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## L I T E R A T U R E

### **“Salvific” Memory, “Enlightened” Oblivion Spectral Traces of the Past in Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* (1800)**

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**I**N MY exploration of tropes of memory and oblivion in Maria Edgeworth’s Irish Gothic narrative *Castle Rackrent* (1800), I start from a thesis advanced in the literature devoted to the dialectics between reminiscence and forgetting, according to which the latter half of the eighteenth century witnessed the emergence of new forms of memory deployed towards the esemplastic production, rather than the mimetic reproduction of the past, in such a way as to illuminate the present and open gateways into the future through the meaningful entwinement of their pathways of signification.<sup>1</sup> Thus, during this period, it is argued, there occurred an “inward turn” of memory, featuring a shift from “classical and early-modern mnemonic systems” to a vibrant metaphoric of remembrance and its attendant phenomenon, oblivion, which could be enlisted in the efforts to grant meaning to personal and collective histories.<sup>2</sup> In her survey of memory as an itinerant concept,<sup>3</sup> for

instance, Anne Whitehead investigates the historical underpinnings of its cross-generational conveyance, showing that from antiquity until the early modern period, practices of remembrance were targeted at a retrieval of previously accumulated information; by contrast, during the Enlightenment, memory was increasingly conceived less as a technical system of mnemonics, and more as a faculty that was adjunct to reason and imagination and served as a means of reviving the past and integrating it within the individual or collective consciousness.<sup>4</sup> In putting forth the syntagm of esemplastic memory,<sup>5</sup> I invoke the Coleridgean trace of secondary imagination, which organically forges new wholes out of disparate images,<sup>6</sup> and also take heed of Edward S. Casey's suggestion that mapping the present's rapports with the past and the future entails accessing the complementary workings of memory and imagination: locked in a triadic dynamics, the proleptic flights of imagination into the "purely possible," into "what *might be*," are replicated in memory's reverse, analeptic returns to the "already elapsed," to "what *has been*," chorographing the place of the present in between these two poles of becoming.<sup>7</sup> In Edgeworth's novel, by recourse to a generative and regenerative type of memory, the past is exhumed—analeptically *and* proleptically, retrospectively *and* prospectively—out of the historical archive and subjected to ceaseless acts of interpretation in the entwined present time-frames of the story's narrator, editor and readers: what Frank Kermode defines as the "salvific" chronotope of fiction.<sup>8</sup> The syntagm "enlightened forgetting"<sup>9</sup> of my title captures the extrication, on the cusp between the Age of Reason and the Age of Romanticism, of both memory and its counterpart, oblivion, from a mechanistic paradigm that envisaged the former as a repetitive technique and the latter as an extemporaneous occurrence, and their reconceptualisation as processes whose interlaced interactions could structure the present's rapports with the past in a meaningful manner. The Edgeworthian project of constructing the memory of the nation by focal limitation to a family's lineage is expressed in the following terms in the so-called editor's preface:

*The author of the following Memoirs has upon these grounds fair claims to the public favour and attention; he was an illiterate old steward, whose partiality to the family, in which he was bred and born, must be obvious to the reader. He tells the history of the Rackrent family in his vernacular idiom, and in the full confidence that Sir Patrick, Sir Murtagh, Sir Kit, and Sir Condy Rackrent's affairs will be as interesting to all the world as they were to himself. Those who were acquainted with the manners of a certain class of the gentry of Ireland some years ago will want no evidence of the truth of honest Thady's narrative: to those who are totally unacquainted with Ireland, the following Memoirs will perhaps be scarcely intelligible, or probably they may appear perfectly incredible.<sup>10</sup>*

Furthermore, Edgeworth's recourse to the memoirist discourse as a means of correcting history's lack of specific nuance and focalized impetus<sup>11</sup> raises the question of the ethical dimension of narrative forms produced within the space of eighteenth-century literature. What might be seen as an act of deception (the writer's dissimulation as the persona of an editor who simply transcribes a genuine discourse, the orally recounted memoirs of a marginal character, for the edification of the readers) becomes invested with the ethical weight of a restitutive gesture, designed to initiate the English readership into the realities of the cultural space of Irishness, which would otherwise be difficult to fathom from an extrinsic perspective. The ethics of novelistic writing—inherent not only at the explicit, thematic level, but also at the formal level of experimentation with points of view and other forms of discursive mediation—becomes entwined with the ethics of reading, for Edgeworth's readers are enjoined to give more credence to the versions of truth articulated in the wings or behind the curtains of History's grand events, among and by the extras, by the marginal "actors and actresses," rather than by the "heroes," the "splendid characters playing their parts on the great theater of the world, with all the advantages of stage effect and decoration."<sup>12</sup> Such ethical undecidability also marks other fictional narratives of the eighteenth-century, in their recourse to paratextual devices. I am referring here, for instance, to the prefaces written by the would-be editors of "found" manuscripts in Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* or in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, or to the introductory chapters of Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, which witness the immersion of the dissembled authorial self in the textual world, guiding the reader through the process of reading, or to Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, a classical case through its very atypicality in the context of the age's preference for realistic verisimilitude, in which the author breaks the ontological boundaries between the real and the fictional universes, simultaneously posing as narrator, character and reader. Any act of reading—and, consequently, that of self-reading, too, through which an author engages in the meta-narrative gesture of writing the preface of his or her own novel—any act of reading, therefore, is "always already a matter of translation, wherein one is always caught in the snares of both fidelity and betrayal,"<sup>13</sup> inviting the reader of this authorial (self)reader to a direct co-participation in the production of meaning, to commitment to present acts of interpretation of the text, as well as of the past in which this text was generated; ultimately, it is from this reflexivity and self-reflexivity that the transformative, emancipatory potential of the novel derives.

In her Gothic narrative of the "Big House" psychocultural *topos*,<sup>14</sup> Maria Edgeworth engages in an archaeology of temporal depths, concertedly invoking and dispelling, vivifying into remembrance and deadening into oblivion the ar-

chival image of Ireland *qua* Gothic territory in itself.<sup>15</sup> The paratextual apparatus of the novel—comprising an editor’s preface and epilogue, supplemented by notes and a glossary of terms that might pose difficulties to an English reader, since they referentially encompass idiosyncratic and, to some extent, “exotic” realities—specifies the authorial intent: to balance the angle of approach to the past in-between the public’s penchant for the “anecdotal” and the critics’ aspiration towards “superior wisdom.”<sup>16</sup> The author *qua* editor expresses therefore a preference for filigree approaches to individualized destinies, in keeping with “the good sense and profoundly philosophic temper of the present times,”<sup>17</sup> and discards the option for an overarching historiographic grand narrative, which would capture the past from a higher, generalizing and universalizing, albeit sterile perspective and would prevent the readers from empathetically responding to authentic, particular experiences:

*Of the numbers who study, or at least who read history, how few derive any advantage from their labors! The heroes of history are so decked out by the fine fancy of the professed historian; they talk in such measured prose, and act from such sublime or such diabolical motives, that few have sufficient taste, wickedness, or heroism, to sympathize in their fate. Besides, there is much uncertainty even in the best authenticated ancient or modern histories; and that love of truth, which in some minds is innate and immutable, necessarily leads to a love of secret memoirs, and private anecdotes. We cannot judge either of the feelings or of the characters of men with perfect accuracy, from their actions or their appearance in public; it is from their careless conversations, their half-finished sentences, that we may hope with the greatest probability of success to discover their real characters.*<sup>18</sup>

*Castle Rackrent*, subtitled *An Hibernian Tale Taken from Facts, and from the Manners of the Irish Squires, before the Year 1782*, locates historical truth not in the spheres of the public, the timeless and the universal, as Henry Fielding would have done in his attempts to “imitate” or omnisciently represent manners, not men, or species, not individuals, in his novelistic variations on the “comic epic poem in prose,”<sup>19</sup> but in the realm of the private, the time-bound and the specific, for her novel is intended as a memento of Ireland’s particularized structures of the socius, exemplified through the intricate relations between the Ascendancy superstratum (the decaying Rackrents) and the Celtic substratum (the rising Thadys), prior to the 1801 Act of Union, which was to abolish Irish political autonomy and to erase the traces of Ireland’s identitarian past, hurled thus into the acculturative vat of Britishness: “When Ireland loses her identity by an union with Great Britain, she will look back with a smile of good-humored complacency on the Sir Kits and Sir Condys of her former existence.”<sup>20</sup> *Castle*

*Rackrent* is introduced to the readers as a true “history,” in keeping with the eighteenth century’s emphasis on the non-fictional, on the factual, even though it could be more safely stated that while striving to stay within the realistic bounds of verisimilitude and credibility, the authorial gesture of having a “native” recount his memoirs to the editor performs the dual gesture of accommodating the fabulous alterity of Irishness within the minoritarian discourse of an Irish subaltern (acquiring thus the necessary distance before the envisioned English readers) and legitimizing the narrative as an authentic portrayal of Ireland, merely transcribed by the editor, who “lays it before the English reader as a specimen of manners and characters, which are, perhaps, unknown in England.”<sup>21</sup> J. Paul Hunter shows that most of the novels produced during this period featured titular descriptions that eschewed their fictionality, by posing as the more “authentic” and “authenticable” discourse of history: “These fictional narratives of present time that chronicled the daily experiences, conflicts, and thoughts of ordinary men and women,” Hunter says, “went by other names, too—‘romances,’ ‘adventures,’ ‘lives,’ ‘tales,’ ‘memoirs,’ ‘expeditions,’ ‘fortunes and misfortunes,’ and (ultimately) ‘novels’—because a variety of features and traditions competed for attention in this new hybrid form that in the course of the eighteenth century came to dominate the reading habits of English men and women of all classes.”<sup>22</sup>

**M**ARIA EDGEWORTH’S decision to dissimulate her authorial persona as a male editor may have served this purpose of authentication, resting on the purported objectivity of one who collects and presents to the reader a genuine document: at the level of the authorial intention, however, Edgeworth claims to offer a nude, unadorned and crude transcript of an oral retrospective narrative, a memoir uttered by an indigenous, colonized man whose destiny is inextricably woven into that of the colonizers, but she refuses to editorialize the text in order to provide it with a unified formal structure or coherence, since “varnish[ing] the plain round tale of faithful Thady” would have solely rendered it “more dramatic and more pathetic,” without making it in any way more credible.<sup>23</sup> Hovering between the generic categories of “history,” “biography” and “memoir,” *Castle Rackrent* aspires to construct a “picture” of Ireland from within and deconstruct the metropolitan cultural stereotypes about this colonial outpost, but manages to articulate an extimate or external-intimate standpoint that stereoscopically accommodates the perspectival angles of both the subversive colonized subject (Thady) and the empathetic colonizer (the author), the latter condensing the project of building a “faithful portrait of [Ireland’s] inhabitants” as a second-order discursive replication of the “accurate” description accomplished by the Englishman Arthur Young’s 1780 travelogue,

entitled *A Tour in Ireland*, which Edgeworth describes as “the most reliable portrait of the Irish peasantry ever printed.”<sup>24</sup>

To that effect, her narrative appears to activate the mnemonic traces of a heteroglossic archive of writings about Ireland, singling out Young’s travel narrative as a precedent because of their consubstantial vantage on “that mixture of quickness, simplicity, cunning, carelessness, dissipation, disinterestedness, shrewdness, and blunder” which is the peculiar stamp of Irishness in her cross-generic account.<sup>25</sup> In fact, in *The Origins of the English Novel*, Michael McKeon approaches the destabilization of generic boundaries in the realm of prose fiction as the symptom of a “taxonomic disease,” manifested, in the long turn of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, through frantic endeavors targeted at discerning and maintaining the categorical confines between genres like romance, the novel, or history; these were, in effect, interchangeable descriptors, leading to the creation of “strange, hybrid forms whose very existence finally must vitiate the discriminatory function of the original taxonomy.”<sup>26</sup> To this generic heterogeneity also contributed the still porous frontiers between a waning oral and a consolidating literate culture, memory and its potential to “preserve” historical fact playing a crucial role in this regard: thus, McKeon shows, the concepts of “originality,” “factuality” and “historicity” are differently inflected in the two types of culture, and while “the authoritative linearity of oral lineages is deceptive” and malleable, transformable in time, it is also the case that “writing ‘reifies’ memory,” since the “physical preservation of knowledge produces not only documents and archives but also conditions for the ‘objective’ comparison of data, even the inclination to regard knowledge as a collection of discrete ‘objects’.”<sup>27</sup>

In *Castle Rackrent*, consistent with an emergent Romantic interest in the local, the individual and the vernacular, the editor commits “himself” to debunking the detrimental effects that hegemonic distortions of public memory may exert in their forging of an aseptic stance on the past and foregrounds an atomization of History into a multifarious array of competing microhistories that can no longer be aggregated into a single, monolithic teleological totality. In other words, what Edgeworth’s self-reflexive commentaries from the preface and the epilogue attest is a shift from the novelist’s position as a historian to that of a biographer who draws her inspiration not from external facts but from an ordinary individual’s orally “enacted” memoirs, for her documentary sources no longer rely on officially-sanctioned historical verities, which would risk distorting or obliterating mnemonic traces that might contribute to the articulation of altogether different, alternative histories, but, as she says, on “secret memoirs, and private anecdotes.”<sup>28</sup> In anchoring her narrative of Hibernian history within the narrow scope of a family’s cross-generational trajectory, seen from the lateral-subordinate viewpoint of an ambivalently positioned raconteur (for Thady is

both an insider and an outsider to the “factual” truth of the Rackrents’ genealogical dissipation), Edgeworth captures the dichotomy between the “transmutable” and the “reifying” transmissibility of data through oral v. written channels. The author opts, as seen above, for a performative, orally-delivered narrative of selfhood and otherness, and even though she attempts, at times, to buttress her foray into the prehistory of the Irish “Big House” she explores with certifying references to various written archives, she foregrounds the dynamic articulation of generational memory not only within the confines of an individual consciousness, but at the intersection of multiple such consciousnesses with the collective, hybridized Anglo-Irish mindset: “The editor hopes his readers will observe that these are ‘tales of other times’: that the manners depicted in the following pages are not those of the present age: the race of the Rackrents has long since been extinct in Ireland; and the drunken Sir Patrick, the litigious Sir Murtagh, the fighting Sir Kit, and the slovenly Sir Condy, are characters which could no more be met with at present in Ireland, than Squire Western or Parson Trulliber in England. There is a time, when individuals can bear to be rallied for their past follies and absurdities, after they have acquired new habits, and a new consciousness.”<sup>29</sup>

The narrative of *Castle Rackrent*—recounted not from a domineering vantage point but from a microhistorical perspective—pivots around the derelict mansion of the title, playing upon the conventional trope of the Irish Big House as a site of familial and collective memory that condenses, in its “fading dilapidation,”<sup>30</sup> the patterns of conquest and submission, usurpation and restoration that have riveted its four generations of owners apart. The “castle” of the Rackrents, about to fall into the hands of the historically dispossessed and (self)-repossessing Thadys, pertains to the trope of the Big Houses, enshrined as Gothic loci in the Irish collective memory of historical trauma, which may also be regarded as the realms of remembrance defined by Pierre Nora as places where “memory is crystallized, in which it finds refuge,” where, notwithstanding the severance of the past from the present through the counterforces of amnesia or oblivion, “a residual sense of [historical] continuity” may indeed be preserved; thus, in addition to the sites of memory identified by Nora (monuments, museums, cemeteries), the Big Houses of Gothic Irish fiction can be seen if not as *milieux de mémoire*, then as *lieux de mémoire*, as the architectural repositories of a “vast fund of memories” among which the sense of an intimate incorporation of the past into the present has been supplanted by the reconstruction of a discontinuous, disjointed past through history.<sup>31</sup> *Castle Rackrent* functions as such a t(r)opological “storehouse of memory,”<sup>32</sup> which spatializes crystallizations of power and powerlessness, wealth and destitution, grandeur and degeneration, condensing the similar downward trajectory of its masters and owners. Thady

Quirk, the octogenarian narrator, performs the role of the archivist ostensibly intent on restoring and preserving the memory of the place, yet he speaks from the marginal position of a servant to the Rackrents, displaying, before the eyes of an intended British readership, not only the symptoms of a “servile, colonized consciousness, masking his own self-interest in a professed loyalty to his reckless and doomed masters,”<sup>33</sup> but also the typical unreliability of an ambivalently nostalgic and ironic Gothic narrator, who engages in palinodic retraction, evasive destabilization of meaning, and perspectival inconsistency as he charts the dissolution of the Rackrents’ genealogical line.

In effect, in *Castle Rackrent*, the narrator’s convoluted imaginary, strewn with crossable boundaries and inverted hierarchies, with the signs of a propagation of the specters of past infractions into a disoriented present, his “gothic pathologies,”<sup>34</sup> as it were, represent the symptomatologies of an ampler psychosocial process of accommodating the mutations and hybridizations that began with the process of colonization. Edgeworth’s confused, unstable, conflicted and conflicting narrator is torn apart in-between repressed fantasies of aggrandizement (elevation, via identification with his upstart offspring, the land-appropriating lawyer Jason Thady, to the privileged status of the former Ascendancy) and nightmares of debasement (relegation to the marginality of the alienated Celtic substratum), but what he essentially maps are the muddled depths of the psychocultural *métissage* that Ireland’s dynamics of collision and conciliation has fuelled throughout time, the fragilities and vulnerabilities that the relinquishment of divisionism, through the bourgeois-driven economic deconstruction of aristocratic hierarchies, rather than through a national political settlement of the conflict, may engender in the social self.

In *Gothic Ireland*, Jarlath Killeen undertakes a discursive archaeology of the manifest and latent epistemic formations of *Hibernia Anglicana*, uncovering “the codes” through which “Irish Anglicans possessed their social and cultural environments.”<sup>35</sup> What Killeen detects is the fact that in the tempestuous history of Ireland’s colonization by the British, the psycho-emotional infrastructure of the Anglican self was predicated on conceptions of Irish Catholics as “monstrous” strangers, especially since these “others” were looked at through the lens of volatile colonizer-colonized relations, predicated on traumatic, confrontational historical moments, like the revolution of 1691 or the rebellion of 1798, which had challenged the solidity of the Ascendancy regime. In line with the well-established notion that the Gothic was coeval with the birth of an enlightened (Protestant) modernity out of the ruinous (Catholic) past, the two identitarian poles that were engaged in conflictual opposition, demanding their mutual abjection in order for one or the other to prevail, were configured thus: “If the Self is unitary, modern, rational, puritan, and in the center, the Self is



Protestant; if the Other is excessive, medieval, irrational, regional, and sexually perverse, the Other is Catholic.”<sup>36</sup> In Killeen’s understanding, according to this binary logic of defilement/imperilment and purgation/abjection, Catholic Ireland was ambivalently associated with a mixture of fascination and repulsiveness, being constru(ct)ed by the Anglo-Irish gentry (positioned at the higher end of the economic, social and political spectrum) as a “space of monstrous drives and apparitions which plague the Self.”<sup>37</sup> In any case, as Killeen also suggests, such confrontational frames of self-definition through the rejection of the other were more or less characteristic of the pre-Gothic discursive representations of Anglo-Irish relations. The full manifestation of Gothic in Irish literature, which was coeval with the publication, in 1800, of Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent*, and with the 1801 Act of Union, marked a definitive move towards reconciliatory hybridization, seen as a processual negotiation of identitarian boundaries: “The Act of Union theoretically brought Ireland closer to the center of British political life but . . . it only succeeded in highlighting the fractious nature of the colonial project. *Castle Rackrent* also attempts to bring together the voices of an Anglo-Irish gentleman and an Irish Catholic peasant but . . . this attempt breaks down due to the duplicitous character of both protagonists. What *Rackrent* did suggest, however, was the radical unity within the island itself, and instantiated a mode of history and fiction writing which could heal the horrific wounds of the past . . . and prepare the ground for a ‘Gothic’ rather than a horrific future.”<sup>38</sup>

**T**HROUGH AMUSINGLY disconcerting splices of narratorial reliability and fallibility, the “biographical” rather than “historical” account provided by the narrator in Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* deconstructs the aforementioned a(nta)gonistic premises of the Gothic, diffracted through the attempt to “archontically”<sup>39</sup> accommodate and personally incorporate multifarious strands of Irishness (Protestant/Catholic, etc.) in a fluid reconstruction of colonial times, the most obvious symbol of which is the Big House and its fluctuating ownership, as it appears to pass from the hands of the landed gentry into those of the economically recalibrated natives. In effect, while Edgeworth is acknowledged as the initiator of the “Big House” Gothic strand of fiction in Irish literature, it is also the case that she prototypally launches another filiative chain of narratives written in this mode,<sup>40</sup> namely “Bog Gothic,” which exploits, in comic-tragic fashion, the quiriness of Irish mindscapes and excavates the stratified layers of the nation’s collective memory. As also conveyed in the works of contemporary writer Patrick McCabe, the universe of “Bog Gothic” enables a “warped” focalization on a “cast of grotesques” which set into higher relief “humanity’s baser impulses, as manifested through the particular mentality” of provincial Ireland.<sup>41</sup> This “blarney” version of Gothic often exhumes the incons-

quential nature of residual sectarian partitions and divisions, which wreak havoc amongst individuals left in abeyance on the frail/fraying threshold between traditionalism and modernization, who plunge into flurries of psychological disarray, intensely charted through a unique blend of grisly pathos and droll bathos.<sup>42</sup> Relevant, in this regard is the astounded reaction of Sir Kit Rackrent's Jewish bride to the sight of the bog, the disorienting marshland that unsettles the foreign woman because to her, it is reminiscent of no other similar landmark. That the peatland is preserved with great pride in the family as a repository of relative wealth and inordinate pride is evinced by Sir Kit's expostulation: "You'll not see the bog of Allyballycarricko'shaughlin at-all-at-all through the skreen, when once the leaves come out. But, my lady, you must not quarrel with any part or parcel of Allyballycarricko'shaughlin, for you don't know how many hundred years that same bit of bog has been in the family; we would not part with the bog of Allyballycarricko'shaughlin upon no account at all."<sup>43</sup> Uncannily serving as the familiar home territory of the Rackrent manorial owner and as the terrifying instantiation of a secondary, spectral dimension of space, which threatens to take over the real and plunge it into the engulfing void of a swampy terrain for Rackrent's foreign wife,<sup>44</sup> the bog becomes the locus of Gothic experience, of psychological dissipation and vacuity by excellence, representing what analysts like Zygmunt Bauman have defined as "empty places," where identity and alterity become one and none, where no process of signification and meaning assignment can be conducted, making them averse to epistemological decryption. Empty places are the residual baggage ("waste-products") of being/non-being left after the structuration of the world into spaces "that matter," the remainder or the detritus left behind and, as such, "they owe their ghostly presence to the lack of overlap between the elegance of structure and the messiness of the world (any world, also the purposefully designed world) notorious for its defiance of neat classifications."<sup>45</sup> The bog is also, and at the same time, a "phagic place," according to the same classification undertaken by Zygmunt Bauman, based on the distinction operated by Lévi-Strauss in *Tristes Tropiques* between the anthropoemetic strategies of ejection and elimination and the anthropophagic strategies of absorption, ingestion and consumption of foreignness or otherness.<sup>46</sup> The bog is a Gothic *topos* not only because it draws in, never letting go, not only because it rests on the oxymoronic trope of invisible carcerality, but because it poses the threat of annihilation not by mere death, but by the transformation of the living into decorporealized selves. The bog also functions, in Thady's mnemonic account, as the site of a critical labor of liberation from the unprocessed mnemonic effluvia or amnesiac blockages that confound the prospects of achieving a peaceful memory of loss. It is a trope of memory that keeps being articulated despite *and* through the disarticulating workings of forgetting,<sup>47</sup> suggesting that

the construction of the past—and of the narrative thereof—is equally a deconstruction, both featuring as constitutive elements in a perpetual process of signification, whereby some of the mnemonic and semic traces are retained, whereas others are inadvertently or deliberately lost. As Derrida shows, the imperative of acknowledging the *revenge* of the past as *arrivance* of the future must be heeded by accommodating the spectral traces of the dead within the inner scapes of a self that recognizes and respects the absolute otherness of his ghosts,<sup>48</sup> and while Thady, the hypermnestic narrator, may only put on a pretense to that effect, the author's restitutive glance at Irish history certainly grants hospitality to its spectral presences-in-absence. In light of Terry Eagleton's diagnosis of the idiosyncratic "bogginess" of Irish literature,<sup>49</sup> it could safely be asserted that like Seamus Heaney, the Irish national poet who transvalorised "bog," turning it into the arch-meme of Ireland's cultural horizons, Maria Edgeworth programmatically wrote in this mode, releasing "bog" from its ostracizing connotations and valorizing it as a trope of "salvific" memory and "enlightened" oblivion, fostering processes of cultural (self-)awareness. Unfolding between the poles of forgetfulness and remembrance, *Castle Rackrent* may be seen to reconceive the past's terrific *revenge* as beneficent *arrivance*.

□

## Notes

1. Cf. John Frow, *Time and Commodity Culture: Essays in Cultural Theory and Postmodernity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 228–229; Anne Whitehead, *Memory* (London–New York: Routledge, 2009), 48–49. See also Harald Weinrich, *Lethé: The Art and Critique of Forgetting*, transl. Steven Rendall (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004), 4.
2. Whitehead, 48–49. As Weinrich shows, during this period, oblivion also began to be regarded less as a spontaneous, accidental jamming of memory's mechanics and more as the processual counterpart of an organically restructured memory, in Weinrich, 4.
3. A construct that becomes differently inflected as it "travels" across disciplinary, chronological and psycho-geographical boundaries. See Whitehead, 4.
4. *Ibid.*, 6–7.
5. See my analysis of this form of memory in the works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Laurence Sterne and Samuel Johnson in Carmen-Veronica Borbély, *Enlightened Forgetting: Tropes of Memory and Oblivion in Eighteenth-Century British Fiction* (Cluj: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2014).
6. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Biographia Litteraria*, eds. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 304–305.

7. Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), xvi–xvii.
8. In *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction with a New Epilogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 46–47, 72, Frank Kermode’s inquiry into the enfoldings of myth and fiction leads him to operate the well-known distinction between *chronos*, “passing time,” the temporal flow, and *kairos*, the moment of being “poised between beginning and end,” “a point in time filled with significance, charged with a meaning derived from its relation to the end”: the memory activated in contact with the Blanchotian “space of literature” may assist readers in accessing (“salvaging”) a moment out of time, caught between eternity and temporality, the *aevum*, which is “the time-order of novels.” See also Marina Warner’s references to the “salvific promise of art,” in Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 348–349.
9. Used by Weinrich, 57–61.
10. Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent*, ed. Susan Kubica Howard (Indianapolis–Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2007), 5.
11. As the author-editor confesses in the preface, “We are surely justified, in this eager desire, to collect the most minute facts relative to the domestic lives, not only of the great and good, but even of the worthless and insignificant, since it is only by a comparison of their actual happiness or misery in the privacy of domestic life that we can form a just estimate of the real reward of virtue, or the real punishment of vice,” *ibid.*, 3.
12. *Ibid.*, 3–4.
13. Julian Wolfreys, “Introduction: responsibilities of J or, aphorism’s other,” in J. Hillis Miller, *The J. Hillis Miller Reader*, ed. Julian Wolfreys (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 10.
14. Cf. Kreilkamp, who speaks of Edgeworth as the creator of the Big House genre, which functions as the psycho-spatial centre of the Anglo-Irish fiction-writing oratory, in Vera Kreilkamp, “The Novel of the Big House,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel*, ed. John Wilson Foster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 61–63. See also Hennelly, who remarks that in Irish Gothic fiction, the “critical touchstone of the castle or house of British Gothic” is spliced with an “indigenous . . . big house with its attendant colonial concerns of unhomey displacement, ambiguous hybridity, and border violence,” in Mark M. Hennelly, Jr., “Teaching Irish Gothic: Big House Displacements in Maturin and Le Fanu,” in *Approaches to Teaching Gothic Fiction: The British and American Traditions*, eds. Diane Long Hoeveler and Tamar Heller (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2003), 140.
15. For the deleterious representations of Ireland in the Gothic fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Jarlath Killeen’s thesis of “Gothic Ireland” as “Zombieland,” in *The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction: History, Origins, Theories* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 1–33.
16. Edgeworth, 3.

17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Henry Fielding, *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and His Friend Mr. Abraham Adams* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1958), xx.
20. Edgeworth, 6.
21. Ibid., 64.
22. J. Paul Hunter, "The novel and social/cultural history," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 9.
23. Edgeworth, 64.
24. Ibid., 64 n. 3.
25. Ibid., 64.
26. Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel 1600–1740* (Baltimore–London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 25.
27. Ibid., 29.
28. Edgeworth, 3.
29. Ibid., 5.
30. Kreilkamp, 62.
31. Pierre Nora, "General Introduction: Between Memory and History," in *The Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, ed. Pierre Nora (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 1.
32. Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London–Melbourne–Henley: Ark Paperbacks, 1984), 294.
33. Kreilkamp, 62.
34. See David Punter, *Gothic Pathologies: The Text, the Body and the Law* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).
35. Jarlath Killeen, *Gothic Ireland: Horror and the Irish Anglican Imagination in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Portland: Four Courts Press, 2005), 9.
36. Ibid., 19.
37. Ibid., 20.
38. Ibid., 222.
39. See Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Frenowitz (Chicago–London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 3.
40. Richard Haslam, "Irish Gothic," in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, eds. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (London–New York: Routledge, 2007), 83.
41. See Stephanie Merritt, "Back to the bog," *New Statesman*, 13 October 2003, <http://www.newstatesman.com/node/146491>, accessed 24 January 2013.
42. Ciaran Ross, "Introduction," in *Sub-Versions: Trans-National Readings of Modern Irish Literature*, ed. Ciaran Ross (Amsterdam–New York: Rodopi, 2010), 15.
43. Edgeworth, 21.
44. The bog also functions, despite its ostensive spatial openness, as a carceral trope, anticipating, at the level of the imaginary, the imprisonment to which Kit Rackrent's wife is about to be subjected, like the prototypical "madwoman in the attic," on account to her aversion to and scorn of all things Irish.

45. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 103.
46. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (New York: Penguin, 1992), 389–390; Bauman, 101.
47. Thady's insistence on his inability to forget is, of course, a conventional allusion to his all-encompassing memory, which conveniently selects and obliterates whatever is deemed fit to support his indigenous version of the conquerors' destiny.
48. See Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York–London: Routledge, 1994), 9.
49. Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London–New York: Verso, 1995), 147.

### **Abstract**

“Salvific” Memory, “Enlightened” Oblivion: Spectral Traces of the Past in Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* (1800)

This study on Maria Edgeworth’s short novel of 1800 *Castle Rackrent* explores the dialectics between two types of memory—of the retentive or retrieval kind and of a productive, esemplastic type, through which analeptically and proleptically, retrospectively and prospectively, the past is exhumed out of the historical archive and subjected to ceaseless activities of interpretation and signification in the entwined present timeframes of the story’s narrator, editor and readers. In light of Terry Eagleton’s diagnosis of the idiosyncratic “bogginess” of Irish literature, the study argues that, like Seamus Heaney, the Irish national poet who transvalorised “bog,” turning it into the arch-meme of Ireland’s cultural horizons, Maria Edgeworth programmatically wrote in this mode, releasing “bog” from its ostracizing connotations and valorizing it as a trope of “salvific” memory and “enlightened” oblivion, which could foster processes of cultural (self-)awareness.

### **Keywords**

Maria Edgeworth, Irish Gothic, esemplastic memory, “enlightened forgetting,” spectral criticism