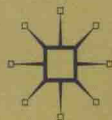


CLASSICS OF
CHILDREN'S
LITERATURE

Selected
Tales
for Children
and
Young
People
maria edgeworth

a new critical edition of the classic texts
edited by **susan manly**



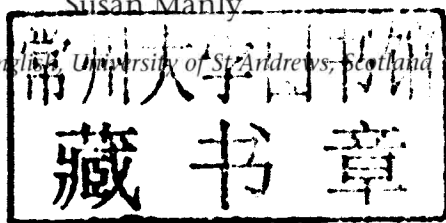
Selected Tales for Children and Young People

Maria Edgeworth

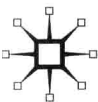
Edited with an Introduction by

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Introduction

Life and Work

Maria Edgeworth (1768–1849) is widely regarded as a pioneer of children's literature. Edgeworth was an innovative writer of numerous tales and novellas for children and young people, whose work was enjoyed by generations of juvenile readers from the late eighteenth until the early twentieth century. She was also the author of *Practical Education* (1798), an important manual on early education that broke away from the speculative approach of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the class-specificity of John Locke (both of whom focused their efforts on the education of boys) to create an experimental, scientific pedagogy, based on observations and anecdotes drawn from the experience of bringing up real girls and boys (eight of her half-siblings from her father's third marriage).¹

Edgeworth's prolific writing for and about children was grounded in a sympathy for young people strengthened by her own turmoil in early childhood: she lost her mother when she was five years old, and her father (a virtual stranger to her) remarried within a few months. Her response to this emotional trauma was to behave so badly that she was sent away to school at seven, and did not return to live amongst the family until she was fourteen, having experienced her stepmother's loss in addition to her first bereavement. From this point in 1782 until her death in 1849, Edgeworth spent most of her time at the family home in Edgeworthstown in Ireland, not far from Longford, where she became her father's estate manager as well as taking a leading role in the education of the younger children (in total there were

¹ John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), focuses on the education of young gentlemen, although it contains much generally applicable advice that Edgeworth incorporates in her own educational theory; Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile, or Education* (1762) focuses mainly on the fictional boy of the title.

twenty-one Edgeworth children by his four wives). Besides *Practical Education* and her tales for younger readers, Edgeworth wrote many novels and essays about Ireland, and was acknowledged by Sir Walter Scott as a pioneer of the national tale. These include perhaps her best-known work, *Castle Rackrent* (1800), as well as *An Essay on Irish Bulls* (1802), *Ennui* (1809), *The Absentee* (1812), and *Ormond* (1817). She wrote a number of witty, complex fictions about women as authors and independent beings, often subtly reflecting on women's exclusion from public life, and on the politics of marriage and sexual liberation, including *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795/1798), *Belinda* (1801), *Leonora* (1806), and *Helen* (1834). In addition, she wrote *Whim for Whim* (1798), a comic play focusing on political subversion in London and based on real events involving the French Queen and the parliamentary opposition; *Professional Education* (1809), about the preparation of young men for careers in the professions; *Patronage* (1814), a long, ambitious tale about two contrasting families; and *Harrington* (1817), which deals with anti-semitism in 1770s London.

This is not an exhaustive catalogue: Edgeworth was a productive and wide-ranging thinker and writer. In her heyday (1800–14), she was the most commercially successful and prestigious novelist in Britain and Ireland: the £2,100 she earned from *Patronage* trebles the £700 Scott earned from *Waverley* (1814), which John Gibson Lockhart thought unprecedented, and was seven times what Jane Austen earned from *Emma* (1816). Edgeworth herself calculated that in all she made more than £11,000 from her writing. Her reputation has suffered since, in part because of her choice of form, the philosophic or moral tale, which became unfashionable as readers began to expect a more uniform naturalism. With the publication of the 12-volume Pickering & Chatto *Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth* (1999/2003), however, and distinguished editions of individual works, as well as fresh insights in critical studies, Edgeworth's achievements as a writer and novelist of ideas are once again being recognized.²

² Marilyn Butler's *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972) remains the fullest treatment of Edgeworth's life to date, and is the main source for this biographical sketch.

The tales in this edition are drawn from four collections published over eight years. Four of the tales are from the first edition of *The Parent's Assistant* (1796) ('The Little Dog Trusty', 'Lazy Lawrence', 'The Bracelets', and 'The Purple Jar'); one from the much expanded third edition of 1800 ('Waste Not, Want Not'); one, 'Rosamond's Day of Misfortunes', from *Early Lessons* (1801); one story, 'The Good Aunt', from *Moral Tales* (1801) and one, 'The Grateful Negro', from *Popular Tales* (1804).³ While 'The Little Dog Trusty', a simple and very short tale, was meant for children aged between three and eight, most of the stories in *The Parent's Assistant* were intended for readers aged between eight and twelve, while *Moral Tales* was aimed at readers of around thirteen upwards. *Popular Tales* was presented as a work primarily for those not usually considered 'polite', and therefore relatively unengaged by tales centring on people of wealth and fashion, but it was widely read by adolescents and young adults.

Education, Enlightenment, and the 'Moral Tale'

The author of five major works for and about children between 1796 and 1804, Edgeworth is known for her realism, her technical virtuosity, her psychological acuteness in depicting the thoughts and feelings of children, her secularism, and her commitment to the increased diffusion of knowledge. Edgeworth began writing in the wake of Immanuel Kant's essay of 1784, 'What is

³ There has been some discussion about the publication date of the first edition of *The Parent's Assistant*, since it is advertised in the first edition of Edgeworth's *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795), but the likeliest date is 1796; the second edition appeared later the same year. See Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 159. *Practical Education* was nominally jointly authored by Maria Edgeworth and her father. Letter evidence, however, suggests that it was very largely her project, and mainly written by her: see Edgeworth Papers, National Library of Ireland MS 10,166/7/161, for instance, in which Richard Lovell Edgeworth refers to it as 'Maria's great work', and hopes that it will 'meet with as favourable a reception as her other works' (letter dated 17 July 1797). Her father contributed the chapters on grammar and mechanics, and material for the chapters on geography, geology and arithmetic, and her brother, Lovell, offered material for the chapter on chemistry; but she is responsible for the rest.

Enlightenment?': his precept for this age of enlightenment was 'Have courage to use your *own* reason', and he envisaged the result as '*man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity*'.⁴ Echoing these ideas, James Keir, one of Maria Edgeworth's father's close friends and fellow Lunar thinker,⁵ celebrated the year 1789—the first year of the French Revolution—as distinguished for

the sudden and extensive impulse which the human mind has received, and which has extended its active influence to every object of human pursuits, political, commercial, and philosophical. The diffusion of a general knowledge, and of a taste for science, over all classes of men [...] seems to be the characteristic feature of the present age.⁶

Chiming with Richard Price's assertion, also in 1789, that the Revolution was the latest sign of a 'diffusion of knowledge which has undermined superstition and error', Keir linked the democratization of knowledge to social transformation: 'In this age, the flame that passes over all kindles the sparks of genius wherever they happen to lurk.' Knowledge was no longer to be 'confined to public schools, or to particular classes of men'; nor was it to be confined to adults.⁷ Keir responded enthusiastically the same year to *Sandford and Merton*, a children's book by another Edgeworth family friend, Thomas Day, describing it as 'more likely to be of

⁴ Immanuel Kant, *An Answer to the Question: "What is Enlightenment?"*, trans. by H.B. Nisbet (1970; London: Penguin Books, 2009), 1.

⁵ Richard Lovell Edgeworth was a member of the Lunar Society of Birmingham in the late 1760s and 1770s, although the group retained a lasting influence on him as a thinker and inventor. Other prominent members of the Lunar circle included Erasmus Darwin, Josiah Wedgwood, James Watt, Joseph Priestley and James Keir, all of them committed to science, invention, and free enquiry. For an excellent account of the Society and its influence, see Jenny Uglow, *The Lunar Men: The Friends who Made the Future, 1730–1810* (London: Faber & Faber, 2002).

⁶ Keir, *The First Part of a Dictionary of Chemistry* (Birmingham & London: Printed by Pearson & Rollason for Elliot & Kay, 1789), iii.

⁷ Keir, *Dictionary of Chemistry*, pp. iv, iii, cited by Mitzi Myers, 'Aufklärung für Kinder? Maria Edgeworth and the Genders of Knowledge Genres', *Women's Writing* 2.2 (1995), 113–40; 113–14; Price, *Discourse on the Love of our Country* (London: T. Cadell, 1789), 41–2.

solid service than any that has been published. It is of little use to write for grown-up people; their acquired habits will generally prevail: but young, unformed minds may be influenced into action'.⁸ Maria Edgeworth's work, too, is grounded in the conviction that reading can play a part in encouraging children to be innovative, independent thinkers, and that they can thus be part of the expanding public sphere invoked by Kant, Keir and Price.

Contemporaries recognized the extent to which Edgeworthian education allied itself with enlightenment and enquiry, and some expressed disquiet at the secular moral principles that this suggested.⁹ For Sarah Trimmer the secularism of *The Parent's Assistant*, Maria Edgeworth's first book for children, undermined its usefulness. To the suggestion in its Preface that gaining a distinct knowledge of children's minds through observation might be considered a 'treasure of natural history',¹⁰ Trimmer retorts: 'Enough may be known of the infant mind to enable parents to educate their children both for Time and Eternity, without their being able to ascertain such facts as these.' Many of the stories, Trimmer felt, neglected opportunities to offer religious education to their readers: 'Lazy Lawrence', for example, depicted Jem's honesty and industry without reference to 'Christian motives', while Lawrence's idleness was not pointed out as an instance of 'sinfulness'. 'Old Poz', meanwhile, in which a cantankerous but good-hearted old magistrate is gently mocked by his daughter, is interpreted by Trimmer as actively subversive, a satire on established state authority: 'Children [...] should be taught, as their catechism directs, to "honour and obey those who are in authority under the king"'.¹¹

⁸ Keir, letter to Day, 29 September 1789, cited by Myers, 'Aufklärung für Kinder?', 114. Myers makes a strong argument for reading Edgeworth as a writer bringing the values and ideas of enlightenment to children.

⁹ See for instance, the review in the *British Critic* XV (1800), 210; and Sarah Trimmer, *Guardian of Education*, 5 vols (London: J. Hatchard, 1802–6), I, 2; II, 171.

¹⁰ Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Preface to *The Parent's Assistant* (London: J. Johnson, 1796), v: Edgeworth is quoting from Thomas Reid, *Inquiry into the Human Mind*, which proposes this close scientific attention to the growth of a child's mind.

¹¹ Review of *Parent's Assistant* in *Guardian of Education* II (1803), 353–60, 415–18: 355, 356, 415.

Maria Edgeworth's interest in writing for children and encouraging children as thinkers was firmly rooted in family projects and interests of long standing, beginning with Richard Lovell Edgeworth's enthusiasm for Rousseau's scheme of natural education in the late 1760s and early 1770s, which led him (disastrously) to attempt to create a real-life 'Emile' in his eldest son. More productive was the 'child register' begun in 1776 by Honora Sneyd Edgeworth, Richard Lovell Edgeworth's second wife and Maria Edgeworth's first stepmother, in which she collected children's conversations as a means of establishing how they thought. In the 1790s, as she was preparing *Practical Education* and helping to bring up a large family of step-brothers and -sisters, Maria Edgeworth revived these child registers. They were an important part of the experimental approach to children's learning which was to form the foundation of her educational writing, and which informs the realistic child characters of *The Parent's Assistant* and later collections of tales for the young.

Edgeworth began telling stories while still at school in Derby (a particularly vivid one told of 'an adventurer who had a mask made of the dried skin taken from a dead man's face, which he put on when he wished to be disguised'), but her earliest published work dates from 1787.¹² Her first tales for children include the autobiographically based 'The Bracelets', written in 1787, and a saga called 'The Freeman Family', inspired by a series of stories about a large family of adventurous children, made up by Richard Lovell Edgeworth and told to his children in 1788–9. This was never published, although parts of it were used for her later novel for adults, *Patronage*. Between finishing the first draft of 'The Freeman Family' and beginning a second, Edgeworth began work on what were to become her first set of *Parent's Assistant* tales, all written between 1790 and 1795, adding eight new tales, written between 1796 and 1800, for the third edition of 1800. Like the unfinished Freeman saga, Edgeworth's tales began their textual life in oral form, as stories written on a slate, read aloud, and adjusted according to the Edgeworth children's comments, as well as editorial advice from other family members, principally

¹² Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 55; Frances Edgeworth, *A Memoir of Maria Edgeworth*, 3 vols (London: printed by Joseph Masters & Son, 1867), I, 10.

her father.¹³ She often solicited ideas and suggestions from family and friends as a basis for her tales: a letter of 1797 to her cousin Sophy Ruxton, for instance, asks for 'any stories or anecdotes from the age of 5 to 15' for the third edition of *The Parent's Assistant*.¹⁴ In 1780, her father and first stepmother had jointly written a privately printed collection of stories about two children, Harry and Lucy, making their first discoveries about the world outside their home, and Edgeworth later incorporated and added to these in her *Early Lessons* (1801), writing sequels in 1814 and 1825.¹⁵ In the years when Edgeworth was writing the first *Parent's Assistant*, there were at least two children in the family aged between ten and thirteen, so the idea of writing for older children and adolescents naturally suggested itself: we can see *Moral Tales* (1801) as growing organically out of her first collection.¹⁶ At the same time, her father's fourth marriage in 1798 meant that new infant half-siblings could benefit from the science-rich educational programme in the lightly fictionalized tales of *Early Lessons* (1801), which follow Harry, Lucy, Frank and Rosamond in their first discoveries about the world.

At least six of the *Parent's Assistant* tales (including two in the current selection) are set in or around Bristol, where the Edgeworth family spent two years. Maria Edgeworth's father and third stepmother, Elizabeth, and her half-brother Lovell left Ireland for England in early summer 1791 in search of treatment for her half-brother Lovell's incipient tuberculosis—the disease that had already killed his sister Honora in 1790. They left her at home in charge of her younger half-siblings, ranging in age from two to ten. On 14 October 1791 their father sent for them and for the

¹³ Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 156, 157.

¹⁴ Edgeworth Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 10,166/7/165.

¹⁵ The stories written by Richard and Honora were never published, and only one volume (the second) of this collection of stories, which they called *Practical Education*, was printed. There is no overlap between this earlier collection and the work of educational philosophy of the same title published in 1798.

¹⁶ 'Mademoiselle Panache' is an interesting example of a tale that bridged the two collections, beginning in *The Parent's Assistant* with its characters as small girls, and carrying them through to adulthood in the second part, when it was transferred into *Moral Tales*.

next two years the family lived in Prince's Buildings in Clifton, a fashionable part of Bristol. Regular outings included walks on the Downs, where the children ran about hunting fossils and clamoring on rocks, and visits to an excellent library in town.¹⁷ The months when she remained behind in Edgeworthstown and the years in Clifton were clearly important times for Edgeworth as a writer: the children relied on her for tales to keep them entertained and interested, especially in Clifton, where they lived in relatively cramped conditions, and had few toys or books of their own. Many tales were written or incubated during this period.

Edgeworth's writing for children has serious purposes, but it is never unimaginative, and is often infused with humour. Although her chosen form for children was the 'moral tale', this was not the moral tale as generally understood by children's literature critics, Humphrey Carpenter and Mari Prichard for instance, who describe it as strongly didactic in tendency, hostile to fancy, pre-occupied with children's self-correction, and dominated in narrative terms by adult preceptors who 'are almost always present, guiding and admonishing the children, and drawing every possible lesson from what has occurred'.¹⁸ Mitzi Myers rejects this description and points out how inapplicable it is to Edgeworth's tales for children: 'Given the family background, the odd thing about the Edgeworth canon is the comparative dearth of lively, wise father figures and the abundance of powerful maternal figures, some wise and many anything but. Equally surprising perhaps are the numerous orphans, emigrés, and displaced persons.'¹⁹

Meanwhile, Alan Richardson questions the common assumption that moral tales are essentially an attempt to stamp out fairytales, the genre often thought of as most imaginative, noting the persistence of fairy-tale motif and plot in Edgeworth's first

¹⁷ Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 105.

¹⁸ Carpenter and Prichard, *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature* (1984; Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 358–60: 359.

¹⁹ Myers, 'Little Girls Lost: Rewriting Romantic Childhood, Righting Gender and Genre', in *Teaching Children's Literature: Issues, Pedagogy, Resources*, ed. by Glenn Edward Sadler (New York: Modern Language Association, 1992), 131–42: 133.

Rosamond story, 'The Purple Jar', with its magically attractive object of desire.²⁰

Edgeworth in fact wrote 'moral tales' for both children and adults, modelled on the French genre of the moral or philosophic tale, as used by Voltaire (François-Marie d'Arouet), Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis and Arnaud Berquin, the latter prominent and important writers for children in the 1780s, when Edgeworth was beginning her career as an author.²¹ Jean-François Marmontel, whose *Contes Moraux* were published in 1763, was particularly influential in forming Edgeworth's sense of the philosophical potential of the genre. Marmontel thought of the tale as primarily a witty often comic form that prompts reflective thought. As Mitzi Myers observes, Edgeworth

self-consciously used the term 'tale' for her fictions not because she is prudish about the novel (the usual explanation), but because she thus signals to contemporary readers the intellectual, argumentative, analytical genre she domesticates, feminizes, and frequently subverts. [...] for a woman writer who wants to be taken seriously and explore serious issues, who values her youthful protagonists and is interested in more about them than who they'll marry, the moral tale offers progressive possibilities.²²

Edgeworth's 'moral tale' was thus vitally connected to her commitment to enlightenment.

The Parent's Assistant and Early Lessons

'The Little Dog Trusty' and 'The Orange-Man', simple tales for very young children, were written in 1790 or 1791. Together with 'The Purple Jar', these stories were published in the first and second

²⁰ Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 116.

²¹ Edgeworth's 'Advertisement' to *Belinda* (1801) insists that it is a 'moral tale', not a novel; and *Harrington* (1817) was similarly conceived: see Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 221–2.

²² Myers, 'Little Girls Lost', 136.

editions of *The Parent's Assistant* (1796), but were transferred to *Early Lessons* in 1801. Both 'The Little Dog Trusty' and 'The Orange-Man' address child readers directly ('Little boys, I advise you, never be afraid to tell the truth; never say, "*stay a minute*," and "*stay a little longer*," but run directly and tell of what you have done that is wrong'); and both end unhappily for one of the two child protagonists. 'The Little Dog Trusty' is focused, as its title suggests, on the issues of trustworthiness and obedience to parental authority, the parity between the submissive, innocent dog and the boy hero, Frank, indicated as the tale closes by the renaming of the dog (which is henceforward also to be called 'Frank').

The disciplinary impulse can be strong in Edgeworth's earliest stories although others, like 'The Bracelets' (written in 1787), present error as something that can help to develop children's moral sense. Edgeworth's own early experiences at the hands of her much admired but strict first step-mother, Honora, and her father, might have prompted the emphasis in these first stories on stern instruction and stringent punishment. Honora's preoccupation with obedience is evident in a manuscript notebook entry that shows her reflecting on the beating of her four-year-old son for refusing to recite vowel sounds, as well as in a letter expressing her conviction that

almost everything that education can give, is to be given before the age of 5 or 6—therefore I think great attention & strictness should be shewn before that age; particularly, if there is anything refractory or rebellious in the disposition, that is the time to repress it, & to substitute good habits, obedience, attention, & respect towards superiors.²³

'The Little Dog Trusty' is true to this authoritarian model of moral education: its hero, Frank, escapes punishment by admitting his culpability in overturning a basin of milk while romping with his brother, but his brother is punished by being 'whipped, till he cried so loud with the pain, that the whole neighbourhood could hear him'. In addition, Robert is made an object of

²³ M.S. Eng.misc. c.895, fol.76, Bodleian Library, Oxford; letter to Mrs Margaret Ruxton, n.d. [?1776], cited in Butler, *Maria Edgeworth*, 47.

disapprobation in order to enforce the lesson for the benefit of neighbouring families (his father renames the dog with the express intention that Robert's dishonesty will be publicized among all the local children when they ask about the dog's name-change).

The story of Trusty, Frank and Robert is drawn from an incident in the Edgeworth household, related in the chapter on truth in *Practical Education*, in which 'H——' (Maria Edgeworth's half-brother Henry) broke a looking-glass while his parents were out: 'As soon as he heard the sound of the returning carriage, he ran and posted himself at the hall door. His father, the moment he got out of the carriage, beheld his erect figure, and pale, but intrepid countenance.' Instead of punishing Henry, or expressing anger on hearing his frank confession, Richard Lovell Edgeworth praised him: 'he would rather all the looking-glasses in his house should be broken, than that one of his children should attempt to make an excuse'. Maria Edgeworth urges parents in such cases to explain to children the 'great disgrace' of falsehood as opposed to the 'slight inconvenience' involved in speaking the truth.²⁴ In contrast, if physical punishment is used to stigmatize lying, children remain in subjection to authority, obedient from fear rather than honourable from the ambition to build and maintain integrity.

In the two Rosamond tales selected for inclusion in this edition, we see Edgeworth moving away from the punitive treatment of error. Edgeworth's endearingly fallible child heroine, Rosamond, is introduced in 'The Purple Jar' (1796), where she is seven; but she returns in further stories in *Early Lessons* (1801), in the *Continuation of Early Lessons* (1814), and finally in *Rosamond: A Sequel* (1821), by which time she is thirteen. The longevity of the character, appearing in tales spanning some 25 years, suggests her popularity and indicates the appeal that this voluble, inquisitive and irrepressible fictional child had for her creator.

As 'The Purple Jar' opens, we are plunged with Rosamond into a busy London shopping street, a world that she has not yet learnt to interpret: 'she saw a great variety of things, of which she did

²⁴ *Practical Education* (1798), ed. by Susan Manly, vol. 11 in *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, 12 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003), General editors Marilyn Butler, Mitzi Myers & W. J. McCormack, 118.