics: 'It seems, in truth, no longer the Cause of Nations alone, but of Individuals—not a dispute for a form of Government, but a condition of safety'.[79] The Revolution is not a struggle for political change but a domestic concern. As such, it falls under the purview of women. Moreover, one might read an allusion to the Committee of Public Safety created in April 1793. Individual action can therefore represent a force to match France's new political institutions.[80] Nevertheless, Burney needed to adopt the mask of the secret female politician, and never more so than when she married d'Arblay, a union that risked incurring the 'wrath of John Bull'.

One of the biggest dilemmas that confronted Burney's 'John Bullism' was her relationship with the penniless d'Arblay, a member of the émigré coterie the Lockes hosted at Norbury Hall in 1792. The 'Juniper colony' was predominantly

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[78] *Ibid*., p. iii.
[79] To Dr Burney, Halstead, October 2, 1792, *J&L*, I, p. 230.
[80] Burney's pamphlet was published in November.

Constitutionalist. Even though they emulated the British model of Constitutional monarchy, Constitutionalists were frequently seen as 'begetters of the Revolution'.[81] '*All* the *Constituents* are now reviled as authors and originators of all the misfortunes of France', Burney wrote to Susanna, a feeling Dr Burney shared.[82] 'To Charles Burney', Doody explains, 'a Constitutionalist such as d'Arblay seemed almost personally to blame for the sanguinary events in France'.[83] Burney's 'Courtship Journal' confirms that 'nothing could make him forget his being a *Constitutionel* [sic]'.[84] A series of letters attests to the intensity of Dr Burney's anger and the internal strife d'Arblay's proposal created amongst the Burney circle. William Locke acted as intermediary between d'Arblay and Dr Burney, who refused to meet his son-in-law, asserting:

> [I]t is unnecessary to remind you, that M. d'*A.* being a foreigner, and of a party against which our court, as well as the chief part of my daughter Fanny's friends, have strong prejudices, will be likely to impede his advancement in his original profession, or in any enterprise wch he may in future plan in this country[.][85]

D'Arblay is doubly the other, through politics and nationality. With the juxtaposition of 'friends' and 'court', Dr Burney underlines the interconnection between the personal and the political. If Burney had accepted to give up her friendship with Madame de Staël, she refused to comply with her father's wishes that she give up the match. This union would place her as a doubly marginalised other, a position she constantly negotiated in her journals and letters.

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[81] Doody, *Life*, p. 199.
[82] To Susanna Phillips, October 1792, *J&L*, II, p. 2.
[83] Doody, *Life*, p. 201.
[84] To Susanna Phillips, the Courtship Journal, April 1793, *J&L*, II, p. 74. See also: 'the *Constitutionel* is cruelly in the way!' (p. 65).
[85] Dr Burney to William Locke, Chelsea College, 10 September 1793, *J&L*, II, p. 171.

Burney herself was anxious that her marriage to d'Arblay would damage her friendship with the royal family. After deciding to accompany d'Arblay to France in 1801, she relayed to her father a note Miss Planta had passed on from the Queen, who approved of d'Arblay's 'visiting his native Country; that it is a duty he owes his family,—& that [Burney] is quite right in accompanying him thither in June'. Burney emphasised the 'comfort & satisfaction' it gave her, showing her father that royal assent mattered to her.[86] The circulation of this note is therefore a means to prove her allegiances have not changed.

Burney's private writing has the dual function of confirming her Englishness while simultaneously erasing the otherness of d'Arblay and their French acquaintances by painting them as English, highlighting the qualities that were consistent with a British character. A Paris journal entry addressed to her father comments on the 'English plainness and simplicity' with which the Beauvau children are raised, which shows their central position to the Burneys' understanding of English national character.[87] Whenever Burney describes d'Arblay's character, she also underlines sincerity and simplicity, traits that coincide with the most valued qualities of British identity. She erases his otherness, in a way constructing him as an Englishman.

Burney was first acquainted with d'Arblay through her sister Susanna (Mrs Phillips), who admired his 'open and manly countenance' and his 'manly *franchise*'.[88] The unlikeliness of a Frenchman being frank is captured in the use of the French word. Burney was fascinated by d'Arblay's character but had to negotiate on the page his French identity. No Francophobe, Burney valued the French language, her relationship with d'Arblay blossoming through their linguistic exchanges. Like the fictional Lord

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[86] To Dr Burney, West Hamble, 2 November 1801, *J&L*, V, p. 29.
[87] [To Dr Burney] Paris Journal, *J&L*, V, p. 267.
[88] *Diary and Letters of Madame d'Arblay*, V, p. 363.

Orville, d'Arblay was a true polite gentleman, whose reserve matched her own, but, unlike Orville, Burney had to make d'Arblay palatable to her English readers. In the midst of her deep distress at the reports of the execution of Louis XVI, Burney still gushes about the French émigré:

> [D'Arblay] is one of the most delightful Characters I have ever met, for openness, probity, intellectual knowledge, unhackneyed manners. M. De Narbonne is far more a Man of the World & joins the most courtly refinement & elegance, to the quickest repartee & readiness of wit.[89]

While there is no hint of Chesterfieldian behaviour or affectation in Narbonne's 'courtly refinement', the comparison between their manners suggests that d'Arblay, by being less a 'Man of the World', has a more unvarnished nature, and presumably favours domestic entertainments. His character relies less on performance and polish than Narbonne, and in that sense is less French, since they were associated with love of show. His 'openness' is, moreover, fully compatible with the British emphasis on sincerity and simplicity, while his 'unhackneyed manners' reflect an unaffected character. D'Arblay would reveal himself to possess all the qualities and accomplishments that made him an appropriate marriage partner for an Englishwoman.

Surprised to find herself falling in love with a Frenchman, Burney recognised in d'Arblay virtues that her John Bullism had taught her the French could not possess. A quality she highlights early on is d'Arblay's sincerity, which she paints with strikingly English strokes. Even before her father objected to any connection with the General, Burney underlined those aspects of his character that were compatible with British qualities:

[89] To Dr Burney, Norbury Park, 4 February 1793, *J&L*, II, p. 11.

> M. D'Arblay is one of the most singularly interesting Characters that can ever have been formed. He has a sincerity, a frankness, an ingenuous openness of nature, that I had been injust [sic] enough to think could not belong to a French Man. With all this, which is his *Military* portion, he is passionately fond of literature, a most delicate critic in his own language, well versed in both Italian & German, & a very elegant Poet.[90]

Positively raving about his character, Burney constructs d'Arblay as a gentleman, not a *gentilhomme*. As she confesses her nationalist prejudice, Burney describes a man whose nationality by extension cannot be detected. D'Arblay can no longer be identified as a 'French man'. By admiring his professional and private identities, through his military occupation and his personal taste, Burney portrays a man who is suited to both public and domestic spheres. The triad 'sincerity', 'frankness', and 'openness', very British qualities, helps emphasise the transparency of his character. Underlining this description is d'Arblay's unaffected disposition, an important sign of sound character. Early on in their correspondence, she confessed her personal dislike of enigmas and declared: 'je hais l'affectation, […] VOUS, qui [sic] je regarde comme la Franchise, l'Honneur, & la sincérité même'.[91] Affectation is the bugbear of the late Georgian period; d'Arblay is represented as the very embodiment of those qualities John Bull called his own.

More than d'Arblay's sincerity, however, it was their shared preference for simplicity that Burney valued, a quality that she also took great pride in observing in their son Alex, a point discussed below. Torn between strong feelings and apprehensions, she sought her sister's advice concerning d'Arblay's proposal. Burney

[90] To Dr Burney, Mickleham, 16-19 February 1793, *J&L*, II, p. 17.
[91] To Mr d'Arblay, Chelsea College, 3 April 1793, *J&L*, II, p. 43. 'I hate affectation, […] YOU, who I view as frankness, honour, and sincerity itself.' (translation mine)

genuinely believed she had met the one man who could make her happy: ‘Everything upon Earth I could covet for the peculiar happiness of my peculiar mind seems here united’.[92] Her infatuation erupts in letters where the jagged syntax and torrent of dashes mirror her feverish state and her excitement at perceiving the valued ideals of plainness and simplicity:

> His nobleness of character—his sweetness of disposition—his Honour, Truth, integrity—with so much of softness, delicacy, & tender humanity—except my beloved Father & Mr. Lock, I have never seen such a man in this world, though I have drawn such in my Imagination. […] Did you see his Letter?—you could never have mistaken its Writer—’tis all himself—plain, noble, upright, simple[.][93]

Dr Burney is the measure of English gentlemanliness, a comparison that conveys Burney’s implicit filial respect. The style of d’Arblay’s letter mirrors his character, showing ‘sentiments and turn of mind laid out open without disguise’, as ‘all himself’ implies, a point she repeatedly emphasised. As is the case for the fictional Robert Martin, plainness and simplicity are admired and associated with nobility of character. It is almost as if d’Arblay seduced Burney through the English qualities she saw in him. Burney identifies in d’Arblay the sort of manly simplicity Edgeworth admired in her brother (see Chapter 3). Another epistle she described as: ‘The little Billet which M. D’Arblay wrote in his own apartment, & gave you, afterwards, to enclose—I will copy.—You will soon see, by its simplicity of plainness & good nature & honour, that this was dictated only by himself’.[94] Burney certifies the authenticity of d’Arblay’s simplicity by stressing that she did not alter the original text. Plainness, good nature,

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[92] To Susanna Phillips, Chelsea College, 2-3 April 1793, *J&L*, II, p. 41.
[93] *Ibid*., p. 42.
[94] Courtship Journal, *J&L*, II, p. 112.

and honour seem grouped into one, fitting into the category of simplicity. There is something peculiar in 'simplicity of plainness', a sort of layering that reveals the importance for Burney of this trait in the Frenchman. This emphasis is a way for Burney to erase d'Arblay's otherness, constructing him as a British gentleman her family cannot fail to admire.

Burney demonstrated their shared preference for simplicity long after their marriage. After they settled at Camilla Cottage, a name that conveys the idea of a simple residence, Burney noted their friends' favourable responses to their 'simple dwelling' and anticipated others' surprise at their almost ascetic environment. 'You will smile at our bare walls, & unfurnished Dwelling—& more than simple way of life', she tells Mrs Waddington, but 'it agrees with us'.[95] D'Arblay, moreover, shared Burney's appreciation of simplicity. The issue was frequently addressed in their reflections on their social circle. They, for instance, disagreed on the simplicity d'Arblay noted in Caroline de Jargeaille, which contrasted with the first time they had met her. D'Arblay was pleasantly surprised at meeting her again:

> Tes souvenirs sans doute te la representent comme un peu minaudiere et coquette. […] Eh bien mon amie, il est impossible de concevoir rien de plus naturel et de plus agreablement simple que cette belle et charmante personne, en qui le jugement surpasse l'esprit la beauté et les talens.[96]

Burney was highly doubtful that such a transformation could have taken place and was furious that d'Arblay should try to influence their son in thinking of her as a marriage prospect:

[95] To Mrs Waddington, 20 April 1799, *J&L*, IV, p. 277.
[96] To Madame d'Arblay, Paris, 20 September, 1816, *J&L*, IX, p. 222.

> I have often heard of simple & natural characters becoming coquettes & des *petites maitresses*—but of the reverse, never before […] natural! simple?—where was that Nature, where that simplicity concealed when we saw her in 1802?[97]

For Burney, simplicity, like nature, cannot be affected nor can it be adopted later in life. It is a quality that cannot be performed.

Burney was at great pains to erase d'Arblay's French origins, destabilising the distinction between foreigner and native, even down to his physical appearance. One might argue that Burney disguised d'Arblay as an Englishman. She reminded her brother that his first impression of d'Arblay was not of a Frenchman:

> Do you remember seeing […] a Gentleman—whose face, you said looked *any thing* but French? […] This Gentleman—if I am not of all women the most mistaken, is one of the noblest Characters now existing.—An Exile from patriotism & loyalty, he has been naturalized in the bosom of Norbury Park & Mickleham, amongst the dearest & best of my Friends—[98]

Burney again stresses d'Arblay's exceptional character, underlining the impossibility of detecting his French nationality. The repetition of 'gentleman' indicates a nobility of character that supersedes all other issues. 'Naturalized' removes his foreignness farther, destabilising the distinction between the foreigner and the native. Norbury and Mickleham function here as synecdoches for England, his inclusion there transforming him into a British citizen.

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[97] To M. d'Arblay, Saturday 2 September, 1816, *J&L*, IX, pp. 226-27. 'Your memory probably presents her a little as a simperer and a coquette. […] Well, my friend, it is impossible to imagine anything more natural and more agreeably simple than this beautiful and charming person, in whom understanding exceeds wit, beauty, and talents.' (translation mine)

[98] To Charles Burney, Norbury Park, 23 July 1793, *J&L*, II, p. 175.

It was equally important to Burney that her son display the sterling British qualities of plainness and simplicity, as mentioned above. As a dual French and English citizen, the young Alexander d'Arblay was a stranger within. His birth introduced a foreign element connected to Britain's most hated and feared enemy. This is clearly illustrated in their attempt to return to England in 1812. When she and Alexander finally left Dunkirk on an American vessel, Lieutenant Harford refused to allow Alexander, 'a French person', on board, 'without a passport & permission from Government'. After Burney confirms he was born in England, Harford states 'that's quite another matter! Come along, Sir! We'll all go to-gether,' a bizarre resolution where the English trio now happily walk along together.[99] Burney, however, does not say whether or not Alexander is English or French, simply that he was born in England, which reflects the difficulty of articulating dual national identities. To conceal her son's French origins, Burney highlighted his plainness and simplicity on a number of occasions. She rejoiced that Alex was thought to possess 'all the po<liteness> of a French man joined to all the simplicity of an English Man'.[100] A few days later, she recorded the same anecdote: 'a clergyman told one of the Cantabs here that Young d'Arblay was a most pleasing youth, possessing all the politeness of a French man with all the simplicity of an English Man!!!! There's for you Nuncle!'[101] Again we can observe the association of politeness and refinement with France, here counterbalanced with English simplicity, which guarantees the sincerity of her son's character, and thus his British disposition. The flourish of exclamation points is that of a proud mother.

The publication of her father's *Memoirs* (1832) represents a determined effort to remind the British public of her unceasing loyalties to the Royal family and her native

[99] Dunkirk Journal, *J&L*, VI, p. 727.
[100] To Alexandre d'Arblay, Ilfracombe, 2-7 August 1817, *J&L*, X, p. 584.
[101] To Charles Burney, Ilfracombe, 23 August-3 September 1817, *J&L*, X, p. 645.

country, as well as a desire to clean her husband's name of any collusion with the French government. Her family relied on her husband's French military pension and his income from his position at the Ministère de l'Intérieur. As a French general, her husband was expected to fight alongside Napoleon's army against the British. D'Arblay solicited a commission, which his family needed financially, under the condition that 'he would not bear arms against the country of his wife', a request which Napoleon reluctantly granted.[102] The d'Arblays' personal trajectory takes on political meaning and Burney is keen to showcase her husband's disassociation from Napoleon's military operations. Burney herself is oddly connected to the emperor's final decision. She explains that Napoleon interrupted his conference with General Lafayette, who acted as intermediary, grumbling about the '*diable de lettre*' he had received from d'Arblay, then suddenly resolved that '[he] ought only to regard in it the husband of Cecilia', accepting d'Arblay's petition.[103] While this comment presents d'Arblay as a henpecked husband, it also gives Burney an unexpected agency. She is referred to metonymically, a gesture that recognises her authorship and her status as a public figure. It is Burney the author who is acknowledged here and unexpectedly protects her husband. D'Arblay nevertheless had to remain on French territory. Burney and their son Alexander followed him for an initial period of one year, which extended to a decade.

Once she was a resident in France at the height of the Napoleonic conflict, Burney had to address an even more delicate issue: how to represent Napoleon in her letters without arousing the authorities' suspicion, all the while communicating her loyalty to her native country. The letters reveal that Burney was aware of the impact her position as a celebrated English novelist could have on her family. There is no doubt

[102] Frances Burney, *Memoirs of Doctor Burney*, 3 vols. (London: Moxon, 1832), III, p. 315.
[103] *Ibid*., p. 317. See also, To Madame d'Arblay, 10 mars 1802: '*il ne considererait dans cette demarche que le mari de Cecilia*'. *J&L*, V, p. 173.

that Burney was not in favour of Napoleon's victory over Britain, but the war dictated that she remain silent on the matter. In a similar way that one can argue that the Gagging Acts prevented authors in the 1790s from openly discussing politics, one can argue that Napoleon gagged Burney's writing. It is only after the battle of Waterloo, in July 1815, that Burney refers to Bonaparte as a 'Tyrant' for the first time since 1799. Surprised that her friend Mary Waddington should praise Napoleon, Burney retorts:

> [H]ad you spent, like me, 10 years within the control of his unlimited power, & under the iron rod of its dread, how would you change your language! by a total reverse of sentiment! yet was I, because always inn-offensive [sic], never molested[.][104]

Burney censored many of her letters referring to Napoleon. In a letter to Miss Planta of 1802, in which Napoleon appears as 'Your favourite Hero', Burney later supplied the note: 'This was an appellation agreed upon previously for Buonaparte as a Flattering one, & therefore safe one, in case of a letters' [sic] seizure or miscarriage.'[105]

If Burney could only be 'inn-offensive' by remaining silent, how then could she discuss Napoleon Bonaparte, the great scourge of Europe and Britain's most ferocious enemy? How could she communicate to friends and family her hope that her native country would emerge victorious, without arousing suspicions from French authorities that she was a political agitator working for the Crown, or simply a dissident? Moreover, like other English writers of the Romantic period, Burney was equally fascinated and horrified by Napoleon's greatness.[106] The letters contain some intriguing positive presentations of Napoleon, which strangely coincide with English values.

[104] *J&L*, VIII, p. 282.
[105] *J&L*, V, p. 295.
[106] For a detailed discussion of Romantic writers' ambivalence towards Napoleon, see Simon Bainbridge, *Napoleon and British Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Bainbridge focuses exclusively on male writers.

Burney witnessed Napoleon's 'grande revue' of his troops in December 1802, which Maria Edgeworth also attended, and expressed a very different sentiment from earlier correspondence. She was especially struck by 'his Genius, & so penetrating a seriousness—or rather sadness', appearing as a 'profoundly studious & contemplative Man'. She further noted 'The plainness, also, of his dress, so conspicuously contrasted by the finery of all around him, conspires forcibly with his countenance, which seems "Sicklied o'er with the pale hue of Thought," to give him far more the air of a Student than of a Warrior'.[107] Burney seems to be drawing an 'English' portrait of Napoleon: his sadness evokes the English malady of melancholy. Napoleon's 'plainness' is conspicuous in the midst of this dazzling parade. The reference to *Hamlet*, famous for its meditative hero, also presents a striking image of a man whose political success was based on his swift military victories.

Bonaparte's cultivation of the image of an austere Republican, then Emperor, was strangely compatible with British values. An observation in a Paris notebook entry, which was never sent, complicates the idea that Burney transformed Napoleon into an Englishman simply to avoid censorship or influence her British readers. In the spring of 1812, she visited the studio of the French artist Jacques-Louis David, where she saw two portraits of the Emperor, in which he 'displayed himself as the magnanimous Master of the French, & the pacific Inviter to Fraternity from the English'.[108] The entry underlines Burney's awareness of the self-fashioning function of art. She decodes the paintings as propaganda pieces with different aims, one to bolster French military power and the other as a diplomatic missive.[109] The second portrait, *L'Empereur debout*

[107] Journal Letter to Dr Burney, *J&L*, V, pp. 313, 314.
[108] Spring 1812, *J&L*, VI, p. 625.
[109] Napoleon did not want the portrait to go to England. He tried to convince David to sell it to him, offering him 30,000 francs. Napoleon actually kicked the canvas and damaged the portrait. David painted another one, alongside four copies additional. [*L'Artiste, Journal de la Littérature et des Beaux-Arts*, 2ème série, 2ème tome (Paris, 1839), p. 38]

dans son cabinet, was commissioned by 'a British Nobleman', Alexander Hamilton-Douglas. The stress on 'British' as opposed to 'Scottish' reflects an understanding that the United Kingdom is united against Napoleon's armies.[110] Burney was struck by what she understood was Napoleon's decision to emphasise the man, in his private study, over the military conqueror:

> [W]hat belonged to himself individually was by himself indicated: his face, therefore, has an expression as simple, as unaffected, & as unassuming as his attire, &, with the fall of his hands, which are very finely finished, he seems to mean making an appeal to the British Nation, through the British Nobleman for whom this Representation of their renowned Antagonist is designed, that shall cry out: Look at me, Britons! survey me well! What have you to fear, or doubt? What is there to excite such deadly hatred, in a Man as soberly & modestly arrayed as the plainest John Bull among yourselves, & as philosophically employed, without state or attendance?—[111]

What surprises Burney are the plainness and simplicity that Napoleon presents to the viewer, which she acknowledges are a powerful way of influencing the British public.[112] Asked by Madame David how she thought 'les Anglais' would receive the portrait, Burney replied 'too well', which was interpreted as an 'implied acknowledgement that Bonaparté had well understood how to conquer John Bull's opinion for the attainment of British popularity'.[113] Burney's reading of the painting stresses the self-identification of the British as domestic and plain. Shortly afterwards, Burney managed to leave for England with her son and the manuscript of *The*

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[110] His commission of Napoleon's portrait is a disloyal act since he hoped Napoleon would become and ally and help restore the Stuart line, to which Hamilton belonged, to the British throne.
[111] Spring 1812, *J&L*, VI, p. 623.
[112] Burney tells us the painting was only exhibited to Hamilton-Douglas' 'confidential Friends'. *J&L*, VI, p. 626.
[113] *Ibid*., p. 626.

Wanderer. Her time in France had, however, changed her, and she returned to England as a stranger within.

The journal-letter of Burney's 'Police-Adventure at Dunkirk' and her return to England offers a vivid testimony of an English woman with strong affective connections to France, which trouble her understanding of her national identity. For all her John Bullishness, Burney reiterates the ties she has with France, ties she cannot and will not sever. Her first evening in England is a combination of delight at experiencing English culture again and of seeing her native country anew through the lens of foreign experience:

> Our first Dinner at Sir Thomas's was extremely amusing both to Alexander & myself. A large fillet of Veal, & a noble Sirloin of Beef were a sight that seemed to us, after the small & dainty French *plats* we had left, to demand a whole Garrison to devour. These, joined to Plum Pudding & Apple Pye, with the constant sound of the English Language ringing in my Ears, kept my pleased muscles in continually smiling play during the whole Repast.
>
> The Assembly in the Evening was by no means equally entertaining. I missed there completely the charm of French Vivacity with French Politeness, that so often, in select French Coteries, had produced upon me an effect quite enchanting.
>
> Vivacity was little in question, & Politeness less. There was no delicacy of attention to others, none of that vivifying quickness of repartee that startles, yet forbears wounding. In select French Society there is a Life, a Spur, a spirit of pleasure, that give it a zest rarely indeed to be met with in England—though, to MY favoured lot, that rarity has been singularly accorded.[114]

[114] *J&L*, VI, pp. 729-30.

The meal described, with its emphasis on beef and plenty, is rather John Bullish, not dissimilar to the mocking preferences of *Milord anglois* Edgeworth outlined in *Leonora*, but Burney stresses the hardiness of the meal, contrasted with 'dainty' French cuisine, perhaps with a hint of over-refinement. Her reflections on English sociability differ strongly from the ones painted in Edgeworth and Austen's fiction: there is no trace of the English amiability *Emma* or *Patronage* celebrate. France remains the undisputed seat of polite refinement and sophistication. Burney seems to catch herself in the act of praising polite French circles a little too much as she interrupts herself with a dash as soon as she utters the word 'England'. It is almost as if seeing 'England' written on the page, she realises she expressed unpatriotic sentiments, since politeness was precisely what France and Britain were competing for. Burney then very quickly goes on a 'tangent', praising the different English circles where she did experience vivacity and politeness.[115] The 'tangent' culminates in a panegyric on the royal family. No longer afraid of appearing a traitor, she can freely express her loyalty to the British crown. She presents the royal circle as one of eminent characters, 'singularly marked by native Simplicity of manner'.[116]

If Burney was now free to disclose national sentiment in her private correspondence, she nevertheless saw it as a duty to remain impartial with regards to France in a public setting. Burney felt bound to the French nation, a source of internal conflict. While she celebrated England, she refused to act as a political informer, going against her friends' expectations. On that same evening, Burney kept information from her friends, making their reunion

[115] *Ibid*., p. 732.
[116] *Ibid*., p. 732.

> painful from the severe restriction I thought it a duty to inflict upon myself, not to act the part of a returned Spy against the Land that had given birth to my Husband, & that had afforded me a residence of uninterrupted tranquility [sic] during 10 unbroken Years; while yet the Government, & Govenors [sic], of that Land had my peculiar ill will, & the success of my own against it was the warmest wish of my faithful John-Bull Heart. This point of Honour was not sufficiently clear to make me quite happy either in revealing or concealing such private circumstances of National interest as had fallen to my knowledge; &, through my honoured Husband's extensive connections, they were many. I gave, therefore, great & evident disappointment to Lady Liverpole, who frequently urged my communications by assuring me she was very discreet; & I partook of the mortification from the struggle which it caused me to be its Inflicter.[117]

This passage neatly captures Burney's ambivalence and distress at occupying the in-between position of the native returning to her homeland who remains attached to a foreign country. This was precisely the criticism that was levelled at her final novel *The Wanderer*.

The Wanderer (1814): The Simplicity of the Secret Female Politician

Being mistaken for a political informer and her novel appearing as a nationalist work were precisely what Burney feared when she returned to England in 1812, with the manuscript of *The Wanderer*. The Dunkirk journal, a 'highly polished, retrospective journal account', records Burney's impression of being under surveillance as a

[117] *Ibid*., pp. 733-34.

foreigner and her constant fear that the French authorities would consider her a spy.[118] Her curiosity is naturally awakened when she sees a group of Spanish prisoners, since they were England's allies in the war effort. Burney paints a silent mutual understanding in their exchanges of looks of 'sympathy' and 'grateful consciousness'. The feelings that her countenance silently communicates identify her as British, the body once again signalling national belonging, as it had when she sported a 'gothic' English dress in Paris (see Chapter 1). Burney is careful to not approach them too closely, 'lest [she] should be suspected as a Spy.'[119] This fear proved legitimate since she was later arrested by the Officer of the Police and could have been charged with 'conspiracy with the Enemies of the State'.[120] A few years later, in 1815, crossing the German border, she again faced 'passing for an Emissary, an Impostor, or spy'.[121] This clearly illustrates the fact that women could be considered as political agents.

To protect her manuscript, Burney had to prove that it was free of compromising political content. Her husband convinced the chief police officer Mr de Saulnier that 'the Work had nothing in it political, nor even National, nor possibly offensive to the Government'.[122] However, when the Custom-House officer found the manuscript in her portmanteau, Burney could not 'induce him to stop the accusations of traitorous designs'.[123] It was only thanks to the assistance of an English merchant long established in Dunkirk that she could save 'this Fourth Child of [her] Brain' from destruction.[124] This is, for Burney, nothing short of a miracle, 'Such an event […] truly memorable,

[118] Sabor, 'Scriblerations', p. 85.
[119] *J&L*, VI, p. 718.
[120] *Ibid*., p. 718.
[121] To Charlotte Barrett, Paris, 27 September-3 October 1815, *J&L*, VIII, p. 544.
[122] *J&L*, VI, p. 716.
[123] *Ibid*., p. 716.
[124] *Ibid*., p. 717.

as well as singular, during a period of such unexampled strictness of Police Discipline with respect to Letters or Papers, between the two Nations.'[125]

The Wanderer (1814) is Burney's most politically complex novel, its representation of the 'female difficulties' a stringent critique of English society. Savaged by contemporary reviewers and overlooked by critics for a long time, Burney's last novel has recently regained critical favour as a 'bold experiment'.[126] It is now usually discussed for its radical and feminist politics, most notably its representation of revolutionary ideals and Wollstonecraftian theory through the counter-heroine Elinor Joddrel.[127] While critics debate whether or not *The Wanderer* is conservative or revolutionary, Darryl Jones stresses that political ambivalence is the very essence of the novel, a characteristic that also marks the text as a product of its time. Jones helpfully suggests that '*The Wanderer* can be read (and demands to be read, I think) against the grain of its author's ostensible politics'.[128] A staunch monarchist who hated the 'Jacobin tribe' and any 'Jacobinical malignity', and who counted many Tory followers as friends, Burney's fiction nevertheless offers a critique of John Bullism and of conservative, Burkean ideology.[129] Deidre Lynch in particular persuasively argues that *The Wanderer* opposes a Burkean theory that conflates 'domestic' and 'home' and that associates Englishness with patrimony, thus disenfranchising women.[130] Lynch, moreover, shows how Burkean theory was deeply troubled by the 'denaturing' of

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[125] *Ibid*., p. 717.
[126] Epstein, p. 213.
[127] See, for example, Darryl Jones, 'Radical Ambivalence: Frances Burney, Jacobinism, and the Politics of Romantic Fiction', *Women's Writing* 10:1 (2003), pp. 3-25; See McInnes, pp. 102-114; Joanne Cutting-Gray. For a discussion of the French Revolution, see Carmel Murphy, '"The Stormy Sea of Politics": The French Revolution and Frances Burney's *The Wanderer*', *Women's Writing* 22:4 (2015), pp. 485-504.
[128] Jones, p. 19.
[129] *J&L* II, pp. 5, 20.
[130] Deidre Shauna Lynch, 'Domesticating Fictions and Nationalizing Women: Edmund Burke, Property, and the Reproduction of Englishness', in *Romanticism, Race, and Imperial Culture, 1780-1814*, ed. Alan Richardson and Sonia Hofkosh (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 40-71, pp. 43, 48.

national products once they have been decontextualized, which Burney and her heroine experience as they return to England. *The Wanderer* underlines the paradoxes of attempts to stabilise the nation and Englishness: 'for Romantic political economy, the prosperity of the nation-state was to begin at home […] [b]ut, as a commercial, empire-building nation, England could perpetuate its identity only when it weakened the borders defining the place of its insiders, as it absorbed the alien resources beckoning from outside.'[131] More recently, Maria Jerinic has examined the revision of 'the notion of an "essential Englishness" […] fundamentally different from an "essential Frenchness"' the novel offers.[132] Carmel Murphy has also shown how, in reopening issues raised by the French Revolution debate, Burney was stepping onto a territory that had been "remasculinize[d]"'.[133] Burney and her heroine are the secret female politicians that demand a radical re-examination of 'British shores' (402) on the eve of the Napoleonic wars.

With its motif of the return of the native, Burney explores the themes of sameness and difference and introduces a secret female politician. Its liminal heroine, clothed in secrecy, 'incarnates the foreign woman as the compound stranger who tests out the integrity of the homeland'.[134] The novel itself occupies a liminal position: set during the aftermath of the French Revolution, it was published the year before Britain finally defeated Napoleon. The preface masks the novel's female politics, presenting a wildly different account from the experience of the Dunkirk journal. Burney is careful to pay homage to the Custom-House officers, who she claims are a credit 'to the honour

[131] *Ibid*., p. 52.
[132] Maria Jerinic, 'Challenging Englishness: Frances Burney's *The Wanderer*', in *Rebellious Hearts: British Women Writers and the French Revolution*, ed. Adriana Craciun and Kari E. Lokke (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), pp. 63-84, p. 64.
[133] Carmel Murphy, '"The Stormy Sea of Politics": The French Revolution and Frances Burney's *The Wanderer*', *Women's Writing*, 22:4 (2015), pp. 485-504.
[134] Simpson, p. 229.

and liberality of both nations' (4). Burney's concern was to prove the manuscript contained 'neither letters, nor political writings' (4). The parity in the treatment of letters and political writings shows that the two were interchangeable in the period, given the same weight in terms of import: there is no distinction made between private correspondence and an openly political tract. A 'work of invention and observation' (4), on the other hand, is dismissed as having no social implications, when Burney's relief is evidence that, for her, fiction is extremely political.

The Wanderer, following the theme of 'woman as the stranger within', offers a complex examination of national character and dramatizes the anxieties surrounding women's function in the construction of national identity, as well as their ambiguous position as political agents in the late Georgian era. Savaged by contemporary reviewers as 'so evident a falling off in a veteran of acknowledged abilities', *The Wanderer* is a challenging text that reflects many of Burney's own anxieties and ambivalences about national allegiances and women's role in the construction of the nation.[135] There are many parallels between Burney and her heroine Juliet Granville, who, as female writer and nameless heroine, occupy a liminal position between state and home. Much like her heroine, Burney became a native other whose work destabilised many assumptions about the distinctions between the native and the other, most controversially in its questioning of the opposition between the French and the English upon which British nationalism relied. As Simpson argues, '[*The Wanderer*] fully explores the paradigm of women as "boundary subjects", in Kristeva's words, whose function can be judged in terms of their "ability to modify the nation in the face of foreigners" and to "orient foreigners confronting the nation toward a still

[135] *Critical Review* 5:4 (April 1814), pp. 405-24, p. 407.

unforeseeable conception of a polyvalent community."'[136] For Lynch, Juliet Granville is a 'diasporic' and 'contraband subject' who 'scrambles the terms by which English law sorts out female identities'.[137] Identity in *The Wanderer* is understood in terms of movement, women's (im)mobility thereby securing or threatening the existence of the 'true-born Englishman'. Much like Edgeworth, Burney in *The Wanderer* represents British identity as fluid and heterogeneous. As the wife of a French citizen, Burney could only prove her loyalty to her native country through her adherence to English principles. She adopted the same strategy when developing the character of her final heroine, an Anglo-French exile.

The Wanderer has, however, often been considered at odds with its time, by both contemporary reviewers and Burney scholars today. Published after a long gestation period, a few months after Walter Scott's instant hit *Waverley*, the novel is set in 1793-94, 'during the dire reign of the terrific Robespierre' (11), a temporal setting considered no longer adequate for a production 'illustrating the characters, manners, or opinions of the day' (6).[138] The *Anti-Jacobin Review* complained that Burney had failed to see that 'society has changed', while Sarah Salih describes *The Wanderer* as 'a 1790s novel manqué'.[139] Read in the light of its comments on the French Revolution, the novel appears disconnected from the realities of Britain in 1814. Brian McCrea, echoing contemporary reviewers, maintains that, 'As a hermit at Camilla Cottage and then as an exile from England in 1802–1812, Burney missed the invention of Great Britain', and that *The Wanderer* fails to address a country that is celebrating its victory over

[136] Simpson, *Romanticism and the Question of the Stranger*, p. 229.
[137] Lynch, 'Domesticating Fictions', pp. 62-63, 43.
[138] Our knowledge of the composition of *The Wanderer* is partial: the novel was begun in the late 1790s, abandoned for a while, and finally completed for publication in 1814.
[139] *The Anti-Jacobin Review* 46 (April 1814), pp. 347-54, p. 353; Sarah Salih, '*Camilla* and *The Wanderer*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney*, ed. Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 39-54, p. 46.

Napoleon, as if Burney had somehow been entirely sheltered from contemporary events and the national mood.[140] Burney was, on the contrary, highly aware of the public's expectations. As she told her brother James, following the poor reception of the novel: 'half the Public expected, from my long residence in France, Political anecdotes, or opinions, & the other half expected, from the title of the Work & my own unsettled life, The History of the Author.'[141] This statement illustrates Burney's understanding of the overlap between the public and private spheres, for her novel will be read according to her personal life. Anticipating the climate in which her novel would be received, Burney emphasised the novel's neutrality in the preface, arguing it was written without 'the form of foreign influence, or of national partiality' (4). It was precisely because it refused to be John Bullish that *The Wanderer* met with critics' wrath. John Wilson Croker, whose 'scurrilous personal attack […] has already received more attention than it deserves', illustrates the political atmosphere in which the novel appeared.[142] For Croker, Burney composed an apology of Napoleon Bonaparte, when 'she ought not, as an Englishwoman, as a writer, to have debased herself to the little annotative flattering of the scourge of the human race'.[143] Croker conflates writer and citizen in his juxtaposition, which reveals the role the novel as a genre played in the construction of the nation. Even though women were not supposed to be political creatures, their work was nevertheless examined for their political content and intensely scrutinised for (un)patriotic material.

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[140] McCrea, pp. 88, 83.
[141] To James Burney, Bruxelles, July 10, 1815, *J&L*, VIII, p. 317.
[142] Justine Crump, 'Reading Frances Burney', in *A Celebration of Frances Burney*, ed. Lorna Clark (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), pp. 88-99, p. 97. John Wilson Croker in *The Quarterly Review* famously described the novel as having 'the features of Evelina—but of Evelina grown old'. Discussed in Doody, *Frances Burney*, p. 335; Harris, *Revolution*, pp. 25-26; Thaddeus, pp. 170-71. See, especially, Devoney Looser, *Women Writers and Old Age in Great Britain, 1750-1850* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).
[143] John Wilson Croker, *The Quarterly Review* 11 (1814), pp. 123-30, p. 130.

The issue of Burney's nationality shaped contemporary readings of *The Wanderer*, as it shapes the fate of her heroine. Both women lived in France at the height of political conflicts between France and Britain and have personal connections to French citizens. They are married to French citizens, although in Juliet's case, her union to a French commissary is a civil ceremony that has no legal force in England. Known as 'Madame d'Arblay' throughout the nineteenth century, Burney's position in the public imagination was as the wife of a French émigré. In a discussion of *Camilla*, Jane Austen's boorish John Thorpe refers to its author as 'she who married the French emigrant' (*NA*, 43), demonstrating that Burney's literary reputation was inseparable from her private life. Some reviewers attributed what they perceived as the diminution of Burney's literary talents to her marriage to d'Arblay. The *Anti-Jacobin* offers a telling example:

> The high reputation which Miss Burney enjoyed as a writer of novels, raised our expectations of instruction from a new production of Madame d'Arblay, very high indeed. We were not such strenuous Antigallicans as to expect that our fair author would experience any diminution of talents from her union with a native of France[.][144]

Drawing an implicit opposition between 'Miss Burney' and 'Madame d'Arblay', Burney's self is uncomfortably split between the two, as in the American preface to her father's memoirs. Implicit in the reviewer's account is the belief that contact with the French leads to an enervation and corruption of the English character, as argued by Hannah More or Edmund Burke.[145] The loss of Englishness is evidenced by her language: 'her long absence from England […] has betrayed her into the frequent use

[144] *The Anti-Jacobin Review* 46, p. 347.
[145] *Ibid*., p. 347.

of *Gallicisms*, most offensive to English ears'.[146] Thomas Macaulay made a similar objection in *The British Critic*, noting that she had 'forgotten the common elegancies of her native tongue, […] adopting a phraseology which is neither French nor English, but uniting the bombast of the one with the awkwardness of the other'.[147] Burney's hybrid language combines French finery with the ruder aspects of the English language, leading to a mongrel form of writing.

The 'stormy sea of politics' to which the preface refers is not simply an allusion to the Anglo-French war, it is also a coded remark on women's contentious presence in political debates. The discussion of the heroine's admittance amongst the company at the inn after landing on British soil offers a miniaturised illustration of the objections to women encroaching on politics. It is also a reflection on the issue of border control and the reception of aliens, since the scene takes place right after they reach the 'British shore' (22), at the inn closest to the custom-house. The narrative clearly constructs this zone as one of border control, as it is a British rather than simply English location. Mrs Maple's objection to Juliet's presence leads to a discussion of gendered political authority, as the Admiral sees Mrs Maple's request as an illegitimate exertion of power. Even though he has retired from naval service, the Admiral considers his public authority intact:

> 'I am not sunk into such a fair weather chap, as to make over my authority, in such a little pitiful skiff's company as this, to petticoat government;—though no man has better respect for the sex, in its proper element; which, however, is not the sea. Therefore, Madam,' turning to Mrs Maple, 'this gentlewoman being my own passenger, and having comported herself without any offence either to

[146] *Ibid*., p. 352.
[147] *The British Critic* 1 (January-June 1814), pp. 374-86, p. 376.

God or man, I shall take it kind if you will treat her in a more Christian-like manner.' (24)

If the sea is read as a metaphor for politics, then the Admiral's dismissal of female intervention as 'petticoat government' marks politics as an exclusively male space, a conception reinforced by the idea of 'proper element'. Mrs Maple and the Admiral fight over who controls the entrance of foreign elements, and therefore who secures the nation's borders. In her treatment of Juliet, Mrs Maple is a political woman, who wishes to monitor the movements and the treatment of refugees, which is essentially Juliet's status at the beginning of the novel. The Admiral, on the other hand, displays the sort of benevolence Burney had appealed to in *Brief Reflections*, despite the secrecy that envelops the heroine.

The novel opens with a dense fog that symbolises the overriding suspicion, fear, and uncertainty that dominate the narrative and surround its heroine, whose impenetrable identity the fog mirrors. It neatly captures the atmosphere of a country at war, where paranoia prevails. Mr Riley mocks young Ireton for being 'afraid the sea should be impregnated with informers, instead of salt, and so won't venture to give breath to an idea, lest it should be floated back to Signor Robespierre, and hodge-podged into a conspiracy' (15). Faces cannot be recognised nor movements monitored. Mrs Maple, Elinor Joddrel's aunt, is convinced that Juliet is 'sent amongst us as a spy for our destruction!' (25) and would have everyone know that she is 'a foreigner, of a suspicious character' (26). 'Secrecy' and 'mystery' are frequently applied to the heroine and there are many hints that she might be an enemy of the British state. The constant reference to 'British shore[s]' (16, 402, 751) and 'British ground' (25) supports a reading of Burney's text as an examination of the state of the United Kingdom as opposed to just England. The passengers clamouring for her name, the wanderer enters

as a voice, refusing to reveal her name or her identity. Juliet sticks to a strict 'plan of privacy and obscurity' (771), a pairing that underlines the secrecy necessary to delimit a private self. The novel illustrates the troubling nature of privacy and its potential social threat, as characters variously attempt to reterritorialise it.[148] As Suzie Asha Park notes, '[t]he audience's demands for both disclosure *and* mystery imbricate a larger cultural pressure to seek out the hidden self'.[149] The fog therefore acts as a liminal space where the individual can escape from the machinery of the state, as reflected in the characters' clandestine escape from Robespierre's government.

Rather than representing institutions as agents of national cohesion, *The Wanderer* proves that the very institutions supposed to guarantee domestic security are the same instruments that weaken its borders. The machinery of state is represented in the newspaper advertisement that describes Juliet physically and explains she 'goes commonly by the name of Miss Ellis' (756). The press helps to monitor private individuals, confirming Henry Tilney's claim that 'newspapers lay every thing open' (*NA*, 203). The novel, however, hints at the weakness of this apparatus, since the advertisement was placed by the commissary, Juliet's French 'husband'. The marriage allows the commissary to make a claim to Juliet's English property and fortune, upon which, according to Burkean theory, the state is founded. Through the advertisement, the Frenchman has managed to infiltrate the state and threatens to symbolically invade it. There is, moreover, an uncomfortable suggestion here that Britain exposes its own women to the monster of the Revolution. In refusing to grant Juliet the hospitality to

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[148] For a compelling examination of eighteenth-century anxieties concerning privacy, see Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Privacy: Concealing the Eighteenth-Century Self* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

[149] Suzie Asha Park, '"All Agog to Find Her Out": Compulsory Narration in *The Wanderer*', in *Recognizing the Romantic Novel: New Histories of British Fiction, 1780-1830*, ed. Jillian Heydt-Stevenson and Charlotte Sussman (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), pp. 126-54, p. 128.

which her birth and Christian charity entitle her, the state exposes itself to foreign threats.

The post office offers another example of an institution that both unites the country and exposes it to external forces. One of the elements that make Juliet suspicious to others is, like Austen's Jane Fairfax, her connection to the post-office. Mary Favret argues that Jane Fairfax's sudden outburst on the post office allows her 'to retrea[t] into obscurity', for 'the post office both protects and negates the individual body'.[150] But the post office also has the potential to signal a secret, illicit correspondence:

> When British fears about invasion and insurrection were at their height, legal prosecution of seditious activity relied on the interception and confiscation of the rebels' correspondence. […] The combination of various legislative maneuvers—the Alien Act (1793), the creation of the Alien Office (1794), the Traitorous Correspondence Act (1793; extended in 1798), the "Two Acts" against Treasonous Practices and Seditious Meetings (1795), and the Newspaper Act (1798)—allowed both the Home Secretary and the Foreign Secretary, as well as the Post Office itself, to scrutinize, appropriate, or restrict any written material circulating in and out of England.[151]

Lynch similarly notes that 'Burke repeatedly locates the origins of the French menace in correspondence, in letters that cross and recross the English Channel'.[152] Juliet's inquiry about letters immediately arouses suspicion, coupled with the fact that she refuses to give her name. Letters are a physical, visible manifestation of the need for privacy, which is in conflict with the interests of the nation, especially in times of war.

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[150] Mary Favret, *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics, and the Fiction of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 161.
[151] *Ibid*., p. 39.
[152] Lynch, 'Domesticating Fictions', p. 53.

They are a focal point of 'the tensions between needs for separateness and for community', which Burney herself experienced, as the previous discussion of her private writing demonstrates.[153]

In *The Wanderer*, the reader encounters Burney's 'preoccupation, consistent throughout all her novels, with naming, identity, and legitimacy', the heroine's name withheld even from the reader for the first half of the novel.[154] This decision might have been motivated by Burney's own experience as 'Madame d'Arblay' to argue against women's positioning in society through their name. Juliet's namelessness ensures she is assessed in terms of character as opposed to social status. It is also a powerful means of political resistance: defining the 'self in negative terms', the heroine 'transcends social determination' and is 'invulnerable to other people's readings.'[155] It is also a way for Burney to illustrate the savagery with which otherness is met: as a nameless character, Juliet is 'this foreigner' (26), 'the stranger' (27), a 'black insect' (27), the 'Incognita', or the 'demoiselle', despite her desperate appeal 'I am English!' (26) But Juliet, who is also French, is a liminal being, caught between France and England, troubling the idea of a fixed identity and challenging the neat distinction between other and native. Even her real name, Juliet, is, as Doody observes, double, since it connects her to Shakespeare's heroine as well as Rousseau's Julie.[156] Juliet speaks in French at first, 'understands English on and off at her pleasure (16), and finally switches to English. Born in Yorkshire, she was first educated in England then in a French convent. Lord Denmeath presumes that she is a 'Papist' (615) because she greatly admires and respects the Bishop. Juliet corrects him, stating: 'I am firmly a Protestant! But, as such, I am a Christian' (615-16). As in *Brief Reflections*, religious differences are subsumed

[153] Spacks, *Privacy*, p. 297.
[154] Jones, p. 9.
[155] Lynch, *Economy of Character*, p. 200.
[156] Doody, 'Introduction' to *The Wanderer*, p. xxiii.

in the label 'Christian'. Juliet is fluent in both languages, although she speaks English with a slight 'foreign accent' (643), an alterity that is not erased by the end of novel. Thanks to her maternal grandmother, Juliet, like Edgeworth's Ormond, reads French and English classics. Women and literature are central to Juliet's education, the novel thus arguing for women's participation in the construction of national identity, as seen in Maria Edgeworth's fiction. Burney alternates between French and English authors, Boileau and Pope for poetry, then Racine and Shakespeare for drama, evenly balancing the two literary traditions.

Like Edgeworth's Grace Nugent, the shadow of illegitimacy clouds Juliet's birth, although unlike Grace or Evelina, Juliet knows who her parents are. The union between the young Miss Juliet Powel and Lord Granville is legal but kept secret first by Granville's father, the Earl of Melbury, who looked down on the match, then by Granville himself and his brother-in-law Lord Denmeath, a villain who prevents Juliet making a claim to her rightful property. Even though her union to the French Commissary is void, the Frenchman conveniently dies, thus allowing for an uncomplicated denouement as Juliet can marry the hero Albert Harleigh.[157] For Sarah Salih, the novel's resolution represents a problematic 'racial erasure': her otherness 'purged (or "sacrificed") when the Admiral, who turns out to be her uncle, produces the "documents and certificates" which establish her Englishness and her ancestry beyond a doubt', 'Juliet's alterity is altered during the course of *The Wanderer*, so that by the time the novel concludes, the unfathomable "other" has been converted into a reassuringly "native" subject, who may assume her rightful place in the upper echelons

[157] Critics often find Harleigh disappointing. For Doody, pp. xxiii-xxiv, Harleigh is the least attractive of Burney's heroes, 'a very passive and fussy person'. Claudia Johnson also sees him as a disappointing character. *Equivocal Beings*, pp. 165-88.

of English society without disturbing existing social or racial structures.'[158] While I agree that Juliet's otherness is partially resolved by the end of the novel, I believe the narrative retains her otherness in her hybrid identity and argues for her sameness not simply on the grounds of legal sanction, but also on the basis of her character, an important element of national identity. This indeterminacy reflects the novel's understanding of the self as porous and fluid. By retaining her heroine's alterity, Burney suggests that Britishness is constituted by and benefits from otherness. Juliet, like Britishness, is the result of complex cultural and political exchanges.

Juliet is both '*la sage petite anglaise*' (644) and a 'female Robinson Crusoe' (873), two seemingly antithetical identities. The different national perspectives on Juliet's character, underlined by the use of different languages, highlight the idea that Juliet deeply troubles national identity and British femininity. As a 'female Robinson Crusoe' (873), Juliet revises the standard model of female behaviour and offers perhaps one of Burney's most secret political message. A model of resilience and independence, Defoe's Crusoe also became an emblem for the rising middle class that threatened aristocratic hegemony. As Patrick Parrinder notes, readers of Crusoe quickly forgot that he is of German descent.[159] He is Defoe's 'true-born Englishman' in the sense that he is not of pure English descent, since there is no such thing, but, for Romantic readers, Crusoe had acquired this status of 'archetypal Englishman', as the 'nearest rival' to John Bull.[160] Just as Edgeworth revises English literary tradition to reconfigure it as British, Burney similarly appropriates this masculine model to argue for women's ability to define their history on their own terms. As a wandering female with 'a rare

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[158] Sarah Salih, '"Her Blacks, Her Whites and Her Double Face!": Altering Alterity in *The Wanderer*', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 11:3 (April 1999), pp. 305-15, pp. 302, 314.
[159] Patrick Parrinder, *Nation & Novel: The English Novel from its Origins to the Present Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 19-20.
[160] *Ibid*., pp. 63, 26.

hand […] at hocus pocus work' (771) and 'so great an adept at metamorphoses' (49), Juliet foregrounds an identity that is fluid and hybrid. She crosses national, social, gender, racial, as well as generational boundaries.[161] While her constant mutations are often accompanied by hardship, they are also oddly empowering, escaping from normative social systems. According to Angela Keane, 'In the Romantic imagination, the woman who wanders, who defines herself beyond the home and as a subject whose desires exceed or preclude maternity, divests herself of femininity and erases herself from familial, heterosexual structure of the national.'[162] Burney therefore redraws the boundaries of femininity through her wandering female.

Wandering may be a Romantic trope, but in the case of Burney's heroine, the wandering female is both a potential threat to national security and a challenge to the nation's claim as a polite nation. Juliet's trajectory mirrors the development of the novel that Margaret Cohen and Carolyn Dever identify as the result of 'intersections and interactions among texts, readers, writers, and publishing and critical institutions that linked together Britain and France'.[163] In their genealogy of the novel, the 'Channel zone' is a significant 'arena of cultural power', 'a story of cultural exchanges and of cultures constituted through exchange', 'processes [that] vindicate and challenge the imagined contours of the nation-state'.[164] As in Burney's journal-letter of her return to England, France remains in *The Wanderer* the centre of culture and refinement. Juliet is in turn a music teacher and a seamstress, skills that support her financially and which she acquired in France. Miss Matson capitalises on Juliet's French association,

[161] As Lynch notes, the choice of blackface is 'unmotivated by the demands of plot'. 'Domesticating Fictions', p. 60. Salih, p. 309, points out that this change in complexion is reassuring: Juliet is at least a 'European, not an African'.
[162] Keane, p. 3.
[163] Margaret Cohen and Carolyn Dever (eds.), *The Literary Channel: The Inter-National Invention of the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 3.
[164] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

displaying the young woman in the shop-window and presenting her work as 'a specimen of the very last new fashion, just brought her over by own of her young ladies from Paris' (629). The novel represents the darker realities of cross-Channel economy: Juliet witnesses in the New Forest 'the cross-channel traffic' of 'unlawful goods', with the 'laces, and cambrics, and gloves, just brought to land' (715). This illegal trafficking is the result of deep social inequalities. Juliet's wandering therefore serves to question the United Kingdom's position as a polite nation.

This hybrid wandering figure is in fact a model of British femininity, through her display of simplicity. Despite her French upbringing, Juliet bears an unaffected 'possession of cultivated talents' (75) that contrasts with the vulgarity and meanness of her English entourage, which simultaneously invalidates accusations of deception. Her aristocratic origins can be detected in her demeanour, which is compatible with the ideals of British femininity. Harleigh's objection to Mrs Maple's idea that Juliet is a vagabond because 'neither her language nor her manners' (30) supports this conjecture. Even though she changes identity, moving up and down the social ladder, and is in many ways constantly acting, there is never any doubt about the quality of her character, which always follows 'unaffected conduct' (453).[165] Despite the mystery that surrounds her and the ease with which she moves from one identity to another, every one of Juliet's gestures and words appears natural. This is paradoxically never more apparent than in her performances, both musical and theatrical, in which a perfect union between nature and art is accomplished. Juliet is caught red-handed playing the harp and singing in Mrs Maple's drawing-room, where she appears as 'a performer whom nature had gifted with her finest feelings, to second, or rather to meet the soul-pervading

[165] For a discussion of Juliet as actress, see, in particular, Kathleen Anderson, 'Frances Burney's *The Wanderer*: The Actress as Virtuous Deceiver', *European Romantic Review* 10:4, pp. 424-51; Francesca Saggini, *Backstage in the Novel: Frances Burney and the Theatre Arts* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012).

refinements of skilful art' (74). Her surprised audience is struck by her improvised recital, which contradicts all of its assumptions about her history. Juliet's true self transpires in all her actions, which Harleigh had identified early on in the novel: 'To him, her language, her air, and her manner, pervading every disadvantage of apparel, poverty, and subjection, had announced her, from the first, to have received the education, and to have lived the life of a gentlewoman' (75). Harleigh reiterates his point, telling Elinor he sees Juliet as 'an elegant and well bred young woman [...] there is a modesty in her air which art, though it might attain, could not support; and a dignity [...] that make it impossible for me to have any doubt about the fairness of her character.' (76) The reference to Juliet as a 'gentlewoman' as opposed to 'noblewoman' is telling, since it separates the notion of polite character from an association with nobility.

The question of Juliet's 'arts' and her unaffected character is crystallised in the novel's scenes of performance. The private theatricals represent the difficulties for women to 'negotiate the tricky codes of female self-display' and the paradoxes that surround the examination of character.[166] It is paradoxically when she officially assumes a fictional role that Juliet can allow her true self to transpire. Again, when she performs the part of Lady Townly in Vanburgh and Cibber's comedy *The Provok'd Husband* (1728), her true character is thrown into relief, with the simplicity so essential to British femininity:

> Even her attire, which, from the bright pink sarsenet, purchased by Miss Arbe, she had changed into plain white satin, with ornaments of which the simplicity shewed as much taste as modesty, contributed to the interest which she inspired. It was suited to the style of her beauty, which was Grecian; and it seemed

[166] Lynch, *Economy of Character*, p. 200.

> equally to assimilate with the character of her mind, to those who, judging it from the fine expression of her countenance, conceived it to be pure and noble. (738)

The irony of her performance is that she is closest to her real, social self on stage than at any other point in the novel. Her character is especially revealed in her decision to alter her costume and infuse it with the simplicity conduct manuals recommended (see Introduction). The passage suggests a complete equation between internal disposition and outward countenance, an important aspect of character. Juliet's simplicity guarantees her sincerity and foregrounds her British identity.

Even though Juliet has a claim to a title, her history places emphasis on character as opposed to rank and insinuates that middle-class women will provide a bright future for England. Juliet's father is Lord Granville, a landed aristocrat unable to stand up to his father, but her mother, Juliet Powel, was 'the orphan and destitute daughter of an insolvent man of business' (641). 'Her mother came not, indeed, from an ancient race', but, her friend Gabriella assures the eccentric Sir Jaspar, 'she was a pattern of virtue, as well as a model of beauty' (640-41). There is already in the mother's history a hint that men cannot secure England's future since its trades*men* fail in their enterprises.[167] Juliet unites her mother's true nobility of character with her father's title, thereby altering in the process the localising of character. Juliet inherits her Englishness it seems less from her father than from her mother, who has 'her own sweet name' and 'her own sweet character' (834). Her maiden name is Powel, a more English-sounding name than the French 'Granville', suggesting that the initial dilution of English character finds its origin in the upper classes. It is also her grandmother who

[167] There is a surprising number of successful businesswomen in *The Wanderer*, even if their methods do not always correspond to humane ideals.

accompanies the infant Juliet to France and teaches her English, when it was the Granville family's decision to send her to Montpellier. The child's ties to Britain are secured through the middle-class maternal line, whereas the aristocratic male line sends its female elements to abroad, thereby deliberately diluting and vitiating the English character. By means of this narrative, Burney suggests that the women of England act as better guardians of Englishness than men. Burney, like Austen in *Persuasion* and in *Emma*, hints that the emerging professional classes offer fitter examples of British character. This she does through a member of the navy, Admiral Powel, Juliet's uncle.

The Admiral is a proud Englishman who stands for England, who emerges as 'an uncle, a protector, […] so excellent a man' and who offers Juliet the 'prospect of solid comfort' (846). In his unwavering respect for the female sex, Powel follows the codes of chivalry Burke had complained were 'gone'.[168] He is the embodiment of middle-class ideology, whereby women are domestic creatures who should not interfere with matters of state politics. As a naval officer, he is also part of the emerging professional classes that reshuffled the fabric of British society.[169] Even before he knows he is related to Juliet, he always addresses her as 'gentlewoman' when other characters have no qualms insulting her. Even though the Admiral is not as sophisticated a gentleman as Mr Knightley or Captain Wentworth, there is a sense in which he represents a positive Englishness that follows Christian values and principles, operates on merit, and treats people according to humane values rather than strict rules of decorum. The Admiral owns that he has 'little or no schooling;—except by the buffets of the world' (833). Jocelyn Harris is right that Austen improved on Burney's model in *Persuasion*, but we should be careful not to conflate the Admiral's vernacular

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[168] See Burke's famous dismay that 'The age of chivalry is gone.' *Reflections*, p. 231.

[169] The Admiral did not receive his position through commission but through merit alone: 'I owe nothing to birth nor favour' (833).

and naval language with artistic failure.[170] By introducing a character with a professional idiolect, or in other words a plain speech, who is also one of the few voices of Christian morality, Burney demonstrates that character does not rely on social rank, even if his character does not come without its share of problems. The Admiral is also the one who calls out on the hypocrisy of the upper classes as well as the aspiring middle classes that ape the manners of their social superiors. When the aptly named Mrs Howel accuses Juliet of theft, he ironically plays with Mrs Howel's social aspirations:

> 'A Lady, Ma'am, such as I suppose you to be, can't fail having the right way of thinking. But that sort of gentry, as I have taken frequent note, have an ugly kind of knack, of treating people rather short that have got a favour to ask[.]' (810)

By playing with the terms 'gentry' and 'Lady', the Admiral calls Mrs Howel on her own game of presenting herself as a proper lady. Powel, on the other hand, displays the kind of politeness that befits a gentleman, as he displays a humanist benevolence towards strangers.

Conclusion

Like many other women writers, Burney ostensibly shied away from any political discussions, concealing her interest in political issues even in her private writing. Burney addressed the question of national identity in particular early on in her career, in both her private and published writing. Discussing *Evelina*, *The Wanderer*, and the journals and diaries, as well as the prose work *Brief Reflections Relative to the Emigrant French Clergy*, this chapter traced the evolution of her reflections on national

[170] Jocelyn Harris, *'A Revolution almost Beyond Expression': Jane Austen's* Persuasion (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007).

identity, from her identification as 'Fanny Bull' to her position as 'Madame d'Arblay'. Her marriage to General d'Arblay, her ten-year exile in France, and the birth of her son shaped her understanding of identity as fluid and heterogeneous, her writing an attempt to articulate a fractured self, caught between her loyalty to her native country and her new ties to its long-term rival. Simplicity as an important means of navigating these conflicting loyalties and her sense of herself as a stranger within. Simplicity enabled Burney to transform the General from a 'gentilhomme' into a British gentleman.

Burney was highly aware of the reception of her work as 'Madame d'Arblay' and of the effects readers and reviewers considered her union had on literary powers. Savaged by reviewers, *The Wanderer*, a novel shaped by the ongoing conflict between Britain and France, offers Burney's most sustained exploration of national identity. Like Burney herself, the English-born heroine Juliet Granville is a liminal creature with ties on both sides of the Channel. Unable to reveal her true identity, Juliet can only be defined by her character, where simplicity dominates. Juliet's own history places a strong emphasis on the value of the middle classes and their contribution to the nation through both their public and private actions. Burney, like Austen and Edgeworth, remodels the figure of the gentleman through her representation of the navy and the importance of character over rank.

Chapter 5

‘Far be it from us to meddle with politics’ (*Helen*): Secret Female Politicians and the ‘Golden Mean’ of Simplicity in Maria Edgeworth

Maria Edgeworth adopted the mask of the apolitical writer early on in her career. The volume *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795) opens with ‘A Letter from a Gentleman to his Friend upon the Birth of his Daughter’, a witty satire on male objections to women’s claim to equal consideration. Denying that women can compete with men in intellectual endeavours, the gentleman stresses that women should be excluded from the ‘science of politics’, adamantly asserting that no historical figure can convince him ‘it is safe or expedient to trust the sex with power’.[1] In *Belinda* (1801), Lady Delacour’s canvassing is not with the public good in mind, but an attempt to settle her personal vendetta with Mrs Luttridge. *In Madame De Fleury* (1809), the narrator, echoing Hannah More’s *Strictures*, claims that ‘no amiable or sensible woman can wish to interfere’ with politics.[2] Even late in life, Edgeworth remained ambivalent about women’s presence in and interference with political affairs. Her private correspondence is revealing, recording reflections ranging from domestic Irish affairs to global issues, indicating a keen interest in politics, which run alongside sometimes disparaging comments on women’s political engagement. As Kathryn Gleadle observes, ‘letters functioned as tools for local and political influence but also as sites for the display of female anxieties. The letters of many politically active women reveal not only agency and authority but also striking expressions of disempowerment, uncertainty as to their political views, and a blurring of the contours of their own agency.’[3] Discussing the

[1] Maria Edgeworth, *Letters for Literary Ladies. To which is Added, An Essay on the Noble Science of Self-Justification* (London: Johnson, 1795), p. 10.
[2] Maria Edgeworth, *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, 12 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999-2003), V: *Madame de Fleury* (1809), ed. Heidi van de Veire and Kim Walker with Marilyn Butler, p. 230.
[3] Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens*, p. 15.

memoirs of Madame Roland, a revolutionary salonnière who was executed in 1793, Edgeworth declared:

> She was a great woman and died heroically, but I don't think she became more amiable, and certainly not more happy for meddling with politics; *for*, her head is cut off and her husband shot himself.[4]

For Edgeworth, life is not a price worth paying in the name of political convictions. Yet, as seen in Chapter 3, the Edgeworths believed that the pen could be more effective than the cannon.

A letter to Rachel Mordecai encapsulates the ambiguity and contradiction of Edgeworth's stance on women's political consciousness. Detailing her concerns about the civil unrest that resulted from the rejection of the Reform Bill in the House of Lords in September 1831, Edgeworth presents a sophisticated analysis of the national and international impact of local events: 'The rage for revolutions seems to be catching, from all our neighbors on the Continent.'[5] After an extensive reflection on the causes and effects of such troubled times, Edgeworth suddenly comments:

> I am surprised to find that I have written so much of what I scarcely ever write—*Politics*. But though I feel it is not a woman's department and that as she can do nothing, she had better say nothing; yet all is so out of place now that I have got out of mine.[6]

The language emphasises the idea of the inappropriateness of women's 'place' in politics, as 'department' implies strict divisions of labour. Because the times are 'out of place', however, Edgeworth can allow herself to trespass onto forbidden territory. It

[4] ME to Miss Ruxton, Edgeworthstown, February 27, 1796.
[5] ME to Rachel Lazarus, Edgeworthstown, November 4, 1831, *The Education of the Heart: The Correspondence of Rachel Mordecai Lazarus and Maria Edgeworth*, ed. Edgar E. MacDonald (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1977), p. 214.
[6] *Ibid*., p. 215.

is as if, in a time of political uncertainty, women can surreptitiously infiltrate politics, unnoticed.

As Chapter 3 demonstrated, Edgeworth's fiction complicates a neat distinction between the private and public spheres, showing how the political infiltrates the home and how individual, private character benefits the nation at large, and that women are instrumental in assessing character. National decisions can thus be taken in a female cabinet. As an Anglo-Irish author, however, Edgeworth had to adopt the mask of the apolitical female writer. Mary Leadbeater's *Cottage Dialogues*, for which Edgeworth wrote a preface, illustrate the need for Irish works to present themselves to English audiences as uninterested in politics. Edgeworth was keen to stress that the 'characteristic of the book is good sense' and that the moral principles it supports are put forward 'without alarming party prejudice, or offending national pride'.[7] Even though the work is ostensibly about Ireland, it must be couched as a politically neutral text. Leadbeater includes in her volume a tale entitled 'Politicks', in which the unenlightened Tim meets with his friends in secret to discuss politics. His friend Jem warns him that 'No good ever comes of such people as us having secrets', and then reminds him of the tragic aftermaths of the rebellion of 1798.[8] Jem then concludes: 'it's fitter for us to mind our little potato gardens […]; and while we behave ourselves, no one dares meddle with us, not the king himself, as great a man as he is.'[9] By declaring a complete indifference towards politics, Jem avoids any suspicions. The Irish therefore share the same fate as female writers: they must mask their secret politics.

Sincerity is, for Edgeworth, a British, and not simply an English concern. It is a quality that the other nations that form the United Kingdom must display. The English

[7] Edgeworth, Preface to *Cottage Dialogues*, pp. iv-v.
[8] Leadbeater, *Cottage Dialogues*, p. 230.
[9] *Ibid*., p. 231.

nurseryman fittingly named Mr Oakly in Edgeworth's tale 'Forgive and Forget' in *The Parent's Assistant*, is suspicious of the sincerity of Mr Grant, his Scottish neighbour. Oakly cannot conceive that someone other than an a strictly 'English' man can have unaffected 'friendly manners': 'he secretly suspected, that this *civility*, as he said, *was all show*, and that *he was not, nor could not, being a Scotchman, be such a hearty friend as a true-born Englishman*.'[10] Maria Edgeworth, in this tale, follows Defoe's claim that there is no such thing as a 'true-born Englishman'. The italics seem to reflect the narrator's distancing from the Englishman's words. Oakly's son Arthur, on the other hand, does not care whether Maurice, Mr Grant's son, was born in England or Scotland: 'All I know is, that wherever he was born, he is *very* good'.[11] Character can therefore cross regional differences. England and Scotland are symbolically separated by the walls between the two families' gardens, but the boys' spontaneous crossings suggest the younger generations will achieve a true partnership. Moreover, England needs Scotland to flourish, for Grant has the botanical expertise needed for a nation's healthy agriculture. Edgeworth extends the issue by demonstrating the kinship between the Englishman and his Scottish neighbour, and their shared investment in sincerity, for Grant's demonstrations of friendship are not 'all show'. 'Forgive and Forget' is deeply invested in uniting the different British nations, a unity moreover achieved in the home.[12]

This chapter, which focuses on the figure of the female politician in *Manoeuvring* (1809) and *Helen* (1834), presents a final discussion of Edgeworth's representations of female participation in the construction of British national identity. As in her other novels, character is an important foundation for the nation, and

[10] Maria Edgeworth, 'Forgive and Forget', *The Parent's Assistant; Or, Stories for Children*, 6 vols. 3rd ed. with Additions (London: Johnson and Woodfall, 1800), V, pp. 204-05.
[11] *Ibid*., p. 221.
[12] The law in this tale is an agent of division and fractious relationships.

simplicity and sincerity are essential to establishing a sense of shared Britishness. In her later fiction, however, Edgeworth is less confident in women's future active participation in national concerns. While *Manoeuvring* dismisses female political intrigue as un-British but continues to see the domestic as the site of renovation of the public sphere, *Helen*, which offers Edgeworth's most sustained exploration of the figure of the female politician, is less hopeful about women's future national role. Simplicity remains the site of moral character, but there is greater ambivalence concerning the renovating power of the domestic sphere and women's ability to participate in this renovation.

Manoeuvring (1809): 'We can't well make an English word of it'

Originally entitled 'Plain Sailing', *Manoeuvring* (1809), composed in 1808-09, is a patriotic work that celebrates the British values of openness, sincerity, and simplicity, and rejects secrecy and scheming as alien to the British character. Originally a specialist military and naval term, it soon became a commonplace way of conveying 'artfulness, cunning, subtlety, trickery and stratagem'.[13] Even though 'manoeuvring' was, by the end of the eighteenth century, common in the English language, Brian Southam, in his analysis of the use of the word in Austen's fiction, has shown that the word was still regarded as French in the early nineteenth century: 'it was firmly established in the minds of Jane Austen's contemporary readers as a term for social trickery and manipulation', and readers 'were alert to the word's continuing French flavour.'[14] Edgeworth's thoroughly English Mr Walsingham, of the 'manoeuvrer' Mrs Beaumont, exclaims: 'We can't well make an English word of it', which doubles Mrs

[13] Southam, '"Manoeuvring" in Jane Austen', p. 466.
[14] *Ibid*., p. 468.

Beaumont's otherness, first as a manoeuvrer, and secondly as a female manoeuvrer and politician.[15] Richard Lovell Edgeworth's preface to the first edition of *Tales of Fashionable Life* underlines the foreignness of the deceptive scheming the term implies, defining 'MANOEUVRING' as:

> [A] vice to which the little great have recourse, to show their second-rate abilities. Intrigues of gallantry upon the continent frequently lead to political intrigue: amongst us the attempts to introduce this *improvement* of our manners have not yet been successful; but there are, however, some, who, in every thing they say or do, show a predilection for 'left-handed wisdom.' It is hoped that the picture here represented of a *manoeuvrer* has not been made alluring.[16]

The '*improvement* to our manners' alludes to the stereotype of the British as unpolished and unrefined (see Chapter 1). RLE rehearses contemporary concerns over the transplantation of foreign manners, echoing Tillotson's outburst at the end of the seventeenth century at attempts to 'transform us into foreign manners and fashions' and More's and Burke's similar observations in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Although the tale has an English focus, the use of 'our' can be read as including all British citizens, for, as Marilyn Butler argues in her General Introduction, the *Tales* (1809-12) are 'a polished, ambitious representation of a diverse and divided British nation'.[17] Butler reads *Manoeuvring* as a comic illustration of 'the endemic cultural cringe towards France'.[18] While I agree that the anti-cosmopolitan and anti-Gallic position of the preface and the tale is not representative of the Edgeworths'

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[15] Maria Edgeworth, *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, 12 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999-2003), IV: *Manoeuvring* (1809), ed. Claire Connolly with Marilyn Butler, p. 6. All further references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text.

[16] Richard Lovell Edgeworth, 'Preface' to *Tales of Fashionable Life* (1809), in *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, 12 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999-2003), I: *Castle Rackrent*, *An Essay on Irish Bulls*, and *Ennui*, ed. Jane Desmarais, Tim McLoughlin and Marilyn Butler, pp. 159-60.

[17] Butler, 'General Introduction', I, p. LXXV.

[18] *Ibid*., p. LXXV.

personal views, I believe that *Manoeuvring* nevertheless displays a conscious anti-French sentiment, dictated by its historical context. Written in 1808, the tale bares the trace of the Napoleonic conflict. The preface also foregrounds the interconnection between the personal and the public, establishing a clear continuity between private romantic relationships, 'intrigues of gallantry', with the more delicate issue of 'political intrigue', in other words the world of public affairs and public good.

Manoeuvring has received virtually no critical attention apart from its inclusion in the recent Pickering and Chatto edition of the works of Maria Edgeworth. For Marilyn Butler, the tale has value in terms of Edgeworth's development of the comic mode, but comments that '[t]he later tales, like *Manoeuvring*, though pleasing, have nothing much to say'.[19] This 'polished comedy of manners' is nevertheless a noteworthy contribution to Edgeworth's ongoing reflections on the meaning of national identity in a British society in transition.[20] *Manoeuvring* presents 'a historical struggle between the middle-class Protestant English, best represented by their sea captains, and their powerful, wealthy, and despotic Catholic neighbours, the French and Spanish'.[21] This struggle takes the form of a contrast between moral values, a standard trope of the literature of the period. Through the opposition between Mrs Beaumont and Mr Palmer, Edgeworth dramatizes the effects of the naturalisation of French finesse against native plainness and simplicity. Many of the interactions between the two main characters are presented through military diction, Edgeworth thus staging a metaphorical battle between France/Frenchness and England/Englishness, the two nations competing for political and cultural supremacy. Mrs Beaumont is the stranger within. As a manoeuvring mother and widow, she disseminates foreign ways that compromise

[19] Butler, *Literary Biography*, pp. 325-28, p. 328.
[20] Claire Connolly and Marilyn Butler, 'Introduction', p. xvi.
[21] *Ibid*., p. xx.

central British moral values. Significantly, these are carried out by the emerging professional classes, and in particular the military, sketching a portrait of a changing Britain. *Manoeuvring* then belongs to those texts that, like Jane Austen's later *Persuasion*, reconfigure the meaning of the true British gentleman, recognisable for his preference for plainness and simplicity.

'Manoeuvring' is the double-dealing to which simplicity, with its plain dealing, is opposed. Its main character is the 'cunning widow' Mrs Beaumont, whose name immediately alerts the reader to a French connection. Both her name and her deceitful behaviour characterise her as other. As Butler suggests, 'Mrs Beaumont is not an individual so much as a type—she represents the "beau monde" or fashionable and courtly world.'[22] Always with 'some mighty mystery' (6) in tow, which Mr Knightley for one would abhor, Mrs Beaumont constantly acts according to a 'stratagem', which, like 'manoeuvring', evokes military tactics and scheming. She is a creature of affectation, as her constant 'minikin mystery' implies (6). Female characters that 'manoeuvre' are frequently dubbed 'female politicians', an ironic and slightly patronising gibe that is nevertheless tied to concerns about right female conduct and ultimately the state of the nation. Female manoeuvrings might compromise national security. With the character of Mrs Beaumont, Edgeworth introduces a member of the band of 'female politicians' whose presence is a reminder of the porousness of the boundary that separates the public and the domestic spheres.

Edgeworth is less adamant than her father in the conviction that Britain has until now been immune to the continental vice of intrigue. *Manoeuvring* interrogates the wholesomeness of British superiority in an easily overlooked footnote that immediately problematizes the idea that manoeuvring is alien to Britishness. The fictional editor

[22] *Ibid*., p. xvii.

explains that 'the feminine for an intriguer—an *intriguess*' was 'used in the days of Charles II' (7). The note further comments on Mr Walsingham's ignorance of Irish speech practices. For the lower Irish, Mrs Beaumont is a 'policizer—I would say she was fond of policizing' (7). The footnote thus reminds readers of the less exemplary moments of Old England's history, and that political intrigue, and female political intrigue, have a long British tradition. *Manoeuvring* therefore invites its readers to consider the novel's social comments within a larger British context than its English setting suggests.

One of Mrs Beaumont's arts as a 'maneouvrer' and 'policizer' is that of letter-writing, a form that is both private and public, and conceals as much as it reveals. The novel opens on a letter from the protagonist, peppered with French words and obsequious turns of phrase, with a postscript labelled 'Private—read to yourself', an indication of the public nature of private correspondence. At the close of the first chapter, however, the reader and Miss Walsingham discover that even the 'private' postscript is a stratagem: the 'secret reason' Mrs Beaumont presented her addressee is contradicted by a servant's revelation that she expects a '*pettiklar* gentleman' (10) and is in no way troubled by the chicken-pox outbreak she mentioned in her postscript. The novel therefore stresses the performative nature of letters from the beginning. The signature 'Eugenia Beaumont' is a metonymy for her character, her first name parading a noble nature.[23] She successfully crafts an image of herself as a superior being. Mr Palmer, a family friend, remains ignorant of her true character, since he 'knew her only from letters, in which she appeared every thing that was candid and amiable' (11). Mrs Beaumont exploits the power of private correspondence to establish a reality that differs from the truth.

[23] The Greek meaning is 'well born, nobility'.

The corruption of the truth and the cultivation of secrecy are the consequences of Mrs Beaumont's 'system of artifice', a policy aligned with Frenchness. Like Frank Churchill, there is with her 'always some truth to be concealed for some mighty good purpose' (7). She is comfortable with pursuing 'the conduct of double intrigue' (46), and other characters always suspect her of 'double dealing' (52, 55). Mrs Beaumont cannot convince the dim-witted Sir John Hunter, the heir to a large estate whose family has a 'reversionary title' who wishes to marry her daughter Amelia, that she tells him the truth, as he believes she conducts all 'business' with '*finesse*, and all that sort of thing' (52). As his name implies, Sir John is a sportsman, a sort of John Bullish figure who is, nevertheless, like Mrs Beaumont, a maneouvrer of sorts, since he too conducts domestic intrigue. Mrs Beaumont therefore threatens British sincerity, for which she has no regard: she 'valued a reputation for sincerity as much as Chartres valued a reputation for honesty' (55), a comparison that aligns Edgeworth's protagonist with some of England's most unscrupulous historical figures.[24] Mrs Beaumont manipulates the truth to such an extent that her surname becomes a byword for lies: Mr Walsingham, a close friend of Mr Beaumont, warning his young daughter Marianne against the widow's 'art' and the 'truth' of anything she says, adds that '[he] will not call it a falsehood, but [he] may be permitted to call it a *Beaumont*' (10), which suggests that her words might be even more immoral than lies. Mrs Beaumont pushes the boundaries of truth and honest communication to the point that the regular English language cannot define her behaviour, in the same way that it cannot accommodate 'finesse'. As we have seen, the inability of the English language to accommodate or describe

[24] Francis Charteris was a notorious rake, gambler, and brothel-keeper, nicknamed 'The Rape-Master General of Great Britain'. See Arbuthnot's satiric 'Epitaph': 'In the practice of every human vice', 'He was the only man in his time who could cheat without the mask of honesty'. For a discussion of Charteris' trial for the rape of Ann Bond, see Antony E. Simpson, 'Popular Perceptions of Rape as a Capital Crime in Eighteenth-Century England: The Press and the Trial of Francis Charteris in the Old Bailey, February 1730', *Law and History Review* 22:1 (Spring 2004), pp. 27-70.

transgressive behaviours suggests they are foreign to the British national character. With this linguistic substitution, Edgeworth, through the voice of her male character, is able to rescue the English language from 'running into a lye' as Tillotson, Addison, and Johnson after him, had feared. The novel indeed fashions lying as a specifically French activity when Edgeworth inserts an epigraph to chapter 6 on the good that can come from a lie (36), which she attributes to the French 'philosophe' Voltaire. Lying is clearly associated with French ways, a theme Edgeworth develops in her final novel *Helen*, discussed below.

Opposed to French falsehood is the English preference for truth and sincerity, which are also connected to simplicity. The Beaumont children have escaped remarkably unharmed from their mother's 'system of artifice' (7), which is due to their friendship with the Walsingham family, who taught them 'the advantages of sincerity' (8).[25] Advocates of 'plain truth' (10), the Walsinghams nevertheless remain conscious of the difficulties that can attend truth-telling. There are negative aspects that need to be recognised and justified. Mr Walsingham concedes these points:

> 'The momentary pain I give my friends by speaking the plain truth, I have always found overbalanced by the pleasure and advantage of mutual confidence. Our domestic happiness has arisen chiefly from our habits of openness and sincerity. Our whole souls are laid open; there is no management, no "*intrigue de cabinet*", no "*esprit de la ligue*."' (10)

Walsingham establishes a clear correlation between domestic happiness, another cornerstone of British identity, and sincerity. Walsingham's words anticipate Mr Knightley's declaration: 'Mystery; Finesse—how they pervert the understanding! My

[25] Connolly and Butler, 'Introduction', p. xviii, point out the unusual choice of name here to suggest 'plain dealing' for the historical figure on which Mr Walsingham is based, Burghley Francis Walsingham, 'has been more frequently associated with deceit and spying by the English Secret Service, which he is considered to have founded.'

Emma, does not every thing serve to prove more and more the beauty of truth and sincerity in all our dealings with each other?' (*E*, 486) As in *Patronage*, a male character underlines the pleasures of domestic life. Civic responsibility is best demonstrated not necessarily through political participation or a military career, but through the attachment to home and family and the practice of sincerity. Political practices are, for Walshingham, French. As a female politician, Mrs Beaumont therefore compromises domestic happiness and ultimately endangers the nation at large.

Domestic happiness might derive from sincerity, but, as Walsingham acknowledges, 'plain truth' has disadvantages that must be carefully negotiated. Miss Walsingham, for instance, reflects that young Beaumont 'carries his sincerity almost to a fault: he is too blunt, perhaps, in his manner.' (7) The character's language is tentative, revealing the complexity of sincerity: advised and celebrated, there is always a lingering fear that it can fall into the rudeness that would signal the British as uncivilised. The bluntness that attends plain truth needs to be negotiated.[26] There is often, as seen in the discussions of the figure of the savage and of language, an ambivalence and uncertainty around plainness and simplicity: even though they are the reflection of an authentic, sincere, and therefore British character, they might not fit neatly into the category of civilised behaviour. When Edward Beaumont snaps at his mother after she teases him for 'the blue-stocking style' (107) he adopted in his explanation of Miss Walsingham's superiority over Miss Hunter, the 'victim' of 'her ornaments' (107), Mrs Beaumont's indignation at his retort is such that Edward apologises immediately and asks for forgiveness on the grounds that his manners are indeed too blunt: 'Your son—who is no sentimentalist, no speech-maker—your son, who has hitherto perhaps been too rough, too harsh—now implores you, by these

[26] *Helen* addresses this issue, adding the notion of gender to its discussion. See discussion below.

sincere caresses, by all that is tender and true in nature, to believe in the filial affection of your children.' (108) The roughness Edward concedes is the expression of his sincerity. 'No speech-maker', though in this instance he is, Edward suggests there are modes of discourse, less 'rough' or rude, that might distort the truth. He uses the recognisably English argument that he is a man of few words, like the Knightley brothers, even though his speech, with its use of anaphora and parallelism, is highly rhetorical and controlled. The emphasis on roughness is also arguably a way for Edward to assert his masculinity, as a 'blue-stocking style' aligns him with the famous and often ridiculed salonnières of the eighteenth century.[27]

Edward distinguishes himself from characters that, like the 'expert speechifier' (53) Captain Lightbody, a favourite with Mrs Beaumont, manipulate language and therefore cannot be trusted to mean what they say. Like *Emma*'s John Knightley, Edward Beaumont proves that words and meaning can match. He also implicitly presents himself as a man who is open and does not practise secrecy or manoeuvres. Much of his sincerity is presented through his use of language. He privileges directness, as he 'doe[s]n't love beating about the bush' (23), and does not hesitate to interrupt his mother during a conversation dominated by ambiguity with a 'plain question' (24). '[H]alf explanations' (25) do not satisfy Edward. Mrs Beaumont, on the other hand, cultivates a 'delicacy of circumlocution' (25). Edward upholds British values when his mother practises the 'circuitous phrase[s]' Mirza Abu Khan heard in France. The contrast illustrates John Andrews' observation that the English is a plain blunt man who avoids prolixity and French is a 'language of phrases' (see Chapter 2).

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[27] For insightful discussions of the figure of the bluestocking, see, for example, Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg (eds.), *Reconsidering the Bluestockings* (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 2003); Moyra Haslett *Pope to Burney, 1714-1779: Scriblerians to Bluestockings* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Elizabeth Eger, *Bluestockings: Women of Reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Guest, *Small Change*, pp. 95-151.

Marianne Walsingham displays all the qualities that denote a polite British young lady, including true sincerity and simplicity, which contrast with her rival Miss Hunter's affectation. Eager to see her son marry the affected and capricious Miss Hunter, whom she believes is the heiress to a large fortune, Mrs Beaumont manoeuvres to 'draw her […] into a display' of superior understanding that might 'alarm' (58) her son. Again, Edgeworth uses military vocabulary to describe domestic intrigue. The plan backfires because of Marianne's simple good nature: 'Miss Walsingham, however, was so perfectly free from all the affectation and vanity of a bel-esprit, that she did not alarm even those who were inferior to her in knowledge' (58). The use of 'bel-esprit' suggests that learning intended solely for show is French in nature. By contrast, Marianne is British in spirit, even though her name has a strikingly French connotation. This might be a way for Edgeworth to mitigate the anti-Gallic tone of the tale, in line with her cosmopolitan outlook. Marianne facilitates a truly polite conversation, an amiable exchange dominated by ease and companionability, for no one is made to feel inferior, as opposed to a French parade of learning or wit. Unlike Miss Hunter, whose understanding of female propriety is a crude application of conduct manuals that recommend women do not display learning, as she is only concerned with her appearance and reputation, Marianne Walsingham betrays no fear of being 'thought a blue-stocking' (59). Miss Hunter, on the other hand, following Mrs Beaumont's advice, performs: she '*produce*[s] herself' and, with her 'ill-feigned humility', only manages to 'appear quite like a simpleton' (58). Miss Hunter is typically characterised by her 'simper' (57), an affected behaviour that encompasses her superficial and performed nature.

As a Walsingham, Marianne favours 'plain truth'. Her true British nature is best illustrated on her wedding day, an occasion where parade is allowed. The newspapers,

whose coverage reflects the porous boundary between the public and the private, report that 'she was dressed with simple elegance' (119). Beaumont's barouche is equally 'highly finished, but plain' (119), in line with his preference for simplicity in all matters. Mrs Beaumont, married on the same day to Sir John Hunter, is by contrast 'attired in the most elegant, becoming, fashionable, and costly manner' (119). The new Lady Hunter exits with her 'splendid barouche' (126), a final performance that only thinly masks her ultimate downfall. She has been 'duped' by the false rumours of another family who had spread the news of the heiress to the Wigram estate, which Mrs Beaumont coveted. The heiress is the young English woman rescued from the Spanish convent by Walsingham. The 'intriguess' is ultimately defeated by the plain truth and the disarming simplicity of those around her; her departure represents the removal of foreign habits from the community.

Simplicity is presented throughout *Manoeuvring* as a force that opposes the scheming and intrigue Mrs Beaumont pursues. The episode that showcases Marianne's unaffected yet refined nature opens on a quotation from Hannah More's poem *Florio*, first published in 1786, subtitled 'A Tale for Fine Gentlemen and Fine Ladies'.[28] In this work, women in particular are counselled to follow a religious and modest path, which 'the fair Celia' adopts: 'Led by Simplicity divine, / She pleas'd, and never tried to shine' (56). More's writing, as other conduct manuals, enjoined women to 'Seek neither to shine nor to triumph' and never court self-display, as the English heroines Leonora and Caroline Percy illustrate.[29] It is this opposition to 'love of show' that characterises Marianne as a fine British lady, reinforced by the Protestant, 'simplicity divine' she obeys. The same episode quotes the poem 'Affectation' in full, one the 'fugitive

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[28] Hannah More, *Florio: A Tale, for Fine Gentleman and Fine Ladies: and, The Bas Bleu; Or, Conversation. Two Poems*, 2nd ed. (London: Cadell, 1787).
[29] More, *Strictures*, II, p. 89.

composition[s]' included in Richard Cumberland's *Memoirs* (1806).[30] The reference to Cumberland's *Memoirs* is significant, as the volume does not simply criticise the obvious pitfalls of affectation, but also places sincerity and simplicity at the heart of human worth in his tribute to his friend 'the good old Abbe Curtis':

> It is ever matter of delight to me, when I can see the world disposed to pay tribute to those modest unassuming characters, who exact no tribute, but in plain and pure simplicity of heart recommend themselves to our affections, and borrowing nothing from the charms of wit, or the display of genius, exhibit virtue—*in itself how lovely*.[31]

Cumberland praises a 'plain and pure simplicity of heart' as the essential qualities of moral character, as expressed in Knox's essay 'On Goodness of Heart' (see Chapter 2). It also guarantees greater human connections than cold displays of politeness. Mrs Beaumont discovers her son smiling while reading Cumberland's verse. As seen in the previous chapters, it is equally important that female characters display simplicity and that male characters value it. Mr Palmer praises young Beaumont on those grounds: 'There is an ingenuousness, an honourable frankness about him, that I love.' (85)

Mr Palmer himself practises sincerity and simplicity, his 'sturdy plain sense' ultimately defeating Mrs Beaumont's 'fine and double-refined sentiments' (85). An old friend of the deceased Mr Beaumont, Mr Palmer is the polar opposite of his widow, being 'particularly open and honest in his nature, abhorring all artifice himself, and unsuspicious of it in others' (11). He is thus the embodiment of British plainness and simplicity. He detests 'speeches' (37), values frankness, and is a 'straight-forward, plain-spoken old gentleman' (54), much like John Knightley or Admiral Croft. Palmer

[30] Richard Cumberland, *Memoirs of Richard Cumberland. Written by Himself* (London: Lackington and Allen, 1806), p. 516.
[31] *Ibid*., p. 389.

also rejects secrecy, especially in a domestic setting, which for him harbours the values of the nation:

> 'I'm sure, you, my good lady, are as great a foe as I am to all family managements and mysteries, where the old don't know what the young do, nor the young what the old think. No, no—that's all nonsense and French convent work—nothing like a good old English family.' […]
>
> This frankness would have opened any heart except Mrs. Beaumont's; but it is the misfortune of artful people that they cannot believe others to be artless: either they think simplicity of character folly; or else they suspect that openness is only affected, as a bait to draw them into snares. (38)

Mr Palmer expresses a typically British patriotic sentiment when he connects mysteries to French Catholic practices. He also values intergenerational exchanges, which presents a constructive view of the nation's future. Again, 'simplicity of character', which puzzles artful characters such as Mrs Beaumont and Sir James Harcourt, as seen in Chapter 3, is noted for the warmth it invites from others.

Mr Palmer is an openly patriotic figure, championing domesticity and displaying 'plain good sense' (84), central qualities of British national identity. Having just returned from Jamaica, he revels in English domesticity:

> 'By St. George, there's nothing like Old England for comfort!' cried Mr. Palmer, settling himself in his arm-chair in the evening; 'nothing after all in any part of the known world, like Old England for comfort. Why, madam, there's not another people in the universe that have in any of their languages a name even for comfort. The French have been forced to borrow it; but now they have got it, they don't know how to use it, nor even how to pronounce it, poor devils! Well, there's nothing like Old England for comfort.' (32)

Mr Palmer rehearses the commonplace view of Britain as the place of domestic felicity. The passage is noteworthy for its inversion of cultural points of reference: rather than suggesting that the English language does not have the polish required to translate French 'esprit' and 'savoir-vivre', the French have to look to England for the meaning of domestic comfort. In 1810, the Scottish publication *Town Fashions* made a similar observation: 'in no other country but England, is the true import and meaning of the word *comfort* understood, nor in any other languages used to express a similar signification.'[32] Mr Palmer is convinced of England's position as a leading polite European nation. This Anglocentric view, also detectable in *Town Fashions*, pits England as the centre of British politeness, a point developed below. For Mr Palmer, there is nothing like 'a good English family, where every thing speaks plenty and hospitality, without waste or ostentation; and where you are received with a hearty welcome, without compliments; and let do just as you please, without form, and without being persecuted by politeness.' (33) Mr Palmer, especially in his claim that politeness 'persecutes' people, echoes other works discussed in this study, such as Burney's Mr Monckton, Blair's *Lectures*, or Admiral Croft in *Persuasion*, which criticise the 'forms' of politeness associated with courtliness and affectation that compromise British simplicity and sincerity.

Captain Walsingham offers a more modern model of a British gentleman, who, like Mr Palmer, values plainness and sincerity. In his interactions with Mrs Beaumont, Walsingham insists on receiving a 'frank answer' and repeatedly stresses the 'plain fact' or 'the plain matter of fact' (105) of his statements. He is particularly sensitive to Mrs Beaumont's comparison of his attentions towards her daughter as those of a

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[32] *Town Fashions*, p. 76.

courtier, a figure that, as discussed in the previous chapters, had become shorthand for affectation and hypocrisy:

> Mrs. Beaumont smiled, and observed, that Captain Walsingham, though a seaman, had all the address of a courtier, and she acknowledged that she loved address.
>
> 'If by address Mrs. Beaumont means politeness, I admire it as much as she does; but I disclaim and despise all that paltry system of artifice, which is sometimes called address. No person of a great mind ever condescends to use *address* in that sense of the word; not because they cannot, but because they will not.' (102-03)

Walsingham's disclaimer illustrates the uncertainties that surround the different ways of conceiving politeness and the importance of establishing true politeness as distinct from a 'system of artifice' that is reminiscent of Chesterfieldian graces. 'Address', like 'form', refers to the performance of politeness. Though 'a seaman', Walsingham displays the politeness worthy of a true gentleman. The young Captain also redresses Burke's complaint that 'the age of chivalry is gone', for he rescues an Anglo-Spanish protestant heiress, sequestered by her English family and Spanish Catholic accomplices in a Spanish convent, not as a Captain, but as an English gentleman. Walsingham asks Birch's assistance 'not as [his] captain' (18), which indicates this mission is conducted not under the banner of the British navy but from a personal gentlemanly spirit. This domestic plotline is intertwined with the ongoing military conflict, showing secrecy and intrigue working both at a public and personal level in English society, and thus demonstrating the impossibility of separating the public and private spheres.

For all of Mr Palmer's staunch Englishness, the narrative takes a more British view. The war against France and Spain, which forms the background of the novel, is

a British conflict. Mr Palmer's own wealth comes from business in the West Indies, thus making the champion of 'old English comfort' a part of the machinery of imperial expansion. Mr Palmer himself presents a British perspective when he rejoices at the news that young Walsingham captured a Spanish ship:

> 'A most gallant action, by St. George!' exclaimed Mr. Palmer. 'These are the things that keep up the honour of the British navy and the glory of Britain.' (49)

The 2nd 1809 edition of *Manoeuvring* adds the following lines from James Thomson's famous 'Ode':[33]

> *Rule Britannia*, *rule the waves*,
> Britons *never will be slaves*.

Part of British maritime ideology, the ode participates in 'the creation of a pan-British conception of the Empire as an oceanic entity, equipped with its own historical foundations and destiny', the word 'Briton' moving beyond regional differences.[34] Henry Stephens and William Gifford, the editors of *The Quarterly Review*, were particularly scathing in their analysis of Mr Palmer, arguing that 'The old gentleman is one of the most fatiguing personages we ever remember to have encountered', 'a character of such trite ancestry that it is to be found in the dramatis personae of almost every play or novel of the last century'.[35] The narrative itself hints that Mr Palmer's obsession with 'Old England' is a little outdated. Having spent several decades in the West Indies, he has a nostalgic, slightly flawed view of Britain, which contrasts with the more modern and realistic outlook of the Walsingham family.

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[33] Dustin Griffin analyses the patriotism of the Scottish poet's work. *Patriotism and Poetry in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 74-97.
[34] David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 102.
[35] *Quarterly Review* 2 (August 1809), pp. 143, 148.

As with *Ormond*, the navy operates as a way of bringing together the members of the different nations of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. The novel represents its agency in the transformations of British society, as Austen represents in *Persuasion* with the gentlemanly status of naval characters, as well as its role in the consolidation of the British nation. Conservative and radical writers alike valued the ethos of the military classes. Mary Robinson, for instance, declared: 'Those who have been most brilliantly distinguished, since the middle of the last century, have been reared either in the school of arms, or in the wild bosom of the ocean. They have not been the sickly plants of fashionable hot-beds, where indolence begets vice, and vice becomes the parent of lassitude, apathy, disease, and death'.[36] Robinson's rhetoric is reminiscent of both Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* and More's writing. Mr Walsingham, the representative of modern middle-class Britishness, takes pride in his nephew's 'noble' (8) character, witnessed not only in his loyal friendships, but also in his commitment to the nation. 'For his country', declares Walsingham, 'All I ask from Heaven for him is, opportunity to serve his country' (8). Walsingham recounts his young ward's history, who trained on a frigate led by Captain Campbell, whose name indicates he is of Scottish descent. *Manoeuvring*, however, does not gloss over the tensions that subsisted between the nations of the United Kingdom, represented in the rivalry between Captain Campbell's son and young Walsingham. It is only after Walsingham rescues young Campbell from drowning that jealousy is changed into gratitude. That an English sailor should rescue his Scottish companion might be read as the novel's suggestion that England is, as Hannah More, boasted, the 'Queen of the Islands'. Nevertheless, *Manoeuvring*, like 'Forgive and Forget', emphasises character

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[36] Mary Robinson, 'Present State of the Manners, Society, Etc. Etc. of the Metropolis of England', *Monthly Magazine* (September 1800), intro. by Adriana Craciun, *PMLA* 119:1 (January 2004), pp. 103-119, p. 112.

over origin: the young Scottish lieutenant comes from an army family, whereas Walsingham owes his rank to his own actions, and values character over birth and nationality.

The figure of the young Irish sailor Birch, who 'long[s] for the opportunity of fighting the French' (16) and who is under Captain Walsingham's command, illustrates the new British unity the navy represents. The navy removes the otherness that marginal citizens such as the Irish might otherwise experience. Birch writes enthusiastic letters to his family that testify to a spirit that does not pit an Irish against a Welsh or a Scottish person, but recognises the 'character' of the individual. His eagerness to 'sho[w] the Captain *what is in me*, and that the pains he has took to make a gentleman, and an honour to his majesty's service, of me, is not thrown away' (17) demonstrates that what matters in the army are character and merit, rather than birth, as the italics emphasise. Moreover, Walsingham's objective is to transform Birch into a 'gentleman', thus participating in the renovation of the figure of the gentleman as a British entity. Birch's story is one of social aspiration:

> God willing, I will never disgrace his principles, for it would be my ambition to be like him in every respect; and he says, if I behave myself as I ought, I shall soon be a lieutenant; and a lieutenant in his majesty's navy is as good a gentleman as any in England, and has a right (tell my sister Kitty) to hand the first woman in Lon'on out of her carriage, if he pleases, and if she pleases. (17)

Allowing Birch to speak in his own voice, Edgeworth does not edit his lengthy letter, written in plain but vernacular English. His parents show some of his letters to Beaumont, who likes them 'because they were written with characteristic simplicity and affection, and somewhat in the Irish idiom, which this young sailor's English education had not made him entirely forget.' (7) Unlike *The Absentee*'s uncomfortable

reminder that English good sense threatens to extinguish ‘Irish enthusiasm’ (see Chapter 1), Birch’s language retains his Irish spirit. The simplicity of the writing, like Robert Martin’s letter, conveys the soundness of Birch’s character. The Birch family, having settled in England, are an example of the economic exchanges between the two nations. As farmers, they are contributing to the wellbeing of the nation, and their friendly relationship with young Beaumont is also an example of the possibility of Ireland and England being united.

Manoeuvring therefore demonstrates the different ways in which the professional classes renovate the figure of the British gentleman at the beginning of the nineteenth century. A text stamped by the ongoing Napoleonic conflict, the tale opposes French love of intrigue and secrecy and British sincerity and simplicity. As in Edgeworth’s other texts, domestic and political plotlines are deeply intertwined, reflecting the interconnection between the public and private spheres. With the character of Mrs Beaumont, Edgeworth introduces the figure of the female politician whose love of secrecy is a threat to British sincerity. Her ‘love of artifice’ is defeated by characters’ simplicity, which, although a guarantee of truth, can occasionally cause ‘momentary pain’.

Helen **(1834): Female Politicians in the Closet**

> The political conferences were held in Lord Davenant’s apartment: to what these conferences tended we never knew and never shall; we consider them as matters of history, and leave them with due deference to the historian; we have

> to do only with biography. Far be it from us to meddle with politics—we have quite enough to do with manners and morality.[37]

With this seemingly unambiguous statement at the close of a lengthy gathering of political figures at Clarendon Park, *Helen*'s narrator asserts the feminine propriety of the novel, apparently upholding a clear distinction between public and private spheres. Symbolised by Lord Davenant's apartment, politics are a male arena which women cannot enter. Should they, however, dare to cross this threshold, women would only be interfering, as 'meddle' implies. Political transactions are, moreover, connected to history, a male genre, which, as seen in Chapter 3, Edgeworth discredits as specious mythmaking. Edgeworth's 'due deference' is therefore deeply ironic, as the personal in her fiction is established as not only more truthful, but also as commanding greater public influence. Moreover, the 'conferences' are conducted in Davenant's apartment, located within the home of Clarendon Park, where its mistress Cecilia, Davenant's daughter, supervises the smooth unfolding of this political gathering, whose success depends not only on male politicians' exchanges, but, more importantly, on their female partners, who 'gover[n]' (207) their husbands. National politics therefore infiltrate the home in *Helen* more deeply than in *Patronage*.

Helen is indeed a novel in which a literal 'female politician', the formidable Lady Davenant, while denying active political engagement, simultaneously dismisses 'the common namby-pamby little missy phrase, "ladies have nothing to do with politics."' (214) The figures of Lady Davenant, possibly modelled on Lady Holland, and Esther Clarendon, a doubly marginalised figure, offer important revisions of British women's investment in politics. Moreover, *Helen* champions female connections,

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[37] Maria Edgeworth, *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, 12 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999-2003), IX: *Helen* (1834), ed. Susan Manly and Clíona Ó Gallchoir, p. 208. All further references are to this edition and appear parenthetically in the text.

exploring 'the ways in which a strong community of women interrogates and subverts assumptions about women's reliance upon and suppression by men.'[38] With its discussion of the 'ubiquitous trope of "female influence"', *Helen* represents the contradictions that surrounded British women's political agency in the early nineteenth century.[39] While this might suggest the novel champions female agency, Edgeworth's narrative is also alert to women's helplessness when their private actions are caught in 'a suffocating web of appropriated and misappropriated textuality'.[40] Its heroine Helen Stanley, a paragon of British simplicity and sincerity, is entangled in a web of secrecy and public scandal as the result of her loyalty to her friend Cecilia, a plotline that presents a more cautious view of female friendship.[41]

Its plot revolving around the publication of 'scandalous memoirs' and illicit correspondence, *Helen* illustrates *Castle Rackrent*'s claim that characters are better known through 'half-finished sentences', 'private anecdotes', and 'secret memoirs'. This plotline represents the ways in which the public encroaches on the private as well as the anxieties that female secrecy generates. The novel also illustrates the fact that women are always suspected of secrecy. 'Vexed with issues of misrepresentation and forgery, *Helen* reveals the instability of women's experience in a patriarchal world that threatens to expose or "publish" them.'[42] Susan Manly and Clíona Ó Gallchoir observe that *Helen* is too often read as 'a somewhat simplistic illustration of the virtue of Truth',

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[38] Frances R. Botkin, 'Finding Her Own Voice or "Being on Her Own Bottom": A Community of Women in Maria Edgeworth's *Helen*', in *New Essays on Maria Edgeworth*, ed. Julie Nash (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 93-107, p. 93.
[39] Gleadle, p. 94. Gleadle, pp. 175-77, discusses 'female influence' in relation to the Great Reform Act.
[40] Pearson, '"Arts of Appropriation"', p. 226.
[41] There are strong parallels between Edgeworth's Cecilia and Burney eponymous heroine. Both resort to lies and secrecy to secure their romantic relationships. Pearson also notes the parallel and outlines the Edgeworth family readings of the novel. '"Arts of Appropriation"', p. 230,
[42] Botkin, p. 93. Critics often read Edgeworth's preoccupation with publication as the expression of 'authorial crisis', *Helen* being her first novel written without her father's help. Botkin, p. 94. See also Butler *Literary Biography*, p. 193. For Koweski-Wallace, Helen is 'the daughter's "monstrous" act'. Koweski-Wallace, p. 176. See her discussion, pp. 188-97.

an observation Mrs Moore, a perceptive reader and friend of Edgeworth, made as well: 'Most people, said she, tell me that the moral of *Helen* is that wish to abide by truth—Very well—But we all knew that before—That's too common a moral'.[43] While I agree that the novel is more than a protracted exposé of the virtue of truth, I believe that its emphasis on truth, which is connected to national anxieties concerning female secrecy, makes *Helen* a text that continues to engage with prior discussions of the state of the nation and the conception of British national character. It develops, almost thirty years on, ideas that Edgeworth had introduced in *Manoeuvring* and *Patronage*, the politics of telling the 'plain truth' in a British context and the controversial position of female politicians.

Helen, like *Manoeuvring*, has attracted relatively little critical attention. It is often seen as haunted by RLE's absence and, like *Patronage*, as a 'failure' to produce an Irish novel, in line with Edgeworth's disheartened comment to her brother-in-law Pakenham that 'it is impossible to draw Ireland as she is now in a book of fiction'.[44] The *Quarterly Review*, while praising *Helen* as one of Edgeworth's finest novels, nevertheless expresses the same regrets that it had in 1814 concerning *Patronage*, wishing that 'she had laid the scene in her native country' rather than London, which strongly reflects Edgeworth's connection to Ireland in the public imagination. *Helen* is by no means a failure nor an English novel by default: written between 1819 and 1834, it is a nuanced response to the political atmosphere of the years surrounding the Great Reform Act of 1832, an event that concerned not only England but the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Kowaleski-Wallace identifies in *Helen* a

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[43] Susan Manly and Clíona Ó Gallchoir, 'Introduction', p. ix; ME to Lucy Edgeworth, 6 Jan 1836, quoted in Butler, *Literary Biography*, pp. 475-76.
[44] ME to Michal Pakenham, February 1834, quoted in Butler, *Literary Biography*, p. 452. Kowaleski-Wallace in particular, esp. 191-97, reads *Helen* as Edgeworth's own struggle with authorship as her father's daughter. Ó Gallchoir, pp. 155-56, also notes this idea of failure; Butler, *Literary Biography*, p. 450.

hardening of Edgeworth's conservative politics and an endorsement of patriarchal dominance, yet, I believe that the novel, in a more direct way than *Patronage*, engages with female political influence and explores alternative models of authority, suggesting more radical social changes than critics have allowed.

Edgeworth was writing *Helen* when she shared with Rachel Mordecai her feeling that, with 'all so out of place', she too was out of place discussing politics. *Helen* is the result of Edgeworth's secret political examination, in a period of heightened political tensions in England and Ireland, the years leading to the first Great Reform Act of 1832, with 'the rage for revolutions' spreading on the continent. According to Ó Gallchoir and Butler, 'Edgeworth was if anything *more* politically conscious and critical at this late stage in her life than she had been at the height of her career'.[45] As she details at the beginning of the Captain Swing Riots of November and December 1830, Edgeworth expressed a clear belief in the need for constitutional reform:

> I have no doubt that something ought to be done and *must* be done but not by the mob. If any step be gained by the *mob*—all is *lost*—for there is no saying to the mob any more than to the sea so far shalt thou go and no further.
>
> If the ministry change as from this majority against them seems inevitably those who come in *must* see what they can do for reform and then all the grievances must come before Parliament in constitutional reform. I think it is absolutely necessary. Otherwise there would be *risings* and revolution.[46]

It is therefore difficult to take Edgeworth's claim that politics are not a 'woman's department' at face value, but her ambivalence remains. As Gleadle points out, 'whilst Edgeworth's identity as a member of the landowning elite was more important than her

[45] Ó Gallchoir, p. 156. Ó Gallchoir discusses *Helen* in relation to Catholic emancipation and Daniel O'Connell's campaign for the repeal of the Union. See Butler, *Literary Biography*, pp. 450-52.
[46] ME to Mrs Ruxton, Wednesday, 17 November 1830, *Letters from England*, p. 429.

gender in these interactions, she was quick to evoke her femininity if the paternalistic relationship was challenged'.[47] The sarcasm in 'far be it from us' is clearly a 'strategic employment of feminine identity',[48] and yet the novel contains numerous episodes that rehearse the contemporary view that 'a woman has no business at all with politicks', a means of concealing the text's political reflections.[49] As seen in the discussion of *Patronage*, reviewers flippantly remarked that 'the clumsy machinery of majesty, and the cumbrous agency of those superior beings vulgarly known by the name of ministers and favourites' did not become 'Miss Edgeworth's taste'.[50]

Set in England in 'the every day life of the Whig aristocracy', *Helen* follows the misfortunes that befall its eponymous heroine, a paragon of English sincerity and simplicity, when her childhood friend, the impulsive and capricious Lady Cecilia, shares an embarrassing secret that will entangle Helen in a web of falsehood and secrecy.[51] Before her engagement to General Clarendon, Cecilia developed a romantic attachment for the French Colonel d'Aubigny, with whom she had a brief correspondence. D'Aubigny's private papers are to be edited for publication, broadcasting Cecilia's connection to him. There is nothing scandalous in their correspondence, but Cecilia lied to Clarendon that she had 'never loved any man breathing but himself' (227), a falsehood Cecilia knows would lead her husband to abandon her. She asks Helen to 'assist [her] in deceiving her husband' (236) by leading him to believe d'Aubigny's interest was in Helen. Sworn to secrecy, Helen conceals Cecilia's lies and by doing so jeopardises her engagement to Granville Beauclerc, Clarendon's ward. Mystery and secrecy compromise Helen's 'character', on which she

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[47] Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens*, p. 117.
[48] *Ibid*., pp. 117-18.
[49] George Canning, quoted in Vickery*, Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 315.
[50] *The Edinburgh Review* 22:44 (January 1814), pp. 416-34, pp. 432-33.
[51] Butler, *Literary Biography*, p. 467.

relies, for, unlike Cecilia, she is not the heiress to a large fortune or a title. When the papers advertise the impending publication of the memoirs which contain 'the original love letters of a certain *belle fiancée*', Helen is disgraced and must abandon all hope of marrying Beauclerc. What appear as mere 'intrigues of gallantry' are in fact political intrigues, as the revelation of the d'Aubigny papers involves several political agents. Even though Helen is not the novel's leading female political figure, her personal history illustrates how women's private character is a public matter.

The issues *Helen* addresses are an extension of the reflections on gender, identity, and national character Edgeworth had developed in her earlier works. As Manly and Ó Gallchoir note in their introduction, '*Helen* […] stands alongside *Letters for Literary Ladies*, *Belinda*, and *Leonora* as an engagement with women's problematic relationships to the public and the political'.[52] Edgeworth creates the formidable Lady Davenant, a reformed 'English Corinne' (60), who never really forsakes her political engagement. Edgeworth possibly modelled Lady Davenant on the formidable Lady Holland, an 'imperious hostess' whose home at Holland House was 'a powerful cultural and political centre between 1797 and 1840'.[53] Satisfied with the notion that she is her husband's 'second self' (68), Lady Davenant, despite her claims otherwise, never truly abandons politics. Much of her actions are presented in terms of 'influence', a highly contested area. General Clarendon, Lady Davenant's son-in-law, the voice of conservative domestic ideology, accepts 'female *influence*', 'contradistinguishing it from power' (210), which demonstrates the highly contentious nature of the issue. Lady Davenant, unlike Mrs Percy and her daughters, is part of an aristocratic elite which, as historians have shown, enabled women to be powerful political agents. Yet, as Kathryn

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[52] *Helen*, p. ix.
[53] Schmid, *British Literary Salons*, pp. 71, 72. See also Leslie Mitchell, *The Whig World*, pp. 48, 104.

Gleadle reminds us, '[t]heir status as political actors, as well as their political subjectivities, were often fragile and contingent'.[54] Lady Davenant is, thus, in Gleadle's phrase, a 'borderline citizen'.

The Davenants form a powerful political dynasty, like the Holland family, who hosted many Whig politicians and supporters.[55] As Leslie Mitchell has argued, Whiggery went beyond politics and should be understood as 'a Whig state of mind' and 'Whig lifestyle'.[56] The wind of reform blows over the novel. The 'political embarrassments' (188) that plague Lord Davenant can be read in conjunction with the pressures on government in the 1830s. '[Lady Davenant] knew from the terror exhibited by the inferior creatures in office that some change in administration was expected, as beasts are said to howl and tremble before storm, or earthquake, or any great convulsion of nature takes place' (188-89). The metaphor of extreme natural phenomena reflects the turbulent atmosphere of the Great Reform Act, which saw a change in government when the Tory Prime Minister Arthur Wellington, who was opposed to reform, was defeated in 1830.[57] 'Unless the storm be dispersed in time', the Davenants would, according to their daughter Cecilia, 'be struck down' (189). This prompts her to plan her own '*coup d'état*', an intervention that illustrates the importance of 'female influence' in political matters.[58] While the rhetoric seems to point to the Tory fall in government, the metaphors of the 'storm' and 'earthquake' convey an atmosphere of revolution, which Whigs were keen to prevent. Cecilia's '*coup d'état*' might then be construed as a Whig endeavour to secure political power.

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[54] Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens*, p. 2.
[55] Schmid, *British Literary Salons*, pp. 72-74.
[56] Mitchell, *Whig World*, p. 12.
[57] For an account of the 1832 Great Reform Act, see, for example, Edward Pearce, *Reform!: The Fight for the 1832 Great Reform Act* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2003).
[58] France had faced a coup d'état by the French judge Charles Cottu, which Edgeworth details in her correspondence. See ME to Mrs Edgeworth, 6 December 1830, *Letters from England*, pp. 439-40.

The 'borderline' position women occupied in politics is captured in the different social events that illustrate elite women's management of elections. As in *Patronage*, the language of politics frequently infiltrates social occasions. Lady Katrine Hawksby, who is jealous of Helen, 'canvassing' for 'the ladies' uniform' for an upcoming 'fête', is 'deputed to collect the votes' (154). Katrine in fact comes, like Lady Davenant and Cecilia, from a family of politicians. Her sister, Lady Castlefort, hosts an event to promote the candidacy of 'one of Lord Castlefort's brothers [who] is going to stand for the city' (273). The family's malaise that he 'has married the daughter of some amazing merchant', captured in the belittling 'some', arguably exposes the contradictions of the Whig aristocracy: bent on reform, they are reluctant to concede social equality and unwilling to mix socially. At the Castleforts', 'the soft crush of aristocracy' now collides with 'hard unaccustomed citizen elbows' (273), illustrating the uncomfortable and reluctant co-existence between the two worlds. Lady Emily Greville, revolted by a party for the benefit of 'Goths and Vandals', shudders at being placed near 'those animals, wild beasts or tame' (273). Characters' conversations, imagery, and space mirror the purpose of the Act, the extension of the franchise, and the upper classes' obstacles to it. The '*élite* of the world' are symbolically placed at the centre of the saloon, under a bright chandelier: '[C]ircle it was not, nor square, nor form regularly defined, yet the bounds were guarded. […] Several gentlemen of fashionable bearing held the outposts of this privileged place' (274). The presentation of a form that is both indistinct yet carefully protected suggests a desire to cling on to a space that has no real foundation yet confers authority, as 'privileged' implies. The novel clearly does not side with the aristocratic view of socially inferior people as 'city monsters' (275): Helen is shocked at the misplaced pride of the first 'in rank and station in society' (274), as is the novel's hero Beauclerc.

Officially retired from political engagement, Lady Davenant remains, I believe, a political creature and is one of the novel's most active political agents. Even though she blames Staël's comments on English women's absence from politics in her posthumous *Considérations la Révolution française* (1818), Lady Davenant later echoes *Delphine* (1802), when, examining papers containing personal attacks she dreads might jeopardise 'Lord Davenant's honour', she exclaims: '[T]o how few can my character be really known! Women cannot, like men, make their characters known by public actions.' (219)[59] Denied 'public actions', women are to a certain extent powerless to shape and preserve their character. Lady Davenant's outcry expresses the limited agency even elite women enjoy. Her yearning for political power surfaces unconsciously time and time again. Her daughter recognises that 'she is always thinking of papa's glory and the good of the public' (189), which reveals a clear political conscience. It appears, for instance, when she asks Helen to read Cardinal Wolsey's famous speech in *Henry VIII*, 'the finest picture of ambition ever drawn' (219), a scene that already has a 'mark' (219), a sign that she regularly returns to the passage. That she 'can affirm from [her] own experience, that [the speech] is perfectly natural' (219) clearly demonstrates that she shares the same desires as the Cardinal. With Lady Davenant, personal history is also political history. This is reflected in her narration of Cecilia's connection to Clarendon in terms of British history, referring to 'the Reformation' and 'the Middle Ages', while describing the 'dark ages' of her ignorance of her daughter's character (21). As Marilyn Butler points out, Lady Davenant is 'as much at home in foreign capitals as in London', and as such a fluid cosmopolitan figure suited for diplomatic office.[60] As a woman, however, this fluidity makes her a

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[59] See n. 239, p. 389. The *Considérations* lists a few English '*femmes marquantes*', among whom Edgeworth. See n. 38, p. 374. Edgeworth never met Staël personally. For Edgeworth's continuing engagement with Staël's work, see Ó Gallchoir.
[60] Butler, *Literary Biography*, p. 469.

problematic figure. Her chameleon nature resists neat definition and threatens, like Edgeworth, to be 'out of place', a behaviour the novel struggles to accommodate.

Whereas Helen is distressed at Lady Davenant's reputation as 'a great politician', as it implies 'she cannot have time to think about the affairs of [her] famil[y]' (13), her ladyship calmly acknowledges the fact. Willing to accept criticism of her actions 'on the great squares of politics', she, however, rejects the accusation 'of being a manoeuvrer on the small domestic scale' (23), which indicates that she is not a politician like Mrs Beaumont and does not introduce intrigue into her home. Lady Davenant narrates the history of her political ambitions in a lengthy confession to Helen, similar to Lady Delacour's confession to Belinda, which doubles as a warning tale. Lady Davenant's career as a politician begins with the fact that her husband owes his political career to her intervention. The thought of 'producing a great effect in society, of playing a distinguished part, and attaining an eminence' (57) motivated Lady Davenant to manoeuvre for her husband to seek political success, wishing to see him 'distinguished among his peers' in the House of Lords (58). She recognised he had 'great talent for civil business' but no ambition, which she instilled through her 'influence', proving that the machinery of state might not operate without women's intervention. Even though men are elected, they are hugely indebted to their wives' involvement, as Frances Burney suggested in her description of Hester Thrale's active canvassing. By shaping her husband's career, Lady Davenant is arguably a secret female politician. Her political history, moreover, illustrates the fact that politics are a contact zone between the private and the public. A former 'inconstant lover' (58), who jilted Lady Davenant, having failed in his military career, can only retrieve his character through an 'appointment, which at [her] request, was secured to him by [her] husband' (58). This public manoeuvre is inseparable from her private design to 'sho[w] that in

[her] there was none of the fury of a woman scorned' (58). The public and the private are once again inextricably intertwined. The novel, however, seems less confident than *Patronage* that public activities can be the extension of private virtues, as exemplified in the Lord Chief Justice, for instance. Lady Davenant explains that she had to ply her husband away from 'his easy chair of domestic happiness' (58). *Helen* thus seems less confident than *Patronage* that the home can be a corrective to the public sphere.

Having abandoned her Staëlian ambitions to 'exhibit herself in the character of female politician' (60) and become an 'English Corinne', Lady Davenant develops her public status through patronage, spearheading a series of failed entrepreneurial plans designed to help women, in the 'parochial realm' open to women, which nevertheless impacted the nation.[61] Her 'very patriotic but not overwise' (63) endeavours include a 'school at Cecilhurst, and a lace manufactory', as well as a scheme to produce 'Indian cachemires in England' (63). Both ventures are compatible with female propriety. Her other projects, on the other hand, are more controversial, as they involve the kind of cross-channel exchanges that could be seen as a threat to the British state. Her plans required her to 'bring over lace-makers from Flanders', which she then essentially sequestered: 'I shut my lace-makers up in a room (for secrecy was necessary), where, like spiders, they quarrelled with each other and fought, and the whole failed' (63). The secrecy this move calls for reflects English society's distrust of strangers, as illustrated in Burney's *The Wanderer*. In her political and patriotic eagerness, Lady Davenant plays fast and loose with British laws as she 'imports' foreign workers.

Female political engagement is ostensibly presented as 'folly' or 'nonsense', as well as unnatural for British women, which would suggest that *Helen* is deeply

[61] For a detailed analysis of women's agency at the local level, see Gleadle, Ch. 4, pp. 123-56.

conservative.[62] It is only after the revelation from the Davenants' 'dear good friend D—' (60) of the circulation of lampoons ridiculing her as 'a mock Corinne', that Lady Davenant returns to her 'natural form' (60). While Edgeworth never paints her in the same exaggerated way as the cross-dressing, Wollstonecraftian Harriet Freke, the reference to nature suggests Lady Davenant troubles gender distinctions through her political ambitions, which make her an 'unsex'd female'. The inclusion of a French gentleman, who comments on the situation in Paris, where the 'black *pelotons*' of revolutionary 'Parisian belles' (210) gathered to attract gentlemen, serves to highlight the idea that it is part of British women's character that they avoid politics. This Frenchman deplores the growth of 'party spirit' (210) in his native country, on the grounds that it destroys domestic happiness, a very British sentiment. Lady Davenant fears this contagion might spread to England but her French interlocutor is convinced it will not be the case, thanks to British women's sterling character: 'English ladies will never be so vehement as my countrywomen; they will never become, I hope, like some of our lady politicians, "*qui heurlent comme des demons*."' (210) The comparison conveys a loss of femininity and humanity, the language reminiscent of Burke's 'harpies' or Polwhele's *Unsex'd Females*. Lady Davenant concludes by proclaiming:

> 'So long as ladies keep in their own proper character,' said Lady Davenant, 'all is well; but, if once they cease to act as women, that instant they lose their privilege—their charm: they forfeit their exorcising power; they can no longer command the demon of party nor themselves, and he transforms them directly, as you say,' said she to the French gentleman, 'into actual furies.' (210)

[62] Ó Gallchoir, p. 173, sees *Helen* as a 'pessimistic tale' which 'registers the same sense of women's sudden loss of significance that Staël had expressed'.

The passage echoes the conservative writing of More and Burke. As ‘proper character’ indicates, it is socially unacceptable and unnatural for British women to participate in politics. The language here is surprisingly similar to that of conservative writers such as Richard Polwhele in his *Unsex’d Females*. Yet, that women can ‘command the demon of party’ maintains the idea they do influence social affairs, although, as this exchange exemplifies, it is a highly contentious issue.

In a more private setting, Lady Davenant voices a more nuanced view of women’s role that complicates the idea that British femininity cannot accommodate political interest. Alone with Helen, she addresses the issue of ‘the position of women in society’ and its historical evolution head-on, ‘now’ repeated several times, stressing the urgency of the matter. As mentioned above, Lady Davenant considers the idea of female political meddling a ‘namby-pamby little missy phrase’ (214). The accumulation of adjectives highlights the affectation and childishness of this position. This is, however, followed by contradictory remarks on women’s political place:

> Of the public dangers and private personal inconveniences that may result from women becoming politicians, or, as you better express our meaning interfering, with public affairs, no one can be more aware than I am. *Interfering*, observe I say, for I would mark and keep the line between influence and interference. Female influence must, will, and ought to exist on political subjects as on all others; but this influence should always be domestic, not public—the customs of society have so ruled it. Of the thorns in the path of ambitious men all moralists talk, but there are little, scarcely visible, thorns of a peculiar sort that beset the path of an ambitious woman, the venomous prickles of the *domestic bramble*, a plant not perhaps mentioned in Withering’s Botany, or the Hortus

Kewensis, but it is too well known to many, and to me it has been sorely known. (214-15)

Lady Davenant makes a qualitative difference between 'interfering' and 'influence', just as Clarendon had distinguished between influence and power. She here displays 'the tensions and fragility which marked the construction of female political subjectivity'.[63] Ó Gallchoir argues that, in this passage, *Helen* accepts the terms of 'the Burkean rhetoric of custom and prejudice'.[64] For Ó Gallchoir, *Helen* insists on the distinction between the public and the private and women's relegation to the domestic sphere, when Edgeworth's earlier works had 'reimagined the private as a microcosm of the public'.[65] I agree with Ó Gallchoir, but I believe that the novel is ambivalent about women's 'relegation to the domestic sphere'. Lady Davenant never completely abandons her political ambition and the novel as a whole presents the home as the nexus of political affairs. Moreover, *Helen* presents domesticity as the central obstacle imposed on women and forbids women to have any presence in public affairs, implied in ambition. The 'domestic bramble''s exclusion from botanical works written by men indicates the ideological weight of the issue, the idea of poison suggesting that domesticity comes from the outside and is not natural to women and is in fact lethal. Women's political activities can only operate underground, away from public scrutiny, in the privacy of the home. Women then become secret female politicians.

Even though Lady Davenant blames her political ambitions for her failures as a mother, suggesting an endorsement of domesticity as women's rightful place, she never fully abandons the world of diplomacy.[66] She continues to accompany her husband in

[63] Gleadle, p. 15.
[64] Ó Gallchoir, p. 166.
[65] *Ibid*., p. 166.
[66] Kowaleski-Wallace argues that failed motherhood is a recurrent theme in Edgeworth. For *Helen*, see *Their Fathers' Daughters*, pp.188-92. See also Botkin, p. 102. Edgeworth considered that motherhood was the central theme of *Helen*. She told Lucy that Mrs Moore was right when she concluded that the

his diplomatic career and follows him to Russia, leaving Cecilia under Helen's supervision. Lady Davenant clearly has more faith in Helen than in her daughter, which, in a time of social reform, might indicate that the novel invests more power in the lower echelons of the gentry to renew and preserve national character. *Helen* underlines the paradox of the conservative argument that women's private character is the nation's greatest asset. After having chided her daughter for her 'efforts at conciliation', hinting that Cecilia distorts the truth in the process, Lady Davenant then tells her that 'It would really be a national blessing if in the present times, all women were as amiable as you' (210). The novel, however, upholds a different model of British middle-class femininity. Helen, a British middle-class name as opposed to the aristocratic foreign name Cecilia, adheres to plain truth and simplicity. It is women like Helen who are 'a national blessing'.

If Lady Davenant unsuccessfully argues that she is no longer a political creature, her daughter Cecilia on the other hand is upfront about the political nature of her domestic manoeuvres. These appear most strongly in the 'concordatum party' (190) she decides to host at Clarendon Park, a name evoking the Royalist author of the *History of the Rebellion*, which she assures the sceptical Helen will show her 'political talents' (190).[67] Cecilia's decision is motivated by her wish to help her parents in a situation that is both private and political, for in the background is the delay of her father's posting in Russia and the rumours 'abroad that [Lady Davenant] *governs*' (189). She describes her intervention as a 'grand *coup d'état*' that will display her 'political talents'. She organises a 'three days' congress at Clarendon Park, where not a word of

moral of Helen was that 'talented mother should take care not to make their children afraid of them so as to prevent them from telling the truth & trusting them with faults & secrets […] talents should make themselves objects of Love not fear'. ME to Lucy Edgeworth, 6 Jan 1836, quoted in Butler, *Literary Biography*, p. 476.

[67] Ó Gallchoir, p. 164.

politics shall be heard, nor anything but nonsense if I can help it' (190). Her claim that it is 'anti-political', yet with clear diplomatic aims, clearly illustrates the fact that the home is a space of politics, revealing the paradox that a non-political agenda can in fact serve political ends and is a more effective political tool than official politics. Cecilia's main objective is to appease Lady Masham and Lady Bearcroft, whom her mother offended, one a 'favourite at court' and the other 'risen from the ranks', whose husband is a 'man of law' (190), pitting the ancient world of aristocratic court circles against professional classes. Cecilia in this instance proves to be more perceptive than her mother since Lord Davenant's career partly rests on Lady Masham's good will. The conversations that really matter are not those taking place in Davenant's apartment but those between the ladies after dinner. This 'congress' also includes foreign political figures, but the focus is again placed on women. It is extremely important that Cecilia win the heart of Madame l'Ambassadrice, because 'It was well known that the ambassadress governed the ambassador' (207). Female ascendancy in political matters is again underlined. Women are a determining factor in politics because they can access valuable information concerning diplomats' leanings. Cecilia hears first-hand from the ambassador's wife that her father was extremely respected by the French diplomat: 'Madame l'Ambassadrice assured me that her husband looks upon Lord Davenant as one of the first sages in England, that is to say, of Europe' (208). This private, female conversation is a more accurate assessment of diplomatic relations than any public declaration.

Even if the novel explicitly denies political engagement and foregrounds women's non-interference in political affairs, Cecilia's 'congress' confirms that public affairs are settled in the home. While the political conferences are held in Lord Davenant's apartment, Cecilia dexterously manages the feelings of each of her guests,

which guarantees the success of the political conferences from which women are excluded:

> By dint of keeping well asunder those who would not draw well together, Lady Cecilia did contrive to get through the remaining morning of this operose visit; some she sent out to drive with gallant military outriders to see places in the neighbourhood famed for this or that; others walked or boated, or went through the customary course of conservatories, pheasantry, flower-garden, pleasure-grounds, and best views of Clarendon Park—and billiards always. (208)

While the ‘congress’ episode concludes on the claim that official business was conducted behind the closed doors of a male space, Lord Davenant’s apartment, the previous chapters had clearly demonstrated that many political transactions are conducted and secured in the parlour, under the government of women. Even the vulgar Lady Bearcroft acknowledges that she ‘never saw a difficult dinner-party better bothered’ (209). Cecilia is therefore more successful than her mother in managing diplomatic circles, which transpires when Lady Davenant, rather exasperated, exclaims that she ‘would act *Harmony* in the comedy to perfection’ (209). With her character a ‘national blessing’, Cecilia highlights the public significance of women’s private characters.

Its discussion of women’s place in politics notwithstanding, *Helen* also includes a powerful and daunting male figure, General Clarendon, whose presence complicates a reading of the novel as unambiguously promoting ‘female influence’. Ó Gallchoir argues that the estate features as ‘a site of tradition’ as opposed to offering ‘new configurations of gender and power’ and is no longer ‘the utopian space in which public and private meet’, as in Edgeworth’s previous novels.[68] For Ó Gallchoir, Clarendon

[68] Ó Gallchoir, pp. 172, 173.

occupies a central position in the novel that 'indicates an almost complete reversal of the symbols and structures of Edgeworth's fiction': 'It is Clarendon, rather than Helen, or any of the female characters, who represents what it is to be English. In the tradition of Germaine de Staël, this Englishness is not only masculine but aggressively so, in that it threatens the female characters' happiness and peace of mind.'[69] While I agree with Ó Gallchoir's contention that the climate of oppression Clarendon generates cannot be dismissed, I believe that it is the heroine who represents what it is to be English, and that it is perhaps in the novel's interrogation of Clarendon's Englishness that *Helen* allows not just women, but British women, political agency. The General's Englishness, though more nuanced than Mr Walsingham's, is presented as out of touch with modern times: 'English decidedly—proudly English', he is also 'Something of the old school' (17), which the novel suggests is too inflexible.[70] The General is an involved landowner but he displays an outdated, formal politeness. Helen, for instance, notes that he is 'perfectly polite' when welcoming her, 'yet she would have liked it better had it been less polite—more cordial' (17). Helen expresses a similar sentiment to Anne Elliot's preference for the company of Wentworth's naval friends over her family's cold politeness. The General's position is also, arguably, too Anglocentric. His sister Esther, for instance, discussed below, lives in Wales, a situation that casts her as a British, rather than a simply English resident. Women are thus invested with a greater power of unification than men.

While it is true that it is hard to find a 'utopian space' in *Helen*, Edgeworth, as in her other novels, positions characters along the principles of simplicity and sincerity. The novel's powerful female politician is, for example, ultimately vindicated by her

[69] Ó Gallchoir, p. 165. She notes, p. 165, that 'the plot is determined by Clarendon'. She discusses Clarendon, pp. 163-66.
[70] The General is not unlike Sir Thomas Bertram,

belief in plain truth. For Lady Davenant, it seems that the affectation of attempting to become an 'English Corinne' is worse than the desire itself. Affectation belongs to the 'small faults' that are the hardest to confess and paradoxically the greatest: 'Affectation, for instance; it is something so little, so paltry, it is more than a crime, it is a ridicule' (60). Helen's 'plain straightforward truth' (34), which Lady Davenant greatly admires as a sign of 'moral courage' (35), is one of the heroine's characteristics first presented to the reader. The almost tautological formulation 'plain straightforward truth' emphasises the centrality of plainness and simplicity to truth and sincerity, which is central to national identity. Her Ladyship believes that very few men and women 'dare to ask a direct question, and tell plainly what passes in their own minds' (34-35), a comment that echoes some of Edgeworth's own observations on conversation, as seen in Chapter 3. According to Lady Davenant, all virtues are based on truth, which is at the basis of social good:

> '[S]how me a virtue male or female that *can* long exist without truth. Even that emphatically termed the virtue of our sex, Helen, on which social happiness rests, society depends, on what is it based? is it not on that single-hearted virtue truth?—and truth on what? on courage of the mind. They who dare to speak the truth, will not ever dare to go irretrievably wrong. Then what is falsehood but cowardice?—and a false woman!—does not that say all in one word?' (35)

The passage follows the contemporary view that social happiness depends on women's character, while identifying truth as the foundation of virtue. Helen asks General Clarendon that he tell her 'the plain truth', explaining that she grew up 'unused to the world, […] accustomed to live with one who always told [her] his mind sincerely' (33), mindful, however, that he not 'tell [her] in words—that might be painful to [his]

politeness' (33). Helen's sensitivity for the General's feelings implies that, even though it is delicate balancing act, plain truth can be reconciled with politeness.

'Plain truth' and sincerity, central to Britishness, must be negotiated if Britain is to be established as a world-leading civilised nation, an ambition apparent in Cecilia's claim that her father is 'one of the first sages of England, that is to say, of Europe' (208). As discussed in Chapter 2, the period is characterised by debates over reconciling plain and polite languages, and the possibility for truth to coincide with prescriptions of politeness while following the principle of simplicity. Anxieties concerning the falsehood of politeness surface in the General's management of social situations which he would rather avoid:

> His manner was not false; it was only properly polite, not tending to deceive any one who understood the tokens of conventional good breeding. It however required considerable power over himself to keep the line of demarcation correctly[.] (191)

The language stresses the ambiguity of 'the line of demarcation' and that being 'properly polite' is dangerously close to being 'false'. The General notes that Helen, on the other hand, unites 'truth of character' with 'gentleness of manner' (34), making her a positive model for British femininity.

This position as female model in the novel is confirmed by male characters' admiration of Helen's simplicity, a quality valued in women. General Clarendon only fell in love with Cecilia because he detected a 'simplicity of heart' (25) in her blushes. Helen develops her simplicity under her uncle's care. Simplicity is a highly covetable quality, a singular asset for marriageable young women: 'For the single inimitable grace of simplicity which she possessed, how many mothers, governesses, and young ladies themselves, willingly, when they see how much it charms, would too late exchange half

the accomplishments, all the acquirements, so laboriously achieved!' (106) This passage strongly echoes descriptions of Caroline Percy in *Patronage* (see Chapter 3). Accomplishments, the conventional bargaining tool on the marriage market, are superseded by simplicity. Helen's happiness at being 'unnoticed' (106) stresses the fact that she neither seeks display nor performs. Helen is, however, powerless to oppose the accusations of secrecy and deceit that her simplicity of character otherwise contradicts.

If Helen's simplicity is vindicated, the novel also illustrates the problems women can face when their simplicity is considered a sign of masculinity. Esther Clarendon, the General's sister, is all too readily dismissed by critics on the grounds that Edgeworth described her as an 'odious creature' to her sister Lucy, whose assistance Edgeworth credits the most.[71] Marilyn Butler in particular draws a damning portrait of the character, arguing that 'in her boorish manners and her preference for retirement, Esther is a female Thomas Day' and that 'she has none of the sympathy an invalid needs in a nurse' when she takes care of Helen.[72] I argue that Esther is in fact the only character that shows any real sympathy for Helen, even if it is not in the warmest and most feminine manner, since she is the only one who actually offers support before the truth has been re-established, simply because '[she] believe[s] in [Helen's] sincerity' (325).[73] Esther's method is to take action when dealing with emotional states, a response that is often associated with masculinity. She is, moreover, instrumental to the heroine's final vindications. The plot reaches its close thanks to Esther's status as a marginal being, unknown in fashionable circles. As she attends a picture sale, a semi-public space, she overhears different versions 'going about' (365)

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[71] 'Pray assure ?? that Miss Clarendon (odious creature) is not like my most kind delightful Harriet.' ME to Lucy Edgeworth, March 3rd 1834, MS. Eng. Lett. c. 714, 44v.
[72] Butler, *Literary Biography*, p. 476.
[73] Cecilia may feel wretched about her friend's situation, for which she is entirely responsible, but she does not do anything to help her. Her language is highly sentimental and emotional, full of professions of friendship, but her actions serve her own purposes.

concerning the situation between Cecilia and her husband. Unknown 'either by reputation or by sight' (365), Esther secretly collects valuable information that will help Cecilia's cause and ultimately save Helen from public shame. Thanks to her anonymity and invisibility due to her marginal status, the truth is finally established. Esther's critical fate is partly the result of views of what is and is not right female behaviour. Esther challenges many social conventions and gender expectations, and perhaps most controversially, challenges Englishness and patriarchal supremacy. She is, in Kathryn Gleadle's phrase, a 'borderline citizen', who represents the greatest challenge to the centre's hegemony.

It is important that we recognise Esther Clarendon as a figure that contests an English sense of superiority and questions English society from the margins. Esther destabilises the centre both as an independent woman who 'has always been her own mistress' (38) and as Welsh resident. She lives with her aunt, Mrs Pennant, in an old castle inherited from her mother in Llansillen, in South Wales, a situation that recalls the Ladies of Llangollen, the Irish Lady Eleanor Butler-Ormond and Sarah Ponsonby who left their families and settled together in Wales. Fiona Brideoake has recently argued that the couple, identified as exemplars of chaste Romantic female friendship as well as 'enduring signifiers of queer desires', should be noted for their resistance to definition.[74] Esther similarly resists definition. Her Welsh residence should not be read as the character's relegation or banishment to the margins as a result of this indeterminacy. Esther is not an exile, having deliberately chosen to leave the metropolis and fashionable circles. The novel does not side with Cecilia's belief that Esther's retirement is an affectation, the performance of 'melancholy grandeur' (38). Cecilia's

[74] Fiona Brideoake, *The Ladies of Llangollen: Desire, Indeterminacy, and the Legacies of Criticism* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2017), p. 213.

inability to remember the precise name of the place, which she calls 'Llan-something' (38), is a negative comment on the centre's obliviousness to the margins. It is in line with the critique of fashionable education that teaches young minds the capitals of the world but then overlooks their British neighbours and more local attachments. Moreover, by deliberately choosing Wales as her home, Esther appears as a British character.

Esther is, like Lady Davenant, a champion of 'truth', a word she repeats incessantly, perhaps excessively. She hates all forms of concealment and insists that 'I can't talk, I can't hear, I can't understand with a skreen before me' (43), a slightly heavy-handed way of conveying a preference for transparency. Cecilia, with barely concealed derision, explains that Esther is 'too good—too sincere for the world' (39). Cecilia's comment hints that the private virtue of sincerity does not belong to the public realm of 'the world': elite circles do not maintain British character. It is, on the other hand, found in the lower strata of the gentry. Esther's adherence to sincerity identifies her as British, but this very attribution is something the novel negotiates and the character recognises must be qualified. Esther offended a fashionable Frenchwoman in a Parisian salon when she bluntly told her the anecdote contained 'not one word of truth' (39). Cecilia surmises that the French audience refrained from adding '*Bien Anglaise*' (39) to their various expostulations only to spare her (Cecilia's) own feelings. The British reputation for 'rudeness' is therefore not the purview of Milord Anglois.

Esther, however, does not apologise for her plain speech. She has no interest in being 'one of your amiable people' (42) and does not care about offending others. She is especially allergic to any form of concealment:

> '[S]ome show and tell, and others smile and fib. I wish that word fib was banished from the English language, and white lie drummed out after it. Things

> by their right names and we should all do much better. Truth must be told, whether agreeable or not.' (43)

Part of what is so remarkable about her is her frank admission that she is too direct for the customs of polite society:

> 'Miss Stanley looks at me as if I had seven heads […] Do acknowledge that you think me a savage.' Helen did not deny it, and from that moment Miss Clarendon looked less savagely upon her: she laughed and said, 'I am not quite such a bear as I seem, you'll find; at least I never hug people to death. My growl is worse than my bite, unless some one should flatter my classical, bearish passion, and offer to feed me with honey, and when I find it all comb and no honey, who would not growl then?' (42)

The growl at finding 'all comb and no honey' mirrors Esther's preference for substance over form. Even though Helen does not openly confess that she believes Esther is 'a savage', she still passes Esther's sincerity test. Esther seems to positively enjoy her reputation for being a bear, and like Frances Burney, in fact flaunts a John Bullish attitude, displaying a sense of humour and self-awareness for which she is rarely credited. This kind of behaviour is usually expected of male rather than female characters. She is also, as this passage illustrates, a more refined character than she claims, as her ability to play with words reflects a sharp mind.

It is in her preference for simplicity in all of its rude or primitive manifestations that Esther uncovers the paradoxes of this central British quality. She is an extremely strong-willed woman, yet listens to the quiet Mrs Pennant, because of her simplicity:

> [I]ndeed she almost always agreed with this aunt of hers, who, perhaps from the peculiar gentleness of her manner, joined to a simplicity and sincerity of

> character she could never doubt, had an ascendency over her, which no one, at first view, could have imagined. (314)

When she visits her brother General Clarendon and his young wife, Esther is delighted to be reunited with the family dog Neptune, and does not mind having him jump all over her with his wet paws, even if it means ruining her new dress, asserting 'I like rough better than smooth' (41). An even more explicit adherence to plainness and simplicity than Elizabeth Bennet's preference for a plain dish over a ragout, this formulation of simplicity is usually more tolerated of male characters. Esther exposes the anxieties at the heart of simplicity and plainness: 'smooth' implies polish and all of the adulterating effects of politeness, while 'rough' clearly exposes the rudeness that Britons refused to accept. Cecilia, as the representative of correct female etiquette, is obviously appalled by this, in the same way that Caroline Bingley frowned at Elizabeth Bennet's muddy petticoat, but there is something daring in Esther's complete disregard for outward appearances. Critics and readers are enamoured with Elizabeth Bennet and find her decision to walk to Netherfield charming and a proof of independent thinking and strength, but Esther Clarendon receives no comparable praise, when she displays the same sympathy that Elizabeth does: Esther privileges being reunited with the family pet over her wardrobe. Like Elizabeth Bennet running to assist her ailing sister, Esther's free expression of love for the animal is a sign of her humanity.

Critics have struggled with Esther's directness. The *North American Review* was particularly scathing in its analysis of her character, presenting her as 'a lady who was both excellent and disagreeable, not discriminating between what Addison calls "the silly affectation of speaking one's mind"', adding that

> Miss Clarendon is a good example of those characters, who are sometimes found in the world, who take pride in their own sincerity, till they learn to pay

> too little respect to the feelings of others; they do not know that sincerity is one thing, and bluntness quite another; and they do an injury to the cause of virtue, by associating a fine attribute of character with a roughness not necessarily connected with it, which inspires anger and aversion. [75]

Misquoting Addison, the review illustrates the tension and anxieties that surround sincerity, a source of both pride and apprehension, presenting an instance of Mr Walsingham's recognition that 'plain truth' can give 'momentary pain'. Sincerity and polite amiability are a difficult equilibrium to reach. It is, moreover, an even more delicate line to negotiate for women than it is for men.

The narrator declares that Esther's motto could be '*Tout faire sans paraître*' (326), although 'in a different acceptation from that of our favourite modern politician' (326). The Pickering & Chatto edition suggests it refers either to Louvois, Louis XIV's prime minister, or de Talleyrand, both icons of duplicity. The editors translate 'doing everything discreetly' (391), which could be aligned with Chesterfield's '*suaviter in modo*', but there is, I believe, another way of interpreting this phrase as meaning 'doing everything without appearing/seeming'. This does not imply the idea of screening that 'discreetly' conveys, but coincides with Esther's assertion: 'I mean what I say' (316). Her words match her intentions. Esther, in this sense, revolutionises British politics from the margins, purifying them of (French) deceit or any form of manoeuvring. Esther's preference for roughness should, moreover, be read as part of a reflection on Britishness: while it may appear unsophisticated to outside viewers, it coincides with the principles of simplicity and sincerity that separate British individuals from their European counterparts. Like John Knightley, Esther displays a true British style, which is averse to 'making flourishes' (*E*, 506).

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[75] *The North American Review* 39:84 (July 1834), pp. 167-200, pp. 183, 192.

If her brother is a model landlord, Esther is equally involved in the community at Llansillen: among her 'various occupations' are her 'flower-garden' and her 'conservatory', conventional female activities, as well as 'her pretty cottages, and her schools' (342). Even more important is Esther's ability to interact with the local Welsh population, in their own language: the narrative does not state it explicitly but we can infer it from the fact that Helen's language is unintelligible to them, which implies they can only speak Welsh. Esther's independent management of the estate, without male intervention, illustrates Kathryn Gleadle's observation that, 'Within their communities, women could act as authoritative public figures in ways that were strikingly at odds with the highly feminized modes of action with which they were associated in the wider "public sphere" of national campaigns'.[76] Edgeworth too managed the estate at Edgeworthstown after 1826. Despite the novel's ambivalence concerning women's position within national politics, Esther offers an important model for the public agency women can wield as agents of national unity, an operation that is, moreover, conducted outside of London and elite circles.

What unites Esther and Helen is their privileging of simplicity. Helen's simplicity, on the other hand, unambiguously reconciles the virtues of nature and civilisation, without any of the drawbacks of the one or the other, including in her use of language. The 'male coquette' (107) Mr Churchill, in an audible whisper, compliments Cecilia on her companion:

> 'Your young friend this morning quite captivated me by her nature—nature, the thing that now is most uncommon, a real natural woman; and when in a beauty, how charming! How delicious when one meets with *effusion de coeur*: a young lady, too, who speaks pure English, not a leash of languages at once; and

[76] Gleadle, p. 122.

> cultivated, too, your friend is, for one does not like ignorance, if one could have knowledge without pretension—so hard to find the golden mean!—and if one could find it, one might not be nearer to—' (115)

Churchill never completes his sentence. Even though it is highly doubtful that he really cares about women's state, natural or otherwise, his comment nonetheless illustrates the contemporary concern that British women have become artificial creatures. No trace of affectation can be detected in Helen. Moreover, by speaking 'pure English', she does not exhibit a fashionable education focused on the acquirement of foreign airs and graces, seen in social climbers such as Austen's Mrs Elton. It is deeply ironic, however, that Churchill should underline Helen's simplicity and 'pure English' since he peppers his own speech with French phrases, clearly reflecting a double standard and an awareness of the social capital invested in simplicity.[77] It is significant that Edgeworth endowed her socially inferior heroine with this quality.

Like Elizabeth Bennet, Helen's native Englishness is authentic without being less refined. This is reflected in Beauclerc's view of 'Helen's fresh and genuine character', which is in sharp contrast with 'the London female world' (106). Again, Helen's simplicity acts as the ultimate captivating element: 'he was charmed by the perfect confiding simplicity of Helen's mind, so unlike what he had seen in others—so real.' (95) Helen herself champions simplicity, just as Lady Davenant champions truth and plain speaking, when she defends Dr V—'s simplicity against Churchill's claim that there can be an 'out-of-season simplicity' (113). By arguing that simplicity is not just a matter of innocence of youth, the novel places simplicity as a seminal value, which spans all aspects of modern society, including dress, that specifically female

[77] Comedies of manners satirised polite educations that privileged foreign languages. In Reynolds' comedy *The Will*, the young Howard, who tries to gain his uncle's inheritance, has received the standard education of a polite gentleman that 'taught [him] foreign languages before [he] knew [his] own'. Frederick Reynolds, *The Will* (London: G. G. and Robinson, 1797), p. 12.

arena always under scrutiny, especially in times of civil unrest. Encouraged by conduct manuals, from Hannah More to *The Mirror of the Graces*, simplicity in women's attire seems a particular bone of contention when revolution threatens. Lady Davenant is particularly pleased with 'the perfect simplicity of [Helen's] dress' (181) for a ball at Clarendon Park, in contrast with the 'over-dressed' aristocratic guests, who, enthralled by their 'passion for baubles', exhibit 'costly deformit[ies]' (181). Helen, on the other hand, like Fanny Price, displays a simplicity of taste that makes her an adequate model for British femininity. The politics of female dress come to the fore in the context of the political unrest of the 1830s. A member of the royal party is nicknamed 'Golconda' or 'the Duchess of Baubleshire' (177), whose passion for dress and jewels leads Lady Davenant into a presentation of the political repercussions of 'this bauble insanity' (182). Recalling the stories of Marie-Antoinette and Josephine Bonaparte, whose purchases of expensive jewellery led to loss of public favour, Lady Davenant reminds her daughter and Helen of the political consequences of women's private sartorial choices.[78]

The heroine's choice of partner coincides with her adherence to simplicity. Trying to establish who Helen thinks 'the most agreeable' between Horace Churchill and Beauclerc, Lady Davenant explains that the former is a mere 'feu d'artifice', all ostentatious show, but 'in Beauclerc there is too little art and too ardent nature' (118), which might indicate that he is, like Esther, a little rude. The novel, however, does not support the view that Beauclerc is not refined enough. Cecilia likes Beauclerc not for

[78] The supposed purchase of a jewel worth over a million pounds, known as 'the Diamond necklace affair', was a huge scandal for which Marie Antoinette was blamed and often seen as one of first triggers of the revolution. Historians have demonstrated the queen's innocence but the perception in the early nineteenth century that Marie Antoinette was responsible for the Revolution remained. See Sarah Maza, 'The Diamond Necklace Affair Revisited (1785-86): The Case of the Missing Queen', in *Marie-Antoinette: Writings on the Body of a Queen*, ed. Dena Goodman and Thomas E. Kaiser (New York; London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 73-98.

the ‘grandissimo qualities’ her mother observes, ‘but just because he is the most agreeable person in nature; and really natural; though he is a man of the world, yet not the least affected. Quite fashionable, of course, but with true feeling’ (37). Beauclerc displays the perfect balance between refinement and simplicity. This is confirmed by his letters, which Helen reads from Lady Davenant’s portfolio: ‘There was no sort of affectation in them—quite easy and natural, “real feeling, and genius”’ (20). Beauclerc is in fact an ideal British gentleman, in opposition to Churchill’s Frenchified affectations. Beauclerc’s patriotism, like that expressed by Knox, for instance, is found in his private virtues. Much to Lady Davenant’s chagrin, the young man has no desire to seek representation in parliament. Beauclerc is a man who displays common sense and expresses many of Edgeworth’s own beliefs: he values ‘above all—education, and the diffusion of knowledge’ (83). Significantly, Beauclerc believes England ‘maintains her superiority among nations’ thanks to the British constitution, its ‘equal laws and just administration’, and the fact that ‘the superiority of talent is superior in England to the aristocracy of birth’ (83). In his exchanges with the General, Beauclerc presents more progressive opinions, which, as Julie Nash argues, ‘still allows for an aristocracy, but one based on talent, one to which even those of “the lowest station” can aspire to.’[79] A question the novel, however, does not answer is where this ‘aristocracy of talent’ can fully express itself. As the Castlefort political gathering illustrates, the ‘aristocracy of birth’ is reluctant to open the ‘bounds’ of their ill-defined space to ‘city monsters’.

Conclusion

Whereas *Manoeuvring* is confident about the construction of a shared Britishness based on the principles of simplicity and sincerity, which allows for a

[79] Nash, *Servants and Paternalism*, p. 50.

widening of the meaning of gentility and greater participation of the professional classes, *Helen* is a text marked by tension and ambivalence. Simplicity, an empowering quality in her previous works and an important site of social renovation, does not wield the same agency in Edgeworth's final novel. Women's position as instrumental to the construction of the nation is, moreover, less certain. Even though the narrative demonstrates the agency women wield in political transactions, its conclusion is ambivalent at best. As the novel reaches to a close, Helen appears as 'a pale bride', who recovers her looks in an almost parodic way: 'the sun shone out, and ray of light was on her face and it was lovely.' (369) This piece of *deus ex machina* does little to mitigate the heroine's preceding persecution. The ending is unconvincing and rushed, seeing Cecilia reunited with her husband as Lady Davenant breathes her last. Esther is absent from this scene, which raises the question of her future influence. Lady Davenant's final claim that Helen will be 'perfectly happy' (371) has an odd ring. As Ó Gallchoir observes, 'there is no where for Helen to turn' and she has no role other than that of Beauclerc's wife.[80] The pessimism Ó Gallchoir argues characterises Edgeworth's final novel can perhaps be traced to another way in which women are excised from the public world: that of a political literary tradition. An early scene sees Clarendon and Beauclerc in rare agreement over the 'true English sense' (82) of a French-authored book, *Letters on England* (1825). The General misattributes it, naming 'Madame de Staël' as its author, when it was in fact her son, Auguste de Staël-Holstein, who composed the text. The confusion is telling, mirroring, I believe, Edgeworth's own uncertainty and misgivings concerning women's future place in politics. The 'golden mean' of simplicity is relegated to the domestic sphere, casting a shadow over the possibility of social change.

[80] Ó Gallchoir, p. 173.

Conclusion

As this thesis has demonstrated, women's fiction, by exploring the meaning of character and the function of simplicity, plays a crucial role in the construction of British national identity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. While concerns over the loss of simplicity can be traced throughout the eighteenth century, it also takes on new meaning at the turn of the century, when the United Kingdom changes its borders, Ireland becoming an official member in 1801. Closely aligned with sincerity, simplicity guarantees the genuineness of characters' speech and behaviour, and is thus opposed to the cardinal sin of affectation. The simplicity on which British character is based is not a return to primitive simplicity, however, but rather part of a cluster of words that articulate an individual's moral soundness and their practice of a true politeness, where benevolence matters more than a superficial performance of the 'forms' of politeness. The need to be civilised and appear as a polite nation was in constant tension with desires to remain simple. Simplicity thus became an increasingly more reliable sign of true, British, politeness, less concerned with the forms of decorum than with a desire to be sincere. Even in its lapses of polite conduct, simplicity was the sign of a superior understanding. Austen, Burney, and Edgeworth's representation of simplicity are central to their examination and redefinition of British politeness and gentility. Simplicity promotes a new middle-class model of behaviour that opposes courtly models.

As I hope to have shown, simplicity also functioned as a powerful agent of national cohesion. Rather than seeing identity as fixed, Burney and Edgeworth in particular demonstrate that British identity is fluid and porous, supporting Defoe's claim that the 'True-born Englishman' is a 'Het'rogeneous *Thing*'. Many of Edgeworth's characters have hybrid identities, sometimes unknown to them. While this

sometimes casts a shadow over those characters and compromises their social position, the practice of simplicity always guarantees their sincerity and ultimately vindicates them. It also marks them as British, as opposed to simply English or Irish. Simplicity allows marginal characters to trouble the supremacy of the English centre. It is also an important category for women to address, as English national identity is often articulated in the period as essentially masculine. Simplicity is thus at the heart of gender politics of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

In a review of Constance Hills' volume *Maria Edgeworth and her Circle on the Days of Buonaparte*, Virginia Woolf wistfully comments:

> How charming our ancestors were!—so simple in their manners, so humorous in their behaviour, so strange in their expressions! […] dull must be our fancy if we fail in the end to furnish all the Georgian houses in existence with tables and chairs and ladies and gentlemen. There is no need to tease ourselves with the suspicion that they were quite different in the flesh, and as ugly, as complex, and as emotional as we are, for their simplicity is more amusing to believe in and much easier to write about.[1]

Woolf seems to subscribe here to Brontë's view of Austen's fiction as one of indoor parlours populated by ladies and gentlemen. While it is true that neither Austen, Burney, nor Edgeworth advocated a return to primitive simplicity, this thesis endeavoured to demonstrate that what Woolf presents as uncomplicated 'simple manners' is in fact a deeply complex issue, fraught with tensions and contradictions. Resisting representation, simplicity is a 'golden mean' that is only rarely found.

[1] Virginia Woolf, Review of *Maria Edgeworth and her Circle on the Days of Buonaparte* by Constance Hill, *TLS* December 9, 1909. Reprinted *TLS* January 5, 2018, p. 34.

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