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# Anne Plumptre: An Independent Traveller

GLENN HOOPER

In 1812, Henry Lichtenstein, doctor of medicine and philosophy, and professor of natural history at the University of Berlin, published his two volume *Travels in Southern Africa*. In the preface to his work Lichtenstein considered the purpose of travel writing, and how the variety of accounts published for similar regions differed so widely; although the sole subject for many a writer, he concluded, 'seems to have been to make their works entertaining to their own countrymen, or at the utmost, to their contemporaries in general', he, himself, had 'avoided all attempts to embellish his descriptions, lest they might endanger the throwing [of] an improper shade over the whole of the picture'.<sup>1</sup> While Lichtenstein's self-analytical and ruminative tone may strike a note of cautious piety for many a reader, it also serves as a means of comprehending the various changes that were happening to the travel narrative form for this particular period. For example, in Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes*, it is suggested that where eighteenth-century travel writers worked with a more factually based model, eschewing all temptations towards self-promotion or personal drama, the nineteenth-century writers moved in the direction of making their texts more entertaining, or autobiographical, or simply more imaginative than had been previously the case. According to Pratt, texts such as Mungo Park's *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa*, first published in 1799, not only marked 'the eruption of the sentimental mode into European narrative ... at the end of the eighteenth century', but also transformed the way in which travel writing would be subsequently written and read.<sup>2</sup>

What makes Lichtenstein's text interesting for the purpose of my discussion, however, is not just its relationship to the various threads of a specifically Euro-American discussion concerning the complexities of the travel narrative form, but that his text had been translated into English from the original German by Anne Plumptre, novelist, mineralogist and traveller. Author of a novel, entitled *The Rector's Son* (1798), and a travelogue, *Narrative of a Three Years' Residence in France* (1810), Plumptre is not just an interesting narrator in her own right, but the quietly unobtrusive and, I believe, methodologically sympathetic figure behind Lichtenstein's work. In fine, her translation of his *Travels* reveals an affinity for a more scientifically based model, suggesting that Pratt's thesis of an end-of-century transformation of the travel narrative form is not necessarily true for all writers.

Born in 1760 to Anne and Dr. Robert Plumptre, President of Queen's College, Cambridge, Anne Plumptre received a good education and went on to excel in

1 H. Lichtenstein, *Travels in Southern Africa* (2 vols., London, 1812). 2 M. L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London, 1992), pp. 74-5.

languages, in addition to developing an interest in drama and creative writing. In fact her linguistic and theatrical interests were to coalesce during the years 1799 and 1800 when she was given the opportunity to translate several of Augustus Von Kotzebue's plays from German to English. Poet Laureate and director of the Imperial Theatre at Vienna, Kotzebue was a hugely popular dramatist in his day, and Plumptre seems to have revelled in her duties as translator, completing his *The Count of Burgundy*, *The Virgin of the Sun*, *The Force of Calumny* and *The Horse and the Widow*, all within this two year period. In addition, she translated, also from German, *Letters Written from Various Parts of the Continent*, a series of observations published in 1799, in which several travellers offered their views on continental Europe at a time of intense and significant change. She spent the period 1802 to 1805 living and conducting research in France, and making preparations for the first of her travel narratives.

But in the summer of 1814, Plumptre made a trip to Ireland, remaining there until the following year. The results of her visit were written up and eventually published in 1817, under the title *Narrative of a Residence in Ireland*. Compared with many another travelogue, Plumptre's *Narrative* is an accomplished piece, blending together issues as diverse as science and architecture, politics and mineralogy, while showing little or no sign of plagiarism throughout.<sup>3</sup> In addition the narrator not only appears well-informed and genuinely interested in the subject of her inquiry, but seems drawn towards the sort of methodological procedures outlined by Lichtenstein. Divided into two parts, with many subsections and chapters, the text is concerned with two separate journeys; the first to Dublin and Wicklow, with an extensive visit to Antrim and Down where the author has the opportunity to indulge her passion for mineralogical inquiry, followed by a second journey, which also takes in Dublin and Wicklow but which then fans out towards the south and south-west. Although the itinerary is interesting in itself, particularly her northern route, a region ignored by many travellers, the issues I wish to address concern how Plumptre actually engaged with the country, how her writings differ, if at all, from those of men, and the predominant political and ideological pressures under which she wrote.

In Sara Mills's analysis of women's travel writing, it is suggested that it is the various travellers who moved across landscapes as investigators and scouts who should be credited with much of the colonial enterprise. Mills's efforts to map differing responses to dominant discourses, her assessment of recent criticism which has conceptualised colonialism in masculine terms only, and her preparedness to accept that women's writing had its own discursive and interpretive parameters, makes her text an important stage in our understanding of the relationship between colonial discourse and travel writing. For example, while she acknowledges Mary Kingsley's efforts at self-deprecation in her *Travels in West Africa* of 1897, Mills also points to the masculine adventuring hero position

3 For an overview of the extent to which plagiarism distorted the writings of many travellers, see P.G. Adams, *Travelers and Travel Liars 1660-1800* (New York, 1980).

adopted by Kingsley as well as the alignment of the narrator with colonial politics generally.<sup>4</sup>

Although Plumptre's text, like Kingsley's, evokes the occasional note of humour, relating, for example, a comical moment in which she is invited to christen an island off the west coast of Ireland by local inhabitants, the text is more interestingly read within the context of colonialist discourse. More specifically, the narrative can be related to the Act of Union of 1800, to the attendant 'double-think'<sup>5</sup> that affected many English commentators who travelled to Ireland in its aftermath, and to the way in which the Union inferred a relationship of parity and equivalence between the two countries. This equivalence, however, could only be partially satisfied within the parameters of epistemological desire. Many writers were obsessed with comprehending Ireland, not least because they linked an understanding of the country with an opportunity for greater control and more effective management. For example, in Sir Richard Colt Hoare's *Journal of a Tour in Ireland, A.D. 1806*, it is suggested that 'the island of HIBERNIA still remains unvisited and unknown', a condition he attributed to 'the want of books, and living information'.<sup>6</sup> In the preface to Plumptre's travelogue, we are told that it was 'the very flattering reception with which the *Narrative of my Residence in France* was favoured' that prompted the current engagement with Ireland.<sup>7</sup> However, a selective quotation from Spenser's *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, printed on the title page, in which the country is evoked as a deterritorialised landscape, suggests that a post-Union interest in the commodification of Ireland may have had some part in that decision.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Plumptre continues:

If we are anxious to be introduced to a knowledge of the face of their country, to understand its natural advantages and disadvantages, its customs and manners, its civil and political state, that we may be enabled to compare them with our own, and judge between them and ourselves, – a much deeper interest will surely be excited when these injuries, these comparisons, relate to an object so near to us as a SISTER.<sup>9</sup>

Like Hoare, Plumptre reveals a desire for information about the country, not just because a Union has been effected, but because that Union's chances of success are read in terms of epistemological gains and advantages.

On the one hand, Ireland is there to be discovered, so to speak, and to be made available to a readership full of anticipation in the wake of this recent legislation. On the other hand, Ireland is a vehicle by which Plumptre can assert her own

4 S. Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London, 1991), pp. 153–74. 5 R. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600–1972* (London, 1988), p. 342. 6 Sir Richard Colt Hoare, *Journal of a Tour in Ireland, A.D. 1806* (London, 1807), ii. 7 A. Plumptre, *Narrative of a Residence in Ireland* (London, 1817). 8 'And yet it is a most beautiful and sweet country as any is under heaven, being stored throughout with many goodly rivers, replenished with all sorts of fish most abundantly, sprinkled with many very sweet islands and goodly lakes ...', *ibid.*, title-page. 9 *Ibid.*, preface.

independence and authority. By speaking about the political and cultural affairs of Ireland, in other words, she can present herself as a figure of decision, aligning herself with narrators as centrally placed, in canonical terms, as Edmund Spenser, while simultaneously presenting her own work as a contribution to that canon. Describing herself as the author of a well-received travelogue may reveal a pride and confidence in her ability to map the contours of Irish cultural and political life, but it also allows us to recognise something of the dominant manner and tone of the text itself. Bearing in mind that until 1857 women, on marriage, 'became civil minors and were not allowed to own property' helps establish the degree to which the text may be seen as radical in its assessments and strategies.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, it is possible to present Plumptre as a proto-feminist writer, since her attempts at political assessment, her observations, and her narrative style suggest an indifference to the contemporary discourses of femininity which affected, and frequently limited, the writings of many other women. As Mills has indicated, because women travel writers sought physical as well as intellectual freedom in which to prepare and then document their own experiences, they very often had to compromise themselves by incorporating into their texts gestures of ideological and discursive surrender. For example, Mills suggests that because the writer Fanny Parks wished to report on Thug militancy in India but realised that such a commentary and subject matter might be deemed 'unfeminine', she decided on a 'distancing strategy' that would help provide, and yet 'mediate the information' for her readers; in Park's case the best vehicle proved to be the 'letters from a friend' format.<sup>11</sup>

With Plumptre, however, things are rather different. There is no shirking or denying her responsibilities, and no efforts at self-effacement or denigration anywhere in the text. She confidently cites Richard Pococke and John Carr,<sup>12</sup> and by so doing not only establishes her familiarity with each of their texts, but manages a degree of almost institutional, certainly professional, compatibility between each of their works and her own. As to those aspects of women's writing which very often remain undeveloped entirely – like the adoption of a quasi-scientific voice – Plumptre has absolutely no reservations. Admittedly, the level of scientific assessment performed at the Giant's Causeway may come across as a little strained, certainly a little exhaustive, yet the description is not an isolated affair and, regarded in the context of the overall work, not at all unusual: 'The latter circumstance, in addition to the occurrence of basaltic fragments, in which a *sphere appears to be enveloped by a polyhedral figure*, suggested the hint for an opinion which I have been led to adopt – that a *compressible laminated sphere is the primitive figure* of each prismatic articulation.'<sup>13</sup> Supported by references to a paper originally published in the *Journal de Physique* and to an 'excellent paper in the Philosophical Transactions'<sup>14</sup> by Mr Gregory Watt, Plumptre's enthusiastic

<sup>10</sup> Mills, *Discourses*, p. 95. <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82. <sup>12</sup> Richard Pococke, *Tour in Ireland in 1752*, edited by G.T. Stokes (Dublin, 1801), and Sir John Carr, *The Stranger in Ireland* (London, 1806). <sup>13</sup> Plumptre, *Narrative*, p. 145, emphases in original. <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

assessments, backed up by an indefatigable belief in her own interpretive self-worth,<sup>15</sup> have a very credible legitimacy and worth.

When Cora Kaplan writes of the way in which women are linguistically defined as 'segregated speakers' for whom 'the suppression and restriction of their speech'<sup>16</sup> is an internalised position into which they have been inscribed by the forces of patriarchal discourse, she writes for the majority of women. However, when we look at the narratives of women travellers to Ireland and, occasionally, elsewhere we are immediately confronted by a sense of ideological violation. In seeking access to cultures and landscapes quite alien, and certainly quite incompatible with anything like that sphere of the domestic with which they had institutional familiarity, many women were challenging social proprieties and expectations far in excess of anything previously imagined. Not all the women who travelled, of course, were like Plumptre. Many of them had to sacrifice themselves and their opinions in order to comply with the rubric of femininity that pervaded the social and ideological landscapes of the time, while many more of them masked or underplayed their intelligence so as simply to have their work accepted, even though to do so carried its own problems and penalties.<sup>17</sup>

Anne Plumptre was however something of an exception to these gendered limitations, writing confidently and unselfconsciously on a range of topics distinctly 'unfeminine'. Indeed, Plumptre's feminist credentials are very clearly displayed at several junctures of her text. For example, during the course of her travels she not only informs us of how she has procured a letter of introduction to Lady Morgan, whom she describes as that 'amiable authoress',<sup>18</sup> but she also meets, while in Dublin, with Sir William Betham, brother of Matilda Betham, author of the *Biographical Dictionary of the Celebrated Women of Every Age and Country*, which was first published in 1804. In instances such as these, Plumptre takes the opportunity to emphasise not only the range of her reading and the extent of her social contacts, but also her alignment with progressive, in some instances explicitly feminist, figures. For example, in Plumptre's private life she also happened to be a friend of Helen Maria Williams, the well known democrat, noted for her sympathy for the revolutionaries in France, with connections to Fanny Burney and Wollstonecraft; what might be said to have drawn Williams and Plumptre together was not just their travelling and respective residences in France, but their commitment to the kind of revolutionary politics current in Britain as well as continental Europe from the 1790s onwards. In addition, it is tempting to make a connection between Plumptre and Elizabeth Inchbald, who

15 'I am not aware that any theory ... I have never observed ... I am inclined to think ... I would now take a comparative view ... the most familiar examples with which I am acquainted ...', *ibid.*, pp. 146–47. 16 C. Kaplan, *Sea Changes: Culture and Feminism* (London, 1988), p. 77. 17 Mills's assessment is worth some consideration in this regard: 'However, as I have already noted, women writers are caught in a double-bind situation: if they tend towards the discourses of femininity in their work they are regarded as trivial, and if they draw on the more adventure hero type narratives their work is questioned', *Discourses*, p. 118. 18 Plumptre, *Narrative*, p. 9.

also worked on Von Kotzebue's plays, specifically *Lovers Vows*, which Inchbald was asked to fit for the stage at Covent Garden in 1798. All of these women wrote about women's issues, of course, but perhaps just as noteworthy for our purposes, is how many of them complement Plumptre's own philosophical and literary development. More specifically, while feminist politics appears to be the one theme that binds all of their texts together, many of them seemed to regard travel writing as an additional focus in their lives. For instance, when we remember that Mary Wollstonecraft published her *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* in 1796, a text which was well received and went into several printings, we can begin to see how important was the travel narrative form for women of this period. Whether we might consider Wollstonecraft as laying the foundation, so to speak, for other women travellers of the time is debatable, but since Mary Williams also published a travel account, entitled *A Tour of Switzerland*, followed by Plumptre's travelogues of, firstly, France, and then Ireland, a tradition of politically enlightened female travel writing would appear to have been in the making for the last decade of the eighteenth, and the early years of the nineteenth centuries.

An interesting question to now pose is: in what manner did Plumptre deal with the subject of a female emancipatory politics while touring in a country recently in conflict with her own and, to what extent, and in what ways, did she deal with the politics and practicalities of colonialism? Sara Mills has suggested that many feminist analyses of women travellers tend to downplay any oppressive or unpalatable aspects to the women under discussion in favour of a critique that centres on their individuality or eccentricity.<sup>19</sup> Other lines of engagement have simply chosen to regard women as far too involved in their struggle against social convention to be interested in anything as alien as colonial policy or ethnicity and, of course, there are levels or degrees of interpretation for which analyses such as these have a certain applicability. But, in addition to delegitimising women as ideologically complex figures in their own right, there are further dangers with this type of assessment; dangers in seeking to see them as non-political and as uncontaminated by the experiences of so ethnographic an encounter. To be sure, problems existed for women which tended to make any ideological interpretations and pronouncements they might offer considerably more complex, like the pressures and parameters of a restrictive feminine discourse that foregrounded the individual over the racial, or the domestic and private over the public spheres, but women who were intelligent and privileged enough to travel (sometimes unchaperoned), as well as motivated enough to have their experiences later published, cannot be seen as uniformly apolitical.

For example, I suggested earlier that Plumptre's text was coloured by an Act of Parliament which constitutionally established the Union of Britain with Ireland. However, we must also remember that because that Act was brought about, in large part, by the revolutionary activities of the Irish themselves, its

<sup>19</sup> Mills, *Discourses*, p. 3.

reception and interpretation by successive English travellers to Ireland was seen in distinctly uncertain and ambivalent terms. In fine, if Ireland was to be afforded the narrative luxury of parity and accommodation, then that narrative would have to exist alongside another, one of widescale nondenominational insurrection. Consequently Ireland, increasingly regarded by specifically English writers as a politically ambivalent and unpredictable terrain, came to be a source of interpretive difficulty for many of its visitors. With Anne Plumptre the tendency to double-think may not be so pronounced as that of, say, Sir Richard Hoare, but a brief examination of some of the issues raised by Plumptre reveals a more complex and politically aware narrator than might be supposed.<sup>20</sup>

In her assessment of nineteenth-century women's travel narratives, Shirley Foster makes the point that 'the woman writer often represents foreigners sympathetically, as individuals with whom she tries to identify rather than as symbols of an alien "otherness"'. The woman traveller/writer, she continues, 'blurs the demarcation between "them" and "us" and may be less assertive than her male equivalent'.<sup>21</sup> Sara Mills, while keen to stress the power differential that existed between women travellers and their 'subjects', gives qualified support to this thesis by suggesting that because the assessment of women and colonised natives was similar, ('simple, childlike, deceitful, passive, not capable of intellectual thought, and more closely allied to nature'), the representational efforts of some women were more sympathetic than those of men.<sup>22</sup> While this may well be the case for the texts analysed by Foster and Mills, it is not wholly the case with Anne Plumptre. For example, if we examine Plumptre's experiences at the Giant's Causeway we will find her description of the native Irish to be no less explicit than that to be found in male texts, and no less sure in its pronouncements:

But the troop of guides by which the Causeway is infested are always upon the look-out to collect every thing they can find worth seizing ... Notwithstanding my peremptory rejection of their services, a whole flock of these cormorants would continue to follow me about the whole day, and then made their impertinent intrusion a pretence for wanting some remuneration at the conclusion.<sup>23</sup>

Dehumanising the Irish and translating them into an undifferentiated mass whose intrusive presence is one to be painfully endured by the visitor to Ireland is a central theme here. The Irish, Plumptre seems to suggest, are a hindrance and an obstacle to leisured and intellectual activity, their presence best seen as a frightening plurality of native and ethnic difference:

<sup>20</sup> For an assessment of the difficulties that faced figures such as Hoare, see my 'Stranger in Ireland: The Problematics of the Post-Union Travelogue' in *Mosaic*, 28, 1 (March, 1995).

<sup>21</sup> S. Foster, *Across New Worlds: Nineteenth-Century Women Travellers and their Writings* (London, 1990), p. 24. <sup>22</sup> Mills, *Discourses*, p. 92. <sup>23</sup> Plumptre, *Narrative*, p. 142.

Scarcely can a carriage stop at a shop, or a well-dressed person enter one, but the door is immediately surrounded by a number of these miserable-looking beings [beggars], whose clamours and importunities exceed those of the English beggars in equal proportion with the wretchedness of their appearance ... to them working and being well kept, is greater misery than their rags and wretchedness, while indulged in their beloved indolence.<sup>24</sup>

What the language also establishes is the degree of representational compatibility that exists between Plumptre and her male colleagues, showing, in particular, how unconstrained is the narrator by the discourses of femininity that traditionally bound women to specific areas of assessment and interpretation. Plumptre's evocation of the Irish in these lines is no different in sentiment from a dozen other male texts, in that the same enunciations of power seek to represent the Irish as an uninvited and unwelcome presence.

However, Plumptre's choice of language also shows her to be influenced by the quite specific issues of unionism, or at least by the sorts of quite radical and problematic frames of reference which unionism inspired. For example, when, towards the close of the text, she suggests, 'It cannot be denied but that the state of the country calls loudly for some amelioration – that the situation of the inferior classes among the Irish is lamentable, is affecting',<sup>25</sup> and writes that 'the Irish are a kind and warm-hearted people, extremely disposed to show kindness themselves, and no less feelingly alive to receiving it from others',<sup>26</sup> she shows a level of tolerance and, particularly, in the latter instance, a level of parity between herself and the Irish. In other words, for Plumptre Ireland can be the 'SISTER'<sup>27</sup> island, with a relationship to England which is important, if at times a little unfortunate and unpleasant. It can also be a source of great interest to her, provoking some serious reflection and, on one occasion, even a vigorous defence of it against one of its better known critics:

The writers of his time, then, taking their cue from the court, vilified Ireland in every way; and Mr Hume, at all times too much disposed to abandon his better judgement when personal or national prejudices interposed, has, without considering the inconsistency of what he says, suffered the impartiality of the historian to be overpowered by their designed and wilful misrepresentations.<sup>28</sup>

However, Plumptre's generosity towards the Irish is ambivalent throughout, and one finds the country aligned with a deeply conflictual model of representation: a model that cites their basic humanity, their poverty, or their congeniality one moment, and their barbarous and marginalised state the next. Ireland has been linked in union to Britain, Plumptre's narrative would appear to suggest, but that Union looks like an extremely fragile one indeed:

24 *Ibid.*, p. 44.    25 *Ibid.*, p. 338.    26 *Ibid.*, p. 337.    27 *Ibid.*, preface.    28 *Ibid.*, pp. 334–5.

The heads of the rebellion were crushed, but venom still rankled in the hearts. If in later times these things have been partially corrected; if by degrees something of the jealousy and asperity with which this rival sister was regarded has abated, too much has still been retained: till that be entirely eradicated, Ireland can never be other than a diseased limb of the body politic.<sup>29</sup>

In the course of reading Plumptre's *Narrative*, then, one encounters a rather curious blend of ideas. As I have indicated, Plumptre was interested in mineralogy and politics, historiography and architecture, and she wanted to believe that she was not only travelling into sometimes strange and dangerous territory, but that she was on a mission of discovery also. At Glenarm, for example, she tells of the following experience:

As if everything connected with the shores of this extraordinary corner of the globe was of a gigantic nature, I found marine plants of a size so enormous that everything of the kind, which before I had thought vast, were dwindled into pigmies;— they were besides of a totally different kind from any I had seen before. Part of the principal stem of a leaf which I picked up and carried away with me, but afterwards unfortunately lost, measured nearly four inches in circumference. I was not more fortunate with two immense leaves which I brought away, one measuring above three yards in length.<sup>30</sup>

But these acts of discovery, it seems to me, interesting or humorous though they may be, are a means of avoiding other realities also. Without being ungenerous to Plumptre, one of the sensations her text provokes is that she sometimes uses this older, more scholarly, Linnean tradition as a means of avoiding many of the specificities of recent Irish unrest: one type of language, in other words, used as a means of repressing other histories and other voices.

Although the concept of 'home' is usually regarded as signalling a realm of domestic fixity and permanence, Alison Blunt suggests that for women travellers, in particular, home is 'constructed in an arbitrary, retrospective way while the traveller is away, and, by necessity ... changes on the traveller's return'.<sup>31</sup> Between Britain and Ireland, the concept of home has always had a particular relevance, although it has frequently indicated confusion and loss as much as notions of ownership and possession. While many post-Union travellers were content to relate to Ireland in the context of epistemological realignment, others desired a state of renewal, unsullied by past memories of conflict and racial antagonisms. Anne Plumptre, trying desperately to avoid a confrontation with the past, found herself presenting Ireland's incorporation within the Union as a naturally occurring political reality, making Ireland home — the title of her text, *Residence*, suggests at much — while at the same time exoticising the country for the purpose

29 *Ibid.*, p. 336. 30 *Ibid.*, p. 107. 31 A. Blunt, *Travel, Gender, and Imperialism: Mary Kingsley and West Africa* (London, 1994), p. 114.

of professional satisfaction, even if such claims occasionally rang hollow and untrue. Unfortunately, trying to get such a balancing act right, trying to make Ireland sufficiently foreign to justify being there in the first place, but sufficiently amenable so as to complement the prevailing ideologies of the time, could make, as the following quotation suggests, for very uncomfortable writing indeed. Like some of her colleagues, Plumtre attempted to disengage from Ireland, to purify herself in the interests of ideological propriety, but occasionally the past, and past memories, would come back to trouble her:

At Tipperary I first heard of the disturbances which just now commenced in these parts; only two nights before the Mail had been attacked on the other side of Cashel by a very desperate gang, and a soldier had been killed ... the object was not so much to get money, as arms ... I came to Cashel to see the celebrated rock and the venerable remains of antiquity with which it is crowned, but I could now see nothing except the increased sufferings which the country had prepared for itself; I became indifferent to everything else, and I thought only of quitting scenes which seemed surrounded with nothing but gloom and horror. I saw the rock and the ruins at a little distance, as I entered the town, and as I quitted it they presented but new ideas of devastation, and I passed on. Yet for one moment I felt an impulse to stop the carriage and ascend the rock. The rain had ceased in the night, the morning was fine, the sun was shining upon the mouldering towers and turrets, and they assumed an air of magnificence which methought ought not to be passed by. The next moment, however, the idea that though the heavens were bright and clear, all was gloom in the moral atmosphere, came too forcibly over my mind to be repelled, and I pursued my route. At present my feelings upon this occasion seem strange to me, they seemed so in a few hours after, but at the moment they were irresistible. I have often asked myself since, why I did not see the ruins of Cashel, – I could never answer the question satisfactorily.<sup>32</sup>

Setting Ireland into a framework by which it may be read as a place of racially inferior inhabitants, or effete antiquarianism, then, is not particular to male narrators, nor particularly unique come to that. Anne Plumtre's strategies may differ from many others because they are less ethnologically charged, or because they are born of a somewhat more liberal post-Union paradigm, and yet her text can converge with a quite radical form of engagement also.<sup>33</sup> She fitted in with many other writers of post-Union Ireland in that she inherited a certain unease about her relationship to the country, which was rendered all the more prob-

<sup>32</sup> Plumtre, *Narrative*, pp. 310–2. <sup>33</sup> Nicola Watson's assessment of Helen Maria Williams provides an interesting gloss to Plumtre: 'Later friends included Anne Plumtre, Amelia Opie, the Wordsworths, and Lady Sydney Morgan, all known for their "Jacobinical" opinions at one time or another', in Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel, 1790–1825* (Oxford, 1994), p. 29.

lematic in her case because of her natural sympathies with revolutionary politics. Above all else, though, the act of writing seemed a very affirmation of self for Anne Plumptre: a means of self-validation in the normal manner of things, but a gesture of revolutionary, specifically feminist, activity also. Aligning herself with a series of complex and frequently incompatible discourses, her writing showed a remarkably dense philosophical and literary inheritance, even if like Von Kotzebue, the dramatist who inspired her to a period of intense intellectual activity at the beginning of the nineteenth century, she has slipped quietly from our view.<sup>34</sup>

**34** The institutional amnesia concerning Plumptre is all the more unjust when we consider that the originally unpublished tour-notes by Plumptre's brother, James Plumptre, written in the 1790s when he was travelling around Britain, were recently published. See James Plumptre, *The Journals of a Tourist in the 1790s*, edited by Ian Ousby (London, 1992).