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Think Piece: Magic and Darkness

In this story, I was immediately drawn to the things I thought was prevalent in Irish history, and how these things are at play in the story. Throughout the story I noticed how much the supernatural and magic are so much at play in Irish Culture. Whenever I think about Ireland I always think of it as a magical place. This may be brought upon partly by popular culture, but in stories like *Castle Rackrent* you can see this magical aspect. At one point in the story, Thady says that he tried to warn his master (Sir Murtagh) that he heard a Banshee, a harbinger of death (6). Though the supernatural and magic is prevalent in Irish culture, pain and despair is a great part of the Irish culture as well. You can see this in the notes of the story that says the “Irish have been always remarkable for their funeral lamentations” (Glossary 3). This could be for numerous reasons, but one of those reasons may be the many battles fought throughout Irish history, crushed rebellions, and the potato famine and the lives it took. Whatever the reason, the Irish have always had a long and, at many times, tragic history.

I was more interested in the darker undertones rather than the magical ones. Thady is very much an unreliable narrator and through his point of view the Rackrent's are a good and honorable family. However, if one reads closely, it's apparent that that this is false. He says that the only fault of his master Sir Kit was that he gambled (14). However, Sir Kit locked a Jewish woman away for seven years, and she was only released because he died. Thady was definitely wrong in his evaluation of his master's character. He would constantly praise and see the family in a good light, and he was completely distraught when Castle Rackrent was sold and was no longer in the hands of the Rackrent family, but the Rackrent's weren't at all deserving of his immense lionization.

I thought back to the poems that we talked about in class. In “Mise Eire” by Eavan Boland, we see how the speaker feels like the tragic and darkness of Irish history is made to seem better than it was. Thady does this a lot throughout *Castle Rackrent*. He makes the Rackrents seem better than they are. This may be something that Maria Edgewood was trying to bring to light. She may be trying to show how people repaint history, especially the history of things they are close to. This could be for many reasons. In Thady's case, the author may have a reason when she states that biographers may have a partiality “which blinds a biographer to the defects of his hero” (2). In other cases, it could be a defense mechanism designed to shield people from the hurt and pain of their past. It could be simply that people don't want to think of their country as tragic or bad, or a master's family in Thady's case. Whatever the reason may be, this attempt to see history in a better light may be something Maria Edgeworth was trying to bring attention to.