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Recognisably Irish?
The Diasporic Fiction of Regina Maria Roche[1]

Christina Morin

Recent studies of migration into and out of late eighteenth-century Ireland have noted the ways in which Dublin, then 'the second city of the empire', served as a 'cultural centre', offering a variety of individuals, including artists, musicians, actors and teachers, a fresh start and ample opportunity for patronage.[2] Although emigration *into* Ireland remained proportionally higher than relocation *out of* the country in the latter half of the eighteenth century, the 1798 Rebellion, coupled with the ensuing Act of Union (1800), brought a notable increase in outward movement. This was, as Patrick Fitzgerald and Brian Lambkin contend, a crisis-response that initiated a half-century long period of 'mass' emigration from Ireland.[3] Until now, however, emigration in the early part of the nineteenth century has largely fallen by the critical wayside in concentration on the large-scale exodus of Irish natives from Ireland during the Great Famine. This essay turns attention to the emigration, or, more rightly speaking, the migration of literary culture and production that occurred in the wake of Anglo-Irish Union, when Ireland became subject to strict copyright laws that rendered the country's formerly flourishing publishing industry suddenly defunct. As a result, Ireland's authors came to depend on publishers in London and Edinburgh and, as the price of publication rose accordingly, on readers located outside of Ireland.

Correspondingly, a kind of literary 'brain-drain' set in, just as Maria Edgeworth presciently warned would happen in *Castle Rackrent* (1800): '[t]he few gentlemen of education who now reside in this country will resort to England'.[4] Although Edgeworth herself remained resolutely physically attached to Ireland and her father's County Longford estate, her fiction was largely published in London. Similarly, Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan

[1] This essay was completed under the auspices of a postdoctoral research fellowship funded by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS), whose assistance I gratefully acknowledge.

[2] Patrick Fitzgerald and Brian Lambkin, *Migration in Irish History, 1607–2007* (New York, 2008), 132, 133.

[3] Ibid., 149.

[4] Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent* (1800; Oxford, 1995), 97.

(1783?–1859) lived in Ireland during the heyday of her fiction-writing career, but again published mainly in London, where she relocated permanently in 1837. Charles Robert Maturin (1780–1824) also published abroad, either in London or Edinburgh, and complained bitterly to Walter Scott about the lack of literary culture in Ireland: 'there is no excitement, no literary appetite or impulse in this country, my most intimate acquaintances scarcely know that I have written, and they care as little as they know'.[5] Impelled, at least in part, by this general indifference to literary production in Ireland, authors like Regina Maria Roche (1763/4–1845) and John Banim (1798–1842) wrote and published a majority of their fictional works in London, confirming both the imaginative and physical relocation of Irish fictional production from Ireland to England in the early nineteenth century.

Yet, while the number of books written and/or published by Irish authors outside of Ireland dramatically increased from the Act of Union onwards, so too did the number of Ireland-related titles, suggesting that despite the relocation of literary culture, Irish authors were increasingly concerned with their native land.[6] Invigorated interest in and attention to Ireland by Irish authors writing in English is apparently testified to by the predominance in the first three decades of the nineteenth century of fiction resolutely centered on the local. The literary forms that pioneered what Katie Trumpener understands as a move away from the more international, cosmopolitan fictional concentration of the 1790s to a narrower, regional field of focus are the national tale and the historical novel.[7] Conventionally understood, such texts envision a decisive meeting of traditionally conflicting temporal and geographical zones in order narratologically to effect national reconciliation. In the case of the national tale, usually seen to originate with the 1806 publication of Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl*, resolution occurs with the English hero's embrace of Ireland, a country he has hitherto viewed as uncivilised, rebellious and unworthy of his attention. His new attachment to Ireland is allegorically confirmed by his successful marriage proposal to a native Irish girl and his decision to take up residence in Ireland, thereby renouncing the habitual absenteeism seen to cause many of Ireland's social problems. With the historical novel, a development of the national tale predominantly associated with Walter Scott and his Waverley

[5] Charles Robert Maturin to Sir Walter Scott, 11 January 1813, National Library of Scotland, MS3884, ff.10–11.

[6] Rolf and Magda Loeber, *A Guide to Irish Fiction 1650–1900* (Dublin, 2006), lxii.

[7] Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton, NJ, 1997), 165.

Series, local colour provides a picturesque setting in which past and present collide, resulting in the hero's determined, if nostalgic, support for a modernity in which Scotland enjoys the many benefits accruing from its once contested union with England.

In both national tale and historical novel, the physical relocation of the hero from the centre – England – to the margins – Ireland, Scotland and (less frequently) Wales – is central to the narrative goal of countering English stereotypes and thereby assuaging English concerns about its supposedly violent, dissatisfied and savage neighbors. The hero's journey to the peripheries of the British nation in texts like *The Wild Irish Girl* and *Waverley* (1814), in fact, begins a necessary process of re-education whereby his preconceived notions of the nation's margins are fundamentally overturned. This reconfiguration of the hero's understanding of the outer regions of Great Britain occurs as a result of what Ina Ferris describes as a process of estrangement. Motivated by 'a migratory impulse through which contending cultures may come into contact', the national tale and its allied literary forms unsettle the hero's sense of cultural belonging by forcing him to undergo a geographical, cultural, and ideological '*bouleversement*'.[8] Only through a personal encounter with the foreign-become-local as a stranger – unknown and unknowing – can the heretofore prejudiced Englishman come to appreciate the true worth of Ireland/Scotland/Wales and thereby cultivate an appropriate sympathy for its people.[9] The Celtic periphery, in such fiction, becomes a kind of tourist destination, its teleological nature, combined with the oftentimes extensive antiquarian discourse that threatens to subsume the fictional narrative itself, revealing Romantic national fiction's debt to travel literature, and in particular to the so-called 'Home Tour' of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[10]

Such texts, written by English authors about neighboring but strangely alien regions, like Ireland, frequently focused on data-gathering. In the case of Ireland, for instance, Home Tours very often centered on what Glenn Hooper describes as 'the ceaseless drive to acquire information on Ireland

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[8] Ina Ferris, *The Romantic National Tale and the Question of Ireland* (Cambridge, 2002), 47, 49.

[9] Ibid., 58 – 9.

[10] The 'Home Tour', as opposed to accounts of the 'Grand Tours' undertaken by aristocratic English males in order to complete their educations, began to develop from 1760 onwards and focused on local regions such as North Wales, the Scottish Highlands and Ireland, which despite their proximity remained as foreign and exotic, if not more so, than the far reaches of the European Continent. See Glenn Hooper, *Travel Writing and Ireland, 1760 – 1860* (Houndmills, 2005), 12.

and the Irish'.[11] In the wake of the Union and the effectively defeated but still threatening violence of 1798, concern with information about Ireland increased dramatically, as did the number of travelers intent on producing their own accounts of a country with which so few people in England felt either familiar or comfortable. English travelogues in the post-Union period, as Hooper convincingly maintains, highlight the fundamental danger of incomplete knowledge and resolutely insist on a causal relationship between this informational lack and the country's recent unrest. Works such as William Patterson's *Observations of Ireland* (1804), Edward Wakefield's *An Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political* (1812), John Gamble's *A View of Society and Manners in the North of Ireland* (1813), William Shaw Mason's *A Statistical Account of Ireland* (1814) and J.C. Curwen's *Observations on the State of Ireland* (1818) suggest that 'if Ireland had been more effectively understood[,] then rebellion might never have happened'.[12] In such texts, securing information about Ireland becomes central to securing the peaceful future of the British nation itself.[13]

Where, however, many English travel writers imply a need to 'write' Ireland according to an English agenda – 'from outside the country and with an eye to policy and the transmission of certain cultural and ideological values' – the national tale develops along a related but opposing trajectory.[14] Although Roche, Edgeworth, Owenson and Maturin are equally concerned with acquainting their English readers with Ireland, thereby providing the information about the country and its people much desired in the post-Union period, their fiction speaks from an insider position. For these writers, Ireland is not a strange and exotic travel destination but home – an important consideration not only because of the apparent authority with which they write but also the stance they take on travel literature authored by 'outsiders'. Whereas the Irish tour, as Ferris explains, revolved around 'someone from "here" travel[ing] "over there" and report[ing] back, the national tale dislodged English readers from home space without securing the journey by a reassuringly English enunciation'. In this way, Ferris maintains, the national tale '[d]isplac[ed] its English readers in a way the Irish tour never did … [and thus] compelled them to consider Ireland as a habitat (a native and independent place) and not simply as the primitive, ridiculous, or dangerous colony of English imaginings'.[15]

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[11] Ibid., 4.
[12] Ibid., 61.
[13] Ferris, *The Romantic National Tale*, 18–19.
[14] Hooper, *Travel Writing and Ireland*, 67.
[15] Ferris, *The Romantic National Tale*, 51–2.

The significance of contrasting authorial perspectives in the Irish tour and the national tale becomes clear in Edgeworth's *Ennui* (1809). Betraying her indebtedness to the earlier travel literature of Arthur Young, whose 1780 text, *A Tour in Ireland*, 'pioneered the modern Irish tour' and distinguished itself from many post-Union tour texts with its Enlightenment commitment to facts and figures as well as its dedication to land improvement as the key to future Irish economic growth and success, Edgeworth includes in her novel an example of a 'bad' travel-writer: Lord Craiglethorpe.[16] '[A]n English lord travelling through Ireland', Craiglethorpe displays an 'ill-bred show of contempt for the Irish' and becomes the subject of Lady Geraldine's ire because of his evidently incomplete and patronising take on Ireland.[17] Although Craiglethorpe intends 'to publish a Tour through Ireland, or a View of Ireland', he is criticised for paying attention only to the upper class and thereby acquiring a fundamentally biased, imperfect and wholly unsatisfactory view of Ireland. The result of his flawed and defective itinerary, Lady Geraldine promises, will be an account as biased as the Irish stereotypes it ostensibly sets out to overturn:

> So after posting from Dublin to Cork, and from the Giant's Causeway to Killarney; after travelling east, west, north, and south, my wise cousin Craiglethorpe will know just as much of the lower Irish as the cockney who has never been out of London, and who has never, *in all his born days*, seen an Irishman but on the English stage; where the representations are usually as like the originals, as the Chinese pictures of lions, drawn from description, are to the real animal.[18]

For Lady Geraldine, a publication so misleading about the Irish people as Craiglethorpe's promises to be is unacceptable, and the trick she determines to play on her cousin centers on a deliberate system of deception. Repeatedly feeding him misinformation, Lady Geraldine sets out to assist Craiglethorpe in producing, in Trumpener's terms, 'a book so completely untrue that it will be unpublishable, even within the exaggerating and denigrating genre of English guides to Ireland'.[19] For the Irish Lady Geraldine, to scupper Craiglethorpe's intentions is plainly a patriotic endeavour; in determining on her scheme to

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[16] Ibid. 27; Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism*, 58.

[17] Maria Edgeworth, *Ennui*, 1809, in Marilyn Butler (ed.), *Castle Rackrent and Ennui* (London, 1992), 208, 209.

[18] Ibid., 211.

[19] Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism*, 59.

trick her cousin Lady Geraldine tells her friends 'You shall see … how I'll deserve well of my country'.[20]

Although Lady Geraldine does not produce her own 'Tour of Ireland' to show English readers the truth she believes Lord Craiglethorpe will never see or know, Edgeworth's point is clear: writing from home about home is an entirely different matter than writing about a foreign location as a foreigner. This episode in *Ennui*, however, remains silent about another ontological possibility – writing about home from outside that home, an insider/outsider position that, as suggested above, became increasingly prevalent amongst Irish writers in the first few decades of the nineteenth century. Neither does it point to a further possibility, a condition of present absence that Terry Eagleton identifies as a central preoccupation in the Irish novel from the early nineteenth century onwards. Such fiction, Eagleton contends, 'returns recurrently to those who are both home and away, present and absent simultaneously'.[21] Eagleton's arguments can be taken to refer to two separate bodies of individuals in early nineteenth-century Irish culture. On the one hand, this position of present absence afflicted individuals who relocated to England, where, even after the Union and the ostensible integration of Ireland into the United Kingdom, they remained outsiders. As Donald MacRaild explains, 'The Act of Union, taken as a neutral constitutional fact, should have obviated the language of "aliens" and "outsiders" when discussing Irish migration because these settlers were migrants *within*, not emigrants *into*, the United Kingdom. No act of parliament, however, could change attitudes overnight'.[22] On the other hand, this experience of estrangement can be interpreted more allegorically, as, in Eagleton's terms, 'less literal expatriation' and more 'the plight of the internal or metaphorical émigré', alienated and estranged from Ireland even while inhabiting it.[23]

The case of Edgeworth's near contemporary, Regina Maria Roche, highlights both of these occasions of present absence that go unmentioned in *Ennui*. Born in Waterford and raised largely in Dublin, Roche (née Dalton) moved to England shortly after her marriage to Ambrose Roche in 1794 and there published the novel that secured her literary reputation, *The Children*

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[20] Edgeworth, *Ennui,* 211.

[21] Terry Eagleton, *Crazy John and the Bishop and Other Essays on Irish Culture* (Cork, 1998), 215.

[22] Donald M. MacRaild, *Irish Migrants in Modern Britain, 1750–1922* (Basingstoke, 1999), 6–7.

[23] Eagleton, *Crazy John*, 215.

of the Abbey (1796).[24] Although we know few of the details of Roche's life, her correspondence with the Royal Literary Society – to which she applied for financial assistance three times between 1827 and 1831 – reveals that she and her husband suffered incredible financial hardship throughout their marriage. In 1802, Roche's husband was declared bankrupt for the first time, and between 1802 and 1804, they became subject to the corrupt conduct of an Irish lawyer, John Baswell, who effectively defrauded them of their Irish estates. The Roches initiated a chancery suit, that, as Roche explained in an 1831 letter, 'eventually terminated in my favour, [but] proved a millstone round our necks from the year 1820 to the present time … [and] nearly, I may say entirely, drained us of our last shilling'.[25] In 1827, in fact, Mr Roche was forced to declare bankruptcy for a second time, after suffering 'a severe paralytic stroke' in December 1825.[26] So bad was the situation that, in 1828, Roche published her novel, *Contrast*, by subscription and noted in the preface that the narrative was written under 'peculiar circumstances' of want, deprivation and ill-health.[27] After the death of her husband in 1829, Roche returned to Ireland in 1831 and spent the remainder of her life penniless and destitute, despite her 'entitle[ment] to an estate of considerable value'.[28] Due to ongoing legal complications, Roche was never able to reclaim the estate she had inherited, and she died in 1845 in rented accommodation in her native city of Waterford.

Although now a largely forgotten Irish author, Roche is a vital point of interest and concern for the scholar of Romantic Ireland and its literary

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[24] The exact dates of Roche's marriage and subsequent relocation to England are a matter of some question, with scholars variously listing her move to England in 1789, or after her marriage, either in 1792 or 1794. By Roche's own account, however, it would seem that she married in 1794 and probably left for England soon after. See Natalie Schroeder, 'Regina Maria Roche and the Early Nineteenth-Century Irish Novel', *Éire-Ireland*, 19 (1984), 122; Loeber and Loeber, *A Guide to Irish Fiction,* 1133; Rictor Norton, 'Roche, Regina Maria (1763/4–1845)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23915 [accessed 14 December 2009]; Jim Shanahan, 'Roch(e), Regina Maria', *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2010), http://dib.cambridge.org [accessed 28 April 2010], and Regina Maria Roche to Joseph Snow, 19 November 1831; Letters to the Royal Literary Society, British Library (hereafter BL), Microfilm 1077, Reel 17.

[25] Roche to Royal Literary Society, 7 July 1831; Letters to the Royal Literary Society, BL, Microfilm 1077, Reel 17.

[26] Edward Popham to Joseph Snow, 23 February 1827; Letters to the Royal Literary Society, BL, Microfilm 1077, Reel 17.

[27] Regina Maria Roche, *Contrast* (3 vols, London, 1828), xiv.

[28] R.W. Baines to Joseph Snow, 19 September 1831; Letters to the Royal Literary Society, BL, Microfilm 1077, Reel 17.

production. Not only do her experiences as a migrant and, later, a wanderer returned consistently inform her novels, but her fiction frequently bridges the gap between forms we now understand as inherently divergent – the Gothic/sentimental and the regional/national. Conventionally, Roche is understood to begin her literary career with Radcliffean-inspired Gothic novels such as *The Children of the Abbey* and *Clermont* (1798) – both of which were so popular as later to be mentioned by Jane Austen, however scathingly, in *Emma* (1816) and *Northanger Abbey* (1818), respectively.[29] Roche was keenly aware of the success these novels enjoyed, writing to the Royal Literary Society in November 1831 that '[t]he success of the work [*The Children of the Abbey*] I need hardly add from what I have just said, was beyond my hopes – but I have reason to be truly grateful to the public'.[30] Despite such success, Roche is traditionally understood to reject the Gothic mode in 1820 in favor of what Claire Connolly calls 'a recognisably Irish mode' in texts like *The Munster Cottage Boy* (1820) and *Contrast* (1828).[31] The turning point in Roche's career from Gothic/sentimental to regional/national is thus conventionally understood as, in Natalie Schroeder's terms, Roche's literary 'return to Ireland'.[32]

Elsewhere, I have argued against current literary criticism's division of Roche's *oeuvre* along formal lines, maintaining that Roche routinely wrote *across* the formal constraints of the 'Gothic' and the 'national' as we now traditionally understand them. In fact, Roche consistently allowed the Gothic mode to infiltrate her so-called 'Irish' novels while also exhibiting a keen concern with

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[29] Austen's noting of Roche's novels attest to their popularity amongst the hordes of Gothic novels that inundated British library shelves during the last two decades of the eighteenth century and the first few decades of the nineteenth. Traditionally, the Gothic novel as a form is understood to begin with the publication in 1764 of Horace Walpole's short novella, *The Castle of Otranto*, but it is only with the success of the novels of Ann Radcliffe (1764–1823) and Matthew Lewis (1775–1818) in the 1790s that the Gothic novel really began to develop the mass readerly following for which it became famous. For critics, the astonishing success of the Gothic novel was a matter of some concern, especially as its readership was largely female and therefore considered particularly prone to the excesses of imagination and feeling the form encouraged.

[30] Roche to Royal Literary Society, November 1831; Letters to the Royal Literary Society, BL, Microfilm 1077, Reel 17.

[31] Claire Connolly, 'Irish Romanticism, 1800–1830' in Margaret Kelleher and Philip O'Leary (eds), *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature, Volume 1: To 1890* (Cambridge, 2006), 415. .

[32] Schroeder, 'Regina Maria Roche', 116, Christina Morin, '"Gothic" and "National"? Challenging the Formal Distinctions of Irish Romantic Fiction' in Jim Kelly (ed.), *Ireland and Romanticism* (Basingstoke, 2011), 175–6.

Ireland in works generally understood as wholly Gothic in nature.[33] Breaking down the by-now entrenched divide between the Gothic and the national is, I think, an important part of current literary criticism's attempt fully to understand the nature of literary production in Romantic Ireland, and Roche provides an excellent starting point. In particular, by noting the continuities between Roche's 'Gothic' works and her 'national' fiction, we can more clearly understand the diversity of Romantic-era literary production in Ireland as well as its manipulation of critically accepted but largely retrospective formal boundaries and divisions. Here, in fact, I want to highlight the ways in which Roche's fiction, whether now considered 'Gothic' or 'national', frequently engages with what must have been a particularly relevant theme for Roche herself – unhomeliness. There is certainly a danger of reading too much of Roche's personal experiences into her fiction, but even a cursory consideration of her treatment of the notions of 'home' and 'homecoming' suggests that her experience of Ireland and of home vitally informs her *oeuvre*. As with Roche herself, many of her fictional characters become exiled from Ireland in some way and return to it only to find it an unwelcoming and hostile terrain. For Roche, as for her heroes and heroines, the longed-for homecoming frequently reveals itself as a deeply unsettling event, promising continued alienation and discord rather than personal happiness as well as social and cultural integration. The Ireland of Roche's experience and of her fiction is, in fact, fundamentally 'unhomely' – simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar, known and unknown, comfortable and uncomfortable, welcoming and unwelcoming.

An idea central to the Gothic novel as a literary form, the notion of the unhomely was famously articulated by Freud in his 1919 essay, '*Das Unheimlich*'. Conventionally, Freud's essay title and the term it gives rise to is translated as 'the uncanny', but, as James Strachey has noted, a more precise translation is 'the unhomely'.[34] This is a term that accurately relates the sense of, in Jerrold Hogle's words, 'the deeply and internally familiar … as it reappears to us in seemingly external, repellant, and *un*familiar forms' haunting the passages of the Gothic novel and its many ruined castles, dilapidated houses, and long-deserted villas.[35] Homi Bhabha offers a similarly compelling description of the unhomely when he argues that it occurs when 'suddenly the home

[33] See Morin, '"Gothic" and "National"?'.

[34] James Strachey (ed. and trans.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud; Vol. XVII: An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works* (London, 1955), 219n1.

[35] Jerrold E. Hogle, 'Introduction: The Gothic in Western Culture' in Jerrold E. Hogle (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (Cambridge, 2002), 6.

turns into another world'.[36] Or, as Freud earlier articulated it, what produces the unhomely is not something 'new or alien', but rather, something that is fundamentally 'familiar and old-established in the mind' but which has somehow become strange and alienating.[37] The unhomely is, as Freud further explains, simultaneously 'the opposite of what is familiar' and that which 'leads back to what is known of old and long familiar'. [38]

This is exactly the sense of home experienced by Amanda Fitzalan in *The Children of the Abbey*. Her new Irish home at the end of the novel – Castle Carberry – is actually her old home – one in which she had lived earlier in the novel – and is therefore familiar, well-known and comfortable to her. Nevertheless, because of the memories associated with this home, particularly that of her father's ignominious dismissal from his position as agent of the castle and his subsequent death, Amanda views her home with feelings of repugnance and resentment. Rather than feeling 'at home' – at ease and content – in Castle Carberry, therefore, Amanda experiences her 'home' as strangely repulsive, so much so that she is forced to flee that home for the nearby convent in which she had earlier taken refuge in her frantic attempts to escape the lascivious designs of Lord Belgrave. Amanda's 'escape' fundamentally disrupts what, until the pivotal moment of return to Castle Carberry, has prepared the reader for the kind of conclusion we now conventionally associate with the national tale. Described by Miranda Burgess as an earlier national tale than *The Wild Irish Girl*, Roche's narrative initially constructs Amanda's homecoming as a joyful occasion in which the wrongs of the past have been righted and Amanda herself is re-integrated into polite society after spending much of the novel falsely barred from it.[39] Where, however, Castle Carberry's 'poor tenants' rejoice in Amanda's return and that of her new husband and former absentee landlord, Lord Cherbury, Amanda finds herself a stranger to the joyful celebrations accompanying her return.[40] Literally estranging herself from her new husband and the home she associates with her father's death, Amanda takes refuge in the dilapidated convent which, despite its otherworldly, Catholic peculiarity, still seems more welcoming and

[36] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, 1994), 10.

[37] Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' in Strachey (ed. and trans.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud; Vol. XVII*, 241.

[38] Ibid., 220.

[39] Miranda Burgess, 'Violent Translations: Allegory, Gender and Cultural Nationalism in Ireland, 1796–1806', *Modern Language Quarterly,* 59 (1998), 33–70. See also Morin, '"Gothic" and "National"'.

[40] Regina Maria Roche, *The Children of the Abbey* (1796; New York, undated), 583.

familiar to her than her own home. For the elated peasants, whose 'indigence' is blamed on 'the emigration of their landlords', the return home of the Cherbury family represents a rectification of past sins, inaugurating a period in which their landlord is literally more 'at home', and thus creating for them a more homely environment in which to live and work.[41] For Amanda, however, Castle Carberry is quintessentially unhomely.

A similar situation occurs in Roche's later novel, *Contrast*. In one of its two inter-related plotlines, the Irish girl, Helena Rossglen, the first daughter of the earl of Rossglen, owner of the beautiful country home, Woodston, returns to Ireland after being raised primarily by her grandmother in England. Expecting to find Ireland as dismal as she has been led to believe it by her prejudiced grandmother, Helena very quickly begins to feel 'something like remorse. Where were the hideous bogs, and the menacing rocks, and the deforming aspect of misery in every direction?'[42] While at Woodston, Helena falls in love with Sigismund Mountflorence, the son of Lord Rossglen's second wife by her first husband and imagines her maternally-inherited wealth saving her lover from almost certain disinheritance. When, however, Helena comes of age and receives her inheritance, she is deceived by the Bridgemores – the English family with whom her grandmother had been friendly and who have only mercenary intentions – into believing her father and his new family have absolutely no regard for her. Tricked in this way, Helena enters into a period of dissipation, encouraged by the Bridgemores, and very quickly finds herself defrauded of all of her remaining money. Penniless and apparently friendless, Helena flees, first to Ireland and then to Wales, where she 'yearn[s] to find [her]self again an inmate of the home [Woodston] endeared by so many tender recollections'.[43]

When she is eventually discovered by Lady Rossglen and entreated to return to that home, Helena agrees, but only upon the condition that the subject of marriage with Mountflorence never again be broached. Helena refuses to give reasons for her strange request, one obviously contrary to her continued affection for Mountflorence, but Lady Rossglen complies. Helena's subsequent return to Ireland is accompanied by far different feelings than those she had experienced on her earlier journey. Not at once awed and surprised by the pleasant mix of familiarity and unfamiliarity of her Irish home, Helena is instead overcome with 'grief' inspired by the recollections of the recent death

[41] Ibid., 156.
[42] Roche, *Contrast*, I, 101.
[43] Ibid., III, 171.

of Sir Rossglen and the loss of Mountflorence.[44] For Helena, the return home, marred as it is by these painful thoughts, becomes an inherently upsetting and disagreeable experience, to the point where, at the moment of her encounter with her longed-for home, she is forced to take refuge elsewhere: '[A]t the thought of all she had suffered–was probably doomed to suffer, through the death of her father, the want of his watchful care, his zealous counsel–her anguish became overwhelming; and, stealing away, she sought refuge in the wood from observation'.[45]

Eventually, Mountflorence overcomes Helena's still unspoken objections to marriage with him, and they are united in what, at first glance, reads as a standard national tale conclusion, especially as Mounflorence avoids disinheritance and inhabits once again his father's ancestral home, St Finian's. Yet, as Aileen Douglas argues, 'What looks like resolution is, however, only a momentary balancing of fictional codes (those of the national tale and the Gothic)'. Precisely when the novel *should* end, in fact, 'the narrative rears into unexpected vigor and begins to repeat in scrambled and perverse form those very textual elements shared with the national tale'.[46] Still haunted by 'the horrid past', Helena is not the happy bride we expect her to be, and she soon reveals the cause of her continued discontent.[47] In her dying letter to her husband, Helena explains that, in the moment of her worst extremity, alone and poverty-stricken, she had allowed herself to be convinced by the rogue, Sir Osbert Henley, not only that he was in love with her but that she had also been deceived by Mountflorence about his character. Believing Mountflorence on the verge of marriage with another woman, Helena eventually agrees to marry Sir Osbert, but, just as she gives her consent and is ushered aboard the boat that will take her away from Ireland forever, she discovers the deceit he has practiced. She escapes only when a fire sinks the ship, apparently taking

[44] Ibid., III, 180. Throughout the novel, there is a sense in which the descendants of Irish exiles and émigrés return to Ireland with a near-memory of homes they have never seen. The major character of the novel's secondary narrative, for instance, describes his arrival in Ireland as one pregnant with a strange sense of déjà-vu: 'Almost he could have persuaded himself he was in the place before, so familiar did every object appear, from the minute manner in which it had been described by his mother'. Ibid., I, 70.

[45] Ibid., III, 180–1.

[46] Aileen Douglas, 'Acts of Union: Irish Fiction between Enlightenment and Romanticism', paper delivered at the Early Irish Fiction Symposium, Trinity College Dublin, 24 March 2010. Aileen Douglas, '"Whom Gentler Stars Unite": Fiction and Union in the Irish Novel', *Irish University Review*, 41 (2011), 192–3.

[47] Roche, *Contrast*, III, 219.

her new husband with it. Soon after, she is located by her step-mother in Wales, returns to Ireland, and is ultimately persuaded to marry Mountflorence. As it happens, however, Sir Osbert is not, in fact, dead. Having survived the shipwreck, he has hidden himself in the countryside near Helena's home and haunted her in both her waking and her sleeping moments. As Helena recounts to Mountflorence in her letter, 'from a waking day-dream of bliss I was roused, the other morning, by the sight, the actual sight, of the phantom of horror that had so haunted my nightly couch!'[48] She further describes how, 'even now, a monster waits within these tranquil shades, to force me hence! with blood-stained hands, to tear your shrieking Helena from your loved bosom, where she fondly hoped she should have found an earthly sanctuary!'[49] The only escape from exile from her home and husband is, for Helena, death.

Where, however, Helena's death brings her the peace she seeks, it renders home a nightmarish reality for Mountflorence:

> He moved on—he paused: whither should he betake him? How could he face his home, despoiled as it was of all that had rendered it delightful? For what should he re-enter it? … and he looked round him, in overwhelming wo[e], as if for the consolation, that, if offered, he would have derided.[50]

Devoid of comfort, home is, for the grieving Mountflorence, an unwelcoming, even forbidding place, just as it was earlier for Helena. Although Mountflorence ultimately comforts himself with the thought that 'the grave must render up its dead' at the coming resurrection, his hope for the future is, significantly, an otherworldly one, framed in the language and form of a prayer.[51] Resolution for Mountflorence, in other words, must be a heavenly, rather than an earthly one.

Such pessimism about the future of Ireland and its ability to nurture and sustain its people in a text ostensibly understood as a national tale is in keeping with early nineteenth-century writers' perception of the increasingly fractured nature of Ireland itself. Edgeworth famously stopped writing about Ireland precisely because of the country's volatile state in the run up to and aftermath of Catholic Emancipation (1829). As she wrote in 1834, 'it is impossible to draw

[48] Ibid., III, 297.
[49] Ibid., III, 297–8.
[50] Ibid., III, 320–1.
[51] Ibid., III, 326.

Ireland as she now is in a book of fiction – realities are too strong'.[52] Similarly, Owenson frequently cast her eyes elsewhere for literary inspiration – Belgium, India, Italy – and, though she continued occasionally to return home, physically and metaphorically, over the years, her frequently displaced engagement with that home, in her own life and in her fiction, underlines an increasing discomfort with the realities of Irish social, cultural and political life. Where, however, it is tempting to view such pessimism as the sole domain of the national tale in its later years, the central role that the notion of unhomeliness plays in Irish fiction from the late eighteenth century onwards suggests Irish authors' continued concern with home, not just as a place for which to yearn and seek but also as a place that might ultimately disappoint. As underscored by the continuum evidenced in *The Children of the Abbey* and *Contrast* – two novels that frame Roche's literary career in England – the idea of home is always undermined by its promise of mixed pleasure and pain. In Roche's novels, as in those of her contemporaries, the seeming joy of homecoming is routinely upset by a discordant sense of alienation and disaffection, signaled by what Natalie Schroeder terms Roche's 'amorphous' depiction of Ireland in her works: 'On the one hand, Ireland is a beautiful, highly idealised backdrop for the many romantic love scenes of [Roche's fiction]. At the same time, it is a country on its way to total ruin'.[53]

Schroeder here is referring specifically to *The Munster Cottage Boy*, in which the Irish heroine, Fidelia, longs for her maternal country with a firm belief in its ability to revive and refresh her after a long and tedious absence in London:

> With that dear country every thing of happiness or pleasure was still associated; to it her thoughts still reverted – to it her untravelled heart still fondly turned – to it she had determined yet, some way or other, to make her way. Oh! to breathe again the fresh air of its bright green fields, would be renovating to her soul. In returning to it, she felt as if she was returning to a home. She could recollect nothing but kindness and good-nature in it.[54]

In Ireland, however, Fidelia is no more at home than when she was outside the

[52] Quoted in W.J. McCormack, 'Edgeworth, Maria (1768 – 1849)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8476 [accessed 8 June 2010].

[53] Schroeder, 'Regina Maria Roche', 122.

[54] Regina Maria Roche, *The Munster Cottage Boy* (4 vols, London, 1820), I, 52.

country. In fact, still under the reluctantly-afforded protection of the Bryerly family, Fidelia continues to be misused and secluded from society. Moreover, having become infected by Fidelia's delight at returning to Ireland prior to their departure from England, the Bryerlys are sorely displeased with the welcome afforded by their native land:

> Great were the expectations of pleasure which Mrs Bryerly and her daughters entertained from their visit to Ireland, but which, as extravagant expectations almost ever are, were fated to be disappointed. Years had occasioned changes, which, in place of old intimates, gave to them the faces of strangers, who neither knew nor cared any thing about them. Not without an unpleasant situation could Mrs Bryerly walk about D–, where they landed, and which, from being her and Mr Bryerly's native place, they preferred to any other part of the kingdom, and find themselves stared at as total strangers.[55]

The unexpected and alienating changes the Brylerys witness upon their return to Ireland are later remarked upon by Lord Castle Dermot, who, in stating his determination 'never [to] let any man abuse the country', nevertheless continues to point out its faults: 'There's no variety here–nothing on the grand, the magnificent scale that there is abroad'.[56] The answer ventured forth to this statement is a confirmation of Ireland's decline since the Act of Union: the country's lack of grandeur is said to result from the fact that 'the national consequence of the kingdom has been bartered away, and with it the means of keeping up that splendour and magnificence it could once shew has been lost'.[57] Lord Castle Dermot suggests, in response, that those responsible for the 'bartering' should be 'punish[ed]' by 'be[ing] compelled to live entirely in [Ireland]'.[58]

Even for Fidelia's father, Glenmore, for whom absence from Ireland is a punishing necessity, homecoming is an uncomfortable, alienating experience, largely, Roche's narrative suggests, because of the internal divisions of the country itself. Evidencing what George Haggerty calls Roche's 'actively pro-Catholic … narrative agenda', *The Munster Cottage Boy* lays the blame for Ireland's unhomely nature on continued sectarian segregation and the coun-

[55] Ibid., I, 55.
[56] Ibid., III, 133.
[57] Ibid., III, 133.
[58] Ibid., III, 134.

try's refusal to allow a majority of its population legally and literally to claim the land as home.[59] Glenmore, for instance, the orphaned son of an ancient Irish family now fallen into poverty, is exiled from Ireland because of his implication in the 1798 Rebellion. When the peasant man who cared for him after his parents' deaths is 'accused of having given shelter to some fugitives from a rebel camp surprised in the neighbourhood', Glenmore defends his foster father and, in the process, accidentally shoots one of the men searching his house.[60] Condemned to hang for his crime, Glenmore is forced first to witness his foster father being tortured to death for his supposed involvement in the rebellion. Then, on the eve of Glenmore's execution, 'a party of rebels poured unexpectedly into the village where I was confined and which was but a small one[,] poorly defended, and forcing the prison, liberated me'.[61] An apparent murderer and Catholic sympathiser, Glenmore flees the country only secretly to return years later to save his daughter – who he believed to have died at birth – from social infamy and financial desperation. Re-united with her hitherto unknown father and beset by continued intrigues and troubles in Ireland, Fidelia determines to emigrate with her father. Before they can embark for America, however, they are subjected to such want and deprivation that Glenmore is driven to the brink of death. In the midst of their suffering, the pair is discovered by a naval officer once known to Fidelia who, after listening to her narrative, redeems her in the minds of her friends and, moreover, reveals that the victim of Glenmore's supposed crime – murder – had not, in fact, died but had instead lived and was desirous of making amends with his former foe. Glenmore subsequently recovers from an illness induced by want, despair, and the thought of subjecting his daughter to such deprivation and, through the timely intervention of an unknown and unnamed benefactor, is re-possessed of 'the long-alienated estate of his family', which had been 'fraudulently obtained' from him by his former, adopted parent, Mr Winterfield.[62]

The conclusion to Roche's lengthy tale sees Fidelia's imminent emigration to America prevented and the long-established exile of her father overturned. Moreover, the reader is encouraged to believe that Fidelia will soon marry Rodolph Morven, also known as Colonel Grandison, heir to the fiercely nationalist Lord Fitzossory, in a pro-Catholic echo of the national tale's

[59] George E. Haggerty, *Queer Gothic* (Urbana, IL, 2006), 72.
[60] Roche, *The Munster Cottage Boy*, II, 315.
[61] Ibid., II, 320–1.
[62] Ibid., IV, 281.

allegorical marriage plot. In fact, at stake in *The Munster Cottage Boy* is not the negotiation or, indeed, reconciliation of English and Irish to union, but a similar sympathetic take on Catholic Emancipation. Although Lord Fitzossory is often repugnant in his extremism, banishing his daughter for her marriage to an Englishman and only forgiving her upon her promise to allow him full control over her son, Rodolph, his desire for Catholic re-possession of lands and emancipation underwrites the novel's conclusion. Unable to think calmly of 'the alienation of the properties of the old Irish families, or the restrictions imposed on account of religion', Lord Fitzossory raises his grandson in the hope of producing a national leader who might advocate 'the cause of his countrymen … and gradually [lead them] to that emancipation that would permit those whom worldly policy had tempted to apostasize from the faith of their ancestors to quiet their consciences by returning to it'.[63] Fidelia's marriage to Grandison thus envisions the key to Ireland's future redemption as Catholic Emancipation. As with the marriages in *The Wild Irish Girl*, *Ennui*, and *The Absentee*, however, *The Munster Cottage Boy*'s union remains proleptic.[64] The closing lines of the novel, in fact, place conclusions in the reader's hands: 'leaving it to the imagination of our readers to group the several characters in the way most agreeable to their respective fancies, we shall now beg leave to drop the long-raised curtain on our dramatis personae, with a natural wish that they may not rise from the entertainment with any feeling of disapprobation'.[65] Disappointment, however, is the natural response, especially when the reader finds his/her patience with the preceding four volumes rewarded not, as we might expect, with marriage or even Fidelia's joy at having been redeemed in Grandison's eyes, but, instead, her thoughts on 'the frail nature of earthly bliss'.[66] Reflecting on the story of her mother, who died soon after her husband's exile to America, Fidelia is less than sanguine about the future of her own suggested marriage. Naturally, her downhearted musing at the same moment of her supposed joy – confirmed in the good opinion of Grandison and no longer facing the prospect of permanent emigration – casts a dark shadow on the happy imagery the narrator prompts us to construct in our own heads.

Roche herself, in her personal correspondence, points to the shadows darkening her own return to Ireland and home. With her husband dead, Roche

[63] Ibid., I, 168–9.

[64] Douglas, 'Acts of Union'; Douglas, '"Whom Gentler Stars Unite"'.

[65] Roche, *The Munster Cottage Boy*, IV, 282.

[66] Ibid.

wrote to the Royal Literary Society pleading for £10 that she might spend 'some two or three months' in Ireland visiting friends.[67] Shortly after being granted the sum and finding her way to Ireland, Roche discovered herself in an even more dire situation than when she had left England. As her lawyer, R.W. Barnes, explained to the Royal Literary Society:

> Since my letter to you, Mrs Roche's situation is somewhat altered: she was then most anxious to raise a small sum, sufficient to defray the expense of her passage to Ireland … The small sum requested was lent to her & she is now in Ireland – It is quite uncertain how long she may continue where she now is and she has not a guinea in the world to support herself; and I almost fear that the difficulties of her late husband (owing to the Chancery suit, which now keeps Mrs Roche in the greatest poverty) have already occasioned so heavy a charge upon many of her [friends] that there is little hope of any effectual assistance being received from them … the only prospect Mrs Roche has before her is starvation which at the present moment she is not very far distant from.[68]

Returned home for a short, consolatory visit, Roche finds that she is, in fact, almost wholly alone in the world. Unable to provide for herself because of past treachery, she can now no longer depend on her friends for succour. Nor can she return to her adopted home in England. Instead, she must turn to the Royal Literary Society for yet another grant to sustain her in her own home. Her bitterness at this situation is suggested by her recognition in a later letter to the Royal Literary Society that her 'strong attachment to [her] native place' owed primarily to the memory 'of those who are now no more'.[69] As with Amanda Fitzalan, Helena Rossglen, and Fidelia Glenmore, Roche experiences home and homecoming as a deeply unsettling event, haunted by the memories of the past and shadowed by continued pessimism about the future.

Impelled, at least in part, by her experiences as an Irish émigré, Roche's fiction consistently reveals her concern with Ireland as well as an apparently contradictory imaging of Ireland as both idealised motherland and

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[67] R.W. Barnes to the Royal Literary Society, 9 November 1831; Letters to the Royal Literary Society, BL, Microfilm 1077, Reel 17.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Roche to Royal Literary Society, 19 November 1831; Letters to the Royal Literary Society, BL, Microfilm 1077, Reel 17.

uncomfortable, ruined, and ruinous society. Above all else unhomely, Ireland in Roche's novels offers the returned émigré very little hope, comfort or relief. Although Roche envisions part of the solution to Ireland's simultaneously welcoming and unwelcoming, familiar and unfamiliar nature in the aftermath of Anglo-Irish Union as Catholic Emancipation in texts such as *The Munster Cottage Boy*, her writing career had ended before she could envision this solution in her fiction or, indeed, experience it in real life. As a result, Roche remains forever silent about the 'solution' enacted in 1829. Her own experience of poverty, destitution and loneliness upon her partially unwilling repatriation to Ireland in 1831 suggests that the home to which she had returned was not that which she had longed for in England, or in her fiction.

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