

par Józef Szczepaniec, le meilleur spécialiste des écrits politiques de Potocki à cette époque.

En 1806 Potocki fut chargé de la direction du *Journal du Nord* au ministère des Affaires étrangères à Saint Pétersbourg. Il écrivit alors beaucoup d'articles pour expliquer la politique étrangère de la Russie à l'égard de la France et de Napoléon. La paix de Tilsit mit fin momentanément à l'attitude hostile de la Russie à l'égard de la France. Dès lors le *Journal du Nord* cessa d'intéresser Potocki. Ses articles sont aussi intéressants parce qu'ils ont été écrits avec un sens de l'humour qui réjouit le lecteur. On a omis ici un de ses articles qu'on peut rattacher au voyage de Potocki en Chine. En lisant les trois premiers volumes des œuvres choisies de Potocki nous pouvons nous faire une idée de la largesse de ses horizons et de l'importance d'une partie de son œuvre.

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Maria Edgeworth. *Castle Rackrent*, ed. Susan Kubica Howard. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2007. xliii+87pp. US\$9.95 (pb). ISBN 978-0-87220-877-3.

An 1800 reviewer of Maria Edgeworth's novel *Castle Rackrent* praised the work as "a very pleasant, good-humoured, and successful representation of the eccentricities of our Irish neighbours" (cited in Jacqueline Belanger, "Educating the Reading Public: British Critical Reception of Maria Edgeworth's Early Irish Writing," *Irish University Review* 28, no. 2 (1998): 240–55). Subsequent critics have shared that early appreciation of the novel, but have seen in it a more nuanced portrayal of Irish life. For most of the twentieth century, readers were introduced to *Castle Rackrent* through George Watson's Oxford edition (1964), but in the past two decades, Penguin Classics (1992) and Houghton Mifflin's New Riverside series (2005) have produced editions of the work, which also appears in Pickering & Chatto's collection of *The Works of Maria Edgeworth* (2003). This latest edition of *Castle Rackrent* is edited and introduced by Susan Kubica Howard, who writes in "A Note on the Text" that she has "annotated the novel with an eye toward providing an undergraduate reader with the tools to read this edition as easily and fully as possible, and a more advanced reader the sources to go further in-depth with his or her inquiries" (xxxvi). She does the former well, and undergraduate readers will find many of these

tools valuable. A more advanced reader would probably do well to use another edition.

Castle Rackrent purports to be an “unvarnished tale” (4) narrated by Thady Quirk, an old Irish family servant. The novel is glossed and annotated by an authoritarian English editor, who alternately explains and undermines Thady’s tale. Any modern editor seeking to publish a new edition of this book must first come to terms with the novel’s original editorial apparatus, written by Edgeworth herself, probably with contributions by her father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth. In her introduction, Howard notes that the editorial apparatus operates on more than one level, “allowing readers from varied backgrounds and with diverse perspectives to engage in the novel” (xxiv). Howard’s own introduction likewise allows readers of varying backgrounds to appreciate and understand the text better. Her section on the novel’s historical context brings together important information on the historical relationship between Ireland and England, explaining the origins of the draconian “penal laws” and the devastating consequences of a nation presided over by absentee landlords. Howard details the role that the Edgeworth family played in reforming the tenant-landlord system, and Maria’s direct involvement in her family’s estate as agent and accountant (xv). Howard’s introduction highlights the “many parallels between Thady’s story of the Rackrent family’s abuse of—and attempts to keep—the estate, and the story of the Edgeworths’ own ancestors’ equally inept though ultimately successful efforts to hold onto theirs” (xxix). This context and the supporting examples that Howard cites place important emphasis on the interrelationship between generations, between classes, and between nations depicted in *Castle Rackrent*. Each of these issues is central to Edgeworth’s text and, as Howard reminds us, complicated and uncomfortable.

Yet Howard’s decision to move Edgeworth’s editorial footnotes to the end undermines the multiple voices that make *Castle Rackrent* an original and thorny novel. These notes originally appeared at the bottom of the pages of Thady’s tale, and they complicate the work in important ways. Certainly *Castle Rackrent* is not the “plain unvarnished tale” (4) that its putative editor claims. While some scholars dispute the role of *Castle Rackrent*’s editor, clearly he (or she) underestimates Thady Quirk from the outset. In the novel’s preface, written for the benefit of “the *ignorant* English reader” (5), the editor alludes to Thady’s “habitual laziness” and inability to deceive his more sophisticated readers. Yet readers cannot help but question the truth of Thady’s tale: he proudly describes his son Jason’s mounting business successes, while condemning Jason’s eventual takeover of the Rackrent estate; he portrays the Rackrents as stingy and

incompetent landlords and employers, while insisting on his affection for them; and he wonders how any woman would be eager to become Sir Kit Rackrent's second wife after he kept his first wife locked in her room for years. Thady's claims of Big House loyalty are questionable at best, and the reader should not take the editor's simplistic assessment of Thady at face value. Indeed, these have been among the central questions that critics have posed of this work: what is the relationship between the novel's Irish narrator, Thady Quirk, and its English editor? Is the editor a stand-in for Edgeworth? For the stereotypical English reader? The novel offers several (sometimes opposing) possibilities, and a careful reading of the text must take into account the relationship between Thady's narrative and the editorial glosses.

In choosing to move the editor's notes from the bottom of the page to the end of the novel, Howard minimizes the disparity between the words of "Honest Thady" and the editorial voice of authority. Instead, Howard's own annotations appear as footnotes, and they helpfully define terms, summarize the ideas of other critics, and provide historical context. Without doubt, placing her scholarly glosses at the bottom of the page where readers can access them easily makes the novel more understandable, but this move is made at the cost of de-emphasizing the work's competing voices. Furthermore, the original notes are now titled "Maria Edgeworth's Notes to *Castle Rackrent*," suggesting an un-ironic identification between Edgeworth and the editor.

That *Castle Rackrent* is much more than a "very pleasant" representation of the late-eighteenth-century Irish people is made clear by the continued scholarly interest in the novel and in Edgeworth studies in general. This new critical edition is a good introduction to the author and novel, although a few problems make it a less-than-ideal foundation for further research. For example, Edgeworth's father "Richard Lovell" is twice called "Robert" (xv) in the introduction. In addition, the Works Cited page features no works published after 2002. The introduction, however, clearly and economically provides a useful overview of historical, biographical, and critical contexts, which will enhance the understanding of the many readers who continue to discover this book.

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