

Edgeworth, Wilde and Joyce: Reading Irish Regionalism through 'the cracked lookingglass' of a Servant's Art

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A work of fiction may be at once localized in what it represents and very large in its sense of an audience: as that greatest of Irish books, Joyce's *Ulysses*, manifestly is. A crude explanation for the internationalism of much of Ireland's literature in English is the materialist one: a nation of four million or so provides a small market to sustain a steady flow of ambitious literature as that of modern Ireland. But Edgeworth's strange approach to the identity and integrity of her characters (to be examined next), and her elaborate procedures to invent a multinational readership, suggest that far more complex needs and motives are in play.

– Marilyn Butler (1992)¹

I was the only girl under the stairs
But I was the first to notice something was wrong.

– Paul Muldoon, 'The Big House' in *Mules* (1977)

I seriously believe that you will retard the course of civilisation in Ireland by preventing the Irish people from having one good look at themselves in my nicely polished looking-glass.

– James Joyce to Grant Richards, 23 June 1906

Figuring 'the cracked lookingglass of a servant'

Much has been said – yet perhaps little explained – regarding Stephen Dedalus's caustic rejoinder in the first episode of *Ulysses* to Buck Mulligan's theatrical toying with a stolen, defective mirror: 'It is a symbol of Irish art. The cracked lookingglass of a servant'.² Mulligan admits he has 'pinched' the lookingglass

¹ Marilyn Butler, 'Introduction' to Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent and Ennui* (London, 1992), p. 36. ² James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler (New York, 1986), p. 6. Two rather typical and finely detailed approaches to the trope of the 'cracked lookingglass' or 'mirror' in Joyce should be cited: Michael H. Begnal, 'Art and History: Stephen's Mirror and Parnell's Silk Hat' in *Joyce's 'Ulysses': The Larger Perspective*, ed. R.D. Newman and W.

from Ursula, one of his aunt's 'plainlooking servants'.³ Apparently a nondescript servant does not need a mirror; but the mocking Mulligan parades his theft about the Martello tower in the grand gesture that shaving his rather 'equine' face seems to militate.⁴ Malachi Mulligan relishes his 'hyperborean' image of aristocratic overlord, Martello tower and all,⁵ but his boastful confession of theft from the room of a domestic servant underscores his own shallow vanity and malicious dependency on the good nature of his purported inferiors. He appropriates a servant's lookingglass for want of his own, and he lusts after the coins he can coax out of Dedalus for an evening's debauchery. Mulligan is a 'mockery', 'usurper' and 'betrayers' of friendship in Dedalus's eyes.⁶ He is also a modern refiguration of that resilient stereotype of the nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish regional novel – namely, the dissolute lord of the manor.

Joyce's opening episode of *Ulysses* does much to dramatize the social, political and cultural dynamics of turn-of-the-century Irish servility – that is, the multiform relations between Irish servants and masters, renters and lords. Indeed three aspects of these servile dynamics are worth emphasizing. First, the strained interaction of Mulligan and Dedalus parrots the unequal dynamics of landlord and renter. Mulligan demands the key to the tower for which Dedalus has paid the rent, and furthermore demands money for drink. He justifies his forceful claims with a witticism which voids the wisdom of *Proverbs* by rendering it Nietzschean: 'He who stealeth from the poor lendeth to the Lord. Thus spake Zarathustra'. Moreover, Dedalus reads his circumstances in mental phrases that recall Noah's curse on the land of Canaan: 'A servant too. A server of a servant'.⁷ Joyce thus portrays one Irishman rendering another homeless and penniless in terms echoing both the dynamics of aggressive lord and dispossessed renter and the post-Christian ethics of Nietzsche, the arch-apologist for aristocratic insolence and lordly self-will. Second, the even more strained interaction between the Englishman Haines and Dedalus underscores the latter's resentment of the former's domestic intrusion and cultural appropriation. Haines is a potential collector of Dedalus's sayings; yet, like a folklorist of regional colour, he offers no money in kind. Moreover, Dedalus must explain his most biting witticism to Haines, 'I am a servant of two masters, an English and an Italian', in a context which ironically enacts its subtle play on the nature of indigenous Irish servitude.⁸ Third, the treatment of the elderly milkwoman in relation to all three young men is rendered in condescending terms: Mulligan mocks her sexually, Haines patronises her culturally and linguistically, while Dedalus questions her ability to recognize her betrayers.⁹ The opening chapter of *Ulysses* thus constitutes a literary 'lookingglass' for Irish servitude: its diverse representations of servility seem strongly marked, even overdetermined, as representations of 'Irishness' itself.

Thornton (Newark, 1989), pp 233-43, and Albert Wachtel, *The Cracked Lookingglass: James Joyce and the Nightmare of History* (London, 1992). 3 Ibid., p. 6. 4 Ibid., p. 3. 5 Ibid., p. 5. 6 Ibid., pp 12, 17, 19. 7 Ibid., pp 19, 10. 8 Ibid., p. 17. 9 Ibid., pp 11-13.

Stephen's bitter analogy that 'the cracked lookingglass of a servant' is 'a symbol of Irish art' becomes overdetermined as well in this initial episode. He first uses it to capture and artfully name a flaw in Mulligan's aggressively theatrical performance of his morning ablutions. It is then taken up by Mulligan as a bit of cleverness which may loosen a 'guinea' from Haines for drink.¹⁰ Finally it is repeated by Mulligan to Haines in Stephen's company, in order to promote the Englishman's notion of collecting Dedalus's sayings.¹¹ This overdetermined witticism demands that we look more closely at the literary and cultural fault-lines which compose it so forcefully – yet also so elusively – as emblematic of Irish matters, both servile and artistic.

The conventional attribution of Joyce's allusion and Stephen's witticism to a passage in Oscar Wilde's fictional dialogue 'The Decay of Lying' (1889) has been so well cemented by the scholarly endeavours of Weldon Thorton, Don Gifford and Harry Blamires that it may seem perverse to question it.¹² However, as useful as this attribution might appear, it blocks or precludes an understanding of Joyce's reading of the thematics of Irish servility, as well as of some of the discursive complexities of Irish literary regionalism. It is nevertheless crucial to read Joyce's allusion through Wilde:

Cyril [to Vivian]: I can quite understand your objection to art being treated as a mirror. You think it would reduce genius to the position of a cracked looking-glass. But you don't mean to say that you seriously believe that Life imitates Art, that life in fact is the mirror, and Art the reality?

Vivian: Certainly I do.¹³

The allusion to Wilde is very useful, for Stephen Dedalus is a refiguration of Vivian, and Malachi Mulligan is a reworking of Cyril; however, the 'cracked looking-glass' over which Wilde's wits fret is the overly worn figure of artistic representation. It is the heavily worked emblem of Renaissance and Augustan beliefs that art and writing should by nature mirror the way things are or should be. This trope is not Joyce's 'cracked lookingglass of a servant,' but the 'mirror

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 9. ¹¹ Ibid., p. 14. ¹² See, for instance, Harry Blamires, *The Bloomsday Book* (London, 1966), p. 3; the third edition of the same text, *The New Bloomsday Book* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 4; and Don Gifford, *Ulysses Annotated*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley, 1988), p. 16. There seems to be a tendency, both among students who have not read Wilde and among critics who read Bram Stoker as an Anglo-Irish novelist, to force an association between Joyce's 'cracked lookingglass of a servant' and the observation that in the second chapter of *Dracula* Jonathan Harker shaves with the aid of a mirror in which he cannot glimpse Count Dracula's reflection. This association seems highly speculative, because it fails to connect with or exfoliate any of the distinctive features of Joyce's actual trope regarding the nature of Irish literary representation. ¹³ See *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Richard Ellmann (Chicago, 1982), pp 73-4.

of nature' trope traceable through Hamlet's speech to the players, back to Plato's idealist conception of artistic mimesis. Wilde's Vivian seeks to renew the pleasures of artifice by placing the designs and determinations of the dissembler – the artist – in primary, privileged position. Wilde's Cyril resists this art-for-art's-sake manoeuvre but ultimately restates Vivian's tendentious and counter-mimetic aesthetics. His metaphor of the 'cracked looking-glass' captures the secondary and flawed status of the artist within the aesthetic regime of neo-classical realism; yet in true Wildean fashion it also ironically underwrites the overly worked and intellectually worn status of artistic mimeticism.

Wilde's anti-mimetic witticism, articulated through Cyril, has invariably been seen among Joyceans as the source for Joyce's own witticism in the first chapter of *Ulysses*; however the issue of 'the servant' is always evaded. The overdetermined articulation of Joyce's troping of Irish artistic representation demands closer reading, particularly for the way in which the thematics of Irish servility and regionalism are foregrounded every wit as much as the nature of 'representation'. Indeed, Joyce's figure of 'the cracked lookingglass of a servant' looks through Oscar Wilde's 'The Decay of Lying' toward an ingeniously telling passage in Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (1800), a work narrated by an Irish servant and generally acknowledged as not only the pioneering Anglo-Irish novel but as the first regional novel in the English language.

Tracing Critical Constructions of Irish Literary Regionalism

A great deal of work has been done on literary regionalism and the Anglo-Irish novel; but this critique tends to trade upon a set of platitudes that Joyce's and Edgeworth's narrative practices actually challenge. For instance, in the 1950s Walter Allen's *The English Novel* positioned Edgeworth and *Castle Rackrent* as having 'occupied new territory for the novel' by providing fiction with a 'local habitation and a name'.¹⁴ According to Allen, Edgeworth 'perceived the relation between the local habitation and the people who dwell in it' in precise fashion, one which located the production and social conditioning of literary characters 'in a countryside differentiated by a traditional way of life from other countrysides'. As a consequence, Allen credits Edgeworth with the invention of 'the regional novel' and with setting the model for future Anglo-Irish regional novelists as well as for Walter Scott and Ivan Turgenev.¹⁵ Besides these discriminations of rural regionality and local character, Allen detected a third aspect of innovation on Edgeworth's part: 'the way in which the history of the Rackrent family, who are Irish landowners, is told'. He comments:

¹⁴ Walter Allen, *The English Novel: A Short Critical History* (London, 1954), p. 98. ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 98-9.

The story is narrated by old Thady, a peasant who is the ancient retainer of the family. So we have at once a family history and a vivid self-portrait of an old man, simple, shrewd, possessed of native dignity, told in his own language, which, though naturally a literary version, is close enough to Irish peasant speech to retain the illusion of authenticity. And Thady is a delightful character, rich in what we now think of as typically Irish humour, the more beguiling because it is unconscious.¹⁶

In this observation Allen glosses the narrative artistry of Edgeworth's literary servant. He romanticizes local facts in *Castle Rackrent* (Thady as 'the ancient retainer of the family' and as 'unconscious' in his 'typically Irish humour'), but in so doing he secures a telling third feature of literary regionalism: its 'vivid', 'rich', and 'beguiling' local speech which constructs for a reader 'the illusion of authenticity'. Moreover, James Newcomer's work in the 1960s did nothing to destabilize Allen's portrait of Edgeworth's work as a regionalist. *Castle Rackrent* achieves distinction because, Newcomer argues, Edgeworth's new genre of writing charts speech and attitudes graphically, locally, and 'individually,' with each local character occupying 'his own niche in his local society'.¹⁷

In the 1970s Marilyn Butler's extraordinary literary biography *Maria Edgeworth* placed the achievements of the author of 'The Irish Tales' within a social and familial context which firmly secured her reputation as a successful innovator of Irish literary regionalism, English literary realism and the European 'social novel'. Butler argues that Edgeworth's later tales of Ireland such as *Ennui* (1809) and *The Absentee* (1812) accommodate more effectively the author's didactic intentions, and provide less ambiguity concerning the Enlightenment assumptions motivating her historical fiction than the Quirk-dominated and open-ended satire of *Castle Rackrent*.¹⁸ In both early and late work, though, there is, according to Butler, 'a new degree and kind of realism' which promotes 'regional setting', 'regional dialect', and 'the distinctive ways of speech' in designated regions.¹⁹ Thus what Edgeworth enacts in *Castle Rackrent*, in an interpretively polyvalent fashion, is 'mastery of [Thady Quirk's] idiom and attitudes' – a thoroughly engaging realization of regional, class-specific speech which puts an individual and his province in life on record for others to read.²⁰ While Butler locates Edgeworth's literary achievements within a capacious intellectual set-

16 *Ibid.*, p. 99. 17 James Newcomer, *Maria Edgeworth the Novelist* (Fort Worth, 1967), p. 18. See also Newcomer's *Maria Edgeworth* (Lewisburg, 1973), pp 62–5, for similar comments. George Watson's 1964 'Introduction' to the Oxford World's Classics edition of *Castle Rackrent* (Oxford, 1980), pp vii–xxv, portrays Edgeworth's literary regionalism in similar terms, though with attention to contemporaneous Anglo-Irish politics. 18 Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography* (Oxford, 1972), pp 305–7, 357–60, 481–2, 485–8. See also Butler's *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* (Oxford, 1981), pp 95–8. 19 *Ibid.*, pp 342, 345. 20 *Ibid.*, p. 352.

ting, she nonetheless identifies a triadic matrix of local social environment, local character type and idiomatic and vernacular speech as the defining features of literary regionalism.

Subsequent critical work on literary regionalism and the origins of the Anglo-Irish novel tends to iterate the now-familiar framework of defining features and to ignore the Enlightenment and progressive educationalist context in which Butler's literary biography operated. W.J. Howard's 1975 thesis pursues in detail the regionalist genealogy sketched by Allen in the 1950s.²¹ He argues that the formative period of literary regionalism (1800-25) embraces the time of Edgeworth's initial experiments with setting fiction in the midlands of Ireland and Scott's later experiments with setting fiction in the Borders and the Highlands of Scotland. Howard keys the origins of literary regionalism to a reaction against metropolitan chauvinism and tales of upper-class metropolitan life found in most previous novels as well as to 'the new Romantic belief in local environment as a factor in the growth of the individual mind'.²² Correspondingly he argues that literary regionalism 'responded to the increasing uniformity of life which emanated from the capital, by seeking to preserve modes of life which seemed threatened by such uniformity'.²³ This markedly Romantic and indeed 'conservationist' approach to the origins of literary regionalism emphasizes both the articulation and preservation of traditional differences from the standard English culture of the day and the construction of regionalism, itself as a geographical, cultural, and socio-political category. However, unlike geographers and politicians who emphasize the edges and borders of regions, literary regionalists wrote, according to Howard, from 'the heart of a region, the core from which [distinctive] characteristics radiate'.²⁴ In turning to trace the ways in which literary regionalists such as Edgeworth and Scott 'portray the essence of a regional way of life', Howard hits upon the same triadic matrix of literary regionalist features already identified: local environment, regional character types, and the 'stage properties' and 'peculiarities' of regional actors in their distinctively vernacular, non-metropolitan dramas.²⁵

John Cronin and Julian Moynahan again emphasize this matrix for Edgeworth's literary regionalism; yet they do so by berating Butler for contextualizing Edgeworth's thought and writing within English and Enlightenment European contexts, rather than within a distinct Anglo-Irish context. In his attempt to construct a genealogy for the nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish novel (Edgeworth, Banim, Griffin, Carleton, Kickham, Moore and Somerville and Ross), Cronin generously cites Allen's pedigree for Edgeworth as the originary matriarch of literary regionalism.²⁶ He stresses Edgeworth's regionalist penchant

21 W.J. Howard, 'The Genesis of the Regional Novel: A Study of Maria Edgeworth and Sir Walter Scott' (doctoral dissertation, University of Leeds, 1975). 22 *Ibid.*, p. i. 23 *Ibid.* 24 *Ibid.*, p. 3. 25 *Ibid.*, pp 3-4. 26 John Cronin, *The Anglo-Irish Novel*, Volume One: The Nineteenth Century (Belfast, 1980), p. 25.

for 'collecting curious habits of speech and striking turns of phrase', as well as the biographical fact that Thady Quirk's 'particular kind of dialogue' is based upon the real talk of John Langan, an Edgeworth family steward and tenant whom the novelist knew from her teens until late in life.²⁷ For Cronin, though, Butler misconstrues the fictional force of *Castle Rackrent* because she disregards the book's post-Union identity politics – namely, its 'profound contempt for the Anglo-Irish squirearchy', 'the Ireland of the Anglo-Irish Protestant Ascendancy, the "Irish Protestant Nation" which sold itself for a mess of peerages to Pitt at the time of the Union'.²⁸ This contempt is localized in 'one of the submerged people' of the region, Thady Quirk, Edgeworth's 'greatest achievement in the realm of characterisation', 'a magnificently realised slave, a terrifying vision of the results of colonial misrule'.²⁹ This mode of reading appears motivated by the desire to install a polarized identity politics at the core of *Castle Rackrent* and to provide an originary prompt for the Anglo-Irish 'Big House' novel rather than to pursue a critical examination of literary regionalism within Ireland:

Pace Marilyn Butler, ... *Castle Rackrent* remains Maria Edgeworth's most considerable work of fiction and continues to exert a powerful influence to the present day. At the centre of the work is the rotting house itself, that great symbolic focus of the Protestant Ascendancy's preoccupation with its own decline. The ruinous house haunted the dark imagination of Sheridan Le Fanu, it is everywhere in the novels of Lever, Somerville and Ross and George Moore.³⁰

Cronin notes – yet does not explore – the servile status or the narrative artistry of Thady Quirk. Thady's functionality, just like the symbolic focus of John Langan's life, seems in Cronin's account to be completely embodied by his narrative exposure of moral rot and political decline at the heart of the Anglo-Irish social order.

Julian Moynahan constructs a genealogy of Anglo-Irish literature from Edgeworth to Yeats, yet Butler's biography troubles his construction of a regionalist tradition from the outset. Moynahan claims that 'Maria Edgeworth is the true begetter of the Anglo-Irish literary line extending well into the present century' and that 'in her novels of Irish subject matter she first created the national and regional novel as a distinct subgenre'.³¹ However, he believes that Butler's volume betrays her 'lack of an Anglo-Irish concept'.³² As with Cronin's chastisement of Butler's work, Moynahan detects 'ignorance' on the biographer's part concerning what constitutes Anglo-Irish identity, defined as

27 *Ibid.*, pp 25–6, 38. 28 *Ibid.*, pp 29–30. 29 *Ibid.*, p. 36. 30 *Ibid.*, p. 39. 31 Julian Moynahan, *Anglo-Irish: The Literary Imagination in a Hyphenated Culture* (Princeton, 1995), p. 12. 32 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

the doubled or split consciousness of a unique situation, this situation entailing, on the one hand, a link with, yet removal from, English origins and English society; and on the other, a closeness to, and yet a removal or isolation from, the native Irish community.³³

Moynahan thus stipulates a particular Anglo-Irish identity politics which Edgeworth must be assumed to embody biographically, and to express literarily; yet from these observations it necessarily follows that Edgeworth and *Castle Rackrent* must be read in a particular way – that is, one which underscores the rightness of an Anglo-Irish concept of social identity and literary lineage.

Rather ironically, Moynahan's chapter on Edgeworth is liberally sprinkled with allusions to James Joyce's works and techniques; yet such cunning linkages never precipitate recognition that an Hiberno-English or an Enlightenment European contextualizing of her work might have merit. Instead Moynahan produces a distillation of 'Edgeworth's originating efforts' in the form of a checklist of characteristics, an established 'paradigm' for 'any true Anglo-Irish work to come'.³⁴ This catalogue includes restatements of the well established triadic matrix of literary regionalism: (1) local, rural region ('A focus on the fortunes or misfortunes of the rural proprietors and their families in the isolated estate houses of the Irish country districts'); (2) local character types ('A fascination, often a nervous one, with the lives of the "peasantry"'); and (3) idiomatic, vernacular speech and attitudes (the writer's 'attitude of research' which 'attends to the "facts" and "traits" of mere Irish social custom, folkways, oral traditions, speech patterns, and self-presentation in everyday life').³⁵ Three further paradigmatic characteristics of an Anglo-Irish literary tradition are added by Moynahan to this recurrent set of regionalist features. All strongly underscore the Anglo-Irish identity politics which he has been at pains to read into the fabric of Edgeworth's originary literary moment: (1) 'involvement in the Irish situation'; (2) 'isolation and separation of Anglo-Irish writing from many of its readers who are English'; and (3) "'we Irish" ... cultivate the English language distinctly differently from the people and the writers of Britain and may even use the language more vigorously and vividly'.³⁶ Taken together, these traits posit the ambiguous, 'hyphenated' status of the Anglo-Irish writer and writing: placed in and involved with matters Irish, yet addressing the distant metropolitan English reader who inhabits a culturally uniform and linguistically standardized centre.

Moynahan's work represents the most developed critical position on literary regionalism in nineteenth-century Ireland and within an Anglo-Irish literary context.³⁷ Moreover – and quite importantly – it is a position firmly rooted

33 Ibid. 34 Ibid., p. 39. 35 Ibid. 36 Ibid., pp 39-40. 37 Brian Hollingworth, *Maria Edgeworth's Irish Writing: Language, History, Politics* (London, 1997), pp 7-46, appears rather timid and derivative in comparison with Butler and Moynahan.

within a well established discourse on the origins of literary regionalism in the English novel. The time has come, however, to question some of the merits of this discourse on literary regionalism from Allen in the 1950s to Moynahan in the 1990s, and to calibrate precisely what it occludes in the reading of Edgeworth, especially her *Castle Rackrent*.

Historicizing Literary Regionalism and 'Edgeworth's Example'

The historically contingent nature of the foregoing discourse on literary regionalism has never actually been examined. The fact that it largely involves unacknowledged restatements of Henry Morley's once very influential late nineteenth-century construction of English and Irish literary history is not merely an oddity of modern criticism, but a significant occlusion of a founding moment in the critical discourse on literary regionalism. Henry Morley (1822-94), a major contributor to Charles Dickens's *Household Words*, editor of the *Examiner*, and Professor of English Literature at University College London, devoted his long academic career to the development of English literature as an academic subject.³⁸ In particular his *First Sketch of English Literature* (1873) and, more importantly, the fifth and final volume of the *Library of English Literature* (1876) establish the literary-historical link between Walter Scott and Maria Edgeworth, and offer terms for what will later become the triadic matrix of definitive features of the regional novel in English.³⁹ However this critical linkage, and the attention paid to literary regionalism, occur as the last of several observations which Morley makes about the qualities of Edgeworth's work. His strong emphasis on Edgeworth's innovative literary realism, on her progressive educational views, and on the merits of *Belinda* (1801, a novel of English social manners), tends to position his early critical estimate of the writer within the purview of Butler's later literary biography.

Morley eventually offers suggestions concerning the origins and characteristics of the regional novel by accepting Scott's description of 'Miss Edgeworth's example'; he notes in the *Library of English Literature*:

³⁸ See Margaret Drabble (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 5th ed. (Oxford, 1985), p. 669. ³⁹ Henry Morley, *A First Sketch of English Literature*, rev. ed. (London, 1896), pp 905-6, and *Sketches of Longer Works in English Verse and Prose*, Vol. 5 of *The Library of English Literature* (London, n.d.; 1st pub., 1876), p. 357. See also Morley's introduction to the 36th volume of 'Morley's Universal Library', Maria Edgeworth, *Stories of Ireland: Castle Rackrent, The Absentee* (London, 1886), p. 8. Morley regarded 'English Literature' in a refreshingly capacious fashion, accepting and articulating various Irish and British, Celtic and Teutonic, Gaelic and Germanic, Norman and Anglo-Saxon strands of its origins and complicated multicultural development. He was keenly mid-Victorian in his scholarly attitudes and views, but also vastly prescient in riddling the borders of 'nationalist' conceptions of literary history with the manifest realities of multicultural contacts and intercultural affiliations.

When Walter Scott began novel-writing it was under the impulse of Miss Edgeworth's example. In the general preface to the 'Waverley' Novels he wrote thus: 'Without being so presumptuous as to hope to emulate the rich humour, pathetic tenderness, and admirable tact, which pervade the works of my accomplished friend, I felt that something might be attempted for my own country of the same kind with that which Miss Edgeworth so fortunately achieved for Ireland – something which might introduce her natives to those of the sister kingdom, in a more favourable light than they had been placed hitherto, and tend to procure sympathy for their virtues, and indulgence for their foibles.'⁴⁰

After emphasizing Edgeworth's realism and social progressivism, Morley permits this textual moment in which *Castle Rackrent* (and pointedly not *Belinda* or her other writings) becomes Romanticized, even sentimentalized, in the interests of making a literary historical transition to speaking of Scott and his fiction. Scott's 1814 appraisal of Edgeworth and a nascent regionalism within the 'Three Kingdoms' are foregrounded here, rather than anything that is deeply reflective of Edgeworth's fictional project. Moreover, the three familiar features of twentieth-century articulations of literary regionalism can be recuperated as Scott's own initial codification of 'Miss Edgeworth's example': (1) the local region, one's 'own country' (Ireland or Scotland); (2) the 'natives' or local character types (Irish or Scottish); and (3) an affective presentation of local idioms and attitudes ('procure sympathy for their virtues, and indulgence for their foibles'). The fact that Scott's implied audience comprises English readers ('those of the sister kingdom') leaves significant social and cultural space for later formulators of literary regionalism such as Howard and Moynahan to explore the impact of 'metropolitan chauvinism' and of 'hyphenated' political identity on the formulation of Anglo-Irish and Anglo-Scottish literary regionalism. Yet Morley should be acknowledged for his initial efforts to sketch a history of nineteenth-century Anglophone literature, exhibiting the impulse toward regionalism as a distinct orientation to be detected in the reading and writing of Scott. The founding moment of literary regionalism and its definitive characteristics thus comprises the acceptance of Scott's conservatively Romantic and rather sentimentalist reading of *Castle Rackrent*.

It is not only crucial to question the hegemony of Allen's construction of the origin and definitive features of literary regionalism – and thus to emerge from behind the shadow of Scott's sentimentalist reading of *Castle Rackrent*; it is also important to attend to a mode of reading Edgeworth's regionalism which only recently has come of age. Tom Dunne's 1984 O'Donnell lecture entitled *Maria Edgeworth and the Colonial Mind* revealed a pathway for theorizing Edgeworth – particularly *Castle Rackrent* – which showed the compatibility of

Butler's appreciation of Edgeworth's social ideals and literary motives with a critically mature appreciation of her regionalist narrative strategies. Dunne argues that Edgeworth's progressive, ameliorizing ethos, in spite of privileging an anglicized civility and 'enlightened paternalism,' was deeply fascinated with Irish strategies of survival, especially Irish 'exploitation [of speech] as a mechanism of survival by the vulnerable, whether servant or peasant'.⁴¹ Thus readers of *Castle Rackrent* must attend to the mentality and narrative strategies of 'an ironic servility'.⁴² The medium of Hiberno-English speech with its 'richly varied' eloquence on the one hand and its 'servile, cajoling, flattering, deceiving' registers on the other, were dual testimony to 'the potential for loyalty and improvement in Irish character' and 'the language of survival as developed by a vulnerable people'.⁴³ Similar claims have often been made about the regional patois and richly resonant eloquence of African-American speech, and Maria Edgeworth herself made such cross-cultural comparisons with West Indian slaves in *The Absentee* and *Essay on Irish Bulls*.⁴⁴ In *Castle Rackrent*, though, readers encounter 'the language of servility' at full throttle: words and events are manipulated in the interests of survival; they are vulnerably exposed to caustic judgement by an 'English' readership, while concurrently revealing 'remarkable understanding of the mentality of its victims' to an 'Irish' audience aware of 'the old colonial ethos' which thrives upon such servility.⁴⁵

Marilyn Butler's 1992 introduction to the Penguin Classics edition of *Castle Rackrent* and *Ennui* adds significantly to this mode of reading Edgeworth's Irish regionalism. Butler chafes against mock-historicist readings of *Castle Rackrent* which 'limit it to a commentary on Ireland in 1800'.⁴⁶ A longer colonial history is evoked by Edgeworth from her title page onward, and interregional contexts and cross-regional comparisons are made throughout the notes, glossary and preface.⁴⁷ Moreover, the servile 'voice' of Thady Quirk who dominates the two-part narrative constitutes, according to Butler, a consummate 'act of mimicry' which spares neither four generations of dissolute native-born landlords nor 'the equivocal figure, the landlord's servant, who is actually part of the system', that is, the increasingly dysfunctional feudal system of colonial Ireland.⁴⁸ Thady's vernacular and idiomatic speech permits readers to hear an Irish inflection, but also to recognize a rather Bakhtinian heteroglossia at play; Butler observes:

The brilliantly condensed narrative of the regime of Sir Murtagh and his lady is given in a language thickened by Anglo-French legal terminol-

41 Tom Dunne, *Maria Edgeworth and the Colonial Mind*, 26th O'Donnell Lecture, University College Cork (Dublin, 1985), pp 6, 21. 42 *Ibid.*, p. 8. 43 *Ibid.*, p. 17. 44 *Ibid.*, pp 19, 23. 45 *Ibid.*, pp 20-1. 46 Butler, 'Introduction', p. 9. 47 See also Mary Jean Corbett, 'Another Tale to Tell: Postcolonial Theory and the Case of *Castle Rackrent*' in *Criticism*, xxxvi (1994), pp 383-400, and Hollingworth, *Maria Edgeworth's Irish Writing*, pp 99-106, for some useful commentary on the 'editorial apparatus' of *Castle Rackrent*. 48 Butler, 'Introduction', pp 9-11.

ogy, the linguistically archaic remnant of a decayed feudal system. As Condy nears his sodden end Thady, a parodic bard, provides the native Irish caoinan or funeral song in praise of the dead chief – at once a gesture of traditional loyalty and a last act of courtly flattery.⁴⁹

Thady's narration voices the rhetoric of an archaic system of land and population mismanagement, but not through the medium of an enlightened social critic of feudalism and colonialism. His fascinatingly self-discrediting and resiliently self-justifying persona of the servile subaltern proves absolutely necessary to preserve and prolong this system of catastrophic mismanagement. The fully realized and localized character of Thady, replete with his vernacular intimations of unswerving loyalty to his local lord, personifies the contradictions of the regional social order from within, and in a manner which places the ironic dependency of lord and bondsman on display for those who must now question the social and political cost of servility as an ongoing survival strategy.⁵⁰ Butler grasps the affective, pragmatic and didactic core of Edgeworth's innovative literary regionalism when she maintains that 'an appropriate reader's response to *Castle Rackrent*' is to become 'more aware of a world which is not the estate, of a politics [Thady] shuts out, of an entire ethical dimension which the system he serves works to deny'.⁵¹

Edgeworth's literary regionalism is thus intensely localized, character-rooted and enthrallingly idiomatic; yet it refuses to sentimentalize this triadic matrix of narrative features. Instead it dramatizes local character types, idioms, and attitudes as they help propagate, impede, preserve or ameliorize local social systems and defective political orders. Edgeworth deploys and depends upon situational and verbal irony, Enlightenment economic and philosophic thought, and a 'multinational readership' to achieve her literary ambitions; she thus resembles eighteenth-century writers such as Swift, Fielding, and Edmund Burke far more than the nineteenth-century regionalists who follow in the wake of Scott.⁵² As Susan Greenfield has argued, Edgeworth's *Belinda* pivots upon a sophisticated, ironic rewriting of Alexander Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, while exploring English colonial politics, perceptions of West Indian creoles, and national and sexual identity.⁵³ Thus *Belinda*, published the year after *Castle Rackrent*, read principally as a comic novel of manners, might also be insightfully read as a regionalist study of local social systems and defective political orders (in Bath and Jamaica), though with no one as mesmerizingly idiomatic as Thady Quirk to serve as narrator.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 12. 50 See Richard Sennett, *Authority* (New York, 1980), pp 127-9, for a probing sociological explanation of this Hegelian, ironic structure of servility. 51 'Introduction', p. 14. 52 See *ibid.*, pp 15-36. 53 Susan C. Greenfield, ' "Abroad and at Home": Sexual Ambiguity, Miscegenation, and Colonial Boundaries in Edgeworth's *Belinda*' in *PMLA*, cxii (1997), pp 214-28.

It seems possible to discriminate among at least three modes of literary regionalism – all of them found within the work of nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish novelists. First, there would appear to be a Romantic, sentimentalist and ‘folkloristic’ mode, deeply indebted to the fictional work of Scott, though following the impulse of his oft-cited 1814 appreciation of ‘Miss Edgeworth’s example’. Scott may indeed look toward Edgeworth; however nostalgic, romanticizing and conservationist regionalists follow the practice of the Anglo-Scottish master of local colour and regional historical texture. Among nineteenth-century Irish writers John Banim, Gerald Griffin and William Carleton would be fitting exemplars of this folkloristic mode of literary regionalism. For instance, Carleton’s *The Squanders of Castle Squander* (1852) recalls *Castle Rackrent* in its title and its first-person narrator, Randy O’Rollick. This latter figure at first resembles an upwardly mobile Jason Quirk who finds himself playing the role of Thady to two generations of lordly squanderers; however O’Rollick’s narrative groans under the weight of poorly digested historical settings, overly worked idiomatic phrases, and stereotyped local characters. Scott’s and Allen’s triadic matrix of literary regionalist features are fully in evidence; but their literary execution seems squandered in sentiment, nostalgia, and the apotheosis of the local for the sake of the local. A second mode of literary regionalism may fare little better with later readers, but there are staunch defenders of its practices. There is a distinctly anti-modern, conservative, and indeed reactionary mode of literary regionalism which trades upon stereotypes of social, ethnic, cultural and political difference within regions, and which insinuates the legitimacy of traditions and the status quo as such. Among Anglo-Irish novelists Samuel Lover (particularly in *Handy Andy* and its thoroughly stereotyped Irish servant), Charles Lever, and Edith Somerville and Martin Ross are perhaps the most fitting exemplars. The Anglo-Irish ‘Big House’ novel tends to project this mode of literary regionalism, and the embattled – or at least ‘hyphenated’ – identity politics of Anglo-Irishness often finds itself dramatized in this case from within. A third mode of literary regionalism is one which may be aligned with the narrative practices of Maria Edgeworth in *Castle Rackrent*. This type shares with the two others the triadic matrix of literary regionalist features, and accordingly risks being conflated with either a folkloristic or a reactionary regionalism. However, Edgeworth’s ironic mode of literary regionalism provides a way to render linguistically and psychologically, idiomatically and somatically, those regional structures of authority and servility that construct a Rackrent and comprise a Quirk. Such structures, rendered affectively through the intensely localized voice and persona of Thady Quirk, deconstruct a Rackrent’s pretense to lordly authority and turn a Quirk’s residual servility towards ironic intent.

Reading the 'cracked glass' of Edgeworth's Irish art

In the second half of *Castle Rackrent*, comprising the history of Sir Connolly, Thady slyly observes his lord and master Condy Rackrent shaving badly in a 'cracked glass'.⁵⁴ This passage offers a wonderfully condensed, revelatory moment in which the narrative art of the servant discloses not only typical features of the Anglo-Irish regional novel but also the dark humour, irony and social critique for which Wilde and Joyce, and their fictive voices of Vivian and Stephen, are far better noted. Edgeworth constructs a narrative moment in which the reader senses Condy Rackrent's abject failure to comprehend the irony of his wife reading *The Sorrows of Young Werther* while he blithely shaves.

This passage appears at a significant narrative juncture, for it is the make-or-break financial moment in the final generation of a fiscally irresponsible family. The dissolute and deeply indebted lord of the manor must borrow money from his in-laws in order to cover the rash expenses of a campaign for a seat in Parliament and for a house in Dublin. A letter arrives from Isabella Moneygawl Rackrent's family, but Condy's wife commands him to shave rather than share her news with him. In the meantime Thady – the reader's window or 'lookingglass' onto this scene – busies himself in the corridor outside trying to mend a broken window with a roofing slate because no more uncut glass remains on the estate. He has no trouble eavesdropping on the Rackrent domestic scene; the door has gone lockless and the bolt ruined. It is a finely rendered ludic vignette, with an idiomatic voice providing an unending flood of small details of an Irish estate in freefall:

Presently I had a glimpse of him at the cracked glass over the chimney-piece, standing up shaving himself to please my lady. But she took no notice, but went on reading her book and Mrs. Jane doing her hair behind. 'What is it you're reading there, my dear? – phoo, I've cut myself with this razor; the man's a cheat that sold it me, but I have not paid him for it yet: what is it you're reading there? did you hear me asking you, my dear?' 'The Sorrows of Werter,' replies my lady, as well as I could hear. 'I think more of the sorrows of Sir Condy,' says my master, joking like.⁵⁵

Condy Rackrent comports himself in a manner not unlike Joyce's Malachi Mulligan, shaving himself with the aid of 'the cracked lookingglass' on the Martello tower. Mulligan's egocentrism, ungenerous disposition and uneasy humour operate insistently at the expense of someone else. The lines regarding the razor and the man who sold it, or the rendering of Werther's sorrows as Condy's, would not be out of character if interpolated into the staged, egotistical banter of Joyce's first episode of *Ulysses*; however, it is the 'cracked glass'

of Condy which focuses the scene. It is another, intimately telling, sign of local ruin; yet it also here becomes 'the cracked lookingglass of a servant', Thady Quirk, as he trains his narrative art upon glimpsing the morning on which the last of the Rackrents will sign and seal the end of his marriage, his estate, and his way of life. Condy uses a ruined mirror to shave; but Thady appropriates and weaves the figure of a marred lookingglass into the texture of an artful tale of outrageous dissolution of a broken social order. Retrospectively considered, Edgeworth initiates a subtle troping of Irish narrative artistry, a 'symbol of Irish art' which Joyce refracts through the lens of Wilde's 'Decay of Lying' and places tantalizingly on display at the opening of *Ulysses*.⁵⁶

Irony and the necessity to read ironically are pivotal here as well. The purportedly 'plain round tale of faithful Thady' to which 'The Editor' draws the reader's attention in the closing paragraphs of *Castle Rackrent* has been 'varnished' with irony well before this moment of closure.⁵⁷ The impending dissolution of the last lord of Rackrent manor appears abundantly clear to readers, though the teller of the tale maintains a façade of disingenuous and 'faithful' servility to the end. He glimpses, records and compounds the numerous signs of his master's decline, duplicity and denial. The sheer narrative overdetermination of these signs seems intended to suggest – if not ensure – an ironic reading of Quirk's tale.⁵⁸ Yet the insistent loyalty to family and estate, generating as it does an intensely localized and regional voice, yields a social state of affairs which Edgeworth appears moved to edge round, so that readers possess more than enough handles and prompts towards an ironic reading of her regionalist performance. The Preface, Glossary, and battery of notes provide a range of alternative voices, idioms and attitudes – including the fiction of the locally well informed and well disposed 'Editor' – so that readers seem invited at numerous turns to query the ties that bind Thady to his estate and his way of life. Even though Thady maintains he 'would go to Cork to serve him any day in the year', once Condy has been displaced from manor house to gate lodge, this overdetermined profession of loyalty to the Rackrent family demands not merely laughter but sober reflection on the social structures of authority and servility which underwrite such sham commitments.⁵⁹

Thady's enunciative status and narrative subjectivity also appear marked, even overdetermined, by his surname; 'Quirk' possesses an obscure etymology

⁵⁶ Irish writing in the wake of *Ulysses* appears insistently to grapple with the challenge and intimations of this trope. See the social and ethnic dimensions of William Butler Yeats's bitter meditation upon what the Irish do or do not see in the 'looking-glass' of 'The Statues' from *Last Poems* (1939), or the hauntingly idle repetitions of the figure of a 'cracked mirror' in Gabriel Godkin's narrative in John Banville's *Birchwood* (London, 1973), pp 21, 32, 87, 134, 158, 165. ⁵⁷ *Castle Rackrent*, pp 121, 62. ⁵⁸ See Vivian Mercier, *The Irish Comic Tradition* (Oxford, 1962), pp 196–7; and James Newcomer, *Maria Edgeworth the Novelist*, pp 144–51, and *Maria Edgeworth*, p. 66, for early treatments of this point. ⁵⁹ *Castle Rackrent*, p. 111.

but is traceable according to the OED to 'western dialects' which afford an interface between English and forms of Gaelic. A 'quirk' is 'a sudden twist, turn, or curve; especially in drawing or writing'; it involves 'a verbal trick, subtlety, shift or evasion' or 'a clever or witty turn or conceit; a quip'. Quirks comprise, for example, the clever verbal dodges expounded at length and in witty defence of Irish eloquence by Maria Edgeworth and her father Richard in their co-authored *Essay on Irish Bulls* (1802). In the passage concerning 'the cracked glass' and Thady's eavesdropping on the Rackrents in conversation, the title of Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) appears as though by a quirk of memory and regional idiom. Thady's Irish pronunciation elides the sound of the linguialized consonantal combination 'th' – a strong marker for English speech and pronunciation – and expresses the more dentalized consonant 't' in its place.⁶⁰ This quirk of Irish pronunciation helps render the passage 'regionalist', even, linguistically speaking, to the subtle level of the phoneme. This audible quirk, moreover, is ironically inscribed within the very ambivalence of Thady's 'real name' and his series of appointed nicknames: 'honest Thady', 'old Thady' and 'poor Thady'.⁶¹ Does a reader say or think 'Thady' or 'Tady'? Thady Quirk, then, in name and character, in voice and persona, appears simultaneously an endearingly potent and deviously ambivalent linguistic marker for 'Irishness' and for an Irish regionalist narrative.⁶²

One more quirk or 'witty turn' appears recuperable in the passage concerning 'the cracked glass': the passage composes a scene of reading, particularly the irony of reading against the grain of regionalism. Edgeworth would seem to project an awareness of a highly literate, European audience here – one which Butler calls 'a multinational readership'.⁶³ The allusion to the *Sorrows of Young Werther* thickens the regionalist texture of *Castle Rackrent* and also invokes a familiar plot for many of Edgeworth's contemporaries. Goethe's enormously popular tale of the star-crossed, unrequited lovers Werther and Lotte provides the reading which Isabella Rackrent will not share with her husband. Her refusal – and Quirk's apt notation of it – reveal the huge gulf in aspirations and motivation which separates Condy and Isabella Rackrent on what turns out to be the final morning of their life together. Isabella has married out of love and against the wishes of the Moneygawls, while Condy has wed out of financial

⁶⁰ Of course, there is the added irony that Thady's Irish pronunciation coincides with the German pronunciation of 'th'. ⁶¹ *Castle Rackrent*, pp 65–6. ⁶² Unlike Marilyn Butler's Penguin Classics edition (based upon the rigorously edited and thoroughly re-punctuated 1832 collected *Tales and Novels by Maria Edgeworth*), George Watson's Oxford World's Classics edition of *Castle Rackrent* is based upon the first edition, published by Joseph Johnson in London in 1800. This first edition and Watson's editorial reconstruction of it afford at least two passages in which an Irish pronunciation of 'tings' and 'tink' for 'things' and 'think' can be read as heard. See Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent*, ed. George Watson, pp xxvii–xxviii, 74, 77, 125. ⁶³ 'Introduction', p. 36.

need and the prospect of deep pockets on his wife's part. The upshot of this marital fiasco exhibits sheer parody of the sentimental plot of Goethe's tale. Condy is no Werther, and neither Isabella nor Judy M'Quirk – whom Thady imagines to be Condy's first and true love⁶⁴ – fit the model of a faithful, long-suffering Lotte. Condy Rackrent's accidental suicide from drink, while Isabella and Judy have found good reasons to be anywhere but at his side, heightens the ironic inversion of the tale of Werther. Indeed 'the sorrows of Sir Condy' provide readers with a regional quirk in the narrative voice of *Castle Rackrent* but also a cross-regional irony on its author's part.

It is clear that Joyce's trope for 'Irish art' must be read within the grain of Edgeworth's articulation of an Irish narrative voice, which comically evokes an Irish literary regionalism while rendering its representation faulty, cracked and in need of the supplementation that irony and ironic reading can bring. Stephen Dedalus finds himself in precisely this state of affairs when musing about Mulligan and Haines and the serving woman who brings them fresh milk in the opening pages of *Ulysses*. Dedalus understands the cultural and ideological complexities of the moment, yet recognizes that the serving woman is wedded, like Thady Quirk, to 'serving her conqueror and her gay betrayer'.⁶⁵ Joyce supplements this scene of an insistent servility by overdetermining its construction and allowing his readers to perceive his comic figures ironically – a narrative strategy present in *Castle Rackrent*, the alleged instigator of Irish literary regionalism and the nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish novel.⁶⁶

64 *Castle Rackrent*, pp 88–90, 118–21. 65 *Ulysses*, p. 12. 66 Joyce places 'T. Quirke' among the audience who wildly cheer the Citizen's rendition of Thomas Davis's 'A Nation Once Again' in the twelfth episode ('Cyclops') of *Ulysses* (p. 261). The passage enacts an hyperbolic version of rhetorics of nineteenth-century Irish cultural nationalism and indicates Joyce's awareness of the extremes to which a non-ironic ethos of regionalism could go.