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## ‘Talk talk talk ...’ Virginia Woolf, Ireland and Maria Edgeworth

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**Abstract:** This article considers Woolf’s only visit to Ireland and her attitude to the country as revealed in her diary and in a review of a book about Maria Edgeworth. She considered the fault of the Irish to be their loquaciousness. Her diary reveals her belief that Irish literature had declined since Dean Swift. Woolf, both in her twenties and when she visited Ireland in 1934, revealed a certain antipathy to the country. She asserted, for example, that the Irish propensity to talk had prevented the production of literature of any quality after the eighteenth century. In the 1909 review, Woolf, while criticising the author of a book about Maria Edgeworth, attacks Edgeworth herself. But her words imply that she had not read Maria’s Irish novels. Bloomsbury’s ‘snobbery’ and Woolf’s Feminism throughout the essay are evident in her implicit criticism of the way that Edgeworth sacrificed love for duty. In dismissing Edgeworth’s achievement, Woolf betrays a degree of ignorance that is worth considering.

**Key Words:** Woolf, Edgeworth, Swift, talk, superficial, Land Question.

Many writers and critics, over the years, have cited the Irish propensity to ‘talk’ – a notable, recent example being Brian Friel’s *Translations* (1980). But certain English writers, notably Virginia Woolf, have adopted a more negative and critical attitude towards Irish articulation perceiving it to be hindrance to literary creativity. Woolf, who visited Ireland only once, from 30 April to 8 May 1934, certainly concluded that the Irish talked too much but also implicitly claimed that, as a result, they produced no literature of merit after the demise of Jonathan Swift – but was she right?

Woolf’s diary reveals an initial impression of Ireland that was hardly auspicious, she viewed it as “A mixture of Greece, Italy & Cornwall; great loneliness; poverty & dreary villages ...” (Bell and McNeillie 1982: 209). The Woolfs stayed with Elizabeth Bowen at Bowen’s Court, at Farahy, near Kildorrey, County Cork. Quentin Bell’s account of the trip suggests that it was somewhat boring recounting that in “At the end of April they took a fortnight’s holiday in Ireland; it was pleasant, though wet and on the whole uneventful” (Bell 1973: 177). Bell seems to hint that his aunt’s views on Ireland were probably influenced – at least in part – by such vulgar, even ‘touristic’, considerations as the state of the weather. The weather may have been bad and the company at Bowen’s Court – which included the “baboon Conolly & his gollywog slug wife Jean ...” (Bell and McNeillie 1982: 210) with “their gorilla faces”

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1. I am deeply indebted to John C. Clarke, Professor of History and International Politics at the University of Buckingham, for numerous discussions and for his generous help in the preparation of this article.

(Bell and McNeillie 1982: 211) – not much better, but this article will argue that Woolf’s attitude to Ireland, ultimately negative, will be better understood if more serious matters, ones relevant to her ideas on society and on literature, are taken into account.

At first sight, Woolf’s own comments suggest that she enjoyed her brief stay in Ireland. She wrote that “its been one of our most amusing tours. If only for the talk talk talk ...” (Bell and McNeillie 1982: 216). In fact, it seems to have been ‘talk’ that made the deepest impression on her. Though it should be noted that Oscar Wilde had made a similar observation archly commenting that “We are a nation of brilliant failures, but we are the greatest talkers since the Greeks” (Yeats 1977: 135). At this point, Woolf presents ‘talk’ in a positive way. The same appears to be the case when, on a social visit to Adare, she was much impressed by both the verbal dexterity and longevity of Mrs. Ida Fitzgerald to whom “Talk is ... an intoxicant” (Bell and McNeillie 1982: 213). She “talked till 11 & wd. willingly be talking now ...” that leads Woolf to ask “Why arent [sic] these people the greatest novelists in the world?” (Bell and McNeillie 1982: 213). The most obvious inference from this question is that Woolf did *not* consider the Irish to be the greatest novelists in the world. At this point, Woolf seems to have thought that the Irish way with words *should* have given them an enormous advantage over less loquacious peoples. She must have given the matter more thought and the issue was clearly at the centre of her mind when she dismissed the idea of permanent residence in Ireland noting “No, it wouldn’t do living in Ireland, in spite of the rocks & the desolate bays. It would lower the pulse of the heart: & all one’s mind wd. run out in talk” (Bell and McNeillie 1982: 216). It seems that Woolf’s thinking on ‘talk’ had developed and it was now seen not as an advantage to real creativity but as a disadvantage. Endless ‘talk’ might be agreeable enough on a brief holiday but in the long run it would be disastrous. Woolf implies that the mind loses something of itself in excessive ‘talk’ and at the same time deep feeling and reflection – “the pulse of the heart” – is lowered. We shall return to this notion when examining specifically Woolf and Edgeworth.

Of course, there were other aspects of Ireland that made Woolf uneasy. Her hostess at

Bowen’s Court was descended from a family of Cromwellian settlers of Welsh origin and the house itself had been built in 1775. Bowen’s Court, “like many of the Ascendancy’s Big Houses after the troubles [was] a place of dilapidated grandeur” (Lee 1997: 652). Woolf’s diary records “how ramshackle & half squalid the Irish life is” (Bell and McNeillie 1982: 210). As Hermoine Lee notes, it was unfortunate that Woolf had not read “*The Last September* (1929), Bowen’s evocative fiction of the Anglo-Irish during the Troubles” (Lee 1997: 651), before her visit; had she done so, her opinion of Ireland might have been different.

At Bowen’s Court, Woolf must have realised that she was witnessing a way of life in terminal decline. Like many of the Bloomsbury Group, she was acutely aware of the fragility of civilization and of the ever-present threat of violence and anarchy. It may not be a coincidence that Bowen’s Court, which seemed unlikely to last much longer, was a product of the eighteenth century – a time that Woolf and her friends generally admired and much preferred to the succeeding Victorian period. In Ireland, Woolf detected “that life is receding” (Bell and McNeillie 1982: 209). By that she may have meant that civilization was receding. Of course, it is important to stress that Woolf visited Ireland not long after the end of the Irish Civil War, when levels of violence had been higher than at any time since 1798. In particular, she experienced a “sudden sense ... of being in the midst of history – that is of being in an unsettled, feverish place, which would have its period given it in the books; anything may happen” (Bell and McNeillie 1982: 215). Woolf’s sense of being at a turning point in history has a double resonance. First, Ireland, having survived civil war, was still trying to find the right path with public opinion deeply divided over de Valera’s Irish Free State. Secondly, sitting in Ireland, Woolf must have seen the parallel between the inevitable demise of the Anglo-Irish and the sense that Europe was inevitably sliding towards war. Woolf knew that she would be on any Nazi death list – along with her husband, Leonard, who was a Jew – should England be invaded. They, like the rest of the Bloomsbury Group, were deeply interested in politics and it was only two years after her trip to Ireland that Julian Bell, her nephew, was killed in the Spanish Civil War.

But it is Woolf's views on Irish literature that are of greatest interest to us here. As we have seen, she did not consider the Irish of her own time to be "the greatest novelists in the world." A relatively small country, whose living writers included W. B. Yeats, George Bernard Shaw and James Joyce, might reasonably make such a claim.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Hermoine Lee specifically notes that Woolf seriously "underrated Joyce" (Lee 1997: 650) and Kathryn Laing cites "her now infamous reading of James Joyce's *Ulysses*" (Laing 2001: 1). Woolf's fairly low estimate of modern Irish writers cannot be ascribed to mere ignorance. She was reasonably well-informed about Irish politics, she had been "reading a biography of Parnell" (Briggs 2005: 289) "knew Shaw [and] she would have heard Julian [Bell] talking about his great hero, Michael Collins" (Lee 1997: 650). More remarkably, Woolf had met W. B. Yeats who was the driving force behind the Irish Literary Revival and, with Lady Gregory, The Abbey Theatre. It may, however, be worth noting that Yeats was notoriously loquacious.

It is important to appreciate, however, that Woolf's condemnation did not extend to all Irish writers, merely to those of the last century or so. When she turned to the works of the eighteenth century, she displayed an enthusiasm bordering on veneration. Her reservations about nineteenth and early twentieth century Irish writers really sprang from a conviction that they had strayed too far from the glorious traditions of her hero, Dean Swift. Woolf actually contemplated a campaign to rectify this: "I'm trying to get the Irish back to the great men of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Swift!" (Bell and McNeillie 1982: 255). She went so far as to visit Swift's tomb, in St. Patrick's Cathedral, (Church of Ireland), Dublin, to read "the tremendous words".<sup>3</sup> It is almost as if she approached Swift's last resting-place in the spirit of a Medieval pilgrim, hoping that the bones of the 'saint' would somehow work the necessary miracle.

2. Although Yeats became famous as a poet and Shaw as a playwright, both men were also 'novelists.' Yeats started but never completed *The Speckled Bird* while Shaw wrote five novels: *Immaturity*, *The Irrational Knot*, *Love Among the Artists*, *Cashel Brown's Profession* and *An Unsocial Socialist* – all between 1879 and 1883.

A clue as to what lay behind Woolf's belief in the decline of Irish literature may be found in her evaluation of Maria Edgeworth. But perhaps a word needs first to be said about Edgeworth's own background that so influenced her views and mode of writing. Edgeworth, whose family "came into Ireland ... about the year 1583" (Edgeworth and Edgeworth 1856: 3), was guided forcefully, in her writing, by her father, the notably energetic and loquacious Richard Lovell Edgeworth [RLE]. She gracefully accepted his four marriages and the addition of twenty-one siblings – Woolf's claim that RLE "had nineteen children" (Woolf 1948: 152) is incorrect. Moreover, Edgeworth turned a practised 'blind eye' to RLE's callous treatment of his first wife, Anna Maria Elers, and to his questionable 'Rousseau-esque' experiments concerning orphan girls. But Edgeworth was influenced by RLE's championing of such social philosophers as Edmund Burke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith. In fact, most of her early works were non-fiction with such 'serious' titles as *Practical Education* (1798).

Here we shall examine Woolf's essay, written when she was just twenty-seven, entitled 'Maria Edgeworth and Her Circle'. Woolf's ostensible task was to review *Maria Edgeworth and her Circle in the days of Buonaparte and Bourbon. With numerous illustrations by Ellen G. Hill and reproductions of contemporary portraits* (1909). Woolf's review appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* of 9 December 1909 (McNeillie 1986: 315-319). Not surprisingly, this 1909 review – relative 'juvenilia' – lacks the incisiveness of her later reviews, but it already reveals impressive powers of ridicule. But it also reveals Woolf's willingness to pass judgement on another writer while being apparently unacquainted with what they actually wrote. In Woolf's condemnation of the loquaciousness of the Irish and the decline in nineteenth century Irish literature – which

3. The inscription which reads "UBI SAEVA INDIGNATIO ULTERIUS COR LACERARE NEQUIT" has been translated variously as "He lies where furious rage can rend his heart no more" (Bell and McNeillie 1982: 217n) and "Where Savage Indignation Can No Longer Tear The Heart" (Morris 1993: 146).

must include Edgeworth – she fails to recognize that actually her criticism echoes that of Edgeworth and RLE in *Essay on Irish Bulls* (1802). In a surprisingly humorous and lively series of chapters, the Edgeworths address various aspects of the Irish use of language and cite the English propensity to laugh at the Irish – especially when they use the English language:

... when a poor Irish haymaker ... mistook a feminine for a masculine noun, and began his speech in a court of justice with these words: ‘My lord, I am a poor widow,’ instead of, ‘My lord, I am a poor widower;’ it was sufficient to throw a grave judge and jury into convulsions of laughter (Edgeworth 1832: 149).

But, more telling, is the ironic remark that “It was ... in law, no murder to kill a *merus Hibernicus*; and it is ... no offence against good manners to laugh at any of this species” (Edgeworth 1832: 149). In addition, “Much must be allowed in England for the licence of conversation; but by no means must this conversation-licence be extended to the Irish (Edgeworth 1832: 150). It is, though, the humour of the Edgeworths’ criticism – unlike in Woolf’s case – where they are at their strongest:

An uninformed Irishman, hearing the sphinx alluded to in company, whispered to a friend, ‘The sphinx! who is that now?’ ‘A monster, man.’ ‘Oh, a *Munster*-man: I thought he was from Connaught,’ replied our Irishman, determined not to seem totally unacquainted with the family (Edgeworth 1832: 153).

In the chapter ‘Thoughts That Breathe, And Words That Burn’, the Edgeworths show how it takes an Irishman an extraordinary amount of time merely to say that he has a complaint against one Christy Salmon. The man prefaces his argument by saying that “it would be too bad to be keeping your honour from your dinner” (Edgeworth 1832: 176) and proceeds to do exactly that by launching into a seemingly endless monologue – locquaciousness indeed! But, as the Edgeworths note, “The vulgar in England are too apt to catch at every slip of the tongue made by Irishman” (Edgeworth 1832: 232) – a point ironically proven by Woolf’s comments.

In 1800, Edgeworth’s first – and most successful – Irish novel, *Castle Rackrent*, had appeared – with much of the Glossary supplied

by RLE. Her novels about Ireland focus on the responsibilities of Anglo-Irish landlords and on the wider Land Question. The Act of Union (1800) had ‘united’ Britain and Ireland but only after the nominally independent Dublin Parliament, rife with corruption, had unsurprisingly agreed. The result, in the eyes of Catholic tenants, was the imposition of an alien power and religion. While the British Government controlled the country using troops and militia, the Church of Ireland (Protestant) became the State religion and English Law superseded the remnants of Brehon Law. Edgeworth and her father – who had been a member of the Dublin Parliament – were appalled by what they witnessed. Landowners, principally members of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, became willing absentees in London. They were not put off by the fact that English aristocrats regarded them as being barely civilised and certainly not their social equals. Ascendancy landowners often left corrupt agents or middlemen to squeeze as much rent out of their impoverished tenants as possible. Catholic tenants, who were generally discriminated against, also had to pay tithes to the Church of Ireland and agrarian violence – ranging from burning hayricks and cattle mutilation to murder – increased proportionately.

In her Irish novels, Edgeworth advocates resident and enlightened landowners and the fair treatment of all tenants regardless of their religious allegiance. So successful was the Edgeworth family in putting their theories into practice that, when the French landed to support the United Irishmen in 1798, RLE and his son were nearly lynched, by their fellow Protestant landowners, who suspected them of treason. The fact that they returned home to find that their house, unlike others, remained completely unharmed merely added to the widespread belief that the Edgeworths’ relationship with their Catholic tenants was far ‘too close.’ It was against this background of mistrust, suspicion and religious antagonism that Edgeworth sought to create a fictional world as a means of convincing landowners that RLE’s enlightened approach was the solution to Ireland’s land problems. In other words, Edgeworth’s approach was essentially didactic and much preoccupied with duty and responsibility. But there was more to Edgeworth than that. Her most successful novel, *Castle Rackrent*, created an entirely new

genre, the ‘Regional Novel’, that was successfully to be taken up by, among others, Sir Walter Scott – “who confessed that he had been inspired to turn from poetry to novel-writing by Maria’s stories of Irish life” (Lane 1989: 51). Indeed, “among Maria Edgeworth’s literary descendents [are] Balzac, Pushkin, Manzoni, and Sienkiewicz [and] Turgenev” (Tracy 1998: 23). Even the King found value in Edgeworth’s novel:

George III ... found ... value in *Castle Rackrent*. Soon after the publication of this latter work, Mr. Edgeworth told his father-in-law that he had it on good authority ‘that the King was much pleased with *Castle Rackrent* – he rubbed his hands and said what what – I know something now of my Irish subjects’ (Murray 1971: 45).

But, to return to Woolf’s 1909 review. At first reading, her review seems to be far more critical of the unfortunate Miss Hill than of Edgeworth herself. She ridicules Hill’s superficial concentration of such things as dress, anecdotes, famous people glimpsed and other gossipy items, as she caustically admits: “one need not trouble oneself with minds and emotions” (McNeillie 1986: 315). Woolf subtly deconstructs Hill’s whole intellectual approach questioning her incisive abilities by noting that, when describing Madame Recamier, Hill is obsessed by the way she looks rather than what she says or does – before revealing doubts that Edgeworth ever met Recamier.

Woolf is ready to give some praise to Edgeworth who she describes as being “strikingly modest” (McNeillie 1986: 316) and who wrote, travelled, conversed on everything from politics to poetry and was the object of love. Woolf deplores the fact that Hill makes no attempt to consider the effect the news of victory at the Battle of Waterloo (1815) had on Edgeworth, yet indulges in stories of only marginal relevance to her subject – simply in order to drag in some famous names or retell well worn anecdotes:

Perverse although it may seem, Drogheda and the opinion of Drogheda upon the victory interests us far more than the account of Wellington’s reception in Paris; possibly if we were told what Miss Edgeworth saw among the peasants on her estate we should realise far better what Waterloo meant than by reading the faded exclamations of Mme d’Arblay upon the spot (McNeillie 1986: 317).

Why delve into Drogheda’s bloody past at the hands of Oliver Cromwell and consider how attitudes towards England might have changed in the course of 150 years when you can learn about what was worn at the celebrations? The facetious nature of Woolf’s tone is hard to misinterpret but, should the reader miss the point, she drives home her fully justified argument:

... as we run through Miss Hill’s book, we pick up straws everywhere, and 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. Nevertheless, there are moments when we bewail the opportunity that Miss Hill seems to have missed – the opportunity of getting at the truth at the risk of being dull (McNeillie 1986: 318).

Woolf’s article is perceptive, subtly humorous and a good example of ‘damning with faint praise.’

Although Woolf implies that Edgeworth was more interesting than Hill presents her, it does not mean that she really held her in high regard. We are bound to wonder if the attack on Hill – a fairly obvious target – is not just a cover for an attack on Edgeworth. This possibility comes to mind at the beginning of the review. Woolf raises the obvious question: “... Miss Hill does not ask herself once in the volume before us whether people now read Miss Edgeworth’s novels” (McNeillie 1986: 315). Woolf does not elaborate on who these “people” are – perhaps she means members of her own ‘Metropolitan’ and self consciously ‘clever’ Bloomsbury Circle. Indeed, Woolf has been heavily criticised for her allegedly elitist attitude towards readers.<sup>4</sup>

4. Woolf’s “borrowing of that phrase, ‘the common reader’, from Dr Johnson has been a hostage to fortune. She used the word ‘common’ as he did, to mean general or ordinary. But because there have been so many attacks on her life and work (especially in Britain) for snobbery, high-brow-ism and a refusal to write for the mass public, the other meaning of ‘common’ has crept into the discussion” (Lee 1997: 414-415).

But whoever these “people” are, the clear implication is that they do not – perhaps should not – read Miss Edgeworth’s novels. It has to be said that the review does not suggest close familiarity with Edgeworth’s Irish novels such as *Castle Rackrent*, *Ennui* (1809), *The Absentee* (1812) and *Ormond* (1817) or even the non-fiction *Essay on Irish Bulls* (the situation is not aided by the inaccurate information supplied in the editor’s endnote).<sup>5</sup> But the most likely reading of Woolf’s reference to “people” is that she was really saying that *she* had not read these novels herself.

Woolf’s implicit antipathy towards Edgeworth requires some explanation. As Olivier Bell remarks, the motivation behind Woolf’s works has been comprehensively examined so “we have had Freudian, Christian, Celtic, mystical, existential, Marxist, Feminist – and you can say *that* again – analyses and accounts of her life and work” (Bell 1990: 23). Woolf’s Feminism has indeed been widely considered and is not the subject of this article but, suffice to say, her antipathy towards the intellectually lightweight Hill, to RLE’s heartless treatment of Anna Maria – which leaves “no course open to us but to hold up our hands in amazement” (Lawless 1904: 35) – perhaps even to Edgeworth herself may well have its roots in her particular brand of intellectual Feminism. But there are other possibilities.

Edgeworth, though nominally a member of the Church of Ireland, hardly considered herself such until she was increasingly forced to do so by events in Ireland post-1810. Moreover, she had forebears who were deeply religious Catholics. Jane Edgeworth was a confidant of Queen Henrietta Maria (1609-69), founded a religious house and “was considered a saint” (Edgeworth 1856: 4). Also, there was Henry Essex Edgeworth (1745-1807) – popularly known as the Abbe Edgeworth –

5. *Belinda* (1801) is not set in Ireland and the second of Edgeworth’s Irish novels is *Ennui* (1809). Although Edgeworth did write many novels, only four were set in Ireland and, after 1817, she determined never to write about Irish issues again (McNeillie 1986: 318 note 2). In a letter to her brother, M. Pakenham Edgeworth, dated 19<sup>th</sup> February 1834, she wrote “it is impossible to draw Ireland as she now is in a book of fiction – realities are too strong, party passions too violent to bear to see, or care to look at their faces in the looking-glass” (Hare 1971: 550).

who was confessor to Louis XVI on the scaffold and who “had knelt down as the King’s head was held up, and blood from it had streamed down on him, saturating his clothes” (Woodgate 1945: 110). But, Woolf’s decision to quote RLE’s comment in her chapter ‘The Lives of the Obscure’, in *The Common Reader* (1925), that “The consolations of religion are fully equal to its terrors” (Woolf 1948: 152) reveals something about her own beliefs and that of others in the Bloomsbury Group. Woolf was no supporter of organised religion as Quentin Bell recalls:

Her own views never changed; after a momentary conversion in childhood she lost all faith in revealed religion and, while never committing herself to any positive declaration, she maintained an attitude sometimes of mild, sometimes of aggressive agnosticism (Bell 1973: 135-136).

But we must return to Woolf on her Irish holiday; was there anything she wrote about that sheds new light on her attitude to the Edgeworths? Perhaps there is. As we have seen, the most striking feature of her response to Ireland was that initial pleasure in the Irish propensity to talk – and talk gave way to a belief that too much talk “would lower the pulse of the heart” and empty the mind. Woolf deplored superficiality and made much of the importance of emotion and thought. She criticises Hill for her preoccupation with the frivolities of society and portrays RLE as so preoccupied with himself and his idiosyncratic ideas that “To muse, to repent, to contemplate were foreign to his nature” (Woolf 1948: 157). Most tellingly of all, Woolf insists that everything is subordinated to RLE’s “interminable chatter” (Woolf 1948: 158) – precisely the same observation she was later to make about Ireland. It was talking too much – being obsessed with externals, doing, even writing too much – that prevented people from being and thinking deeply. Thus Irish literature, from Edgeworth onwards, could never attain true greatness because of its ‘chattering’ quality. Edgeworth may have ‘started the rot’ but Yeats and George Bernard Shaw were open to much the same objections; almost by definition, they could not be “the greatest novelists in the world.”

Of course, there is an underlying problem with this analysis. How do writers really ‘get at’ things such as inner natures if not through the hints provided by trivia and chatter? Woolf

herself exemplifies this point. In her own works, particularly *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), Woolf relies heavily on observation and the inclusion of apparently innocuous information to enhance her ‘stream of consciousness’ narrative. She possessed an insatiable appetite for seeking out the minutiae of life. This point is ironically underscored by Woolf’s own propensity to ‘talk’. She posed an endless list of questions to, among many others, her nephew Quentin Bell, during the 1930s, that have been recounted by Hermione Lee: “What did you have for breakfast? Where did you dine last night and so on? And are you in love? And are you happy? And do you sometimes write a poem?” (Lee 1997: 549). For Woolf, details about everyday life mattered deeply and reflected her own intellectual interest in people and in social interaction. Her own works – both fictional and critical – show that details alone are not enough, they must be cogitated upon to see what they reveal about a person’s character. If writers, like Hill, record only superficial details, then nothing worthwhile is revealed about their subject. We learn nothing about differing characters, beliefs, attitudes or

intellectual positions. But Edgeworth *did* record details – serious details – in both her fiction and non-fiction works and did think deeply about them. As may be seen especially in *Ennui* and *The Absentee*, she wrote tales that were essentially a ‘blue-print’ to solve the growing crisis caused by absenteeism in Ireland. She cared deeply about her Irish tenants, albeit in a rather paternalistic way, and sought to convey their concerns and highlight their anxieties to her fellow landlords and to a generally uncaring English audience. The irony is that it is Woolf who concentrates on the more superficial aspects of Edgeworth and Woolf’s limited knowledge – if she knew of them at all – of Edgeworth’s works is evident. It is a great pity that one of the key female writers of the twentieth century was unable to recognise her counterpart in nineteenth century Irish literature who “has a secure place in the history of the novel ... and ... [was] the most famous woman writer of her day” (Lane 1989: 51). In the process, Woolf arrived at a conclusion about Irish literature since the eighteenth century that was itself superficial and unjust.

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