

Edgeworth and Wordsworth: Plain Unvarnished Tales

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Although studies in Romanticism have long been preoccupied with issues of language and national identity, few critics have paired Maria Edgeworth and William Wordsworth in this discourse.¹ Despite their ostensibly glaring national, political and generic differences, juxtaposing these writers illuminates how Romantic literary texts exhibit the 'packaging' and 'marketing' of regional voices for an expanding reading public. What has come to be called 'British Romanticism' is in part defined by those aspects which are not at all British, ranging from the threat of French political, social or aesthetic influence to the 'assimilation' of Scots or Irish oral tradition and culture. The search for aesthetic and political unity by both Romantics and Romanticists has revealed contradictions that have opened up a wider and more variegated field of inquiry.²

A comparison between Edgeworth and Wordsworth offers fertile ground for investigating how discourses of regionalism and nationalism intersect with literary aesthetics – a juncture that proves a site of conflict as well as of engagement. Both Wordsworth's poetry and Edgeworth's novels consider literature's relationship to national identity; both uneasily propose aesthetic compensation for political and social imbalances. Comparing Wordsworth's programme for poetry in *Lyrical Ballads*, particularly in 'Ellen Irwin, Or the Braes of Kirtle', with Edgeworth's narrative framework in *Castle Rackrent*, it appears that contradictory textual layers in each reflect the tensions between emerging national and regional discourses. Uncovering the 'plain, unvarnished tales' at the heart of these works demonstrates how print culture is both the medium for distinguishing local (and often oral) culture, but also the means of suppressing or even censoring it. A brief investigation of Walter Scott's turn to fiction (and Edgeworth's contribution to this shift) illuminates how the emergence of literary regionalism negotiates the position of the vernacular voice in poetry and fiction.

1 See Gene Ruoff's seminal essay, '1800 and the Future of the Novel: Wordsworth, Edgeworth and Literary History' in Gene Ruoff and Karl Kroeber (eds), *The Age of William Wordsworth* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1987), pp 291-314. See also Marilyn Butler, 'Introduction' to *Castle Rackrent and Ennui* (London, 1992), pp 1-54. 2 As W.J. McCormack has observed, national unity and union between nations are pervasive Romantic concerns ('Romantic Union: Burke, Ireland and Wordsworth' in *Éire-Ireland*, xx, no. 1 [1985], pp 73-95). 3 Editions used throughout will be: W.J.B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (eds), *The*

The year 1800 saw the publication of Edgeworth's slim anonymous novel and the second edition of Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*; both works broke new ground, offering to a hungry reading public works that found value in common language and subjects. Wordsworth's Preface glorifies 'plainer and more emphatic language' on topics of lower and rustic life while, analogously, the Preface to *Castle Rackrent* states that a 'plain unvarnished tale is preferable to the most highly ornamented narrative'.³ In *Lyrical Ballads* 'Ellen Irwin' recounts a minstrel's song of love and death, and in *Castle Rackrent* Thady, an illiterate servant, narrates the tale of the downfall of 'his' family: four generations of dissipated landlords. A significant difference between the two is that while Wordsworth's collection is, in Coleridge's words, 'freed from provincialisms', Edgeworth adopts Irish speech patterns to create the first novel in dialect as well as the first regional novel. Marilyn Butler has noted that while Wordsworth's avoidance of 'cross-class dialogue' glosses over material class differences, Edgeworth succeeds in presenting 'a plurality of (English) languages varying both by region and class'.⁴ Both, however, address language variation and reveal the vexed relationships between regional and national – as well as between oral and print – culture.

By embracing the vernacular, Edgeworth and Wordsworth participated in contemporary debates about language such as those instigated by Thomas Paine, William Hone, John Horne Tooke and William Cobbett.⁵ Speaking the 'vulgar' language traditionally implied that one belonged to the vulgar class and that one was, as Olivia Smith remarks, 'morally and intellectually unfit to participate in the culture'.⁶ She further argues that the dichotomy between vulgar and refined was understood to divide sensibility and culture according to linguistic categories.⁷ Thus the evocation of the 'common man' may be read as a challenge to the hegemony of elite language.

Privileging the voices of minstrels and peasants implicitly critiques élitist conceptualizations about literature. Michael Baron finds such attempts to rescue the local – and particularly the regional – from 'blindly nationalistic associations' to be a distinctly radical act.⁸ These claims for vernacular truth, which were in vogue in the revolution-inflected 1790s, betray radical underpinnings; for instance William Godwin, in his radical *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) argues that 'a plain story, every word of which is marked with the emphasis of sincerity, will carry conviction to every hearer'.⁹ It is significant that Godwin

Prose of William Wordsworth (Oxford, 1974; hereafter 'Prose Works'); James Butler and Karen Green (eds), *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems, 1797-1800* (Ithaca, NY, 1992); and Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent and Ennui*, ed. Marilyn Butler. 4 Marilyn Butler, Introduction to *Castle Rackrent and Ennui*, p. 20. 5 For a thorough discussion of this topic, see Olivia Smith's *The Politics of Language, 1791-1819* (Oxford, 1984). 6 *Ibid.*, p. 2. 7 *Ibid.*, p. 3. 8 Michael Baron, *Language and Relationship in Wordsworth's Writing* (London, 1995), p. 93. 9 William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, ed. F.E.L. Priestly, vol. ii (Toronto, 1946), p. 282.

refers to his audience as 'hearers' rather than readers, thus evoking an oral rather than a literary tradition. This seemingly anti-literary stance appears democratic in its aspirations to disseminate ideas to the lower classes, thus implying that 'truths' are – or should be – familiar and accessible, rather than esoteric and abstract. Both Edgeworth and Wordsworth, as Gene Ruoff observes, equate truth with spontaneity and immediacy, that is, language arising from feeling.¹⁰ The immediacy of speech offers more possibilities than standardized printed text for language variation and for challenging linguistic hegemony.

Paradoxically, many have read localism as a conservative response to Godwinian rationalism. In this case, the vernacular may be read not as radical or progressive, but as a harkening back to a golden age untouched by the exigencies of social or technological advances. James Chandler, for example, argues that the idea of 'natural lore' is inherently conservative. Recalling the conservative Burke, he traces the term tradition as meaning 'the act of handing down ... especially by word of mouth or by practice without writing'.¹¹ However even the orator Burke, like his more radical pamphleteer contemporaries, found print culture an effective and efficient means of 'handing down' inherited truths. Ironically, print culture proves to be a medium that both exposes and obscures local culture.

Yet a plain tale is an appropriate medium for a diverse audience. While Wordsworth wrote for a predominantly English audience, he was clearly concerned to attract a wide and varied readership. In his 1800 Preface he writes:

I have the satisfaction of knowing that ['Goody Blake and Harry Gill'] has been communicated to many hundreds of people who would never have heard of it, had it not been narrated as a Ballad, and in a more impressive metre than is usual in Ballads.¹²

Edgeworth also addressed readers of diverse ages and classes. Conscious that she wrote for the English, the Irish and the Anglo-Irish, she took care to engage them all without overt offence. Edgeworth and Wordsworth were both concerned with the tastes and vulnerabilities of their reading publics; they revised and modified their works, turning plain and unvarnished tales into elaborate, complex narratives. The revisions in – and relationships among – texts, paratexts and prefaces register the tensions of competing discourses and ideologies within ostensibly plain tales.

Lyrical Ballads appeared in 1798 with a short advertisement written by Wordsworth, identifying his and Coleridge's verses as poetic experiments. To

¹⁰ Ruoff, '1800 and the Future of the Novel', p. 308. ¹¹ James Chandler, *Wordsworth's Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Poetics* (Chicago, 1984), p. 159. Burke, like Edgeworth and Wordsworth, may also be read as either liberal or conservative at various points in his career. ¹² Wordsworth, *Prose Works*, vol. i, p. 150. It is worth noting that this passage was removed from the 1850 version, during Wordsworth's more conservative years.

the 1800 edition Wordsworth affixed a Preface that has come to be regarded as one of the central texts of British Romanticism. In this version he proposes 'incidents and situations of common life' as an alternative to the tasteless and excessive writings of the period.¹³ In 1802, Wordsworth famously determined the poet's role as a 'man speaking to men'.¹⁴ What becomes increasingly clear in the course of these revisions is Wordsworth's concern with the poet's relationship to his readership. Despite his professed enthusiasm for the co-operating powers of reader and writer, in his defensive 'Essay Supplementary' of 1815, he states somewhat officiously that 'every author, as far as he is great and original, has had the task of creating the taste by which he is to be enjoyed'.¹⁵ The subjects of his poems, then, resemble objects for consumption that both form and stimulate the taste of the growing literary marketplace in England; however, at the same time, Wordsworth worries that the proliferation of the marketplace will increase the probability that 'Shakespeare and Milton would be driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies'.¹⁶ By composing homely tales of rustic life Wordsworth hopes to save his nation, thus achieving the status of national poet. Baron suggests that it is precisely these aspirations that prevented him from using provincialisms or regionalisms: 'Probably his sense of vocation, his ambition to be a great *national* poet like Spenser or Milton, prevented it because it was natural to assume, then as now, that a national poet must write in a national language'.¹⁷

Whatever Wordsworth's intentions, *Lyrical Ballads* illuminates and sublimates 'the great national events', the social and political tensions, such as those engendered by the French Revolution and its aftermath. The 1800 Preface underlines the correlation between poetic and political concerns precisely by attempting to separate them. On the grounds of space and propriety, he declines to offer a systematic defence of his view to create 'a class of poetry to interest mankind permanently in the multiplicity of and in the quality of its moral relations'.¹⁸

Wordsworth determines that this task is possible only by employing the 'real language of men', the language of feeling. Thus in addition to the lengthy preface, Wordsworth added to the second edition 'some little things which would be more likely to suit the common taste'.¹⁹ Among these 'little things' is the little-read 'Ellen Irwin, or the Braes of Kirtle', the only Scottish poem in the volume and one based on a traditional border ballad.²⁰

13 Ibid., p. 124. 14 Ibid., p. 138. 15 *Prose Works*, vol. ii, pp 425-6. 16 Ibid., vol. i, p. 128. 17 Baron, p. 13. 18 *Prose Works*, vol. i, p. 120. 19 Ernest de Selincourt (ed.), *The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, vol. i (Oxford, 1935), p. 227. 20 There is some question as to where Wordsworth first read the original ballad. He certainly read Joseph Ritson's *Scottish Songs*, which includes the ballad 'Where Helen Lies'; however he also copied into his commonplace book the story of Ellen and the Banks of Kirtle from Thomas Pennant's 'Tour of Scotland'. Both Ritson in his footnote and Wordsworth in a letter cite the story of

'Ellen Irwin' is the tale of a maid with two suitors: when the rejected throws a javelin at the beloved, Ellen jumps in the way and is killed. The beloved then kills the rejected and runs off to Spain as a mercenary in the Moorish wars, only to return and kill himself on Ellen's grave. Though it had appeared in various forms, the following excerpt, from Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802-3) is, in his words, 'without alteration or improvement from the most accurate copy which could be recovered':

O think na ye my heart was sair
 When my love dropt down and spak mae mair
 There did she swoon wi' meikle care
 On fair Kirconnel Lee.

As I went down the water side
 None but my foe to be my guide
 None but my foe to be my guide
 On Fair Kirconnel Lee.

I lighted down, my sword did draw,
 I hacked him into pieces sma;
 I hacked him into pieces sma,
 For her sake that died for me.²¹

The impassioned and grieving beloved narrates this version of the ballad, describing how he avenges Helen by hacking his unnamed foe to pieces. The original version does not explain the circumstances of how or by whose hand Helen died; this information, it seems, was passed down with the song, but not included in it. In Scott's version an introductory paragraph fills in the details; presumably the minstrel's audience would have been familiar with the folklore. Wordsworth's poem, on the other hand, is narrated in the third person and includes the background information (though with modified names). His prosaic narrator relates to an unknown interlocutor the facts and details, and reports the speech of the beloved. There are occasional flashes of sympathy ('Sad tidings to that noble youth ... Alas that he was ever born'); but for the most part Wordsworth's version fails to reproduce the fervency of the original song. As

Helen of Kirconnel as it is told in Pennant. See 'Notes' appended to Butler and Green (eds), pp 382-3. ²¹ Walter Scott, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, ed. Thomas Henderson (New York, 1931), pp 383-4. I have used Scott's version because it best embodies the 'literary ballad', a genre that Scott was anxious to legitimize while recuperating the traditional ballad. Although Wordsworth could not have read Scott's work until after it was published (1803), Scott exemplifies the concept of pseudo-antiquarianism that is being traced here.

in many of the volume's ballads, the narrator almost scientifically documents, and then absorbs, the tale into a narrative that transfers the subjects of his poems into objects of his poetic agenda. Wordsworth's poem concludes:

Now ye who willingly have heard
 The tale I have been telling
 May in Kirkconnel church-yard view
 The grave of lovely Ellen;
 By Ellen's side the Bruce is laid,
 And the stone upon his head,
 May no rude hand deface it,
 And its forlorn HIC JACET.²²

Wordsworth's version, which proceeds at a slower pace than the original, demonstrates the ways in which print culture takes a story handed down 'traditionally' or orally and forces it to conform to the exigencies of the poet or editor. It has been argued that Romantic poets and editors reproduced traditional or minstrel ballads as a popular form of culture that expressed the values of a whole society.

Wordsworth's transmutation hybridizes the border ballad with the pseudo-antiquarian style popular in his own time, using a stanza form based on that of Gottfried Bürger's 'Lenore'. Although Wordsworth had been much influenced by Bürger while reading him in 1798, 'Ellen Irwin' marks his movement away from that style of ballad writing which he saw as evoking responses similar to those occasioned by 'sickly German novels'. Thus *Lyrical Ballads* simultaneously embraces and moves away from traditional ballad models. Mary Jacobus claims that Wordsworth required his readers to 'look critically at the fashion for supernatural and pseudo-antiquarian balladry' and that 'the ballad experiment offers the most illuminating example of Wordsworth's self-defining relation to his literary context'.²³ However, Jacobus continues, Wordsworth's 'colloquial vigour' has no real counterpart in the traditional ballad, and his originality lay in 'approaching the imitation ballad from a startlingly anti-literary direction'.²⁴

Wordsworth quite consciously diverges from the ballad tradition in order to conform to his overall design for the project: to 'follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature';²⁵ but by distancing himself from the original ballad, Wordsworth also removes himself from the Scots tradition of the minstrel and his song. In so doing – and

²² *Lyrical Ballads*, pp 159–61. ²³ Mary Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads* (Oxford, 1976), p. 209. Jacobus comments that Bürger's horror-story ballads are characterized by their pace, narrative control and 'galloping' rhythms. She finds that Bürger's originality lies in his technique rather than theme, and she emphasizes that Bürger's imitations did very little to recover the authentic ballad voice (p. 217). ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 212. ²⁵ *Prose Works*, vol. i, p. 126.

despite the anti-literary nature of his project – Wordsworth resembles the rationalist Joseph Ritson who concentrated on the written transmission of ballads rather than sentimentalizing either the minstrel or the oral tradition.²⁶ Somewhat defensively and contradictorily, Wordsworth commented that it would be ‘presumptuous’ and ‘superfluous’ to follow the original closely. In a note he observes:

It may be worth while to observe that as there are Scotch poems on this subject in the simple ballad strain, I thought it would be both presumptuous and superfluous to attempt treating it the same way ... At the outset I threw out a classical image to prepare the reader for the style in which I meant to treat the story, and so to preclude all comparison.²⁷

The ‘classical image’ thrown out by Wordsworth (‘Fair Ellen, when she sate/ Upon the Braes of Kirtle,/ Was lovely as a Grecian maid/ Adorned with wreathes of myrtle’) distances the poem geographically as well as temporally, and the reference to Greece evokes a nationalism often idealized by the Romantic poets. In addition, the later reference to the beloved’s stint as a mercenary for the Spanish army in the Moorish wars further distances the poem and its readers from current national and political issues. The pseudo-antiquarianism of the ballad form likewise places the action in the distant past. In framing the poem and its objects as exotic and other – as unequivocally un-English – Wordsworth creates more ‘otherness’ than is actually there, defining what is English against what is not. Even though the process necessitates fabrication, this otherness is something that Wordsworth was at pains to contain in his quest to be a great national poet.

Wordsworth tellingly wrote about his poetic subjects (or objects) in his 1802 Preface:

The language of these men is adopted (purified from what indeed appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust) because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived.²⁸

He claimed for the poet the role of a translator who would unveil truth for his English readership. It is important to consider, however, that the terms ‘defects’ and ‘disgust’ suggest an inherent arrogance towards the ‘unvarnished’ nature of rustic and common life. As good as his intentions may have indeed been, the concept of translation as purification is problematic and culturally aggressive.

Wordsworth’s divergence from the ballad tradition – and especially his suppression of the minstrel and his song – distinguishes him from his contemporary

²⁶ Ritson’s work is often juxtaposed with Scott’s or Percy’s, and he was generally considered somewhat a curmudgeon about what he felt was sentimental, even irrelevant. ²⁷ ‘Notes’ to *Lyrical Ballads*, pp 382–3. ²⁸ *Prose Works*, vol. i, p. 125.

Walter Scott, who leaves intact the minstrel's 'antique' language and provincialisms, despite his offering information about 'Ellen Irwin' in his introductory remarks to the ballad. Scott's method resembles Edgeworth's rather than Wordsworth's: Edgeworth's editor may comment extensively on Thady's dialect, but the speech patterns are left intact. Even while striving to legitimize the literary ballad – a form which transcribes oral to print culture – Scott criticizes the 'reciters' and 'transcribers' who demote 'the rugged sense and spirit of the antique minstrel'.²⁹ Scott nostalgically laments the passing of the ballad culture, and even when he turns to fiction he hopes to keep alive the social customs and manners of the Border inhabitants.

Scott described his turn to fiction in the 'Postscript that should have been a Preface' to his anonymous first edition of *Waverley* (1814), and then again in the General Preface to the 1829 edition. To this later publication Scott also added a dedication to the King, an advertisement, an extensive glossary and explanatory notes. Like Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* and Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent*, Scott's *Waverley* thus acquired a complex and multivalent (and inter-textual) layering of voices. Also like his contemporaries, Scott addressed the tastes of his readership, attempting to explain his text and his modes of representation to them. In his Postscript, he acknowledges the influence of Edgeworth on his oeuvre, noting that his object has been to 'describe these persons, not by a caricatured and exaggerated use of the national dialect, but by their habits, manners, and feelings; so as, in some distant degree, to emulate the admirable Irish portraits drawn by Miss Edgeworth'.³⁰

Scott evokes Edgeworth again in his General Preface of 1829, to explain in part why he turned to fiction. Edgeworth's success urged him to attempt something 'of the same kind with that which Miss Edgeworth so fortunately achieved for Ireland – something which might introduce her natives to those of her 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'.³¹ He also documents the influence of the artist and antiquary Joseph Strutt on his project. In 1807–08, Scott edited for publication Strutt's 'unfinished romance', 'Queen-Hoo-Hall'; Scott finished the piece (and included the final chapter with the 1829 Introduction to *Waverley*), and this work inspired him to reconsider his own unfinished manuscript. Scott comments that 'Queen-Hoo-Hall' met with little success primarily because Strutt rendered his language 'too ancient', and displayed his antiquarian knowledge 'too liberally'. These are faults that Scott determined to avoid in his own prose work.

Scott then relates the trajectory of the authorship of *Waverley*, particularly his decision to create a more 'modern' Highland story.³² He had initially planned

²⁹ 'Introductory Remarks on Popular Poetry' to the third edition (1830) in T.F. Henderson (ed.), *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (Edinburgh, 1902), vol i, p. 119. ³⁰ Walter Scott, Postscript to *Waverley, or, 'Tis sixty years since*, ed. Claire Lamont (Oxford, 1990), p. 341. ³¹ *Ibid.*, 'General Preface', p. 353. ³² *Ibid.*

this first attempt at 'a work of imagination in prose' as a tale of chivalry, 'with plenty of Border characters, and supernatural incident'.³³ It is worth pointing out that his subsequent writing process somewhat resembles Edgeworth's hasty composition of *Castle Rackrent*. Scott explains that he wrote the story of Waverley's adventures with Bean Lean rapidly, 'with so little care, that [I] cannot boast of having sketched any distinct plan of the work'.³⁴ The hiatus between original publication and the introduction of prefaces and editorial notes was much longer in Scott's case than in Edgeworth's.³⁵ He outlined his revisions and emendations to the 1829 edition of *Waverley* in the Preliminary Advertisement; here he addresses 'errors of the press and slips of the pen' while adding 'something to the spirit of the dialogue, narrative [or] description'. He adds:

The Author also hopes to publish, on this occasion, the various legends, family traditions, or obscure historical facts, which have formed the ground-work of these Novels ... together with a more copious Glossary, and Notes explanatory of the ancient customs, and popular superstitions, referred to in the Romances.³⁶

He worried that the notes might be thought 'too miscellaneous and too egotistical', but he reiterates his desire to explain the nature of his materials to his readers; he concludes (like Wordsworth) somewhat condescendingly:

It remains to be tried whether the public (like a child to whom a watch is shown) will, after having been satiated with looking at the outside, acquire some new interest in the object when it is opened, and the internal machinery displayed to them.³⁷

His additions create a framework quite similar to that in Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent*; however he presents the explanatory information with a confidence and self-affirmation that Edgeworth seems to lack.

Scott's authorial voice, like Wordsworth's poet-as-translator, recalls Edgeworth's editor in *Castle Rackrent*. This editor, like Wordsworth's, values

33 Ibid., p. 351. 34 Ibid., p. 354. 35 Scott added this material once his authorship had been revealed to the public. His original motive for publishing *Waverley* anonymously was 'the consciousness that it was an experiment on the public taste which might very probably fail' (ibid., p. 355); yet he remained anonymous even after his literary reputation had been well established – presumably because he enjoyed the mystery. 36 Ibid., 'Advertisement', p. 348. 37 Ibid., 'General Preface', p. 360. It appears that Scott's target audience includes Scottish as well as (perhaps more so than) English readers. In the Postscript he states, 'To elder persons it will recall scenes and characters familiar to their youth; and to the rising generation the tale may present some idea of the manners of their forefathers' (ibid., p. 340).

the artless or commonplace rather than the 'decoration' of dominant modes of 'literary manufacture'.³⁸ However, he opts for transcription over translation, and biography over poetry; Edgeworth's editor writes:

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, and besides, the authenticity of his story would have been more exposed to doubt if it were not told in his own characteristic manner. Several years ago he shared with the editor the history of the Rackrent family, and it was with some difficulty that he was persuaded to have it committed to writing; however his feelings for 'the honour of the family' prevailed over his habitual laziness, and he at length completed the narrative which is now laid before the public.³⁹

Edgeworth's editor sacrifices 'intelligibility' (her word) for authenticity, allowing Thady's voice to remain 'unpurified' in dialect. Although he suggests that it is 'habitual laziness' that hinders Thady's commitment to the project, the term 'committing' paradoxically implies that Thady's story is imprisoned (committed) in print.⁴⁰ The editor's attitude toward Thady is condescending, but his attitude toward the 'ignorant' English readers is not much better. Thady's narrative shifts between margin and centre, so that his tale, like his character, eludes a stable reading. Critics have long debated Thady's supposed 'loyalty' to the family; he has been regarded – like Edgeworth herself – as both critical of, and complicit with, patriarchy.⁴¹ Thady's narrative implicitly threatens the Anglo-

38 Ibid., p. 62. 39 Ibid., p. 63. 40 The 1832 edition of *Castle Rackrent*, included in *Tales and Novels by Maria Edgeworth*, revises the earlier editions' use of punctuation and dialect. This version, upon which Marilyn Butler's Penguin edition is based, corrects minor errors and misprints; it employs more modern punctuation conventions, especially the use of quotation marks rather than dashes. George Watson's Oxford World's Classics edition of *Castle Rackrent*, on the other hand, reconstructs the first edition, published in 1800. Brian Caraher, in his essay in this volume (p. 138, note 62), points out that Watson's edition affords several examples in which an Irish pronunciation of 'tings' and 'tink' for 'things' and 'think' can be read as heard. According to Butler, Edgeworth, especially later in her career, openly declares that 'to encourage Irish would be retrograde and divisive' ('Introduction' to *Castle Rackrent and Ennui*, p. 21). In other words, Butler suggests that Edgeworth consciously decided to avoid reference to the Irish language in her later Irish novels; presumably she tones down the dialect in *Castle Rackrent* for similar reasons. 41 Thady's 'long great coat', for example, is used by critics to exemplify dichotomous views of the Irish people as well as of Thady himself. In a footnote about Thady's tattered coat the editor quotes (the anti-Irish Catholic) Spenser in linking it to 'high antiquity'. Ultimately, though, the editor cites Spenser's view that the mantle should be banned because it 'is a fit house for an outlaw, a meet bed for a rebel, and an apt cloak for a thief', thus ironically evoking Ireland's rebellious past. Kirkpatrick suggest that Edgeworth

Irish hegemony despite himself, because his blind devotion to 'his family' opens a gap for ironic critique of it. Between the drunkenness, litigiousness, pugnacity, misogyny and general dissipation of the Rackrent lords, it is difficult to share Thady's deification of Sir Patrick, Sir Murtaugh, Sir Kit and Sir Condy. It is, after all, Thady's ostensibly naïve narrative that documents the demise of 'his' family, while his blood family – that is, his son Jason – seals their fate. Jason's purchase of Castle Rackrent intimates the radical possibilities of Irish Catholics reclaiming the land and of feudal structures giving way to capitalism: he buys rather than inherits the estate.

The structure of and revisions to *Castle Rackrent* register the shifting attitudes towards Thady and his story. Edgeworth wrote Thady's narrative in two parts: the first in 1794–95, and the second, Sir Condy's story, in 1796–98 – that is, literally in the midst of local unrest. Without her father's habitual supervision, and encouraged by her Aunt Ruxton, Edgeworth rapidly wrote Thady's narrative proper and his footnotes, adopting his voice and idiom from her oral impressions of the family steward, John Langan. The characters of the four generations of landlords, Sir Condy in particular, were drawn in part from Edgeworth's own family history as documented in *The Black Book of Edgeworthstown*, an enterprise that was added to and amended through the years.⁴² Thus the voices in *Castle Rackrent* speak from a multiplicity of factual as well as fictional contexts, and from sources that often appear at odds with one another.⁴³

The editorial commentary is made up of three parts: the footnotes to Thady's original narrative; the Preface, which Butler suggests was written by Edgeworth's father; and the glossary and defensive advertisement that were added shortly before publication.⁴⁴ The relationship among these narrative elements is of inter-

links Thady through a tradition of bards speaking for their nations – a connection that challenges *Rackrent's* status as a regional tale (Katherine Kirkpatrick, 'Putting Down the Rebellion: Notes and Glosses on *Castle Rackrent*' in *Éire-Ireland*, xxx, no.1 [1995], pp 77–90). See also Ruoff, '1800 and the Future of the Novel', p. 308. ⁴² Butler, note to 'Introduction' to *Castle Rackrent*, p. 344. ⁴³ Mikhail Bahktin would argue that the form of the novel accommodates a multi-voiced discourse such as is found here. According to Bahktin, the comic novel in particular involves a continual shifting of the distance between author and language: 'the author exaggerates ... one or another aspect of the "common language", sometimes abruptly exposing its inadequacy to its object and sometimes ... maintaining an almost imperceptible distance ... sometimes even forcing it to reverberate with its own "truth", which occurs when the author completely merges his own voice with the common view' (*The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist [Austin, 1981], p. 303). In *Castle Rackrent* the dialogics literally burst it open: paratext and text battle over textual authority. Following Bahktin's line of reasoning, poetry does not accommodate heteroglossia comfortably; thus Wordsworth's narrator in 'Ellen Irwin' absorbs and normalizes regionalisms into a 'unitary' discourse. ⁴⁴ Butler, p. 347. Richard Edgeworth's possible additions to the text demonstrate how his voice circumscribes Maria's writing in the way the Anglo-Irish text circumscribes Thady's Irish-English narrative (and thus adding another textual layer). Kirkpatrick (p. 89) rightly suggests that Edgeworth,

est, especially because many of the footnotes and glossary entries are linguistic explications that both create and interpret the Irish otherness within the Anglo-Irish text. Critics have noted that the paratext functions as a means to distance both the authors and readership – temporally and otherwise – from any association with or responsibility for the events narrated.⁴⁵ Yet it may also be argued that the paratext makes the foreign appreciable *as* different.

The transcription of Langan's idiom into Thady's narrative – like Wordsworth's appropriation of the border ballad or Scott's construction of the literary ballad – evinces the tensions between oral and written culture, and between local and national language; however Edgeworth's use of dialect privileges the Irish voice by permitting it to compete at least proportionately with the English editorial voice. Edgeworth clearly worked at perfecting the idiom, and Butler affirms that her use of dialect reflects subtlety and expertise, and she adjusts the rhythm and syntax to reflect accurately the Irish inflection.⁴⁶ In contrast, Brian Hollingworth finds Edgeworth's idiomatic use of the vernacular somewhat inconsistent, and he points out that the register shifts markedly, the pronunciation 'muzzled' and dialectal vocabulary 'confined'.⁴⁷ Although the glossary notes disrupt the text, ultimately they remain as accessories to – and at the margins of – Thady's narrative, helping the 'ignorant' English readers (and many others) to appreciate the idiom. Butler finds that they create an 'archaeological layering' which provides a cultural history of Ireland.⁴⁸

The advertisement to the English reader placed at the end of Thady's narrative seems to disclaim the glossary notes, stating 'Some friends who have seen Thady's history since it has been printed have suggested to the editor that many of the terms and idiomatic phrases with which it abounds could not be intelligible to the English reader without further explanation'.⁴⁹ By committing to

as a woman writer, shares Thady's status of limited power in a dominant male culture. **45** Kirkpatrick and Ruoff both address this point in their respective articles. In addition, Ruoff and George Watson observe that setting the tale 'before the year 1782' also functions as a distancing mechanism. See Kirkpatrick, p. 80; Ruoff, p. 299; and Watson, 'Introduction' to *Castle Rackrent* (Oxford, 1987), p. xvii. **46** Butler, 'Introduction', p. 12. **47** Brian Hollingworth, *Maria Edgeworth's Irish Writing: Language, History, Politics* (New York, 1997), p. 91. Hollingworth questions Thady's voice as a genuine representation of the local vernacular, suggesting that Edgeworth has modified it to make it accessible to readers. Hollingworth finds, in general, little evidence that Edgeworth maintains any sympathetic or radical attitude toward local language; in fact, he posits that Edgeworth views the vernacular as 'unreasoning' and 'morally dangerous' (25). What Hollingworth does make clear, however, is the ambiguity of Edgeworth's attitude toward the vernacular voice. He draws attention to the radical potential of Thady's voice by exposing 'the injustices of the traditional Irish social system' and the 'speaker as a victim of this system' (p. 94). **48** Butler, 'Introduction', p. 12. Hollingworth identifies the narrative additions as ways to legitimize the vernacular narrative, to provide an 'alternative persona to the suspect Thady', and to 'conduct an ironic debate concerning the role of his vernacular voice' (Hollingworth, p. 100). **49** *Castle Rackrent*, p. 124.

print Thady's narrative, the editor makes available – and simultaneously suppresses – local (and oral) culture. Edgeworth's apparent ambivalence emerges in the shifting attitudes of the paratext which are alternately defensive and offensive, liberating and colonizing.

While some of the glossary notes are apparently critical of the Irishness within the text, others disparage the Englishness that surrounds it. Inconsistencies complicate interpretation of the glossary; for example, the second note concerns John Horne Tooke, the radical, revolutionary-era linguist who privileged the vernacular, including dialect. Tooke's etymologies aimed to disrupt the élitist hegemonic distinctions between vulgar and refined language, and his presence in the glossary affirms Thady's vulgar speech.⁵⁰ Yet the very next note (on the funeral wail 'whillaluh') pokes fun at 'Irishisms' within the text. This term is attended by a lengthy glossary note, explaining that it refers to a lamentation for the dead; the note transcribes from the Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy these words: 'It has been affirmed of the Irish that to cry was more natural to them than to any other nation, and at length the Irish cry became proverbial'. The editor adds:

It is curious to observe how customs and ceremonies degenerate. The present Irish cry or howl cannot boast of much melody, nor is the funeral procession conducted with much dignity ... they begin to cry ... raising their notes from the first to the last in kind of a mournful howl.⁵¹

This note reduces the Irish to an almost pre-linguistic status and highlights their supposed brutishness. What is most interesting about this explication, however, is that it appears simultaneously to reject and establish the importance of a cultural hegemony.

The annotations to Thady's narrative of Sir Condy's story are particularly incongruous. Kirkpatrick points out that the notes accompanying the later parts are more frequent, and the editorial voice increasingly dissociates itself from any alliance with Thady and his family.⁵² Certainly Edgeworth's tinkering with the text both before and after publication suggests anxiety about its substance. A glossary note and footnote were added as late as 1810 (the fifth edition), commenting on Condy's election campaign – a crucial event that indirectly leads to his demise and to Jason's rise to power.

Condy runs in the general elections in order to dodge debts, and his success allows him to defer payment until after his term. Ironically, the additional debts incurred during the election force him to move to Dublin, and it is his absentee landlordism that affords Jason, as agent, the opportunity to plot his own ulti-

⁵⁰ Olivia Smith, *The Politics of Language*, p. 123. Butler points out Wordsworth's failure to mention Tooke in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (Butler, 'Introduction', p. 19). ⁵¹ *Castle Rackrent*, p. 124. ⁵² Kirkpatrick, p. 80.

mate take-over of the Rackrent estate. Condy's electoral success itself is fraught: it is held up to scrutiny by lawyers who wish to determine whether or not any of the freeholders who voted for him had ever set foot upon the ground of their freeholds. Condy's solution is to bring in some sod on which each freeholder could stand and therefore honestly swear that he had.

The 1810 footnote to this incident relates a similar occurrence in 1806 (significantly after the setting of the tale) in which the duke of Sussex, claiming an Irish title, visited an Irish seminary in Rome. When his hosts discovered that he had never 'trod on Irish soil', they brought him some upon which to stand. This note seems to question the Irish peerage system by suggesting that Irish nobility itself is an outmoded sham. If any English Duke can claim an Irish title, then the Irish peerage system is emptied of meaning. Also, the use of dislocated Irish soil to legitimate identity suggests a discrepancy between the physical reality of land and national identity; it suggests that Ireland itself is a displaced entity that needs to be re-established and restructured. The glossary note to the same event, also added in 1810, complicates the footnote. It points out that the same event occurred in an actual dispute between Mr M. and Mr E. over boundaries on a farm, in which one of the tenants cut a sod and inserted it so that no eye could detect the junction in the land: 'the old man, who was to give his evidence as to the property, stood upon the inserted sod when the *viewers* came, and swore that the ground he *then stood upon* belonged to his landlord'.⁵³ A second narrative voice in the same glossary note then adds:

The editor had flattered himself that the ingenious contrivance which Thady records, and the similar subterfuge of this old Irishman, in the dispute concerning boundaries, were instances of *cuteness* unparalleled in all but Irish story: an Irish friend however, has just mortified the Editor's national vanity by an account of the following custom which prevails in part of Shropshire. It is discreditable for women to appear abroad after the birth of their children until they had been *churched*.⁵⁴

The note goes on to discuss how these women place tiles from their homes on their heads so that they can claim to their clergymen that they had never been out from under their own roofs until they had been '*churched*'. This note-within-a-note recalls the argument of the *Essay on Irish Bulls*, which points out that bulls or blunders, thought to be characteristically Irish, may be found in all parts of the world, including England, and it serves to reprimand English ridicule of and sense of superiority over Irishness.⁵⁵ Within this one glossary note two edi-

⁵³ *Castle Rackrent*, p. 136. Butler adds in a note that this dispute took place in a lawsuit between Edgeworth's grandfather and the great-grandfather of a neighbour (p. 352). ⁵⁴ *Castle Rackrent*, p. 136. ⁵⁵ For a discussion of footnotes that contain potentially radical signification, including the 'raking pot of tea', the 'fairy mounts', and the Jewish Lady Rackrent

torial voices vie with one another, ultimately censoring the English – and specifically male – voice of the editor.

It is of particular interest that the dispute documented in the glossary note is one about property and boundaries. Edgeworth's writings characteristically negotiate the lines between biological and social inheritance: property lines are as fluid as one's identity; similarly, national identity is as socially constructed as are property divisions, and thus as prone to usurpation and domination. *Castle Rackrent* documents this struggle, and the text illuminates the Edgeworth family's anxieties about their own property inheritance. This awareness informed Richard's ambivalent position on the Union: although he was for the Union for economic reasons, he voted against it, as Maria put it, because 'England has not any right to do to Ireland good against her will'.⁵⁶ The editorial voice in the Preface concludes with the erroneous assertion, 'nations as well as individuals gradually lose attachment to their identity'.⁵⁷ This is the voice of Anglo-Irish authority – the establishment of a new national, literary, political and religious hegemony that circumscribes Thady's story. Kirkpatrick rightly observes that the Preface was dated in post-Union 1800 – a move that bastardizes a sense of national identity and silences 'those elements that challenge a consolidated presentation of hegemony'.⁵⁸

To read *Castle Rackrent* as a tale about the loss of national identity is to complicate its status as a regional tale. While the Preface asserts that groups of persons lose attachment to their identity, it in part makes clear that the representational priorities of the novel are a way of compensating for a possible loss of public memory. To read this novel as a regional narrative is to distinguish a local or regional culture distinct from that of Britain; paradoxically this delineation represents an assertion of Ireland's national status. As a result, *Castle Rackrent*, like *Lyrical Ballads*, is a strange amalgamation of the local and the universal, and is rife with inner contradictions and ambiguities.

Border ballads, border cultures and border wars are spaces of intersection and contradiction. Indeed borders are perpetually areas of uncertainty – both here and there, neither here nor there – but constantly and dynamically negotiated.⁵⁹ Maria Edgeworth's identity – authorially and nationally – is divided in precisely this way. As a woman writer in the dominant class that itself rests within an ideological and cultural border territory, Edgeworth's loyalties were in constant conflict. Her awareness of her situation, demonstrated by labelling herself as 'little i', and the separation of her author-voice from her other voices, reflects what post-structuralist thought has come to call the 'fragmented subject', a concern that much plagued Edgeworth's Lake District counterparts.

locked in the attic for seven years, see Kirkpatrick, as well as Butler's 'Introduction'. ⁵⁶ Watson, 'Introduction', p. xxxv. ⁵⁷ *Castle Rackrent*, p. 63. ⁵⁸ Kirkpatrick, p. 89. ⁵⁹ Along these lines, Hollingworth ultimately determines that the overall effect of the editorial apparatus is 'to blur the boundaries between fact and fiction, between social history and narrative invention, and in effect, to pass one off as the other' (Hollingworth, p. 106).

In the end, by creating the hybrid form that was to become the regional novel, Edgeworth, like Wordsworth, created the taste of her readers; but her decision, however ambivalently interpreted, to write her text in the vernacular complete with provincialisms, distinguishes her from Wordsworth. Her text carves out a space for the voices of the Irish; as Kirkpatrick has noted: 'Edgeworth's text remains resilient. Though the attempt at an ideological coup is made by the Editor ... even the Editor's voice is inevitably subjected to a subversive irony'.⁶⁰ Also, Edgeworth's identification with the Irish is more believable than Wordsworth's ostensible ability to 'to let himself slip into an entire delusion and even confound and identify' his own feelings with his poetic subjects.⁶¹ As a woman and as a sympathiser with the Irish cause (and one who seemed to consider herself at least in part Irish) Edgeworth does indeed share Thady's status of limited power, while Wordsworth – particularly in the case of 'Ellen Irwin' – appears to appropriate and naturalize Ellen's story with no apparent identification.

Like Wordsworth's border ballads, or the status of the English rewriting of these works in general, the regional novel as conceived by Edgeworth is a complex and hybrid entity. The relationship between written and spoken text is one closely allied with the centrifugal pull of national centralization and the centripetal pull of regional and cultural diversity. The recuperation of regional voices in texts of this period offers a literary solution for perplexing political and cultural problems; however, Romanticism's preoccupation with packaging and marketing regional voices for literary consumption proves to be a politically loaded task that brings into relief national, regional and literary exigencies.

⁶⁰ Kirkpatrick, p. 90. ⁶¹ *Prose Works*, vol. i, p. 138.