Maria Edgeworth’s “Grateful Negro” and the Sentimental Argument for Slavery

When a sympathetic character in Maria Edgeworth’s 1804 story “The Grateful Negro” wishes that “there was no such thing as slavery in the world,” one sees why critics take Edgeworth for an “abolitionist.”1 However, to read this line as “abolitionist,” or as antislavery, one must take it out of the context of the paragraph, of the story, and of the late eighteenth-century British slavery debate. In fact, Edgeworth’s speaker here, the good planter Mr. Edwards, moves quickly from his abolitionist “wish” to a resigned, “reasoned” support for slavery. The line continues:

but he was convinced, by the arguments of those who have the best means of obtaining information, that the sudden emancipation of the Negroes would rather increase than diminish their miseries. His benevolence, therefore, confined itself within the bounds of reason. He adopted those plans for amelioration of the state of the slaves which appeared to him most likely to succeed without producing any violent agitation or revolution.2

Here, Mr. Edwards takes a position much like that of the planter, Bryan Edwards, whom Edgeworth acknowledged as her primary source of information about slavery and the British West Indies.

This misreading of Edgeworth’s stance on slavery is not merely a sign of the small effort that has been made to understand and contextualize an author on the margins of the canon; it also reflects a mistaken assumption about the nature of antislavery writing. The established account of antislavery links it to the broader “humanitarianism” and “sentimentalism” of late eighteenth-century British culture.3 As this story goes, sentimental humanitarianism—and the deeper social forces causing it—led inevitably to the end of slavery. Antislavery and sentimentalism were, together with free-labor ideology, the triplet offspring of Capitalism and Bourgeois Ideology as the couple entered its fecund adulthood. The consensus behind this story is surprising—literary and historical scholars, on both the left and the right, subscribe to it, differing primarily in tone and evaluation. On the left, the triplets are understood as the malevolent agents of their parents, helping to bring about the shift to an oppressive “bourgeois society”; on the right, they are presented as the cherubic, smiling faces of middle-class benevolence and progress.

The problem with this consensus is that, in whiggish haste to show the onward movement of history, it misrepresents the complexities of British thought about slavery in the two crucial decades at the turn of the century. In retrospect, such distortions—stemming primarily from a lack of attention to positions other than the extremes of the slavery debate—may seem unimportant, because the story accounts for the coming of emancipation so neatly. However, accepting emanci-
pation as inevitable suggests a curious helplessness regarding social problems: if positive changes like the end of slavery were inevitable, does this mean that we should passively await the end of problems that have remained with us, such as racism and poverty?

I will argue that Edgeworth’s attempt to re-imagine slavery as humane is actually part of a minor tradition deploying sentiment to support slavery. Still, hers is a “moderate” position, self-consciously placing itself between two extremes, striving for a middle ground between “wishing” for the immediate end of slavery and total acceptance of plantations as they are, and remaining ambiguous about the slave trade. I will read Edgeworth’s position on slavery by contextualizing her story “The Grateful Negro” with sentimental works apologizing for slavery such as Bryan Edwards’, and in so doing I hope to recover a neglected, but important, moment in the history of British representations of slavery.

In “The Grateful Negro,” Edgeworth envisions slavery made palatable: she imagines it reformed in the image of wage labor. The key to her reform is bringing slaves to accept their condition voluntarily, to see it as in their interests, and to accept it much as a free laborer theoretically accepts a contract. The good planter Mr. Edwards broaches the question of the difference between slaves and wage laborers directly: “granting it to be physically impossible that the world should exist without rum, sugar, and indigo, why could they not be produced by freemen as well as slaves?” (p. 202). To the late twentieth-century reader, familiar with the Marxist-inflected historiography of British and American slavery, Edgeworth appears to be invoking a dichotomy between two radically incompatible forms of production: slavery and free labor. However, this was not Edgeworth’s conception; she saw the forms as different, but like other moderates in the slavery debate, whether inclined for or against slavery, she ultimately saw slavery as one type of labor on a continuum with serfdom and wage labor. Henry Brougham, for instance, also saw wage labor as a model to draw on for reforming slavery. In two works published near the same time as Edgeworth’s story, he argued passionately that while slaves should not be emancipated, they should be treated as much like free laborers as possible. He contended that ending the slave trade while guaranteeing the continuation of slavery itself would counteract masters’ and overseers’ irrational cruelty, which he believed was enabled entirely by the possibility of replacing slaves with fresh imports.

Edgeworth’s views on slavery in “The Grateful Negro” (like Brougham’s) not only undermine the blanket imposition of a dichotomy between free labor and slave labor on late eighteenth-century thinkers; such views also undermine the assumption that sentimentalism led to the end of slavery. Despite the recurrent scholarly claim that sentimental sympathy was a driving force behind antislavery, Edgeworth was one of many writers to take the sentimental acknowledgment of slaves’ humanity only as the ground for understanding them as psychological beings, to be managed and manipulated like any other worker. Taking the anti-slavery route from this beginning could lead to the assertion that slaves are the exact equivalents of free laborers, and therefore should be emancipated without delay. The opposite route would lead one to represent slaves as lamentably unable to handle freedom, to suggest reforms that would make their conditions more like those of free laborers, and thereby rescue slavery from its critics. Brougham (perhaps like “those who have the best means of obtaining information” in “The Grateful Negro” (p. 195)) suggests that the example of the successful revolution in Haiti (then called St. Domingo) would inevitably inspire eman-
ipated slaves to revolt against whites (*Inquiry*, 2:155). In “The Grateful Negro” Edgeworth takes the second path while maintaining a skeptical distance from an unabashed endorsement of slavery as it stands.

The central characters in “The Grateful Negro” are Caesar, the title character, and Mr. Edwards, the master who earns his gratitude. In the story’s pivotal event, Mr. Edwards buys Caesar and his fiancé Clara from Mr. Jefferies, an indebted planter, in order to save them from being sundered by the slave market. In typical sentimental fashion, Edgeworth focuses on the psychology of individual relationships in order to imagine a slave who comes to accept his slavery by internalizing a paternalistic, sentimental contract. Through this internalization, Caesar comes to see his interests as intertwined with his master’s, just as a free laborer would under ideal conditions. In fact, Edgeworth’s ideal of labor relations in any context depends on such sentimental paternalism.

In “The Grateful Negro,” Caesar willingly makes himself a slave, offering his devotion in exchange for the preservation of his intended marriage. He appeals to Mr. Edwards, asking “Will you be my master? Will you be her master? Buy both of us. You shall not repent of it. Caesar will serve you faithfully” (p. 200). Although Caesar, a heroic and warlike Koromantyn, approaches Mr. Edwards with “an intrepid rather than an imploring countenance” (p. 200), he happily submits himself to attain his goal. In fact, throughout the story he treats the preservation of his intended marriage with greater emotional intensity than the preservation of his own life. He reiterates his total devotion to Mr. Edwards, saying for instance that “he would stab himself to the heart, sooner than betray his master” (p. 224) and promising Edwards to be “the first” to “die for you” when it comes to fighting against rebel slaves (p. 236). Caesar’s devotion to Mr. Edwards quickly becomes a willing acceptance of his state of slavery, as he strives to make good on his promise to “serve faithfully” in exchange for the preservation of his marriage.

Through his devotion to his master, Caesar chooses to remain a slave rather than rebelling to become free. In fact, his rapturous gratitude to Mr. Edwards leads him to betray his friend Hector’s rebellion. When Caesar attempts to dissuade Hector from rebelling by telling him of “one for whose sake all [the whites] must be spared” (p. 210) and explaining that Mr. Edwards is “unlike...all of his race that we have ever seen” (p. 211), Hector rebuffs him angrily, dismissing Caesar as one “who, by a few soft words, can be so wrought upon as to all the insults, all the injuries he has received” (pp. 211–12). Hector’s rebuff affects Caesar:

> Caesar’s mind was divided, between love for his friend and gratitude to his master: the conflict was violent, and painful. Gratitude at last prevailed: he repeated his declaration, that he would rather die than continue in a conspiracy against his benefactor.

(p. 212)

The rebellion presents Caesar with the chance to dissolve the existing social contract and to start anew as a free man. However, Mr. Edwards’ sentimental recognition of his humanity, his feelings and potential for suffering, in the form of “gratitude,” make it impossible for Caesar to regard his master as an oppressor.

After Mr. Edwards’ intervention to save Caesar and Clara’s marriage, two scenes develop the sentimental master-slave relationship: in one, Mr. Edwards presents Caesar with provision grounds (that is, a plot on which to raise food for his family); in the other, he gives Caesar a knife. In the first, Mr. Edwards addresses
Caesar as if he were no longer a slave at all, but a thriving tenant farmer: "now my good friend...you may work for yourself, without fear that what you earn may be taken from you; or that you should ever be sold, to pay your master's debts." In response to this, Caesar's feelings were "so strong that he could not find an expression for his gratitude" (p. 206). The knife-giving scene is drenched in dramatic irony; Caesar has already argued with Hector about the rebellion, but Mr. Edwards, unaware of the trouble brewing, continues to be as trusting and respectful as ever to his new slave: "Caesar had no knife. 'Here is mine for you,' said Edwards. 'It is very sharp,' added he, smiling, 'but I am not one of those masters who are afraid to trust their negroes with sharp knives'" (p. 223). This act of trusting generosity leads Caesar to the "transport of gratitude" in which he swears that he would "sooner stab himself" than "betray his master" (p. 224).

When the rebellion finally happens, Caesar, true to his declarations, refuses to take arms against his master and even leads Mr. Edwards to the rebel leaders' hideout. Not even an open revolt shakes Caesar's faith in contracting with his master. He exclaims to Mr. Edwards, "I will lead you to the place where they are assembled, on condition that their chief, who is my friend, shall be pardoned" (p. 236), and his faith is justified; Mr. Edwards' first act on finding the rebels is to offer Hector a pardon.

Caesar's devotion, his choice of slavery over the chance at freedom through rebellion, and his sense of himself as relating to Mr. Edwards through rational contracts or bargains are no accidents; they are the intended result of Mr. Edwards' plan of slave reform. Edgeworth articulates these plans by contrasting Edwards, the good planter, with Jefferies, his indolent and inhumane counterpart. The contrast is developed both directly by the narrator and through debates between the characters; oddly, the two methods are somewhat inconsistent. The narrator explains that

Mr. Jefferies considered the negroes as an inferior species, incapable of gratitude, disposed to treachery, and to be roused from their natural indolence only by force; he treated his slaves, or rather suffered his overseer to treat them, with the greatest severity.

(p. 193)

Here affective capability—specifically, the capacity to feel gratitude—becomes the benchmark of humanity in slaves, and the ability to appreciate it the benchmark of goodness in masters. Edgeworth seems to object to Jefferies' idea that Africans are an "inferior species." Furthermore, Mr. Edwards, in contrast to Mr. Jefferies, "treated his slaves with all possible humanity and kindness" (p. 195). Mr. Edwards, the moral center of the tale, is generally read as articulating Edgeworth's own position. His position is explained most fully and explicitly when the narrator explains that his "wish" that "there was no such thing as slavery in the world" is moderated by his fear of "violent agitation or revolution" (p. 195). The passage may seem contradictory, but it has parallels in many passages by slavery's apologists. The passage does illustrate Edgeworth's effort to be moderate; as soon as he articulates Mr. Edwards' distaste for slavery, she hastens to balance it against practical considerations. Mr. Edwards' stance could be fit into certain moderate "abolitionist" (in the limited sense of anti-slave trade) arguments, but it is clearly not "emancipationist," because of his fear that freed slaves would be dangerous.

Mr. Edwards seems more opposed to slavery in his debates with Jefferies than
in the narrator's descriptions of his beliefs. In the first such debate, he articulates a "free labor" position, suggesting that slavery is comparatively unprofitable and implying that emancipation could have economic benefits. He asks rhetorically:

If we hired negroes for labourers, instead of purchasing them for slaves, do you think they would not work as well as they do now? Does any negro, under fear of the overseer, work harder than a Birmingham journeyman, or a Newcastle collier, who toil for themselves and their families? (p. 202)

Here, by maintaining that wage labor is more profitable than slave labor, Mr. Edwards closely follows the logic of the political economist, Adam Smith. In *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) Smith contends that

though the wear and tear of a free servant be equally at the expense of his master, it generally costs him much less than that of a slave. The fund destined for replacing or repairing, if I may say so, the wear and tear of the slave, is commonly managed by a negligent master or a careless overseer. That destined for performing the same office with regard to the free man, is managed by the free man himself. The disorders which generally prevail in the economy of the rich, naturally introduce themselves into the management of the former: The strict frugality and parsimonious attention of the poor as naturally establish themselves in that of the latter.⁶

While Smith makes what may seem to us rather charged use of the word "free," especially if we read him with an awareness of Marx's bitter irony about "wage slaves," it is in his very act of covering over the heartlessness of "free" wage labor that he reveals a new (if primarily theoretical) respect for the individual who happens to be poor. Smith reads poverty as a sign that an individual will take the utmost care in making economic decisions. Just as she does with slavery's sentimental apologists, Edgeworth appears to adopt Smith's main thrust without embracing all its implications. While Smith here may well be giving birth to the modern dichotomy between slaves and free laborers, Edgeworth continues to see a continuum in which slaves, without being freed, can nonetheless become like wage laborers through kind treatment.

Edgeworth also departs from Smith by remaining insistently paternalist despite accepting the idea that workers will produce more when they see it as being in their self-interest. In all her writings, Edgeworth's paternalism is quite explicit; she wrote to her American correspondent Rachel Lazarus that "the instructors of the people do not seem to consider sufficiently that...to give power without the certain and good direction of that power is most dangerous either in mechanics or education—or legislation."⁸ Edgeworth believes that political leaders are in fact "the instructors of the people," but that these instructors must constantly be alert to the "dangers" posed by those same people. Notably, Edgeworth wrote this passage in order to link her concern about recent slave revolts in the United States to her concern about mob violence resulting from disappointment in the failure of parliamentary reform in England and Ireland; it characterizes her anxieties about both slaves and the British underclasses,⁹ anxieties fed not only by her paternalist theories but also, in all likelihood, by news of the Haitian revolution and by her personal experience of the Irish uprising of 1798.¹⁰

Edgeworth's concern about the lower orders' need for guidance seems par-
particularly acute in the case of slaves. Even Mr. Edwards' theoretical objection to slavery—he says that he wished "there was no such thing as slavery in the world"—has strong parallels in sentimental apologies for slavery. In an anonymous 1788 pamphlet, a West Indian Planter very similarly remarks "that slavery is an evil, no man will deny; and therefore it is to be wished, that it could be redressed by an abolition of the state itself," and then goes on to dismiss the possibility of emancipation or even of ending the slave trade. After these statements, so like those describing Mr. Edwards' beliefs, this anonymous writer goes on to argue that after a general emancipation, only "the most sensible and best disposed" ex-slaves would do well; even on their own provision-grounds, "where they themselves are to reap the advantage," slaves are, in general, too irrational to work without being monitored and compelled. Whether Edgeworth would accept such an argument is unclear; she seems to share this writer's skepticism about slaves' ability to cope with emancipation, while also presenting Caesar as both admirable and exceptional. Still, she gives little indication of whether she thinks that other slaves could emulate him. Brougham, her closer contemporary, also rejects emancipation on the grounds of "danger," and goes on to argue that, as wage labor was unknown in Africa, emancipated slaves (or Africans imported as free laborers in the future) would not adapt well to freedom. Like the free blacks already in the colonies, he contends, they would work only to satisfy "their immediate and most urgent wants" (Inquiry, 2:413, 2:419).

What is clear is that "The Grateful Negro" borrows extensively from slavery's apologists. The only work on slavery that Edgeworth cites is Bryan Edwards' History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies, and Edgeworth, imagining slavery within the limits presented by Bryan Edwards, tells a story driven by a similar desire to both reform and preserve slavery. Bryan Edwards was himself a West Indian planter, and although he positioned himself as a moderate, he openly believed that West Indian slavery was, overall, advantageous for Africans. His History went on to be one of the most famous and widely read works on slavery in the early nineteenth century. Although Edgeworth acknowledges her debt to Bryan Edwards, critics have either ignored this important intellectual connection, or have not seen it as evidence of Edgeworth's beliefs about slavery.

In the first edition of "The Grateful Negro," all four of Edgeworth's notes refer the reader to Bryan Edwards. The notes claim a close relation to Bryan Edwards' work—in the second, Edgeworth insists that Mr. Edwards' reform plans "are adopted—not stolen" from "the History of the West Indies" (p. 195). Edgeworth acknowledges that her ideas are close enough to Bryan Edwards' that she could be misunderstood as "stealing" from him, but also insists that she is doing something to alter his work, such that she is "adopting" his ideas and making them her own. The note is to the lines describing Mr. Edwards' retreat from antislavery due to his fear of slaves' violence (p. 195). Here, Edgeworth explicitly privileges fears of revolution over concern for slaves, showing the justice of Rachel Jennings' argument that the story "effectually condones slavery in the Caribbean as a lesser evil than revolution" and of the theory that Edgeworth was deeply disturbed by Haiti and 1798.

Edgeworth is most effusive about Bryan Edwards when she refers her reader to his "eloquent and pathetic passage" on the destruction of slaves' lives when they are sold to pay their masters' debts (p. 197). Edgeworth apparently found the passage difficult to improve upon; following several sentences of paraphrase describing the moment "when a good negro has successfully improved his spot of
ground" and begun a family (p. 197), she uses a large chunk of it word-for-word, to describe how, when sold, the "good negro" is forcibly separated from his wife and children, dragged to public auction, purchased by a stranger, and perhaps sent to terminate his miserable existence in the mines of Mexico: excluded for ever from the light of heaven! And all this without any crime or imprudence on his part, real or pretended. He is punished because his master is unfortunate.\textsuperscript{16}

This passage, appearing identically in both works, illustrates the harmony between Bryan Edwards' work and the sentimental, domestic concerns of late-century novelists.\textsuperscript{17} Like a sentimental novelist, Edwards focuses on the individual (here, the unnamed, representative slave) who has properly sentimental virtues of domesticity, responsibility, and earnest self-discipline, but who is nonetheless cruelly treated due to social forces beyond his control. Edwards' moral appeal is to domesticity, to the value of family integrity. However, in his use of the passage, Edwards shows the extent to which criticisms of slavery, and even such sentimental ones, do not necessarily support antislavery. Edwards uses the passage to argue not that slaves should be freed, but rather that they should be attached to the land like serfs, in order to prevent such breakup of families. This passage, most likely, also inspired Edgeworth to depict Mr. Edwards' key act of saving Caesar and Clara's marriage from being sundered by Mr. Jefferies' debts.

In fact, the entire plot and many details of "The Grateful Negro" appears to be borrowed from Bryan Edwards' History. Most obviously, Edgeworth's good planter is named "Edwards," and this reference is unlikely to be lost on any reader who sees Bryan Edwards' name in all four notes. Edgeworth also alludes to Bryan Edwards' account of the 1760 slave rebellion known as "Tacky's Revolt" when she names Mr. Edwards' "excellent overseer" Abraham Bayley. Edgeworth's narrator explains that Bayley "was more intent upon...humane views, than upon squeezing from the labour of the negroes the utmost produce" (p. 196). This makes him quite similar to "Abraham Fletcher," employed by "Zachary Bayly," and described by Bryan Edwards as "an overseer of singular tenderness and humanity" (BE, 2:64).

More compelling in showing the relation of "The Grateful Negro" to Edwards' History than such coincidences of naming is the plot outline shared by the two narratives. Like "The Grateful Negro," Bryan Edwards' version of Tacky's Revolt is the story of a humane planter (Bayly) who prevents a revolt after being spared due to his reputation as a caring and humane master. Here Edgeworth is justified in claiming to "adopt" rather than "steal" from Edwards. Bryan Edwards' narration of Tacky's Revolt doesn't include fleshed-out characters like either the grateful Caesar or the bad planter, Jefferies. Caesar makes slaves seem, at least potentially, like attractive sentimental heroes; Jefferies, as an indolent planter with a cruel overseer, underlines Edgeworth's skepticism about Bryan Edwards' dismissal of the problem of planter cruelty. She refers ambiguously to this dismissal in her first note, saying that "Bryan Edwards in his History of Jamaica, says that most planters are humane; but he allows that some facts can be cited in contradiction of the assertion" (p. 194). The presence of Jefferies in "The Grateful Negro" suggests that Edgeworth finds those facts more compelling than Bryan Edwards did.\textsuperscript{18}

The ambiguities of Edgeworth's departures from Bryan Edwards' narrative crystallize in a specific scene: the planter's presentation of knives to his slaves.\textsuperscript{19}
As observed above, in "The Grateful Negro," Mr. Edwards' act of trust in presenting Caesar with his own very sharp knife confirms Caesar's sentimental attachment to his master. Bryan Edwards describes Bayly as having a very different experience: "Mr. Bayly...having personally inspected into the situation of his newly purchased Africans...delivered them with his own hands their clothing and knives, little apprehending the bloody business in which these knives were soon afterwards employed" (BE, 2:64–65, nt. b). Edgeworth, through Caesar, gives flesh to her claims of Africans' humanity as Bryan Edwards never does. On the other hand, in the character of Hector, she makes concrete the danger of slaves' violence, just as Bryan Edwards does in his version of the knife-giving scene. Indeed, Edgeworth represents Caesar's friend Hector as frighteningly bloodthirsty. On being woken up from a dream about the rebellion, Hector exclaims that "it was delightful! The whites were weltering in their blood" and he is heard muttering "spare none! Sons of Africa, spare none" in his sleep (pp. 210–11). She even presents a menacing image of rebel slaves with knives: "these negroes held their knives in their hands, ready to dip them in the bowl of poison" (p. 237). She departs from Bryan Edwards in the specificity of her representations; however, while Caesar is more attractive than any slave mentioned in the History, Hector is more frightening. This departure stays within the basic parameters of Bryan Edwards' arguments for slavery, while developing a different emphasis. Caesar's attractiveness is brought out by his master's kind intentions, not by freedom; Hector's vengeful violence supports the concern that emancipation would lead to bloody conflict rather than happiness and progress. Here, in part, Edgeworth shows a historical difference from Bryan Edwards, as her thinking is most likely affected by the Irish uprising of 1798 and by events in St. Domingo.

Two of Edgeworth's most important "adoptions" from Bryan Edwards' History are, first, the idea that improvident masters, whose debts disrupt the domestic and sentimental attachments of male slaves, are one of the worst aspects of slavery; and, second, the idea that if treated humanely, slaves can develop attachments to their masters that will lead them to accept slavery. The first idea suggests, in both The History and "The Grateful Negro," that slavery would be perfectly humane and reasonable if only every master were a responsible paternalist.30 Bryan Edwards takes this premise to the conclusion that slavery should become a system of semi-serfdom with slaves attached securely to their plantations. Strikingly, Edgeworth shows no interest in this conclusion, preferring to focus on masters' responsibilities. The second, even more important, adoption is the idea that by developing slaves' sense of self through sentimental relationships with their masters, one can lead them into a contractual understanding of their position, to a sense that they work in their own self-interest, and that they serve their self-interest best by serving their masters.

An anonymous note appended to Bryan Edwards' consideration of "amelioration"31 appears to have influenced Edgeworth, or at least to have resonated with her Smithian and Paternalist beliefs. It suggests that planters "Make the interest of the master and slave go hand in hand. Now, I think that Small wages, subject to stoppage for delinquency, would have this effect" (BE, 2:55). Edgeworth's Mr. Edwards also believes in the efficacy of wages: if after his slaves complete their daily tasks, "they chose to employ themselves longer for their master, they were paid regular wages for their extra work. This reward, for such it was considered, operated most powerfully upon the slaves" (pp. 195–96). The note writer, like Edgeworth, clearly sees slaves as on a continuum with free laborers.
Oddly, some of the anonymous note writer’s words also appear in the disreputable mouth of Jefferies: the note writer introduces the idea of wages in order to “correct the idea, which a negro may be said to imbibe with his mother’s milk, that whatever he can cheat his master of is clear gain to himself” (BE, 2:155); Jefferies comments, in an argument with Mr. Edwards, “Do what you please for a negro, he will cheat you the first opportunity he finds. You know what their maxim is: ‘God gives black men what white men forget’” (p. 204). However, rather than being a critique or parody of Bryan Edwards and his anonymous friend, this shows the extent to which Edgeworth is committed to their program of reform. Jefferies isn’t blameworthy for observing that slaves steal, but for doubting that reforms like limited wages and “humane” kindness are the solution to such disobedience.

Despite her commitment to sentimental reform, Edgeworth’s fear of slave violence, no doubt inspired by St. Domingo, never diminishes. Her narrator remarks that, as Koromantyns, Caesar and Hector “respected each other for excelling in all which they had been taught to consider as virtuous; and with them revenge was a virtue” (p. 209). Indeed, in Edgeworth’s representation, Caesar’s grateful nature cannot be expected from all slaves. To begin with, he is exceptional and noble. Before his purchase, he is the most exceptional slave on Jefferies’ plantation; like Hector, he was “accustomed to command” in Africa (p. 203). Most importantly, his “sensibility was yet more alive to kindness than to insult” (p. 204). The word “yet” is ominous, suggesting that eventually even Caesar could become more vengeful than grateful. Some slaves, like Hector, are permanently bent into vengeful, bloodthirsty beasts, and become dead to sensibility and gratitude. How quickly this happens, Edgeworth implies, depends on the slaves’ inherent “sensibility” and the extent of their brutalization through slavery.

The implied theory of slavery’s brutalizing effects clarifies Mr. Edwards’ need to restrict amelioration for fear of violence. Although Edgeworth ascribes to Jefferies the belief “the negroes [were] an inferior species” (p. 193) as evidence of his inhumanity, she nonetheless appears to believe in an unbridgeable gap between slaves and their masters. Rejecting, or more accurately, distancing herself from the idea that Africans are an “inferior species” does not entail a rejection of the notion that they are significantly different from Europeans. Edgeworth sees slaves as dangerously irrational, although she prefers sentimental to physically coercive solutions. Hector’s extreme vengefulness is frightening and beyond the reach of reason; he refuses to consider anything that could diminish his beautiful dreams of weltering in the planters’ blood. Even Caesar’s gratitude is overwhelming and irrational; among many other examples, his feelings “overpowered his manly heart” (p. 206); he is driven to “indulge” his “delightful feeling” (p. 209); he experiences a “transport of gratitude” (p. 224); and he wishes to “freely yield to his emotions” (p. 207). Mr. Edwards’ sensibility, by contrast, is vigorous, active, and even restrained. On learning of the threat to Caesar and Clara’s marriage, Mr. Edwards “was moved by their entreaties, but he left them without declaring his intentions.” In fact, preferring action to gratuitous expressions of feeling, he “went immediately to Mr. Jefferies” (p. 200), asked for details of the situation, and arranged to buy the lovers before returning to his plantation. Mr. Edwards’ sensibility makes his emotions and his reason coherent; for Caesar, on the other hand, emotion overwhelms reason.

In her representation of Caesar, Edgeworth follows an emerging pattern in the late eighteenth century: the very “gratitude” that marks African slaves as
human, by displaying their emotional capacity, also marks them as less rational than Europeans, and thus as needing a master's guidance. Here, her beliefs about race and slavery become clear, and resonate with her other writings. Does this implied difference in the ability to balance reason and emotion indicate Edgeworth's submerged belief in racial difference? Given that Edgeworth accepts the Smithian contention that free labor is more productive than slave labor, her continued support of slavery implies an important, but unarticulated, difference. Of course, Edgeworth, as a paternalist, would be skeptical about the rational capacity of all laborers. But does Edgeworth see a racial difference between Africans and Europeans that might justify the continuation of slavery instead of its replacement by free labor? Critics have drawn parallels between Edgeworth's representation of the West Indies—where she had never been—and her knowledge of conditions in Ireland.28 Were African slaves and Irish tenants interchangeable to her?

In her 1812 novel The Absentee, Edgeworth makes a curious comparison: an Irish tenant complains of his landlord, who lives in London, that "He might as well be a West India planter, and we negroes, for any thing he knows to the contrary."24 In her Irish writings, she obsessively chides absentees who neglect their paternalist duties and allow middlemen to abuse their tenants. But for West Indians, she makes no such complaints.25 While Clonbrony, the title character of The Absentee, is living in London, he has no idea that his overseers, the Garraghties, are cruel to the tenants on his Irish estates. By contrast, Jefferies, in residence on his plantation, nonetheless allows Durant to run things immorally:

Complaints of his [Durant's] brutality, from time to timé, reached his master's ears; but though Mr. Jefferies was moved to momentary compassion, he shut his heart against conviction: he hurried away to the jovial banquet, and drowned all painful reflections in wine.

(p. 194)

His indolence as a Creole, rather than geographical distance, keeps Jefferies from fulfilling his paternalist function.

Edgeworth, I contend, believes that West Indian planters may as well avoid their plantations in order to steer clear of the corrupting influences of the colonial climes and of direct contact with slaves. In Belinda (1802), the character flaw that will cost Belinda's suitor, the Creole Mr. Vincent, her hand is his rash propensity for gambling. Edgeworth explains the genesis of his degenerate habit: "the taste for gambling he had acquired whilst he was a child...his father used to see him, day after day, playing with eagerness, at games of chance, with his negroes, or with the sons of neighboring planters" (p. 399). Edgeworth is by no means the inventor of such theories of Creole corruption. In fact, the concept is a familiar one in eighteenth-century letters,26 and is at root a theory of racial difference. Edward Long, a West Indian planter, explains the social and linguistic degradation of Creole women in terms similar to Edgeworth's, saying that it is caused by "constant intercourse from their birth with negro domestics whose drawling, dissonant gibberish they insensibly adopt, and with it no small tincture of their awkward carriage and vulgar manners."27 According to this theory, African slaves, in sufficient numbers, can actually infect their masters with their irrationality.

Her paternalism suggests that Edgeworth would also see Irish peasants as childlike and irrational. However, Irish peasants do not exert a corrupting influence on their lords. In fact, Edgeworth represents the differences between classes
in Ireland as purely situational. In her 1809 novella *Ennui*, a central plot device denies any inherent difference between Irish peasants and Anglo-Irish aristocrats. The turning point in the novel comes when (in a reversal of romance conventions) the protagonist, the earl of Glenthorn, discovers that he is not in fact the proper earl. He was switched at birth with the true heir by his mother, who was the earl’s wet nurse. The town blacksmith turns out to be the rightful earl. They switch roles, and after a series of disasters, the blacksmith earl admits defeat and returns to his old job. The lesson here is that, while bloodline is irrelevant to competence as an Irish landlord, education is crucial to it. Ultimately, the only significant difference between the earl and the blacksmith is their upbringing; the gap between British planters and African slaves, on the other hand, can only be partially bridged, and then only when the slaves cause their masters to “degenerate.” Edgeworth’s acceptance of Creole degeneration shows her belief in a gap between “blacks” and “whites” that is, for practical purposes, unbridgeable.

Edgeworth also takes an ironic attitude to the antislavery boycott of slave-made products in her personal letters, writing that:

> Children in several schools have given up sweet things, which is surely benevolent; though whether it will at all conduce to the end proposed is perhaps wholly uncertain, and in the mean time we go on eating apple pies sweetened with sugar instead of honey. At Mr. Keir’s, however, my father avers that he ate excellent custards sweetened with honey. Will it not be rather hard upon the poor bees in the end?28

Her satirical image of “the poor bees” absorbing the brunt of the boycott suggests her reluctance to equate purchasing slave-made products with responsibility for distant conditions of production. Furthermore, in the image of the bees, she ironically suggests a question: if we start worrying about slave production, where will it end? In making this satirical move, she suggests an equivalence between enslaved African laborers and mere insects; after all, she implies that if one worries too much about slaves, one might well end up worrying about cruelty to bugs.

In sum, Edgeworth was certainly not committed to antislavery. She found the extreme positions on either side of the issue distasteful—she rejects emancipation as a practical solution, but on the other hand, she is disgusted by the immoral, unreflective position of her character Jefferies. There simply isn’t enough evidence to determine her stance on the slave trade.29 Clearly, to her, slavery was undesirable and unpleasant, but it was also necessary to contain the irrationality, and the tendency to vengeance, of African-descended people. While she, with her character Mr. Edwards, would prefer a better world where such things weren’t necessary, in the real world she was, in fact, a lukewarm, ameliorationist supporter of slavery.

As her disgust with Jefferies suggests, however, Edgeworth saw herself as moderate and restrained; not all slave plantations would have been acceptable to her. Her qualms have to do with individual relationships and individual suffering, not with the systematic wrong done to an entire group of people. In her eyes, being the cause of individual misery was a moral dilemma for the master. The master’s affective relationships with slaves provided the opportunity for redemption. As in Caesar’s case, if slaves are “grateful” to masters, then those masters are exempt from charges of brutality and inhumanity. Of course, this scheme
only works because such sentimental relationships obscure one's view of the brutality that makes such "affecting" master-slave relationships possible. Although she may intend "The Grateful Negro" to remain strictly moderate, I believe that Edgeworth plays into the hands of supporters of slavery, and even of the slave trade, because she refuses to acknowledge the violence inherent in slavery. Her "moderate" stance may well have been a common one in late eighteenth-century culture: a resigned, regretful acceptance of slavery that doesn't preclude one from daydreaming about—or even from reaping—the profits available from a well-run plantation.

In fact, throughout the eighteenth century, representations of slave gratitude consistently, if unwittingly, show that slavery depends on systematic brutality even as they celebrate the "humane masters" who benefit from it. This is the case, for example, in both Daniel Defoe's novel Colonel Jack (1722) and Sarah Scott's History of Sir George Ellison (1766).\(^\text{30}\) Defoe's Colonel Jack generates gratitude himself by threatening to whip a slave to death and then granting a conditional pardon; Scott's Ellison is "humane" himself but disciplines slaves by threatening to sell them to crueler masters. Similarly, in "The Grateful Negro," only as long as slaves remember and fear brutal overseers like Durant would they be grateful to "humane" masters like Mr. Edwards. Thus, the sentimental relationships between individual masters and slaves depend on systematic violence.\(^\text{31}\)

Strikingly, sentimental slave reform, depending on a system of violence but defined in terms of "humane" masters and "grateful" slaves, ultimately resonates with Smithian free-labor theory. Smith's psychological insight that people produce best in their (perceived) self-interest is compelling. This self-interest, however, is not wholly constituted by financial gain; this is only the positive incentive. Indeed, "free laborers" also face what might euphemistically be called "negative incentives": starvation and misery for their families. In the debates on the poor laws, many people pointed out the danger to employers of weakening, or removing, these negative incentives. The slaves in a sentimental system face an eerily similar situation: their "positive" incentive is "humane" treatment; negative incentives include physical punishment and forcible separation from family and community. Edgeworth, explaining that Mr. Edwards' slaves would be rewarded with a "wage" if they choose to work beyond their assigned tasks, shows her faith in the power of "positive" incentives adapted from wage-labor psychology: "those who are animated by hope can perform what would seem impossibilities, to those who are under the depressing influence of fear" (p. 196). Here, slavery and free labor are not only compatible, but mutually influential.

In seeing no contradiction between free labor principles and the practice of slavery, Edgeworth resembled many West Indian planters who were her contemporaries. Finding that they could not wring efficient production from their slaves simply through beatings and physical abuse, many planters tried to add self-interest as a motivation. Rather than eliminating abuse, however, planters gave slaves small private plots to farm; slaves were "allowed" to work these plots, in order to provide food for their families, after they had finished an allotted amount of field work. Although in sentimental apologies for slavery such plots are understood as the way to grant slaves a sense of independence and self-hood, ironically, they benefited masters and could increase work loads. Slave owners even coerced slaves to work these "provision grounds," because such plots saved money by replacing food that would otherwise have had to be purchased.

Some masters successfully increased efficiency by the seemingly paradoxical
method of lowering the amount of daily work expected of slaves. When slaves were allowed to stop working on reaching their pre-set allotment, they had an incentive to work quickly. Mr. Edwards seems to be drawn specifically from this model: his slaves had "reasonable and fixed daily tasks" and could receive limited wages (p. 195). Thus, we see that not only Mr. Edwards and other fictional sentimental planters, but also real West Indian slave owners saw themselves as at once paternalist and capitalist, borrowing from free labor theory and from sentimental, nostalgic views of an aristocratic past as it suited their purposes. They perceived no conflict between the values that would be retrospectively identified as antithetically "bourgeois" and "aristocratic"; based on a belief in an immediately irresolvably difference between Africans and Europeans, they also saw no conflict between unfree African labor in the colonies and wage labor in England and Ireland.

Thus Edgeworth's "Grateful Negro" undermines two central assumptions in the current literary-historical debate on antislavery. First, the sentimental strategies of writers like Bryan Edwards, and implicit supporters of slavery like Edgeworth, show the fallacy of an assumption that sentimental humanitarianism leads to antislavery; sentimental discourse may have given an impetus to antislavery, but it could also aid slavery's apologists. Second, the identification of antislavery with "bourgeois ideology" is problematic. An endless flow of pamphlets arguing for slavery pointed to the central role of the slave trade and slave products in the expanding British economy. Planters and their allies identified themselves with such "bourgeois" forces as free-labor psychology, technological innovation, and market expansion, identifying their version of unfree labor as continuous with capitalist ideology. Indeed, it is my contention that slavery and free labor had an imaginative interdependence, one reflected in Edgeworth's representation of slavery, and one extremely beneficial to members of the capitalist employer class, whether they were planters, landlords, or industrialists.

Slavery in Edgeworth's writing does not exemplify the difference between "new," emerging bourgeois values and receding aristocratic ones; instead, for Edgeworth, slavery was at the center of an attempt to bring together the advantages of intense plantation discipline and the internalized incentives to work of contracted wage laborers. This synthesis, I contend, was historically significant not only in the efforts of profit-minded plantation reformers; it also informed the turn from "putting out" and cottage industry to the factory system in England. As several economic historians have argued, the hallmark of the factory system and of the so-called "industrial revolution" was not mechanization so much as the intensification of labor through close supervision in the factory. Perhaps, then, not only did the psychology of wage labor influence practices of slave management, but the high-profile model of profitability presented in the unimpeded supervision of colonial plantation slavery may well have influenced factory owners to introduce stricter discipline.

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1. Wylie Sypher suggests that Edgeworth was brought to her position by her father's friend, Thomas Day, an ardent abolitionist (Guinea's Captive Kings: British Anti-Slavery Literature of the XVIIIth Century (1942; N.Y.: Octagon, 1969), pp. 310–11. Moira Ferguson assumes that Edgeworth, perhaps because she was a woman writer who took explicitly political positions, was working within an abolitionist paradigm. Although she notes Edgeworth's gradualism, she concludes that "the text emphatically commends emancipation" (Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670–1834 [N.Y.: Routledge, 1992], pp. 233, 231–34). Most recently Andrew McCann calls Edgeworth an "abolitionist" and sees her as committed to antislavery through her "bourgeois" values; he asserts that slavery was a "feudal relic" to abolitionists and that her representations contain a "disavowal of the continuities between slavery and capitalism" ("Conjugal Love and the Enlightenment Subject: The Colonial Context of Non-Identity in Maria Edgeworth's Belinda," Novel 30 [Fall 1996]: 58). One problem with this assertion is that it fails to account for the difference between "abolitionists" who opposed the slave trade, and "emancipationists" who opposed slavery itself. Henry Brougham, discussed below, was an abolitionist but also an anti-emancipationist. Suvendrini Perera, in Reaches of Empire: The English Novel from Edgeworth to Dickens (N.Y.: Columbia Univ., 1991), takes a nuanced position, concluding that Belinda "reveals deep anxiety about the possibility of revolution but also allows for the expression and interrogation of the insurrectionary aspirations embodied in feminism [and] abolition" (p. 34), and that "The Grateful Negro," if "cautionary," also offers "a certain understanding of [slave] rebels" (p. 33).

2. The story was published in Popular Tales (London: J. Johnson, 1804), pp. 193–240, a collection of didactic short stories, that along with Moral Tales (1800) was supposed to inculcate the Edgeworthian morality presented in Practical Education. For this passage, see p. 195.

4. Much of this historiography applies a Marxist framework to analysis of slavery, suggesting that slavery was an antiquated mode of production by the late 18th century, and should therefore be understood as opposed to capitalist innovation. In work specifically on Britain, the theme of the relation between capitalism and slavery has for the past half-century been central to considerations both of antislavery and of the practice of colonial slavery; little has been done to question the link between capitalism and antislavery, as can be seen in the implicit consensus on this point in the generally contentious Anti-Slavery Debate. Eric Williams' *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina, 1944) set the initial terms of the debate, suggesting that antislavery was capitalist, bringing about the end of slavery only once it became unprofitable. David Brion Davis shifted these terms in *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, saying that "Economic trends do not explain the politics of British Abolition" (p. 56) and arguing instead that what was at stake in antislavery was the legitimation of free-labor ideology; here the opposition between slavery and capitalist modes of production was articulated most clearly. The debate has continued to be lively in recent years, with key contributions including *The Anti-Slavery Debate*, David Eltis' *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (N.Y.: Oxford Univ., 1987), and many books and articles by Seymour Drescher, for instance *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (N.Y.: Oxford Univ., 1987). Recently, J. R. Ward has investigated the ways that planters used late-century economic innovations in *British West Indian Slavery, 1750–1834: The Process of Amelioration* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988). The most important work on southern American slavery to treat slavery as economically archaic is Eugene Genovese’s, esp. *Roll, Jordan Roll* (N.Y.: Vintage, 1976). A useful critique of this tradition regarding American slavery is Mark M. Smith, "Time, Slavery and Plantation Capitalism in the Ante-Bellum American South," *Past & Present*, no. 150 (1996): 142–69.


7. Again, in a later discussion of slavery and serfdom, Smith suggests that when agricultural workers lack the motivation of self-improvement, it is inevitably the owners who suffer through lowered productivity; people only produce well, he explains, in their own interest (1:413).


9. The historian Michael Hurst pathly characterizes Edgeworthian paternalism, describing Maria and Robert Lovell Edgeworth's self-conception as Anglo-Irish landowners with a reformist bent: "behind the shelter of British power they could live up to the Edgeworth ideal of benevolence and yet impose salutary reforms upon a mass peasantry vastly more feckless than they themselves had ever been" (Maria Edgeworth and the Public Scene [London: Macmillan, 1969], p. 16). Hurst brings into relief the Edgeworths' central paternalist tenet: those who are economically "dependent" are incapable of full rationality on their own. For Maria Edgeworth, then, even "free" wage laborers are dependent, and in need of the fatherly guidance of their betters. She believes Smith's assessment of the usefulness of self-interest, but is more concerned with the possibility that the lower orders shouldn't be entrusted with discerning their self-interest. This is a key difference between Smith and Edgeworth, and underwrites her failure to take on his dichotomous view of slavery and free labor. For an intelligent discussion of Edgeworth's paternalism in "The Grateful Negro" specifically, see Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (N.Y.: Routledge, 1995), p. 79.

10. Edgeworth's disgust with the 1798 uprising is documented in her representation of Irish rebels in *Ennui* (1809) in "Castle Rackrent" and "Ennui," ed. Marilyn Butler (N.Y.: Penguin, 1992), pp. 244–46, 261; the Edgeworth family's experiences of the rebellion is documented by Marilyn Butler in *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), pp. 137–41. Edgeworth's hints of the dangers that make emancipation impossible are perhaps illuminated by Brougham's contention that, in light of St. Domingo, emancipation would surely result in violence (particularly an antiwhite revolt) (*Inquiry, 2:141, 2:155, 2:407*) and by an article in *Gentleman's Magazine* contending that St. Domingo proves that "Negroes... are but a set of wild beasts when let loose without controul" ("Enormities at
St. Domingo," 64 [1794]: 1167). Edgeworth would have been unlikely to credit the histrionic narrative, hinging on the claim that the best-treated slaves led the revolution, offered in A Particular Account of the Commencement and Progress of the Insurrection of the Negroes in St. Domingo (London: J. Sewell, 1796), a translation of reports made by St. Domingo planters to the National Assembly of France. Perera discusses the extent to which Edgeworth was influenced by the antirevolutionary reaction (pp. 17–33).

11. Anon., Considerations on the Emancipation of the Negroes (London, J. Johnson, 1788), p. 2. Intriguingly, this pamphlet, identified as being by a "West India Planter," was printed by the same J. Johnson who would later print "The Grateful Negro" in the first edn. of Edgeworth's Popular Tales (as well as William Preston's antislavery reply to Bryan Edwards). Other writers use the same strategy: Philip Gibbes, to whom Instructions for the Treatment of Negroes is attributed, begins that tract: "Although I sincerely lament the existence of the slave-trade, I feel no repugnance in availing myself of the means it affords me of supplying by purchase the number of Negroes requisite for the management of my plantations" (London: Shepperson, 1797), p. 1. (This is a "reprint with additions" of a 1786 text.) A contributor to the firmly anti-abolitionist Gentleman's Magazine takes the same tack: "every measure calculated to promote the reformation, instruction, or happiness, of the Negroes, is certainly to be devoutly wished; but..." (64 [1796]: 291), as do Arthur Young "I am not pleading for the slave trade, which I abhor; but..." ("Abolition of the Slave Trade," Annals of Agriculture [1793]: 523–27), and the anti-emancipationist Henry Brougham: "any plan, too, which comprehends the idea of free negroes, or includes the word, is peculiarly adapted to accord with the feelings of those worthy persons who are so keenly alive to the sufferings of the Africans in a state of bondage" (Inquiry, 2:406). William Preston, in his Letter to Bryan Edwards, Esquire Containing Observations on Some Passages of His History of the West Indies (London: J. Johnson, 1795), attributes this strategy to Bryan Edwards: "your determination in favour of this cruel traffic seems to be the reluctant sacrifice, of your humanity and candour, to the resistless authority of facts" (p. 3).

12. Considerations, pp. 8–9. This author goes on to contend that eliminating the slave trade would be cruel because planters would work their remaining slaves to death in trying to make up for lost workers before a new generation could be born and raised. Brougham, oppositely, argues that only abolishing the trade would give masters and overseers a strong enough economic motive to overwhelm the impulse to cruelty.

13. Ferguson mentions that Edgeworth quotes Bryan Edwards on Obeah, but contends that this didn't affect her emancipationist position (p. 233). McCann mentions Edgeworth's debt to Edwards, but only in terms of her discussion of Obeah in the novel Belinda (p. 65) as does Perera (p. 20). In the late 18th century, Bryan Edwards was certainly understood to be a supporter of slavery, as evidenced by the antiabolitionist rebuttal, A Letter to Bryan Edwards, attributed to William Preston.

14. One note (the third, on p. 197) was subsequently excised from "The Grateful Negro" in the undated London "second edition," and in the 1854 Philadelphia edn. of Popular Tales. This note refers to the "second edition" of Bryan Edwards' History, that is, to the two-vol. unabridged edn. published in London by John Stockdale in 1794. This is significant, because certain passages that Edgeworth draws on appear only in that edn. All refs. will be to this edn. of the History and given parenthetically in the text as BE, followed by vol. and page number. To avoid confusion, I will, whenever possible, refer to Edgeworth's character as "Mr. Edwards" and use Bryan Edwards full name.


16. The identical passages appear on "Grateful Negro," p. 197, and BE, 2:154. The only differences are in punctuation; I have followed Edgeworth's here.

17. I do not mean to imply that Bryan Edwards was the first writer to employ sentiment, or the claim of planter humanity, as a defense of slavery. Note 10 above shows a number of apologists for slavery trying to co-opt humane rhetoric. Furthermore, before Edwards, two planters, Samuel Martin and Phillip Gibbes, wrote manuals for the treatment of slaves, advocating master "kindness" to elicit productive labor. Martin's Essay on Plantership went through seven eds. before the end of the century, the first appearing in 1750. But only in 1773, in an new initial section added to the 5th edn., did he argue for the benefits
of kindness for both discipline and planters' profits. This section is sometimes called "On the Management of Negroes" and sometimes presented as a preface. According to Richard B. Sheridan, in his article "Samuel Martin, Innovating Sugar Planter Of Antigua," *Agricultural History* 34, no. 3 (1960): 126–39, Martin added this section "motivated in part by a desire to justify the institution of slavery" (p. 129). Sir Philip Gibbs' *Instructions for the Treatment of Negroes* (London: Shepperson, 1786 and repr. with additions in 1797) recommends working slaves under maximum capacity so as to extend their working lives, and allowing marriage to promote both happiness and natural population growth. Gibbs, intriguingly, is praised by Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, ed. Vincent Carretta (N.Y.: Penguin, 1995) in a citation (pp. 270–01, n. 305). Edgeworth is not the only fiction writer to refer her readers to Bryan Edwards; Charlotte Smith also praises him both for "humanity" and writing well in *The Wanderings of Warwick* (London: J. Bell, 1794), fn. 67.

18. Even the editors of the 1798 abridgment of the history take issue with the bliteness of Edwards' dismissal of planter cruelty, going so far as to give a list of contradictory facts. See *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies...Abridged from the History Written By Bryan Edwards* (London: B. Crosby, 1798), p. 195. This abridgment is not the same as that published in Edinburgh in 1794.

19. McCann reads this scene as Mr. Edwards' display of "republican virtue" (p. 69).

20. This is also Brougham's position, although he goes on to add that eliminating the slave trade would harness market forces to the dissemination of master kindness.

21. This lengthy note, by an anonymous "valuable friend" of Bryan Edwards, was added to the 2nd edn. and excised from some subsequent edns.

22. Placing the emphasis on the word "species," rather than on the word "inferior," gives a sense of the point I am making here. As Nancy Stepan explains in *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800–1960* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1982) the change from 18th-century to mid-19th-century thought on race can largely be explained as the move from "monogenism," or the belief that all humans are a single species, to "polygenism," or the belief that different human "races" had different origins and thus are absolutely different. But rejecting the idea of the "races" as different *species* does not necessarily entail the rejection of a hierarchy of racial types *within* the human species.

23. Jennings suggests that Mr. Edwards' plantation resembles an Irish estate more than a Caribbean plantation, noting that "slaves with limited, well-defined duties, and even under some conditions, established wages, very much resemble agrarian tenants" (p. 133). Moira Ferguson suggests that Edgeworth is applying her understanding of the plight of Irish tenants to the situation of slaves (p. 233). And Kathryn J. Kirkpatrick suggests that the West Indian slaves and Irish peasants were essentially fungible to all English colonists, citing a document from 1691 in which Irish laborers are "counted as equal to slaves and negroes at fifteen pounds each" (p. 333). Perhaps, however, the equivalence Kirkpatrick highlights only applies in the late 17th century. Theodore Allen, in *The Invention of the White Race*, vol. 1: *Racial Oppression and Social Control* (London: Verso, 1994), points out that by the late 18th century, the English were beginning to abandon the policy of "racial oppression" of Irish Catholics (pp. 92–95), which had led to earlier forced sales of Irish "soldiers" (p. 74).


25. Furthermore, Edgeworth emphasizes paternalist responsibility for Irish landlords more strongly than she does for West Indian planters. Her novels *The Absentee and Ennui* (1809) are extended polemics against Irish absenteeism. In the above quotation, the Irish absentee's lack of concern is shameful, but would be expected of a resident West Indian planter in regard to his African slaves. In fact, none of the West Indians in another of Edgeworth's novels, *Belinda* (1802), are represented as having a responsibility to return to their West Indian holdings (*Belinda*, ed. Eiléan Ni Chuilleanain (London: Dent, 1995)).


29. A case could be made that she was not an abolitionist, although she may well have been undecided. Still, she never objects to this aspect of Bryan Edwards' thought. And, in two other letters on the trade, she seems at best ambiguous: in one, Edgeworth pokes fun at a boycotter for being overzealous, perhaps even going past the boundaries of masculine propriety: "we met at Clifton Mr. and Mrs. Barbauld. He was an amiable and benevolent man, so eager against the slave-trade that, when he drank tea with us, he always brought some East India sugar, that he might not share our wickedness in eating that made by the negro slave" (Life and Letters, p. 69). Calling the man "eager" makes him seem unreasonable. Referring to "wickedness" so casually and unapologetically sounds ironic; "eating" so described seems not at all "wicked," but like normal behavior. In the context of Edgeworth's skeptical, dismissive attitude toward the boycotter in the letter about the "bees," Mr. Barbauld's behavior seems inappropriate: the only certain result of his antislavery gesture is an awkward social situation in which he ridiculously implies his moral superiority to his companions at tea. In her third letter referring to the slave trade, Edgeworth takes a disapproving tone, but ultimately sounds dismissive: she mentions that she "wept on board a slave ship with my brother, and saw the dreadfully small hole in which the poor slaves are stowed together, so that they cannot stir. But probably you know all this" (Life and Letters, p. 28). Following her observation with a reference to its familiarity only lessens its impact, allowing her not to dwell on the disturbing image. If she had begun by saying "you probably know of this, but..." she would have reached a rhetorical climax in her description of the slave ship; instead, she softens its impact, seeming to dismiss it in order to move on quickly to the next topic.


35. See Fogel, pp. 37 & 39.