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Politics, Paratexts, and Paternalism in *Castle Rackrent*

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<1>In a letter to Sophy Ruxton, Maria Edgeworth describes the drafted pages of her first written work, *Letters for Literary Ladies*, and notes, “They are now disfigured by all manner of crooked marks of Papa’s critical indignation, besides various abusive margin notes” (qtd. Kirkpatrick, Introduction xxv). Throughout Edgeworth’s literary career, her father spent a great deal of time making such “crooked marks” and “abusive margin notes” as he edited and reworked her writing. Whether Maria Edgeworth happily accepted her father’s editorializing or not, it is certain that he played a major role in shaping her literary career through extensive comments and notes. It is no wonder, then, that the Editor who appears in Edgeworth’s 1800 novel *Castle Rackrent* is assertive, judgmental, and condescending, not just to the reader, but also to the characters within the text. Edgeworth’s own relationship with an editor was complex, and scholars have long debated the degree of agency that Edgeworth was afforded in her literary works.

<2>*Castle Rackrent* explores the role of the editor; however, it is primarily a political novel that simultaneously emphasizes the corruption of eighteenth-century Irish gentry and the problems inflicted by British imperialism in Ireland by presenting the history of the titular castle’s subpar – and, at times, – terrible landlords. While the content of the novel is interesting in terms of its historical context and characterization of various landlords who devolve into distorted caricatures, this essay focuses on the novel’s use of paratextual elements and its competing narrators, both of which reveal the tensions between the British Empire and Ireland. This essay demonstrates that the imperial tensions in *Castle Rackrent* reveal Edgeworth’s gendered concerns, too. The aggressive and condescending Editor becomes representative of Edgeworth’s own editorializing father, who heavily criticized her writing. As such, *Castle Rackrent* explores

political and patriarchal anxieties in the nineteenth century and defines these anxieties in terms of paternalism.

<3>This essay employs Gérard Genette's term "paratext" to describe the fictional Editor's explanatory materials that supplement Thady's narrative, namely the preface, advertisement, glossary, and footnotes. According to Genette, paratexts are the accompanying productions which serve "to *make present*, to ensure the text's presence in the world, its 'reception' and consumption in the form...of a book" (1). Paratexts are the elements which exist in the liminal space between the text and the outside world and shape interpretations of the work. Certainly, *Castle Rackrent* would carry a different meaning if its paratextual materials were to be removed, as many of the novel's central themes and anxieties emerge from the tension between the paratexts and the text.

<4>In *Castle Rackrent*, the reader meets two competing narrators: Thady Quirk and the unnamed male Editor, a character in his own right who embodies the prejudices and xenophobia of a stereotypical Englishman. The juxtaposition of these two voices causes Thady – and, by extent, the average Irishman – to seem inferior and less civilized than the average Englishman. Susan Glover has demonstrated the tension that arises between the two narrative voices and how this duality leads to confusion within the novel:

In *Castle Rackrent*, we have a divided title, a divided subtitle, a divided editorial frame, a divided central narrative, two narrators, two families each with two names (O'Shaughlin-Rackrent and M'Quirk-Quirk), two national voices, two religions, and two narrative time frames. It is this struggle for dominance between two voices which leads to both the sense of contra-diction – of speaking-against – in the text, and the consequent sense of an absent center. (308)

These divisions, dichotomies, and dualities that Glover identifies within the text transform the novel into a transhistorical and transnational work. The novel is about Ireland but also about England. It is a specific history of the Rackrents but also a broader history of rackrenting. It is about Ireland's past but also its present and future as the Act of Union promises unity while also threatening conflict. This essay builds upon Glover's concept of "contra-diction" in *Castle Rackrent* and explores how colonial and gendered anxieties emerge in the tension between Thady and the Editor.

<5>*Castle Rackrent* is described on its title page as being an Hiberian tale which takes place in eighteenth-century Ireland. It is Edgeworth's first published novel

which she wrote in the midst of political tensions between England and Ireland, and it illustrates the decline of the Irish landed gentry and their inherent corruption. The historical background which informs the novel has been inseparable from scholarly considerations. As a novel written in the midst of the Irish Rebellion and on the eve of the Act of Union which united Ireland and England by dissolving the Irish Parliament, it has largely been viewed along the lines of allegory – as though the descent of the Rackrent family was indicative of what would happen on a larger scale. Published in 1800, *Castle Rackrent* does appear on the literary scene in a moment of political strife as tensions between Ireland and England were exponentially growing. Although the novel was written predominantly in the mid-1790s before the Irish Rebellion took place, it is certainly informed by the same political struggles, as Kathryn Kirkpatrick has noted. “To say that *Castle Rackrent* was not ‘occasioned’ by the events of 1798 is thus to formulate the issue of writer and context in a falsely dichotomized way,” writes Kirkpatrick (“Putting Down the Rebellion” 77). Brian Hollingworth also asserts the political power of the novel, explaining that, “The Notes and the Glossary, therefore, also act to promote *Castle Rackrent* from the position of fictional narrative to that of sociological document – a piece of data suitable for Lunar discourse. Thady’s slice of Hiberno-English is now presented as more than a story” (102). Essentially, the novel functions as more than just a fictional account of an Irish family’s downfall – it presents a realistic depiction of life in Ireland and the sociopolitical factors that impact it.

<6>As a member of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy, Maria Edgeworth was keenly aware of the social, political, and legal tensions mounting throughout Ireland at the end of the eighteenth century. Born in 1768, Maria Edgeworth moved along with her family to her father’s Irish estate in Edgeworthstown in 1782, where her father served as a present Protestant landlord for the nearby Irish peasantry. His active role as a landlord contrasted with the widespread practice of absenteeism, where the owner of the land would delegate it to someone else, who would delegate it to someone else, and so on, resulting in exorbitant rent prices and the owner being unaware of his renters’ needs or concerns. This idea, also called “rack-renting,” is central to the novel, as its title makes clear. Kirkpatrick succinctly describes the consequences of this absenteeism and rack-renting:

Because the middleman was responsible for nothing more than providing the highest sum to his employer and himself by whatever means available, he represented the worst excesses of agrarian capitalism. Yet the system, in the long run, was not even particularly profitable. It led to overworked land, haphazard farming practices, and run-down cottages. (Introduction xv)

Edgeworth largely criticized absenteeism in *Castle Rackrent* as well as in her later novels *Ennui* and *The Absentee*. The Edgeworths were atypical members of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy, and their time in Ireland among its natives informed Maria Edgeworth's writing. When the Edgeworths arrived in Edgeworthstown in 1782, Richard Lovell made large changes to the estate management to improve the quality of life for his tenants and remove the excesses common to rack-renting. Although Edgeworth criticizes the average Anglo-Irish landlord with *Castle Rackrent*, she did not want Anglo-Irish stewardship to come to an end. While she supported Catholic emancipation and parliamentary reform, she imagined them in tandem with improved stewardship, along the lines of what her family was doing at Edgeworthstown. As Marilyn Butler explains in her introduction to *Castle Rackrent*, "the viewpoint [Edgeworth] wanted to adopt was English and forward-thinking" (306). Alex Howard similarly explains, "Edgeworth's vision for a United Kingdom is moderate: like her father, she strongly favored Catholic emancipation and parliamentary reform, but she also imagined these improvements in the context of continued Anglo-Irish stewardship of the land" (316). Edgeworth did not want to separate Ireland and England but desired to reconcile tensions by progressing forward.

<7>Central to *Castle Rackrent* is the question of authenticity and legitimacy. By drawing on her personal knowledge of Ireland and its difficulties in the late eighteenth century, Edgeworth was able to construct a novel that depicted a realistic – though not *real* – account of a particular Irish family and their displacement. Edgeworth specifically created a feeling of authenticity through the character of Thady Quirk. Thady, a former servant for the Rackrent family in Ireland, tells the story of the four final generations of Rackrent heirs in this novel. He recounts the thriftless Sir Patrick, the litigating Sir Murtagh, the abusive and gambling Sir Kit, and the beloved final owner Sir Condy. Through the history which Thady provides of these four individuals, he describes the decline of a single landowning Irish family, and this decline is representative of what happened on a larger scale throughout Ireland in the eighteenth century – hence the popular allegorical reading of the novel. Once Sir Condy could no longer afford the debts he amassed, he is forced to sign the Rackrent estate to his attorney and Thady's son, Jason. Jason becomes the new owner of the estate, and Thady, who was loyal to the Rackrent family, is unable to reconcile with what he sees as the cruel acts of his son – or so Thady wants the reader to think. As the central narrator of the novel, Thady has been a point of scholarly focus. His role in the text, though, is widely contested. Some scholars view him as a transparent and loyal servant of the Rackrent family, while others view his character as more complex. Coilin Owens explains,

Many readers have considered Thady as an uncritical servant of social and economic orders. But Maria Edgeworth's personal contact with the Irish people did not leave her with any misapprehensions about the naiveté of members of his class, skilled as they were in the cultivation of a servility appropriate to their status as minions of colonial order. (71)

James Newcomer warns that, "we should at least be skeptical of the ingenuousness and the loyalty that appear to be Thady's characteristics" (79). Michael Neill poignantly describes Thady's role in the text as a "masquerade of servility," thereby suggesting that Thady dons the persona of a faithful servant in order to obtain autonomy and control over the narrative (78). He argues that Thady is "a man whose endless protestations to 'the family' are repeatedly undercut by evidence of the crafty shifts with which he helps to advance the interests of his own family, and by the 'whyning tune' that reveals 'poor' Thady's resentments against the landlord class" (78). These perspectives are too restrictive, though. Thady can be both a loyal servant of the Rackrent family and a supporter of his son's ascent; he can both support the Rackrent family and criticize their faults. He does not need to be reduced to either a caricature of Irish peasantry or a conniving, power-hungry man.

<8>As scholars such as Mary Jean Corbett have noted, Edgeworth modelled her narrator Thady off of her family's estate steward John Langan (Corbett 390). Although there are some problematics to Thady's character as Susan B. Egenoff has argued, likening Edgeworth's use of the Irish vernacular to a form of blackface, it does add a level of authenticity to the text, especially in the eyes of Edgeworth's average English reader, who may be unfamiliar with Irish culture and modes of speech. The fact that Edgeworth would imitate John Langan and employ his mode of speech further aligns her with the character of Thady. Edgeworth essentially transformed into this character, donning his identity and voice much like how she did when mimicking Langan. This identification of Edgeworth with Thady further supports the idea that the tension between him and the Editor is representative of a similar tension between Edgeworth and her father. Edgeworth, like Thady, tries to tell her story and is repeatedly interjected and silenced by her father's editorializing. While she struggles to obtain autonomy in her other writings, which her father actively edits and revises, she is able to exile *Castle Rackrent's* fictional Editor to the novel's periphery. Kirkpatrick supports this idea that the Editor in *Castle Rackrent* is representative of Richard Lovell Edgeworth. Although, as she notes, he did not play a major role in shaping the novel as Edgeworth wrote it, "it is as editor that Richard Edgeworth shows up in *Castle Rackrent*" (Introduction xxv). He may not play the role of the novel's editor, but Edgeworth does cast him as the Editor within the novel's paratexts. She restricts his voice, though, to separate paratextual

apparatuses, including the preface, glossary, and footnotes. He still presents his ideas and tries to speak over Thady, but the reader can ignore him, if they so choose.

<9>The ambiguity surrounding Thady's motives and beliefs is a central feature of the novel, one which is caused by the friction between Thady and the Editor. The novel takes the form of a framed dialogic narrative that is presented as a nonfictional account. At the novel's center is Thady's telling of the Rackrent family. He appears to be speaking directly to the reader throughout the text, and he uses an informal and familiar tone. He employs numerous Irish idioms, which contribute both to the novel's informal tone and authenticity as a narrative told by a real Irishman. Granted, Thady *is* a fictional character. However, the use of Irish colloquialisms in the text makes the reader feel as though they are listening to an account from a genuine Irishman.

<10>Thady demonstrates the complexity of his character and calls for the reader to question his person from the novel's initial pages. He begins by telling the reader, "My name is Thady Quirk, though in the family I have always been known by no other than '*honest Thady*'" (CR 7). This claim seems innocent enough; Thady seems to be sharing with the reader his name and his association with the family. Ironically, this emphasis on his honesty calls into question his reliability as a narrator. The assertion of honesty ironically throws doubt onto whether Thady is being truthful and accurate in his account. However, Thady's use of informal language makes the text seem conversational. We want to like Thady because he seems friendly and relatable. He seems to be vulnerable and honest. He continues his introduction to the reader by saying, "...to look at me, you would hardly think 'poor Thady' was the father of the attorney Quirk; he is a high gentleman, and never minds what poor Thady says, and having better than 1500 a-year landed estate, looks down upon honest Thady, but I wash my hands of his doings" (CR 8). This sentence reveals a relationship between Thady and his addressee. The person to whom he is speaking knows him – or, at least, knows *of* him. The addressee is familiar with the son, the attorney Quirk. This preexisting knowledge and relationship lend to Thady's informality and allows the reader to relax. However, it seems like Thady may *want* the reader to let down their guard, so to speak. He wants us to find him trustworthy, and he repeatedly asserts the authenticity of the history he provides.

<11>This skepticism may seem unfounded, but *Castle Rackrent* invites its reader to question Thady's history and intelligence. The inclusion of an intradiegetic Editor who embodies the xenophobia of the British Empire repeatedly undermines Thady's authority. Though the first chapter of the text opens with Thady's voice, the novel itself begins with the voice of the Editor. The Editor explains to the reader that they

will encounter in the pages of *Castle Rackrent* which follow the preface the words of an Irishman who recounts an Irish history. He poignantly notes Thady's use of Irish colloquialism and condescends its use, writing, "For the information of the *ignorant* English reader a few notes have been subjoined by the editor, and he had it once in contemplation to translate the language of Thady into plain English; but Thady's idiom is incapable of translation" (CR 4). With this passage, the Editor explains why he *must* be present in the text in the form of a preface, a glossary, and footnotes. It is necessary, according to the Editor, that the text has a third party present to help mediate and translate Thady's story to the *English* reader in a language that can be understood – in other words, the Editor asserts that the Irish dialect of English is an entirely other language, one that is impossible for the standard Englishman to understand without the guiding voice of a fellow Englishman. In presenting this purpose, the Editor undercuts Thady's authority over the text by making him appear intellectually inferior. Gary Kelly summarizes the effects of language differences in the text: "There is an ironic distance between Thady and the reader, and his substandard English is the index to a variety of ways in which the reader is not meant to share his point of view" (75). It is the Editor who causes this distancing between Thady and the reader by repeatedly emphasizing Thady's differences, not just in language, but also in person. As an Irishman, Thady is intrinsically different than the Editor and, by extension, the reader, whom the Editor assumes is also English. Kowaleski-Wallace explains this effect that the tension between Thady and the Editor has on the text: "But if the glossary contextualizes Thady's narrative authority, it also allows for the representation of the editor's own authority, an authority that only assumes significance in opposition to Thady's limited viewpoint" (158).

<12>Edgeworth further creates distance between Thady and the reader through choices that she made in writing the novel, namely the emphasis that both she and the Editor place on *Castle Rackrent* taking place in the past. In the preface, the Editor "hopes his readers will observe, that these are 'tales of other times;' that the manners depicted in the following pages are not those of the present age" (CR 4). Some of the Editor's glossary entries similarly emphasize the novel taking place in a time now passed, using temporally-indicative phrases such as "It was formerly common" (CR 104), "Formerly it was customary" (CR 108), and "...this custom has long since been banished" (CR 111). This emphasis on *Castle Rackrent's* events occurring in the past creates a temporal distance between the reader and the novel, thereby causing a greater disconnection between Thady and his account of the Rackrent family. This temporalization makes it seem as though the events of the novel took place in a primitive and uncivilized past – a time which no longer exists for Edgeworth's readers. By making it seem as though the Rackrent family hails from

long ago, the Editor's assertion encourages the reader to distance themselves from Thady. However, the title page to the novel states that Thady's narrative takes place in the eighteenth century. With the novel's original publication being in 1800, the Editor's assertion that the novel tells "tales of other times" appears dubious.

<13>Edgeworth's use of temporal and geographical distancing is suggestive of the Gothic genre and places social and cultural anxieties at the forefront of the novel. Gothic romances that precede *Castle Rackrent*, such as Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* and Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, employ similar acts of distancing to aid the reader's suspension of disbelief. Though these Gothic romances are rife with violence and other horrifying elements that seem impossible at times, the reader is able to believe them because they are presented as being from another time and another place. *Castle Rackrent*'s use of temporal and geographical distancing, though, does not serve the same purpose as its Gothic predecessors' use. The inconsistency between the dates present in the novel and the editor's claim that the Rackrents are from a time long ago contributes to the novel's satirical function. Edgeworth subverts the reader's expectation of the Gothic genre and shows how the social and cultural anxieties central to *Castle Rackrent* are unavoidable and present. Thady's tale is recent, and it is close to Edgeworth's contemporary English readers.

<14>Edgeworth plays with genre and form in her other writings, too. Her children's stories published in *The Parent's Assistant*, *Early Lessons*, and *Moral Tales for Young People* all closely adhere to the generic norms of the moral tale, a common children's literary genre in the late eighteenth century. In *Belinda*, she directly challenges readers' preconceived notions of the novel form to defend her writing and align with with more moralistic and didactic texts. In the advertisement which precedes *Belinda*, Edgeworth specifically calls the text "a Moral Tale – the author not wishing to acknowledge a Novel" (B 3). This advertisement asks the reader to keep the generic conventions of the moral tale in mind as they approach the work and to avoid the temptation to think of it merely as a "novel." Edgeworth's use of generic expectations in these other written works demonstrates her literary awareness and suggests that her use of Gothic features in *Castle Rackrent* is deliberate. It lends to a tension, not just between Thady and the Editor, but also between generic expectations and the novel's subversion of them, thereby contributing to the "contra-dictory" nature of *Castle Rackrent*.

<15>Political satire also appears in *Castle Rackrent* in the tension between Thady and the Editor who both narrate the text. This tension appears almost immediately through the interaction between Thady's narrative and the Editor's glossary entries. Thady begins the text by dating his story "*Monday Morning*" (CR 7). The Editor

provides a glossary entry for this innocuous phrase that is extensive at 137 words in length and condescending in tone. He writes:

Thady begins his *Memoirs of the Rackrent Family* by dating *Monday morning*, because no great undertaking can be auspiciously commenced in Ireland on any morning but *Monday morning*. . . All the immediate days between the making of such speeches and the ensuing Monday are wasted, and when Monday morning comes it is ten to one that the business is deferred to *the next* Monday morning. (CR 99)

This glossary note immediately undermines Thady's position of authority in the novel and places him hierarchically beneath the Editor by making it seem as though the Editor is coming from a position of intellectual superiority. The Editor emphasizes the need which English readers will have for this extensive and condescending glossary of Irish colloquialisms. He notes that "many of the terms and idiomatic phrases with which [the novel] abounds could not be intelligible to the English reader without farther explanation" (CR 98). The Editor thus sees the Irish and English as radically different – perhaps even incompatible. The subsequent entries in the editorial glossary are similarly patronizing and lengthy and contribute to the editor's metaphorical subjugation of Thady. The Editor thus becomes representative of the English sense of inherent superiority over other nations and people, and Thady becomes representative of the Irish lower classes.

<16>The tension between Thady and the Editor which the reader witnesses appears in the text when the framed dialogic forms and their narrators collide and compete with one another. The Editor in *Castle Rackrent* effectively subjugates Thady in his own narrative through his use of paratextual elements, specifically the preface and glossary. The Editor then becomes representative of English superiority over the Irish. He claims authority over the novel and interrupts Thady repeatedly to illustrate his supposed inferiority to the reader. The novel thus transforms from a fictional history of a landowning Irish family to a political satire which allows Edgeworth to illustrate the absurdity of the political tension between the Irish and English in the late eighteenth century. Through the interaction of form and character, *Castle Rackrent* illustrates the English belief in their own inherent superiority over other nations and the political instability of eighteenth-century Ireland.

<17>Many of Edgeworth's texts feature similar tensions between competing narrative voices and attest to Edgeworth's struggle to assert her own authorial voice. For instance, her 1801 novel *Belinda* features an inherent tension between the titular Belinda and the imposing Lady Delacour. Dannie Leigh Chalk and Linda Bree have

noted how Lady Delacour overtakes the novel and appears to be its central character more so than Belinda. Chalk describes Lady Delacour as the only dynamic female character in the novel. Bree similarly notes how “Lady Delacour dominates every scene in which she appears, with her wit, her cynicism, her self-awareness and self-loathing, her liveliness and her mercurial temperament” (xix). Belinda is repeatedly silenced and overshadowed by Lady Delacour, who speaks on her behalf and often damages Belinda’s reputation in the process. Her treatment of Belinda, though improved by the novel’s end, is much like that of *Castle Rackrent*’s Editor in relation to Thady.

<18>This tension between narrative voices is not limited to Edgeworth’s fictional writing. There is also a struggle between her and her father in their co-authored three-volume pedagogical manual *Practical Education*. In this theoretical work which draws on pedagogical ideas of the late eighteenth century and the Edgeworths’ own educational approaches, it is unclear when Maria is speaking. Their voices merge together, thereby erasing Maria’s authority in the text. As such, Maria Edgeworth disappears in the pages of *Practical Education* as her person is subsumed by her father. This is not to say that Maria Edgeworth has no sense of power or autonomy in her writing, though. However, the frequent tensions between competing narrative voices in her published works attest to her struggle to assert her ideas, free from the editorializing of her family.

<19>When placed in the context of Edgeworth’s other writings, the tension that emerges in *Castle Rackrent* between Thady and the Editor has implications beyond Anglo-Irish colonial anxieties. It also is representative of – on a microcosmic scale – the tension that emerges between Maria Edgeworth and her father Richard Lovell Edgeworth in her written works. Richard Lovell extensively edited and revised Maria’s written works, including her children’s stories and novels, as Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace and Mitzi Myers have noted. Kowaleski-Wallace refers to Edgeworth as a “daddy’s girl,” who felt that without her father she would “sink into that nothing from which he raised me” (11). Myers challenges this typified consideration of Maria Edgeworth’s literary relationship with her father:

The reductive mythology of Maria Edgeworth as daddy’s good little girl, docilely ventriloquizing paternal ideas, joyfully complicitous in the patriarchal ideology that oppresses her, needs examination at every level, for Richard Lovell Edgeworth’s influence over his daughter still thematizes discussion. (105)

That *Castle Rackrent* is Maria Edgeworth's first novel, written without the guidance of her father, is revealing and brings a new perspective to the conflict between Thady and the Editor. Kirkpatrick explains that "Edgeworth's work was thus marked by the ebb and flow of patriarchal control during this period, both within and outside her household" ("Putting Down the Rebellion" 78). Patriarchal control and surveillance defined much of Edgeworth's life, and these constraints liken her to Thady, who was similarly subjugated and surveilled by the ruling class throughout *Castle Rackrent*. Edgeworth aligns the subjugated position of women in patriarchal society with the position of the colonized across the British Empire. Susan Meyer argues in *Imperialism at Home* that nineteenth-century women authors in patriarchal Britain often liken the position of women to that of the colonized, usually a non-white individual. Such a comparison forms a sense of camaraderie between British women and colonized subjects and asserts the lack of autonomy granted to anyone who is not a white British man.

<20>With the Act of Union, Britain sought to unite with the nearby colonized Ireland, but it was ineffective as an inclusive act of legislation. While Irish people were included in this newly united Parliament, Irish Catholics were excluded until emancipation in 1829. Limitations such as this one imposed by the British Empire are indicative of paternalism, a mode of governance in which the autonomy of the colonized or ruled is limited for the greater moral and social good of the state. It is supported by the concept of social paternalism, which asserts that "providence, not the will of a socially-constructed government, ordered the world, setting men above women, parents above children, and masters above servants" (Nash 13). Essentially, the hierarchical structures of the world, whether determined by gender, race, or nationality, are inherent – not man-made constructs. The term "paternalism" has clear connections to patriarchy, with its Latin root *pater* meaning "father." As such, a parallel between the treatment of the colonized and of women emerges, specifically in *Castle Rackrent*. In this novel, Edgeworth reveals similarities between the subjugation of the colonized in a paternalist society and of women in a patriarchal society.

<21>The treatment of female characters in the novel reveals this paternalism/patriarchy parallel. Kirkpatrick notes the peculiarity of how Edgeworth treats her female characters in the novel, writing, "That the Rackrent wives should prosper in the face of their husbands' ruin creates an interesting contradiction for the project which Maria Edgeworth had set herself in the first part of the novel" (Introduction xix). Because the novel centers around the final four Rackrent heirs, it relies on a system of primogeniture, which keeps landownership in the hands of men and rejects female control. However, the Rackrent women seem to have more power

in the text than their respective husbands. While each Rackrent heir experiences hardship and tragedy, the women are able to escape relatively unharmed. The paternalist/patriarchal system may keep power out of the hands of the lower classes and women in *Castle Rackrent*, but it also protects them from the failures of those in control.

<22>Paternalism manifests in *Castle Rackrent* on various levels, defining the relationship between the aristocracy and the lower classes, between the English and the Irish, and between husbands and their wives. Edgeworth's novel criticizes the legitimacy of such hierarchical structures and demonstrates their inadequacies through its ironic reversals of power. By the novel's end, the lower classes have control over the Rackrent estate through Jason's usurpation – the aristocracy does not. Thady controls the details of the Irish history – the English Editor, try as he may, does not. Further, Maria Edgeworth maintains authorial control over her novel – her father does not. At every turn, Edgeworth undermines the legitimacy of paternalism. She is not alone in this literary tradition, either. The anxieties central to *Castle Rackrent* appear in other nineteenth-century novels by women writers, such as Lady Caroline Lamb's *Glenarvon* (1816) and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). *Glenarvon* takes place in the midst of the 1798 Irish Rebellion and considers Irish identity in the wake of British imperialism, much like *Castle Rackrent*. Lamb uses this Irish backdrop to challenge paternalist structures that limit the autonomy of women. Brontë's novel also explores this paternalist/patriarchal parallel through the relationship between St. John and Jane. St. John's India mission directly connects these concepts as he tries to convince Jane to join him on this imperial venture as his wife. In both instances, these female authors interweave imperial and gendered anxieties to criticize the limitations placed on women.

<23>Like these subsequent authors, Maria Edgeworth uses the novel to explore tensions between the oppressor and the oppressed. Though the Irish Rebellion and political tensions between Britain and Ireland are at the heart of *Castle Rackrent*, the novel explores much more. The struggle for power between Thady and the Editor becomes representative of the struggle between Britain and Ireland, the aristocracy and the working class, men and women, father and daughter. In *Castle Rackrent*, Edgeworth metaphorically cross-dresses to play the role of the narrator Thady, thereby transforming this political novel into a family drama, where Edgeworth is cast as the subjugated and silenced Thady Quirk and her father is cast as the interjecting and condescending Editor. Edgeworth's use of male pronouns throughout the novel's paratexts lends to this reading of the Editor as an intradiegetic character who is representative of her father – but not *literally* her father. By using male pronouns, Edgeworth asserts the fictitiousness of the novel's paratexts as she

distances herself as the author from the Editor. Through these paratexts, Edgeworth is able to challenge paternalist structures and position herself as a proponent of the Irish people.

Notes

For more information on the historical background that informs *Castle Rackrent*, see Susan B. Egenolf, "Maria Edgeworth in Blackface: *Castle Rackrent* and the Irish Rebellion of 1798," *ELH*, vol. 72, no. 4, Winter 2005, pp. 845-869; David Hack, "Inter-Nationalism: *Castle Rackrent* and Anglo-Irish Union," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 29, no. 2, Winter 1996, pp. 145-165, doi: 10.2307/1345856.

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