

Orphans, upstarts and aristocrats: Ireland and the idyll of adoption in the work of Madame de Genlis

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Madame de Genlis' name appears in Irish history due to the fact that it was widely assumed that Pamela FitzGerald, wife of the United Irish leader Lord Edward FitzGerald, was her natural daughter. The significance of Pamela's parentage is more often considered in relation to her supposed father, the duke of Orleans, who was both Mme de Genlis' employer and the cousin of Louis XVI. The duke later became known as 'Philippe Egalité' when he embraced the principles of the revolution. The potent mix of royal blood, radical politics and sexual scandal that surrounded Pamela's birth and upbringing ensured that, even as a child, she possessed a degree of celebrity, or notoriety. Her marriage to Edward FitzGerald added to her iconic status, and also added to the glamour surrounding FitzGerald himself. As his aunt, Sarah Napier, remarked: 'Edward FitzGerald has acted a romance throughout all his life, and it is finished by his marriage to Pamela Seymour'.¹ Katherine Tynan's edited collection of Edward FitzGerald's letters, published in 1916, is subtitled 'A Study in Romance'.² Everyone, it seems, agrees that Edward and Pamela FitzGerald existed on the plane of romance, rather than reality. In the case of both, image and representation are as important as fact. As the historian Marianne Elliot comments, for instance, Pamela's assumed parentage contributed significantly towards establishing the image of Edward FitzGerald as a key figure in the United Irishmen:

the myth [of Pamela's birth] played such a part in creating the reputation of Lord Edward as an advanced democrat that it has survived two centuries of scholarly research, and with Edward's style of dressing and of cropping his hair in the French republican style, long before it became common United Irish practice, [William] Drennan was correct in thinking that 'he and his elegant wife will lead the fashion of politics in a short time'.³

One response to this intoxicating mix of romance and politics has been ignored, and that is the response of Mme de Genlis herself. This is surprising, given

1 S. Tillyard, *Citizen Lord: Edward FitzGerald, 1763-1798* (London, 1998), p. 152. 2 K. Tynan, *Lord Edward: A Study in Romance* (London, 1916). 3 M. Elliott, *Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France* (London, 1982) pp. 25-6.

that she was an accomplished author of novels, tales and educational works, and published her memoirs in eight volumes. Genlis lived in interesting times, and she appears to have materially contributed to their interest. Born in 1746, she married the Comte de Genlis, who later became the Marquis de Sillery. She was an extremely prolific, successful, and highly regarded writer, many of whose works were translated into English. In 1785 she was awarded an honorary doctorate by Oxford University, and it was also proposed that she should be made the first ever woman member of the Académie Française. She was also a controversialist, a public figure, reputed to be a political intriguer, in the best tradition of French 'boudoir politics'.⁴

Genlis was thus a talented, ambitious and intellectually gifted woman whose life and work have attracted scholarly and critical attention. Few of these commentaries, however, make any extended reference to her attitude either to Edward FitzGerald or to Ireland's history or political situation. One of the few such comments is provided by Patrick Byrne, in his 1955 study of Edward FitzGerald. It is perhaps significant that in describing Genlis' attitude towards Pamela's marriage Byrne adopts her perspective, thus creating an implied sense of her attitudes and motivations, without providing any support for these claims:

[FitzGerald] shared an admiration for Rousseau with Pamela herself, this was no defect; perhaps it was merely the enthusiasm of youth. His political views, if not very clearly defined, were what we should now call definitely left-wing, but he was not committed to any dangerous association, and Madame reflected that in England it was always difficult for a man to make trouble for himself by being involved with the left; Tom Paine's case was merely an exception. As for Ireland, Madame never thought of that country at all. She had heard little about Ireland and she seldom thought of Lord Edward in connection with it.⁵

Byrne's speculations, however, do not bear scrutiny. It is certainly true that Genlis' political views are notoriously difficult to define, given her associations with both Jacobinism and Royalism. She was credited, for instance, with converting her employer, the duke of Orleans, to the principles of the Revolution and was supposed to have introduced her pupils as members of the Jacobin Club. Genlis herself, however, disputed these claims in a number of autobiographical texts, and was moreover associated with the Royalist faction in the years after the Revolution. In the 1820s she carried on a brief correspondence with the British Tory journalist John Wilson Croker, who was planning to write a history of the French Revolution; in her letters Genlis declares herself a friend of the church and

4 See J. Harmand, *The Keeper of Royal Secrets: Being the Private and Political Life of Madame de Genlis* (London, 1913) and G. de Broglie, *Madame de Genlis* (Paris, 1985). 5 P. Byrne, *Lord Edward FitzGerald* (Dublin, 1955), pp. 119–20.

conveys an image of herself as a conservative along the lines of Croker himself.⁶ The evidence of Genlis' own writing is that her attitude towards the marriage underwent change as the political climate changed, and public events overtook private lives. The alteration is evident in two different accounts that Genlis gives of the marriage, one in *A Short Account of the Conduct of Mme de Genlis since the Revolution*, published in 1796, and another much later account given in her *Memoirs* of 1825. Although her account of FitzGerald in 1796 is glowing, and she describes the marriage as the culmination of all her efforts in educating and rearing Pamela, in her *Memoirs* she suggests that FitzGerald's 'exaggerated political opinions' had become apparent to her and caused her disquiet as early as 1796!⁷ Byrne's other assumptions about Genlis, that she regarded Rousseau with suspicion, knew nothing about Ireland, and did not in any case associate FitzGerald with the country, are equally unreliable. In fact, Genlis was heavily influenced by Rousseau, and the evidence of her 'Irish tale', 'The Great Earl of Cork', first published in France in 1805, is that not only did she associate Ireland quite explicitly with Edward FitzGerald, but that she chose Ireland as the location for a distinctly Rousseauvian narrative of independence and self-reliance.

There is evidence that Genlis had heard something about Ireland, even before she met Lord Edward. In her *Tales of the Castle* (1784), one of the stories concerns an Irish émigré or refugee, a Madame de Varonne, 'descended from one of the best families in Ireland', who was a loyal subject of James II and followed him into exile in France.⁸ What is certain is that after Pamela's marriage to FitzGerald, Genlis became more interested in Ireland, to the extent that in 'The Great Earl of Cork; or the Artless Seduction', she based her story on the biography of Richard Boyle, the first earl of Cork, who was born in 1566. Given the great number of her writings, it is perhaps less than surprising that Genlis quite often drew on historical and biographical sources as material for her fiction, though it was unusual for her to depart from French sources. 'The Great Earl of Cork' is the title story in a collection of six tales, and in a prefatory 'Historical Notice' Genlis assures the French reading public that although the characters in the story may not be widely known in France, the extraordinary nature of their lives and achievements makes them figures of justifiable interest. In fact, Genlis self-deprecatingly dismisses her attempts to incorporate Boyle's biography into her fiction:

Not being able to offer anything more to the public than this rather mediocre tale, I wanted at least to add to it some historical anecdotes, and to use the interest of truth to compensate for the meagre charm of fiction.⁹

6 J. Bertaud, 'Mme de Genlis, John Wilson Croker et la révolution française', *Revue de la littérature comparée* 51 (1977), pp. 356–65. 7 Genlis, *Memoirs*, 8 vols (London, 1825), iv, 290.

8 Genlis, 'The Brazier; or, Reciprocal Gratitude', in *Tales of the Castle; or, Stories of Instruction and Delight*, trans. T. Holcroft (Dublin, 1785), i, 63. Aside from this reference, however, the tale does not have other references to Ireland. 9 Genlis, *Le Comte de Corke, surnommé le Grand*;

Her acknowledged source is an unspecified British biographical dictionary, but this is liberally embellished with fictional episodes and characters, and is full of inaccuracies and anachronisms. These errors are, I suggest, partly purposeful, or at the very least significant, since they provide an insight into how Ireland was viewed from Genlis' complex and politicised perspective.

Genlis describes Richard Boyle as having been born in Ireland, in Blackrock Co. Dublin, the only surviving child of a young and beautiful widow who lived in a cottage near to a venerable and virtuous man named Mulcroon. Boyle was, however, born in England, in Kent, was not an orphan, and did not set foot in Ireland until 1588, after he had completed his education. In Genlis' tale, Mulcroon adopts the orphan boy and educates him, treating him as his own child. However, he is prevented from ensuring Richard's financial future because his estate is entailed. The main action of the tale concerns Richard's efforts to achieve renown, in spite of his humble origins, and lack of wealth and of family connections. In this he is ultimately motivated by his love for a Lady Ranelagh. Bizarrely, Genlis here chooses to give this fictional beloved the name of Boyle's daughter, Catherine, who on marriage became Lady Ranelagh; in reality, Boyle was married first to Joan Ansely, who died in 1599, and subsequently to Catherine Fenton. Boyle's association with the earl of Essex is represented here as the dramatic crux of the tale; he is thrown into prison on suspicion of involvement in Essex's rebellion, but pleads his case before the queen so effectively that he is cleared and provided with lucrative career opportunities.

It is very easy to find Genlis' departures from historical fact or even historical probability hilarious. It is evident that, for the most part, she is untroubled by the need to establish an 'authentic' sixteenth-century background. The description of the cottage in which Richard was born is just one example. Unable to give his ward any kind of inheritance, it is claimed that Mulcroon contented himself with making improvements to the cottage in which he was born, extending it and decorating it with 'elegant simplicity'. When Richard invites some visitors into his simple but elegant parlour, we are told that it features a large white marble table, and mahogany bookcases decorated with antique busts and alabaster vases. This conjures up a very neo-classical scene, and, in fact, mahogany, which is not native to western Europe, was not used in furnishings in Britain or Ireland until much later. Although Genlis appends a footnote to her description of Blackrock, claiming that it is absolutely authentic, it is clearly an eighteenth- rather than a sixteenth-century location. Blackrock as described by Genlis is a popular and fashionable seaside resort: she breezily informs us that the mineral waters in the area ensure that during the summer time it boasts a glittering society. In Genlis' version of the tale, the earl of Essex is among these notable summertime visitors, which is used to explain Boyle's acquaintance with him. Constantia Maxwell confirms that

ou, la séduction sans artifice. Suivi de cinq nouvelles 2 vols (London, 1808), i, v. Quotations given are my own translation.

Blackrock was an extremely popular spot in the eighteenth century, and that parties did indeed travel out from Dublin to take the waters there, but needless to say this practice was not established in the late sixteenth century.¹⁰

Genlis also appears to have little sense of the social, religious and political tensions of the time. Above all else, Richard Boyle was a representative of the New English, an 'adventurer'. Nicholas Canny has described him as 'a typical member of the New English elite in Ireland'; his career to an extent exemplifies the clashes between Old and New English, and between the New English and the government administration.¹¹ As Canny has shown, the mistrust and suspicion with which the New English were regarded played a highly significant part in shaping perceptions of Boyle's character, and in his own defensive response to attacks on his conduct and character. Genlis' ignorance of, or possibly lack of interest in, the detail of Irish history and culture is also evident in her description of a visit to Wicklow, undertaken by her hero. Boyle visits Lover's Leap near Dargle, and hears the tale associated with the rock. Again, Genlis observes in a footnote that the description of the rock and the account given of the tale are authentic. Boyle hears a voice singing a song relating to this same tale; later he is told that it is a traditional song, well known by the inhabitants of the area. Genlis clearly does not recognise or acknowledge the gap which would have separated a man of Boyle's background, class, religion and language from the popular culture of the rural Irish. Genlis' failure to register crucial aspects of Boyle's biography might cast doubt on the idea that this tale is anything other than a conventional romance with a nominally Irish setting. The comment of Patrick Byrne, quoted above, which suggested that Genlis made no distinction between Ireland and England might thus seem justified. But Genlis' rewriting of Richard Boyle's life suggests that Ireland represented for her a distinct range of imaginative possibilities.

As remarked above, Genlis is keen to point out to her readers that the scenery and the topographical detail in her tale are 'factual and perfectly exact'.¹² All the Irish scenes take place either in Blackrock or in Wicklow. Given that Genlis never visited Ireland, we can only assume that her knowledge of these places derived either from Pamela or from Edward FitzGerald himself, who of course spent his early childhood in Frescati House in Blackrock. He and Pamela lived at Frescati for a period after they returned to Dublin as a married couple; letters written by him to his mother from Frescati are filled with details of gardening and emphasise the happiness of the young family. FitzGerald was in fact reluctant to leave Blackrock, although he needed to decide on a more permanent home. Before settling in Kildare, he considered the possibility of living in Wicklow, and it seems reasonable to assume that he and Pamela made visits to the county.

Genlis' use of two locations associated with FitzGerald indicate that her version

¹⁰ C. Maxwell, *Dublin under the Georges, 1714-1830* (Dublin, 1979), p. 98. ¹¹ N. Canny, *The Upstart Earl: A Study of the Social and Mental World of Richard Boyle, first Earl of Cork, 1566-1643* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 40. ¹² Genlis, *Le Comte de Corce*, i, 1.

of the earl of Cork's life is more than simply factually inaccurate. Like all historical recreations, Genlis' tale is, ultimately, a more informative source on its own period. Genlis extracted from the life of Richard Boyle a tale of the triumph of natural merit, unaided by birth. This is in itself not a complete distortion of Boyle's career: one of the reasons why Boyle was a figure of fascination both in his own lifetime and later was precisely because of his phenomenal rise from obscurity to power and wealth. Canny has described his career as 'truly exceptional' and as 'remarkable by the standards of any generation'.¹³ Genlis' version of this fable is, however, heavily influenced by eighteenth-century philosophies, and is characterised by both suspicion of excessive worldliness and faith in the power of a well-directed education to shape human personality and character. Both principles are, famously, elaborated in the most influential educational work of the eighteenth century, Rousseau's *Emile* (1762).

As a successful educationalist, Genlis was thoroughly familiar with the works of Rousseau. Her *Adelaide and Theodore* (1782) was a particularly highly-regarded work on education, in an era in which such works proliferated. Genlis' response to Rousseau is far from being uniformly negative; as Jean Bloch has pointed out, it has much in common with that of her female contemporaries in Britain and Ireland, such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Maria Edgeworth.¹⁴ Although her educational programme has much in common with Rousseau's, she expresses a great deal of resistance to his insistence that the education of girls should be tailored to their dependent and subordinate role, encouraging their supposedly 'natural' traits of manipulation and deception. Genlis' quarrel with Rousseau is thus focused on his views on gender, rather than on the core principles which underpin *Emile*. The eighteenth-century preoccupation with education was predicated on a general acceptance that character formation had less to do with birth than with early influences, and in both *Adelaide and Theodore* and 'The Great Earl of Cork' Genlis endorses this view. Genlis tell us for instance that the young Richard Boyle was educated by Mulcroon, and that, although his education contained conventional subjects such as mathematics and Latin, Mulcroon focused on efforts to inculcate him with correct and just ideas, and to establish moral principles, thus indicating the primary role of environmental influences in the formation of character. The young Richard's orphan status and lack of money further emphasise his reliance on character and cultivated talents alone, as well as representing a potentially radical critique of systems of wealth and privilege.

This is reflected in the description of Blackrock as a retreat from worldly concerns. Blackrock is, in other words, an idealised eighteenth-century state of mind. Mulcroon, we are told, has experienced unhappiness, and has been the victim of ingratitude and injustice. However, his disillusionment is not accompanied by

¹³ Canny, *The Upstart Earl*, p. 8. ¹⁴ J.H. Bloch, 'Women and the Reform of the Nation', in *Women and Society in Eighteenth-Century France*, ed. E. Jacobs et al. (London, 1979), pp. 3-18, p. 17.

bitterness; thus his experiences have made him wise and have confirmed him in his decision to live an independent life. The environment into which Richard is born, therefore, represents the elusive eighteenth-century ideal of intellectual refinement and moral purity, in which all the advantages of cultivation can be achieved, without falling prey to the corrupting vices of over-refinement and excessive sophistication. At fifteen Richard is described as follows:

The young Richard, born with a noble and sensitive soul, a good memory and superior intelligence, responded excellently to the pains taken by his generous benefactor. As modest and as simple as he was amiable, at 15 he was as handsome as an angel, though he never thought of his appearance; and, full of spirit and imagination, he believed that he simply possessed common sense.¹⁵

Richard's combination of well-cultivated talents and lack of worldly power are set against a character whom Genlis calls Sir Charles Manwood (in reality, Boyle had been briefly employed by a Sir Richard Manwood immediately before he arrived in Ireland). They are rivals for the hand of Lady Ranelagh. Boyle (naturally) triumphs, in a manner which Genlis describes as an 'artless seduction', once again suggesting Richard's position as a version of a child of nature.

The phenomenally successful sixteenth-century adventurer has, therefore, been transformed into an embodiment of eighteenth-century ideas about the primary importance of character as formed in an idealised educative process. In so far as this conviction is opposed to the belief in inherent or essential qualities, it is inevitably at odds with support for the aristocratic system. The location of Genlis' tale in areas associated with Edward FitzGerald suggests, furthermore, that the changes to Richard's character and background were inspired partly by Genlis' personal acquaintance with FitzGerald. As such, they are not randomly anachronistic, but indicative of Genlis' ideas about nobility and suggest that her use of an Irish setting is congruent with the ideas she sought to express in her tale.

Although one can imagine the ire of the FitzGerald family (by far the most respected of the Anglo-Norman or Old English elite) at the idea that they could be confounded with a New English 'upstart', the Boyle of Genlis' tale has a great deal in common with Lord Edward FitzGerald. The education of the large Leinster family in Blackrock was inspired by Rousseau's writings, which were greatly admired by the duchess of Leinster. The location was chosen because it favoured an informal lifestyle; the duchess wanted her children to develop qualities of independence, and to learn to value natural abilities more highly than birth. She wanted to employ Rousseau himself as a tutor for her children; failing that she employed a Scot named Ogilvie. After her husband's death she demonstrated her egalitarian principles and scandalised polite society by marrying Ogilvie and moving the fam-

¹⁵ Genlis, *Le Comte de Corke*, i, 3–4.

ily to the French countryside. Edward's education certainly seemed to 'take'. When serving with the army in Canada he revelled in the primitive lifestyle; later, when he was bitterly disappointed by being turned down as a suitor for Georgiana Lennox, he reflected that the values which separated him from his beloved were absent from more primitive, less artificial societies. Furthermore, by the time he met Genlis and Pamela he had renounced his title, committed himself to democratic principles and been ejected from the Army. In spirit, if not in fact, Edward presented himself as one who no longer relied on birth and position to smooth his way in the world.

Both Edward and Pamela occupied paradoxical positions in the debates around aristocracy and democracy. Edward's case is relatively straightforward: an aristocrat who embraced democracy. However, this is further complicated by his marriage to Pamela. One version of Pamela's birth makes her an (illegitimate) member of a royal house; the other depicts her as an obscure orphan, possessed of a rare 'natural' beauty. The whole is further complicated by the duke of Orleans' conversion to republicanism. According to Stella Tillyard, Pamela's marriage chances were blighted because she was 'damned as an aristocrat by many republicans, and as a republican by many aristocrats'.¹⁶ The 'orphan' Richard Boyle, as represented by Genlis, thus is partly indebted to Edward FitzGerald for his fictional background, but Genlis' character combines aspects of the myths surrounding *both* Edward and Pamela FitzGerald.

At a more general level than individual biography, 'The Great Earl of Cork' contains some features which suggest that even in the minds of relatively poorly-informed foreigners such as Genlis, Irish scenes, characters and events prompted some very persistent associations. As we have seen, in the finest tradition of those who treat of Ireland, Genlis prefaces her tale with an apology for her fiction, remarking that the facts are much more interesting and strange than anything she could invent. It is also significant that Genlis accounts for Richard Boyle's appearance before the Star Chamber by claiming that he was accused of involvement in the rebellion of the earl of Essex. It seems that rebellion and revolution are for Genlis necessary elements of any 'Irish Tale'. Even independently of specific incidents of violence, Genlis' references to two apparently vastly different times and characters are linked by one coherent idea: the association of Ireland with an instability in social status and with disruption in the social order. As an 'adventurer' taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the colonial regime in Ireland, Richard Boyle was able to far exceed the social rank into which he was born. Edward FitzGerald, by contrast, voluntarily relinquished the privileges which had been his by birth. But whilst it is commonplace to observe that commentary on Ireland is informed by the vocabulary of disruption and strangeness, it is interesting to note that Genlis' tale, and in particular its conflation of a number of biographical narratives, suggests the persistence of another metaphor, that of adoption.

¹⁶ Tillyard, *Citizen Lord*, p. 150.

Given the eighteenth-century preoccupation with the influence of environment and education on the formation of character, adoption in this period acquired renewed interest as a form of scientific or sociological experiment, in addition to the inevitable romance surrounding obscured or mysterious origins. Clarissa Campbell Orr affirms Genlis' belief 'in the power of the human will to make and remake human personality and social practices', a belief that she explored in her educational systems and in her decision to adopt Pamela and a younger girl, Hermione, and to bring them up effectively as part of the Orleans household.¹⁷ The Edgeworth circle, who were admirers of Genlis' work, explored the meanings of adoption in a number of ways. The English radical Thomas Day, a close friend of Richard Lovell Edgeworth's, famously adopted two young girls in order to create, through a process of education, an ideal wife along the lines of Rousseau's Sophie.¹⁸ Richard Lovell Edgeworth himself expressed an interest in adopting an infant or young child from a lower class and educating him in the manner of a gentleman, largely in the interests of scientific experimentation.¹⁹ In the work of Maria Edgeworth, adoption and guardianship of children are the norm, featuring in *Belinda* (1801), *The Absentee* (1812), *Ormond* (1817), and, most prominently, in *Ennui* (1809); reflecting both Edgeworth's interest in education and her response to the complexities of personal and national identity. Although Edgeworth's contemporary and fellow-novelist, Sydney Owenson, is usually associated with the allegory of the 'national marriage', adoption is at least as important a metaphor in *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806). The marriage of the Anglo-Irishman Henry Mortimer and the 'Princess of Innismore', Glorvina, is preceded by the metaphorical 'adoption' of each by the other's father. The earl of M— claims that his plan to marry Glorvina was actuated entirely by charitable and benevolent, rather than sexual motives; when he learns of his son's passion for her he abandons the planned marriage, and announces that 'henceforth I shall consider her as the child of my adoption'.²⁰ Mortimer addresses the prince of Innismore in a letter, telling him that so profound was the effect of meeting him that 'the first tye of nature was dissolved; and from your hands I seemed to have received a new existence'.²¹

In the specific context of Ireland immediately after the rebellion of 1798 and the Union of 1800, exploring the malleability of biological ties and the extent of human adaptability was clearly linked to anxiety over the persistence of historical enmity and the instability of the newly-inaugurated political order. The use of the adoption metaphor, however, was a local application of a symbol that was characteristic of progressive and Enlightened thought across Europe. For committed progressives, the phenomenon of adoption was an irrefutable proof that human nature

¹⁷ I am very grateful to Clarissa Campbell Orr for permission to read and cite from her unpublished essay, 'Mme de Genlis, Emigrée, the Republic of Letters and the Politics of Adoption', given originally at 'French Emigrés' Conference II, London, 2 July 1999 (p. 1).

¹⁸ R.L. Edgeworth and M. Edgeworth, *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth*, 2 vols (London, 1817), i, 214–15. ¹⁹ *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth*, ii, 95–7. ²⁰ S. Owenson, *Lady Morgan, The Wild Irish Girl*, ed. K. Kirkpatrick (Oxford, 1999), p. 243. ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

was characterised by potential rather than fixed identity; it was a living demonstration of the power of education and seemed to promise that radical and beneficial change was guaranteed.

By marrying Edward FitzGerald, Pamela might be seen to have exemplified the way in which humble birth could be nullified by education and environment. In the revolutionary climate of the day, the marriage carried an even more radical message, that of the imminent overthrow of the hierarchical social order. Ultimately these promises were not realised. Pamela FitzGerald was one of the casualties of the rebellion of 1798. After her husband's death she was ordered to leave Ireland and lived for a time in the émigré community in Hamburg. Her later life was one of misery and was marred by alcoholism and unsuccessful relationships. The disillusionment and disappointment that Genlis felt can be detected in the changes to her account of Pamela's character from the *Short Account* of 1796 to the *Memoirs* of 1825. In 1796 Genlis describes her adoption of Pamela as 'the best action of my life', and claims that her adopted daughter is 'a model for the wives and the mothers of the age'.²² In her memoirs, however, Genlis provides a different account of Pamela, one which is clearly motivated by the events of the intervening years:

Pamela had a beautiful face; candour and sensibility were the basis of her character; she never told a single falsehood, nor employed the slightest deception in the whole course of her education [. . .] I was deeply attached to her, but my attachment was an unfortunate one. This child, who was so charming, had the least application I ever saw in anyone; she had no memory, and was very volatile [. . .] Her mind was lazy to the last degree, and she turned out the least fit person possible for reflecting. Her fate threw her into extraordinary situations; she found herself without an adviser or a guide in a thousand dangerous circumstances; yet she always conducted herself admirably, as long as her husband lived, and, in some cases, in a manner that was truly heroic.²³

Whilst maintaining a sympathetic view of Pamela, Genlis indicates here that she possessed faults of character which could not be remedied by education – or, at least, not remedied by a guardian as fond and attached as Genlis represents herself to be.

In 'The Great Earl of Cork', by contrast, Richard Boyle more than rewards the care of his guardian and educator, Mulcroon. His character and talent are recognised in spite of his low birth and lack of wealth, and by marrying Lady Ranelagh he acquires membership of the nobility. In effect, Genlis here provides an idealised account of the process of adoption and education, which, in her own experience,

²² Genlis, *A Short Account of the Conduct of Mme de Genlis since the Revolution* (Perth, 1796), p. 41. ²³ Genlis, *Memoirs*, iii, 137–8.

was more complex and tragic. It is undoubtedly significant that Genlis' fictionalized hero is male rather than female, and thus culturally permitted to 'make a name' for himself based on his talents and achievements. In the complex interactions between gender and social structure, women's 'names', identities and reputations were in effect determined by family affiliation and association. Thus, the utopian notion of self-determination which some versions of adoption imply is not, it seems, gender-neutral.

In this tale, I would argue, Genlis approaches Irish history as a vehicle for the representation of events which combine historical causality with lived human experience. The use of fictional narratives which insistently allegorize political and historical events is a marked feature of Irish culture in the early nineteenth century. Genlis' version of the 'national tale' indicates firstly that the allegorical potential of Irish culture was acknowledged even by those with no direct experience of it. But Genlis' 'mistakes' and anachronisms suggest, more significantly, that Irish historical examples provided her with a way to explore and recreate the consequences of social and political upheaval for herself and those close to her. 'Irish Tales' of the early nineteenth-century involve, therefore, more than the introduction of 'local colour' and glamorized marginality: Genlis' use of the genre demonstrates its potential to express the aspirations and disillusionments of the post-Revolutionary condition.