Don’t Write Us Off Just Yet: 
The Political Function of Female-Authored Historical Novels in the Romantic Era

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Introduction

Women have gained a role in today’s (political) power structures. Whether it is a woman standing at the head of a nation, like Angela Merkel, or an almost worldwide women-initiated march against the character and politics of president Trump that, in its own turn, led to marches on general concerns about women’s rights—and even human rights—outside of the United States, the female voice is present. However, this has not always (overtly) been the case in a society where women have long since held the subservient position. Although patriarchy or “the persistent experience of male dominance” (McKeon 295) has long been posited as the main reason for women’s lack of influence, political or otherwise, McKeon argues that the old system of patriarchy went through a crisis during the eighteenth century. This development, which initiated the rise of the female voice in everyday life, eventually resulted in, for example, an act on the separability of married women’s property in 1882 and other innovations in English marital law. Nonetheless, this did not result in complete female emancipation (McKeon 296-298). By the middle of the eighteenth century, the emergent bourgeois classes developed a new version of the system of patriarchy. This new class valued women without a professional vocation and female work became oriented towards female accomplishments like etiquette, reading and playing the piano (McKeon 299). Thus, women both got more rights through the decline of traditional patriarchy (personal property, better marriage settlements) and, at the same time, less freedom through the rise of the new form of patriarchy (women as relegated to the domain of ‘housework’).

Moreover, the perpetual presence of patriarchy favoured male authors. Thus, until recently, the focus in literary studies has been primarily on works written by a select group of male writers starting from ancient Greece and finding its way to more modern times. Male authors like Shakespeare and Milton, but also Dickens, Joyce and others take the stage in most, if not all, of
the authoritative surveys of British literary history. In the last couple of decades, the scope of literary research has been broadened to include works by more female writers. This inclusion changed the prevailing notion that women writers were unambitious and only concerned with fictions that focused on love and domestic affairs (Labbe 1). On the contrary, already for those of them writing in the period 1750-1830, questions of politics, family, selfhood, art, science, war and history and their reaction to those questions were at the heart of their work (Labbe 2). This shows that women writers are not to be written off just yet. So how did they then assert their (political) views? And in what way did or did they not transgress culturally formed boundaries to do so?

Women Authors and the Literary Market

The female assertion and the transgression of culturally formed boundaries was made possible—or at least easier—by changes in the literary market. Innovative new printing techniques already consistently lowered the production costs throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth century, paving the way for aspiring female writers from the eighteenth century. They could now gain easier access to the literary market. The emergent bourgeois class also provided writing opportunities for women by creating a new, still male-dominated public sphere, but one in which some parts were easier accessible to women, including publishing (Spencer 216-217). Spencer explains that this new public sphere “was not public as opposed to private, … [but] rather the realm of civil as opposed to state power”; a public sphere filled with private institutions like clubs, coffeehouses and expanding print culture (216). Especially print culture helped foster a new public dimension to domestic life, that, together with the sentimental ideology of the late eighteenth century, would result in an amalgamation of public and private concerns, often given form through the genre of the domestic sentimental novel (Spencer 217). In combination with this new bourgeois public sphere, the eighteenth century knew a rise in literacy, bringing forth a larger audience
devouring many different forms of fiction (Spacks 1). An increase in readership and differentiation
in writing resulted in an economic opportunity which established novel writing as profitable. In
the final decades of the century, the sharp increase in novel production was even more apparent
with female writers, outnumbering the male writers in certain subgenres like the epistolary novel
(Spencer 212). These women writers influenced the novel’s early development by blending
realistic and romantic elements, that is, romantic in the sense that a woman’s story and her concerns
and desires could be the centre of a narrative (Spencer 213-214). Spencer goes on to state that the
establishment of “a framework of conventions for the novel” defined what people thought a
“woman’s novel” should be (214-215). Together with the numerical increase in women writers
towards the end of the century, this framework constrained their work to fit the expectations of a
“feminine sentimental novel” (Spencer 215), effectively relegating the domestic novel to the
female realm and making it a female genre. However, while presenting themselves as writers only
interested in love, often using domestic settings and praising domestic virtues, the form of the
domestic sentimental novel could and was still used by female writers to question the limits placed
on women’s lives or to become involved in party politics (Spencer 216-217). This conflation of
domestic and public concerns in novels was a consequence of the emergence of the bourgeois
public sphere with its private institutions. So, even though this female novel centred around
domestic issues, it did not mean “a retreat from public issues, since discourse about domestic life
was constitutive of the new public sphere” (Spencer 217).

Secondly, although the sentimental novel was seen as the dominant female genre by the
end of the long eighteenth century, it did not mean that women writers confined themselves to it
completely. Due to their different position within social and economic structures, women writers
could not imitate male patterns of narration and had to experiment with ways to give form to their
own subjectivities through manipulation of genres and the introduction of new subject matter and inventive plot material (Batchelor 86). Amatory fiction and conduct literature are two of the genres that have been female gendered since the late seventeenth century. Amatory fiction generally featured stories on sexual love and romance. Noteworthy writers were Haywood, Manley and Behn. Conduct literature, on the contrary, tried to educate readers on social norms. For example, the eighteenth-century conduct literature wanted women to become noble generalists of history rather than narrow specialists (Looser 21). Reading history was considered an acceptable “substitute for women’s experience outside the domestic or social sphere” (Looser 21). Still, the burgeoning genre of historiography could count on its own fair share of female writers as well (Looser 2). Thus, they broke culturally formed boundaries by not limiting themselves to what was considered the female genre at the time. Female writers made use of historical discourse in their texts in various ways, ranging “from direct engagement with political history, to the use of historical forms in letters or travel writings, to manipulations of historical material in fictional works” (Looser 2). During the long eighteenth century, histories were frequently published and sold with great success (Looser 9). Although historiography’s literary tendencies did not disappear, by this time, the focus shifted to a more scientific and scholarly basis (Looser 13). Hence, the genre of historiography came to stand above the genre of novel writing in status. Consequently, fiction writers, male and female, “likened their productions to histories in order to achieve status through association with a more respectable genre” (Looser 23). The three women writers who make up the scope of this thesis also turned to the genre of historiography, more specifically, to the genre of the historical novel which will be explored in more detail further. The three authors in question are Maria Edgeworth, Jane Porter and Mary Shelley.
First, McCorman (*ODNB*) states that Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849) was born into a family of Irish landowners with an estate, Edgeworthstown, in County Longford. During childhood, she was neglected by her father and, after her mother’s death, she was shipped off to Mrs. Lattafière’s school in Derby, followed by a shorter stay in London. Her father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth, had political aspirations and got involved with a campaign for constitutional reform of the Irish parliament and its complicated relationship to Britain. During this time, they relocated to long-neglected Edgeworthstown and reconnected there, forming an intellectual bond. She acted as rent clerk, which explains her detailed knowledge of the character of the Irish tenants demonstrated in four of her novels: *Castle Rackrent* (1800), *Ennui* (1809), *The Absentee* (1812) and *Ormond* (1817). She assisted her father in the management of the estate and knew of the improvements he wanted to make (Kirkpatrick xvi). This meant that she held a position of considerable power and independence in her family, which was uncommon for women at the time (Kirkpatrick xvi), awarding her the opportunity to involve herself fully with the fate of the Irish tenants. That uncommon position, together with her financially comfortable position, also awarded her the freedom to further explore her literary talent, however still under strong “supervision [from] and [in] collaboration with her father” (Kirkpatrick xxv). Edgeworth began her literary endeavours with committing to paper a family saga, “The Freeman Family”, which later developed into her longest novel *Patronage*, published in 1814, but already finished by the early 1790s. Her early work also involved essays on education and the importance of children’s literature. After her father left for London, her newfound independence and correspondence with her aunt Margaret Ruxton, whose literary preference provided a welcome change to her father’s scientific interests, resulted in the writing of her first novel: *Castle Rackrent: an Hibernian Tale, Taken from Facts, and from the Manners of the Irish Squires, before the Year 1782* (1800). The narrative told by Thady Quirk,
a fictional narrator based on one John Langan, steward at Edgeworthstown, unfolds the “Memoirs of the Rackrent Family” (Edgeworth 7). These memoirs are partially historical and autobiographical as Edgeworth used a family chronicle The Black Book of Edgeworthstown as a source (Kirkpatrick x). The radical Joseph Johnson, who published works from radical thinkers like Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, published the novel in London in 1800. It was very popular when first published and so widely read that a second edition was already published one year later (Kirkpatrick viii). The following years Edgeworth published, amongst others, novels that bore female names for titles and centred around a woman’s life: Belinda (1802), Leonora (1806) and Helen (1834). All novels fared well, although Leonora (1806) could be called a lesser performance. Edgeworth’s fiction was reviewed widely in her day and she became the most commercially successful novelist of her age, sometimes even being compared to Jane Austen in certain areas of critical esteem. One of the most important readers of her work was Walter Scott, who resumed work on what would become Waverley (1814) after reading The Absentee (1812).

Secondly, Jane Porter (1776-1850) was born the third child of an army surgeon (McMillan). Moving to Edinburgh after her father’s death in 1780, she and her sister Anna Maria got a cheap but exceptional education at the school of George Fulton, who was the author of the pronouncing dictionary and other school books. Porter and her siblings came into contact with literature early on in life: they read Shakespeare, Spenser and Sidney as well as ballads, history and biography. This was an exceptional education at the time for young women, as conduct literature advised that happiness could but be found if the desire for education was not present in the female mind (Looser 20). Besides classic literature, the old tales of Scottish heroes were told to them, including stories about William Wallace, who would feature as a protagonist in Porter’s The Scottish Chiefs (1810). They moved again, this time to London to support her brother Robert
Ker’s painting career. Often short on money, the Porters’ mother still insisted on being sociable for the sake of her children. Jane Porter first dipped her toe in the literary pond by working for the periodical the *Quiz* (1796-1798). Mainly remembered now for her *The Scottish Chiefs: A Romance* (1810), Porter was in her day most famous for the historical romance *Thaddeus of Warsaw* (1803), which she claimed to be her first publication of worth. However, both *The Spirit of the Elbe* (1799), a German-like romance, and *The Two Princes of Persia: Addressed to Youth* (1801), a moralistic fable, which were badly reviewed, were also from her pen. Although claiming that *The Scottish Chiefs* (1810) had influenced Scott, he was reported to be disappointed with her conception of the hero William Wallace, apparently having remarked to James Hogg that Wallace’s character had been depleted to that of a fine gentleman (Price, intro. 15). Still, on its publication, the novel was widely read and translated, resulting in nine reprints before the nineteenth century. Notwithstanding the novel’s early success, it was found unhistorical and wildly sentimental. Porter’s early fame did not result in financial independence, so she had to live with and off friends and family until her death.

Thirdly, Bennet (*ODNB*) records that Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797-1851) was born the daughter of political philosophers and novelists William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. Her mother died shortly after giving birth and she was raised in an unorthodox way by her radical father. From an early age on she was acquainted with her father’s political idealism and the resulting financial and social difficulties. This already started forming her later strongly opinionated and assertive mind. Attending a dame-school at an early age, she still got the bulk of her education from her father at home. He taught her history, mythology, literature and the Bible, while visiting tutors took care of art and French. She even studied Latin, which was very uncommon for girls, as it was considered too arduous for the female mind to comprehend. In
addition, Godwin’s friends and acquaintances provided her in her parental home with a world of ideas, ranging from science to politics and literature, that very few girls would have the chance to experience. Shelley grew up with an understanding of her parents’ literary significance in a period of political and social revolution and was from a young age drawn to writing. She rose to fame after the publication of *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* in 1818. The novel permeated all levels of society and became the material for theatrical productions, political cartoons, translations and parliamentary debates. Her first work effectively comments on public politics through private politics, showing the destructiveness of power that is left unchecked due to wealth and position. Even though she was revered for her work, critics put aside the novel’s politics, which would be a male topic, after finding out the author was a woman. In March 1818, they relocated to Italy to treat her husband P. B. Shelley’s illness. There she visited the Appenines in Tuscany, an area filled with the history of Castruccio Castracani, the protagonist of her next work: *Valperga: or, the Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca* (1823). After P. B. Shelley’s unfortunate death in 1822 she returned to England to raise her son. She went on to write politically conscious novels like *The Last Man* (1826) and historical novels like *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck* (1830). She died of a brain tumour in her home in London in 1851.

All three writers belonged to the newly developed bourgeoisie. Even though both Porter and Shelley have known periods of financial distress in their lives, this still meant that they all had opportunities to educate themselves that women from lower classes did not. Nor even women from their own class, as their upbringing was extensive in comparison to what other girls of their age got. After all, educational programs put emphasis on female accomplishments, rather than actual study (Looser 17). Edgeworth, Porter and Shelley, on the contrary, were educated in subjects like classic and modern literature, history, the Bible, management of an estate, education and even
writing. They were learned women for their age and their work was revered by many. However, their fame was kept in bounds due to their gender. Rather than praising her for her accomplishments as a woman, Shelley, for example, was said to have a ‘masculine mind’ and in early years the genius of *Frankenstein* (1818) was attributed to her husband (Bennet). Edgeworth’s father, then, had to leave for her to be able to write her novel without her father’s heavy editorial hand intervening. As Rousseau plainly puts it, “[t]he male is only male at times; the female is a female all her life and can never forget her sex” (qtd. in Tosh 180).

*The Historical Novel*

Edgeworth, Porter and Shelley were adept at using the genre of the historical novel to comment on political issues. Before going into that, a short introduction into the novel, and the historical novel will be given. What is now known as the novel emerged from a wide variety of genres in combination with the ideals of the Enlightenment (Richetti 2). It did not develop overnight, so to state that the novel’s history starts in the eighteenth century is arbitrary, amongst other things because what was written before anticipated what would eventually become the novel (Spacks 2). Still, the eighteenth-century novel conveys “the excitement and power of an era of radical literary experiment” (Spacks 4). Richetti states that “eighteenth century “novels” … constitute the early and truly formative phase of the novel as a genre of prose fiction that has since then come to dominate readers’ sense of what literary narrative should be” (1). Through its continually changing form and rising dominance on the literary market, the novel quickly proved itself a medium in which (women) writers could assert themselves. This was also the case because writers did not need as thorough a knowledge of mythology and classic literature to write novels as they did to write poetry, making it an accessible genre for the lesser educated female. Moreover, just because of its still developing state, it provided female authors with the opportunity to
challenge the fact that patriarchy was passed off as truth rather than as social artifice (Batchelor 88). Both contemporary politics and the societal hierarchy could, thus, be reflected upon by women writers. By the end of the century, the novel solidified into a narrative involving the quotidian world filled with characters no different from the implied reader, relegating the heroes and magical creatures of the older prose romance genre to the psychological realm (Richetti 4). This preoccupation of the novel with ‘familiar stories’, that is, not the other-worldly narratives typical of romance nor the dry relegating of facts found in historical texts, provided a means for the readers to learn about manners, conduct and life in itself (Batchelor 88). That those novels often featured a “deflation or cancellation of eccentric individual perspectives by social norms or by the brute factual force of the physical world” (Richetti 5) then does not come as a surprise.

That (the idea of) the novel came to prominence during this time can be derived from the use of the word ‘novelist’. The *Oxford English Dictionary* records the year of the first use of the word for an author of novels as 1728 (Poole 1). Besides the novel, the aforementioned burgeoning genre of historiography came to prominence as well. A genre which was considered suitable for female education, among others by Hume, because it was thought to mediate women’s erotic obsessions and teach them that “[l]ove is not the only passion, which governs the male-world, but is often overcome by avarice, ambition, vanity, and a thousand other passions” (qtd. in O’Brien 403). Women writers recommended history for girls’ education as well, with the hope to redeem the disproportion existing between the intellect of men and women (Looser 17). Moreover, studies have shown that fiction writers preferred their works to resemble histories in an attempt to “achieve status through association with a more respectable genre” (Looser 23). Over time however, both genres evolved “away from fanciful narrative and myth, and toward stricter standards of factual probability; … toward normative models of narrative mastery and unity; and, above all, toward a
thematic preoccupation with “manners,” customs and social conventions” (O’Brien 398). Ultimately, the use of historiography to heighten the status of the novel and the evolution of the genres towards each other led to the formation of inventive generic combinations, with subgenres like the historical epistolary and the historical novel.

Ever since the pioneering study of George Lukács, critics have put forward Walter Scott and his Waverley novels—the first, Waverley, published in 1814—as the start of the historical novel (Maxwell 1). Only, Scott’s historical novel was, in fact, a continuation of the realistic, social novel; a novel in which the realistic means for portraying the spatiotemporal character of people and their circumstances was created, but which still did not think of history as a process of change (Lukács 18, 30). This did change in Scott’s work. Lukács situates the economic and ideological basis for Scott’s historical novel in the economic and political transformations that resulted from the French Revolution (29). A new humanism arose which considered “the total life of humanity as a great historical process” (Lukács 27). The bourgeois humanists considered revolutions in the past necessary and considered them as forming a foundation for all that is worthy of affirmation in the present (Lukács 28). Scott recreated this idea of history as a process of change in his historical novels next to other, according to Lukács, improvements to the genre. These improvements, as gotten from Lukács and concretised by Hägg, will then be used to discuss the three novels. First, there was an innovation concerning the characters. The novels were composed around the figure of a fictional, mediocre, prosaic hero (Lukács 34). Through fitting a social-historical type with living human embodiment, the mediocre hero served as a way to make historical trends tangible, to present the totality of history’s progression (Lukács 34-35). Just because of his mediocre character, the hero was not the centre of attention and was thus able to function as a point of connection between two contending extremes in society, seeking and finding
a neutral ground on which the opposing social forces could be brought into a human relationship with one another (Lukács 36). Generally, this type of character is called a “middling hero, … a common man who, moving between two distinct ages, two different cultures, two opposite social forces, mediates the conflicts and embodies their impasses” (Vasconcelos 145). This composition allowed the reader to get a picture of the struggle on both sides, but also brought the reader closer to the important representatives of those sides; in this way, emotionally involving the reader in the outcome of the struggle (Lukács 37). These important representatives were often historical figures. Scott’s novels generally introduced the great, historical heroes only after the social crisis had been explained and the attitude of various parts of the population towards the crisis had been made clear (Lukács 39). Moreover, the described social struggle that preceded this hero’s appearance showed how “just such a hero had to arise in order to solve just such problems” (Lukács 39). Through this composition, Scott managed to portray historical reality adequately without romantically monumentalizing or dragging down the historical figures. Hägg concludes from this that for a novel to be historical it has to have real, historical characters mixed with fictitious characters whose personal experiences and concerns are the focus of the work (188). Secondly, the setting to which the narrative is told became one of the ways in which historical novels were rooted in actuality (Hägg 189). For the characters to appear as children of their age it was necessary to give a broad portrayal of the economic and moral circumstances of their lives (Lukács 41). To achieve this, historical events and the physical milieu of the time were depicted and brought into relationship with these characters (Hägg 189). Lukács argues on this point that history does not need to be told “in extenso”, but rather in episodes of “particular importance and significance for the human development of [the] main characters” (45). For it is the social and human motives behind the great historical events that counted, rather than the retelling of those events (Lukács 44). In other words,
the setting functioned as a portrayal “of the broad living basis of historical events in their intricacy and complexity, in their manifold interaction with acting individuals” (Lukács 45). So, the setting was no longer merely a background to which the narrative was told, but an active participant in the fortunes of the characters. Hägg refers to Fleishman in his conclusion that the historical novel must therefore include a number of historical events in the public sphere that mingle with and affect the fortunes of the characters (189). Thirdly, the time in which the narrative is set marked a novel as historical only when it was set at least one or two generations back (Hägg 187). Here, again, Scott’s *Waverley* was the basis on which the tendency was formed: its subtitle “’Tis Sixty Years Since” was taken as indicating a minimum of elapsed time (Hägg 187). Another essential criterion was that the historical facts needed to be researched rather than remembered; that is, the author did not experience the events himself or herself, but had to rely on oral and written sources (Hägg 187). Time, in a broader sense, can also be seen as historical development. Scott thought history to be an uninterrupted series of great revolutionary crises (Lukács 57). Vital for a historical novel is that the past can be experienced in its full capacity, that is, with “a felt relationship to the present” (Lukács 57). That connection to the present is not the alluding to contemporary events, but rather a prehistory to the present that has made present-day life what it is (Lukács 57). In other words, Scott believed that all events were “necessary preconditions of the end-result” (Lukács 59). So, all that happens, happens out of “historical necessity” (Lukács 64). Lastly, truth, or historical probability, took precedence over fictional events. Scott’s historical faithfulness is manifested through his portrayal of the assertion of historical necessity through the actions of individuals (Lukács 65). Historical faithfulness, for Scott, was a means to make “concretely clear the historical necessity of a concrete situation” and could be found in the historical psychology of his characters (Lukács 65). The narrative then must render a faithful image of a concrete epoch (Hägg 189). The
rendering of the world as it was experienced at the time ought to show how and why a person acted in a certain way. So, crucial for a historical novel is the derivation of the characters’ individuality from their age’s historical peculiarity (Hägg 189).

Hägg combines these four elements discussed in his definition of the, for him, typical historical novel: “it is set in a period at least one or two generations anterior to that of the author, communicating a sense of the past as past; it is centered on fictitious characters, but puts on stage as well, mingling with these, one or several figures known from history; enacted in a realistic geographical setting, it describes the effects upon the fortunes of the characters of (a succession of) real historical events; it is—or gives the impression of being—true, as far as the historical framework is concerned” (191). Hägg’s study and definition of the historical novel as based on Lukács’ work serve as a valid starting point for the discussion of the three novels. Important is that the given model is used as a type to which to compare the novels, rather than as a strict definition. Now, Hägg’s study does differ from Lukács’ because of his lack of attention to the importance of dialogue which will be added as an extra focus point. Lukács refers to Balzac’s critique in which Scott’s introduction of new artistic features to literature was emphasised, one of which being the importance of dialogue (30). Dialogue as the “direct coming-to-grips of colliding opposites in conversation” is important to render historical reality humanly authentic so that it can be lived through again by the reader of a later age (Lukács 42). However, dialogue is much broader than that. For the scope of this thesis, the idea of dialogue will be extended beyond conversations or relationships between characters to include the dialogue between narrative and glosses, narrative and editorial, and author and narrator which might shed light on the authors’ stance towards contemporary (gender) politics.
Even though Lukács’ study has been widely influential and Walter Scott’s Waverley novels are considered as introducing the historical novel to world literature, Lukács’ influence needs nuancing. Maxwell, in his work, sets out to show how the genre evolved, starting from seventeenth-century historiographical forms and how these were adapted to accommodate associative narratives, rumour, footnotes, chronology and pure invention to a distinctive method of writing historical fiction (2). This resulted in two types of writers: those who wrote fictional biographies set against a background of public events and those who wrote fictional narratives with historical events, effectually blending life and time (Maxwell 2-3). During the late eighteenth century, historical fiction was introduced in England through the work of William Godwin and others (Maxwell 3). However, it was Scott’s Waverley that epitomised the form found in French historical fiction. The Franco-Scottish model for the historical novel can be divided into two story-types: either a dethroned monarch emerged unexpectedly and tried to reclaim a throne or the narrative revolved around siege warfare (Maxwell 5-6). This shows that the historical novel was already ‘out there’ before Scott published his. Although Maxwell’s study shows the genealogy of historical fiction and the historical novel, he, like Lukács, does not mention female exponents of the genre. Still, Shelley’s writing was influenced by her father, William Godwin, who was one of the first to introduce historical fiction to England and the Franco-Scottish themes of siege warfare and dethroned monarchs are explicitly present in Porter’s The Scottish Chiefs (1810). Moreover, Scott explicitly acknowledges his debt to Edgeworth in his postscript to Waverley (1814) (Kirkpatrick vii). This leads to the conclusion that earlier works by female authors were also based on historical fiction and might have been an additional influence on Scott’s and others’ later works and, thus, the formation of what is now considered to be the historical novel.
Women are accorded an increasingly important place in literary history, claiming central roles in literary studies of the last couple of decades. Studies from the 1980s show women writing to be a conglomeration of differences, the act of writing itself functioning as a manifestation of female power (Labbe 8). As shown earlier, women writers made use of the novel to utter concerns about their place in society and the power of the state, often using domestic scenes (Spencer 217). However, the women writers central in this thesis and introduced before find refuge in historical fiction. Still, scenes may be found in these works that shed light on their political stance. Before moving on to the discussion of the novels themselves, a short introduction into the contemporary political problems that captured each writer’s attention will be given.

First, the land that became Edgeworthstown had been granted to the Edgeworth family in 1619 after James I’s 1609 decision to bring Catholics under Protestant rule (Kirkpatrick xi). In an effort to control Ireland, this sanction, called the Plantation of Ulster, together with the Penal Laws sought to sever Irish Catholics from their property (Kirkpatrick xi). By the late eighteenth century 95 per cent of the land was owned by 5000 Protestant families, but the Anglo-Irish never securely controlled Ireland, due to numerous failed rebellions (Kirkpatrick xi). Edgeworth’s Castle Rackrent (1800) was published the same year as the Anglo-Irish Union was ratified. However, the origins of the novel can be traced back as far as 1792 and a brief period in 1795. In 1798, the family fled the estate when an army of Irish insurgents and rebels, called the Defenders, moved towards Dublin. Upon their return, they found the house relatively scathe free, even though the battlefield where the French were eventually defeated lay close to the Edgeworth property (McCorman). After the revolution, which lasted from May to September 1798, the British reading public was introduced to an untold number of works on the brutal character of the Irish, almost
exclusively written from a loyalist perspective (Egenolf 43-44). So too did Edgeworth who, as a reaction to the rising violence in those years, returned to Castle Rackrent (1800) and added her experience of the Irish uprisings to the work (McCorman). However, contrary to the bulk of the published works on the Irish, hers featured a humorous depiction of the Irish people (Egenolf 44). Although the novel does not contain explicit political statements like the loyalists’ works, Edgeworth’s sentiments on the Anglo-Irish Union and other political issues are present in it (Egenolf 45). Now, the Irish Catholics were promised equal political rights through a parliamentary union between Great Britain and Ireland by the English Prime Minister William Pitt (Kirkpatrick xxxiv). However, George III did not support Pitt’s plan for Catholic Emancipation, leaving the Irish with its own Parliament dissolved and the mass of the populace unrepresented in the English Parliament (xxxv). Edgeworth’s stance on the Union is twofold: she advocates for an improvement of the rights of the Irish, but does so through “[attempting] to reinscribe a system of benevolent patronage in Ireland” (Egenolf 47). In this, she follows her father Richard Lovell Edgeworth, who very much influenced her both in her writings and ideas on politics. He was, as a member of Parliament in Ireland, in favour of the Union, but still voted against it for the simple reason that he wanted the Irish to be persuaded of the truth of the Union, rather than coerced into acceptance (Hack 150-151). He stated in his memoirs that it was his duty to “[contribute] to the melioration of the inhabitants of the country, from which [he] drew [his] subsistence” (qtd. in Hack 148). Both Edgeworth and her father wanted to educate the people and favoured a hegemonic system in which the Anglo-Irish (and English) were superior to the local population (Hack 150).

Secondly, Scotland could, in the seventeenth century, be described as an economically deprived nation (Bullough and Bullough 419). However, Bullough and Bullough continue, eighteenth-century Scotland emerged as a commercial and industrial leader in Europe, not in the
least through agricultural reform (419). This is also the century in which the Anglo-Scottish Union came into effect. In 1707, it was announced that the Treaty of Union had been ratified in Scotland (Mathieson 261). The Union was followed by two Jacobite rebellions: one in 1715 and another in 1745. People detested the Union and felt like Scotland had been exploited. The Union, in the Scottish vision, entailed loss and betrayal because the country was now in the grip of the power of money (Pittock, *Poetry* 53), a reference to the Union’s promised Scottish economic prosperity. The Stuarts “were the only available vehicle for [this] anti-Union feeling, … an ideological counter-core for those who wished to preserve Scottish cultural and political identity in the face of the pressure of metropolitan conformity” (Pittock, *Poetry* 134). Although not very enthusiastic for the Stuarts, they were still the preferred rulers amongst the disgruntled Scots, because they were not the Government (Donald 127). The rebellion did not last long, due to bad leadership and lack of trust (Donald 127-128). In the second rebellion, called “The Forty-Five” (Donald 127), Charles Edward Stuart raised an army against England and once again tried, and failed, to reclaim the throne (Stewart 400). Porter herself resided in Edinburgh during the last two decades of the eighteenth century. She, in a reaction to the unease caused by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, emphasised continuity and believed that public consciousness of the past and its heroes could strengthen the contemporary sense of national community (Price, intro. 9). In her novels, she therefore mirrors contemporary politics of Britain, during the Napoleonic Wars, by concentrating “on the struggle of a small nation against larger imperial forces” (Price, intro. 12). However, Porter does not advocate a reversal of union or Scottish independence, but rather the construction of a united Britain that conforms to her thirteenth-century rendering of Scotland in *The Scottish Chiefs* (1810): a land where “all the women are fair and the men brave” (Porter 374). In this, Porter differs from Edgeworth who focusses on the relationship between different parts of
the British Isles, because Porter is “concerned with consolidation in the face of an outside threat, the imperial ambitions of France” (Price, intro. 18). Consolidation as such serves as a stepping stone to national stability and improved international connections (Price, intro. 19). Moreover, Porter believed in more popular participation in public and national life, from both men and women (Price, intro. 19). So, Porter is concerned with politics on an international scale and in how those politics might influence life in Great Britain, but also with the involvement of both sexes in public life and the consolidation of Scots and Britons into a united front.

Thirdly, Shelley, as daughter to Wollstonecraft and Godwin, was greatly interested in the politics of her day. She inherited from her father the fascination for histories, science fiction and biographies, while her mother’s legacy consisted of her interest in female education and a feminism that put women on equal footing with men (Rajan 9-10). Shelley was often seen as a radical and in favour of the French Revolution. Because she believed in its revolutionary potential, Shelley waged a battle for republican liberties in her novels (Lokke 513). This in contradiction to eighteenth-century Britain, which could be described as a nation that conserved “its monarchy and aristocracy, led the opposition to the American and French Revolutions and was … ruthlessly obsessed with colonial expansion and commercial gain” (Colley 361). Although against the French Revolution, for Britain, as well as for the rest of Europe, the revolution was, together with the revolutionary wars and the rise and fall of Napoleon, for the first time ever history as a mass experience (Lukács 20). Moreover, the quick succession of these wars made the historical character of them far more visible and strengthened the feeling that history had a direct effect upon the life of all individuals (Lukács 20). This strengthened the belief that no useful thought or profound idea can go to waste, because it will find its century and admirers (Lokke 508). This means that the republican liberties Shelley was in favour of could still come to dominate
contemporary society. In her novel, she then puts republicanism and tyranny—despotic rule—to the test. According to Lokke it is Shelley’s aim to write a novel in which historical development needs struggles for power and property and wars to serve human development (505). “Hence the novel, with its privileging of the dimension of time, specific material realities, and individual consciousness, is the genre chosen … to narrate the uncertainties and ambiguities surrounding the possible moment of actualization of revolutionary and emancipatory goals” (Lokke 508). Shelly abhors tyranny and uses her novels to question male glorification of power and ambition (Rajan 13). Interestingly, her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft was considered to be part of the first generation (1790-1810) of the Romantic Period (Mellor 42). This generation initiated a feminist movement, “a [revolution] in female manners” (Mellor 43), that strove, amongst other things, for equal education of and suffrage for women (Mellor 42). However, as a result of the Terror in France, Napoleon’s campaigns and the illness of the English monarch George III this feminist movement resulted in disillusionment and disappointment (Mellor 43). While not disavowing her mother’s beliefs, Shelley did emphasise the obstacles her male and female protagonists faced to reach their dreams of liberty and equality (Mellor 45). So, Mary Shelley differs from Edgeworth and Porter in her political agenda because her goal is not as tangible. Where Edgeworth considers the possibility of Anglo-Irish Union and its real-life tensions, Shelley seems to think things through more theoretically: is republican liberty an option in contemporary Britain? Her novels are in this way experiments on her political thoughts. However, it can still be said that she favours a republican-like society in which women have equal opportunities to men and therefore has a tangible, political goal after all.
Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent*

All three novels are considered historical novels and will be discussed from that point of view, using the aforementioned overview of the historical novel’s characteristics based on Scott’s work. Hence, the next three chapters will show how the novels do or do not differ from those characteristic elements and how this provided the women writers with a means to assert themselves. The chapters are subdivided following the characteristics of the historical novel, previously discussed. First, the middling hero and his role in the narrative will be discussed. Secondly, it will be revealed how setting can show the political stance of the women writers on contemporary and/or gender politics. Thirdly, the impact of the fact that the novels are set in the past on the (implicit) political comments or critique will be discussed. This subchapter will also include the authors’ view on historical development. This is followed, as fourth, by a discussion of the historicity of the novels and how much is changed to fit the goal of the narratives. Lastly, the chapters will go into the different dialogues present in the novel, more specifically, into how political nuances can be construed not only from what is being said, but also from what is being meant. Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* (1800) is the eldest of the novels discussed and when read comes across as different from the other two. Whereas *The Scottish Chiefs* (1810) and *Valperga* (1823) are third-person narrations centred around a historical hero and his entourage, Edgeworth’s novel is a first-person narration centring around Thady Quirk, a steward capable of maintaining relationships both with the Irish tenants and the Anglo-Irish landowners. The novels also differ in the elaborate descriptions of the setting, which are much more limited in Edgeworth’s work. Moreover, *Castle Rackrent* (1800) shows an extensive use of notes and glosses that are a lot less present in the other two novels.
Now, *Castle Rackrent: an Hibernian Tale Taken from Facts, and from the Manners of the Irish Squires, before the Year 1782* (1800) narrates the decline of an Anglo-Irish family across a time span of four generations: Sir Patrick, the licentious squanderer; Sir Murtagh, the litigating malefactor; Sir Kit, the brutal gambler; and Sir Condy, the improvident dupe. Each of the heirs die, while their wives profit from their deaths and end up in better living situations than during their respective husbands’ lives. There is no mention of Sir Patrick’s wife. Sir Murtagh’s wife, who “was of the family of the Skinflints” (Edgeworth 12), on the contrary, is very much present in Thady’s narrative and the tenants’ lives: from teaching children to read and write in return for their spinning to continually demanding duty work. When Sir Murtagh dies, she skips town with almost all the pieces of furniture. Sir Kit marries a Jewish lady, who never gave him her fortune which consisted of diamond jewels she wore. She, as well, prospers after her husband’s demise. Sir Condy marries the English Miss Isabella Moneygawl from Mount Juliet’s Town, even though he is in love with the Irish Judy M’Quirk. Condy and Isabella “set out in great stile” (Edgeworth 48), but that does not last long, as they spend all their money in a year. When Isabella’s family does not want to lend them money, the spouses fight and she decides to return to Mount Juliet’s Town “to live with [her] father and family, during the remainder of [her] wretched existence” (Edgeworth 67). After Isabella’s departure, Jason and Condy set to calculating and paying the accumulated debt. Jason is the son of Thady Quirk and has turned himself into an attorney, rising above his original status and becoming “quite a great gentleman” (Edgeworth 62). As Condy does not have ready money, Jason suggests turning to the land and putting it up for sale. Through his superior knowledge of the law and Condy’s profligate behaviour, Jason gets his hands on the deeds of the estate. Condy retires to a hunting-lodge on the outskirts of the estate, where he decides he will not “be long for this world” (Edgeworth 81). Here, Judy M’Quirk, a widow now, comes to
visit Condy and apprises him of an accident Lady Rackrent (Isabella) was in. Condy, a short time later, comes down with a fever, after downing a horn filled with alcohol, eventually expiring on the sixth day. The narrative is told in the dialect of the Irish narrator, Thady Quirk, a steward to the Rackrent family who has earned the heirs’ trust through working “under [them], and [having] done so these two hundred years and upwards” (Edgeworth 56-57).

A Mediocre, Prosaic Hero

Sir Conolly (Condy) Rackrent, the last of the Rackrent heirs, is often considered to be the protagonist of Castle Rackrent (1800) and is even called “Edgeworth’s pathetic hero” by Davie (Glover 298). The continuation of the memoirs is aptly called the “history of Sir Conolly Rackrent” as it revolves almost exclusively around him (Edgeworth 38). He would thus make a fine, middling hero à la Scott: a fictional, mediocre hero who upholds ties with both the Irish tenants and the landlord class and whose personal experiences are the focus of the work. He grew up on the estate, being of

“a remote branch of the family … and became well acquainted and popular amongst the poor in the neighbourhood early, for there was not a cabin at which he had not stopped some morning or other along with the huntsman, to drink a glass of burnt whiskey out of an egg-shell” (Edgeworth 38-39).

He is not the most interesting character as he is one of the many Rackrents and, although lovable and unfortunately enough duped out of his estate by Jason Quirk, another example in the line of so many “demonstrating all the ways that estate management in Ireland could go wrong” (Kirkpatrick xvi). However, his downfall at the hands of Thady’s son is indicative of Edgeworth’s political interests. Because Sir Condy is portrayed as being in harmony with the Irish community before losing his estate to a member of that same community, it is made clear that the power
relations inherent to hereditary right to land are problematic (Kirkpatrick xxxi). As Condy loses his hereditary right to the land because of Jason’s greater personal application to law, the property is taken out of the hands of the paternalistic landlord. Jason, in other words, “secures his title to the estate through legal training … [and] [a]s such, benefits from the same legal system by which the Protestant settlers themselves had established and enforced their legitimacy” (Kirkpatrick xxxiii). This effectively turns the power relations upside down: placing Jason firmly in the castle and leaving the last of the Rackrents dispossessed (Glover 302). As said before, Edgeworth favoured a system of benevolent patronage in Ireland. So, the reversal of the power relations within the hereditary right to land might reveal “hidden fears of a destabilizing force in the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy” (Egenolf 47). That destabilising force can be given form in the character of the loyal servant who could, in the role of the buffoon, express criticism without being taken seriously (Egenolf 47). Just like Thady is not taken seriously. This reversal of power relations can also be seen in the choice of the middling hero. Although Condy Rackrent is the obvious choice, when reversing the story from the downfall of the Rackrent family to the rise of the Quirk family, a different hero can be identified, making the choice of the hero dependent upon the reading of the narrative as either a plain and unvarnished tale (Condy is the hero) or as an ironic reversal of power (Thady is the hero).

In *Castle* Rackrent (1800), I thus put forward Thady Quirk as the character to take on the role of the middling hero. His presence, both as a character in his narration and as a narrator, persistently creates a need to go back to and re-examine him. Thady Quirk, as the narrator of the novel, is an Irish Catholic and “an illiterate old steward, whose partiality to the family in which he was bred and born must be obvious to the reader” (Edgeworth 3-4). He tells the story in his vernacular idiom and is said to be known in the family only as “honest Thady” (Edgeworth 4, 7).
Now, Thady’s character is not straightforwardly that of a mediocre, prosaic hero which makes the choice not an obvious one. Still, by considering him the hero, the novel can be read as addressing the problem following a Union between Ireland and England: a possible disappearance of the Irish culture. First, he is the only character drawn from life, while the heirs to the Rackrent estate, who form the core of the narrative, are all imaginary (Hack 148-149). Edgeworth did add to the narrator’s age to make him old enough to have known or heard about all generations (Hack 148). Scott’s heroes, on the other hand, are fictional while the representative figures are historical. Still, he does fit the characteristics mediocre and prosaic. Spending his life in service of the Anglo-Irish family living on the estate, he is asked to write the “Memoirs of the Rackrent Family” (Edgeworth 7), which he does in a plain and unvarnished way. Moreover, he is mediocre in the sense that he does not fulfil an important historical role. Secondly, Thady is both the centre and not the centre of attention. He, on the one hand, puts the successive stories of the Rackrent heirs at the core of his narrative, while reducing his role to that of the faithful, simple steward. On the other hand, showing through the entire work is his ironic narration, making the reader focus on and rethink the character of honest Thady. The editor already foreshadows Thady’s influence on and in the narrative, stating that

“[w]e 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” (Edgeworth 1).

Hence, the reader must read between the lines to discover the true conviction of Thady, “whose servile attitudinizing barely conceals his underlying scorn for the landlord class” (Neill 76). Moreover, as narrator, Thady holds the power to decide the future of the Rackrents, the Quirks and
Ireland (Neill 80). This because he is the one who decides what will be told and how it will be told. Tracy states that through inventing Thady, Edgeworth could examine “the process by which the colonized subject simultaneously feigns loyalty, manipulates his rulers, and subverts their control” (qtd. in Neill 80). This can be seen, for example, in the continuous assertions of loyalty to the family and of keeping up their honour, while at the same time laying bare their biggest, darkest secrets: when Sir Patrick Rackrent’s body is seized, Thady is quick to say that none but the enemies of the family believed it to be a sham of Murtagh Rackrent to get out of paying the huge debt his father had incurred (Edgeworth 12). Thirdly, Thady functions as a point of connection between two contending extremes in society. He is part of the community of Catholic Irish tenants and has lived and served under the Rackrent family for his entire life. He even serves as the paternal figure to Condy Rackrent and tells him of his heritage (Edgeworth 39). Thady’s ties to both extremes are represented through the connection with his son, Jason, and his ‘surrogate son’, Condy. The two boys resemble the two sides of the political struggle. However, as they grow older, Jason becomes “a high gentleman … [and] looks down on honest Thady” (Edgeworth 8), resembling more and more the ruling class. This, again, suggests a possible reversal of power relations. Lastly, the narrative can be considered to be about the personal experiences and concerns of Thady Quirk and his son. As mentioned before, the first part of the novel can be seen as the introduction to the story of “the rise of the Quirks” (Kirkpatrick xxix), which is then told in the second part of the novel. In this light, the reader might wonder which family is actually meant by “the family in which [Thady] was bred and born” (Edgeworth 3): that of the Rackrents or that of the Quirks. This might also explain why the term is italicized and, thus, brought to the attention of the reader.
To conclude, the mediocre hero, depending on the reading either Condy Rackrent or Thady Quirk, provides Edgeworth with the means to process her fears and ideas on the political problems of her time. In a straightforward reading of the memoirs told by a loyal servant, Condy Rackrent is the personification of all that is wrong with the landlord class. Moreover, his demise at the hands of the Irish Jason Quirk displays latent fears of Irish power and power reversals. In an ironic reading, on the other hand, Thady Quirk and his rhetoric represent the power of the inferior Irish (Egenolf 47). Because “where power relations determine the conditions of meeting, linguistic exchange becomes a duel … So little is being said, so much is ‘being meant’” (Steiner 34-35). So, it is through reading between the lines that the reader can grasp the tensions in the power relations. This shows perfectly how the irony of Thady functions in the narrative: it provides the narrative with an undercurrent of power struggles that mirrored those of contemporary politics.

_A View of One’s Own_

Unlike the other two novels, _Castle Rackrent_ (1800) contains very limited background descriptions. Told from the perspective of Thady, the narrative primarily focusses on the characters and their fate and interactions. The novel thus differs from the Waverley novels in that the physical milieu and historical events needed to depict the characters as products of their time is not present. However, when broadening the meaning of setting to include not only historical events, but also (fictional) events in the everyday lives of the characters, it brings forth a comment on Irish culture and identity. Hack attributes to the novel a logic of supplementarity: “something that seems to be a mere addition turns out to be logically and chronologically prior to or constitutive of that which it is supposed to add to or complete” (147). This logic is then applied to the absorption of Ireland into Britain (Hack 147). For example, the coming to the estate of the Rackrent family and the events preceding that are fictional, yet telling of the dubious relationship between Ireland and
Britain. This can be found in the changing of the family name which is constructed as a background setting to the story. Thady explains how the Rackrent family is one of those ancient families of the kingdom of which everybody knows the old family name was O’Saughlin, “related to the kings of Ireland” (Edgeworth 8). He then explains how Sir Patrick O’Saughlin inherited the estate from his cousin Sir Tallyhoo Rackrent on the condition “that he should, by Act of Parliament take and bear the surname and arms of Rackrent” (Edgeworth 9). When introduced to the family in the preface, there is no mention of the Irish forefather or the obviously Irish name O’Saughlin. Also, the family prides itself on the English part of their identity which is made clear from the descriptions of the heirs’ characters. These descriptions can be seen as fictional settings attesting to the events taking place during the lifetime of said heir. After Sir Patrick’s death, the next generations are more and more anglicized: Sir Murtagh makes the Irish “English tenants” (Edgeworth 14), which means they have to pay their rent the day it is due rather than into arrear; Sir Kit Stopgap was an absent landlord who “grew tired of the place … [and] sailed for England” (Edgeworth 20); and Sir Conolly (Condy) prefers the daughter of a neighbouring landlord over the truly Irish and lovable Judy M’Quirk. In other words, the Irish part of the identity is overshadowed by the English part within this Anglo-Irish family. However, Edgeworth problematises the disappearing of Irish culture as a supplement to that of England through attaching to the Irish culture an older history, linking the O’Saughlin name to the kings of Ireland. This is done again when Sir Murtagh dies, according to Thady, as a result of disregarding an ancient Irish belief in fairies. This could be a “failure of assimilation” (Hack 147) and brings forth an awareness of the two cultures and, consequently, an awareness of what a union would really entail: a possible loss of Irish singularity.
As stated before, the novel narrates the story of the Rackrent family going back four generations. The subtitle itself dates the events “before the year 1782”. Even though appearing to have happened over two generations ago, the narrative does not conform to the other standards set by the Scott type of which Hägg stated that the author may not have experienced the events discussed in the narrative (187). Edgeworth based her novel loosely on “The Black Book of Edgeworthstown, a chronicle of her own family’s struggles to secure its Irish estate” (Kirkpatrick x). The chronicle serves as a written source on which the author relied to write her story. This way, the facts are researched rather than remembered. However, she does not apply the historical facts as they are, but rather uses them as a basis to which she moulds her fictional narrative. Moreover, the dating of the narrative might not be true to life. Although “the Editor hopes his readers will observe, that these are ‘tales of other times’; that the manners depicted in the following pages are not of the present age” (Edgeworth 4), the opposite is true. Edgeworth wanted to avoid censure on her satiric portrait by putting it in the past, because the reported abuses in the novel—rack-renting and absenteeism—still afflicted the Irish greatly (Kirkpatrick ix). Rack-renting and absenteeism are complementary problems: you need an absent landlord, to rack-rent. In case of an absent landlord, meaning he does not reside on the estate, a middleman is relied on to take on the land, but that middleman takes advantage of the tenants and sub-lets at the highest price he can get, causing untold misery (Kirkpatrick xiv). So, it can be said that Edgeworth both did not experience the facts as she based her story on her grandfather’s ledger, but did experience the facts of rack-renting and absenteeism as they were still an issue in Ireland during her days as rent clerk at Edgeworthstown. Still, by blending the boundary between past and present, Edgeworth is able to portray historical development in the sense that all events are, as stated before, “necessary
preconditions of the end-result” (Lukács 57). This means that by putting the narrative back two generations, Edgeworth adds “historical necessity” to the development of the Anglo-Irish Union (Lukács 64). In other words, the problems and tensions between the Catholic Irish and Protestant Anglo-Irish caused a need for political change to arise, which was then expressed in the Union. When considered like this, the narrative suggests Edgeworth was in favour of the Union. As said before, she was in favour of a system that would ensure Irish prosperity, while maintaining a patriarchal hold on the Irish, but voted against the Union, because she did not want it to be forced on the Irish against their will.

Interestingly, a second ‘author’ can be distinguished within the narrative proper: Thady Quirk. As the one who has “voluntarily undertaken to publish the Memoirs of the Rackrent Family” (Edgeworth 7), he is considered the author within the story: as homodiegetic narrator he is both the one that tells the story as well as a character in the story. While the related events have indeed happened in the past, for Thady they continue up until the present moment in which he is letting them be committed to paper. He has both heard about the historical facts, and has experienced them when he grew up. Everything that is told is based on what he remembers; he does not make use of oral or written sources. Moreover, to him, the facts are indeed historical because he is a character in the fictional narrative that has experienced the fictional events as being true. So, while Edgeworth is the author who researched the historical facts and then fictionalized them, Thady is the author who experienced the fictional facts and then portrayed them as being true. When following Scott’s logic on historical necessity, the two narratives each develop towards a different outcome. Edgeworth’s narrative seems to end in an approval of a patriarchal system, while Thady’s seems to end in an overthrow of that system. So, by putting the narrative in the past Edgeworth
succeeds in portraying a historical development which is subsequently used to elaborate on the idea of a Union and its possible consequences for both sides.

_A Sepulchre of Truth_

Hägg identifies the historical novel as being—or giving the impression of being—true where the historical framework is concerned, because it has to describe the effects of historical events on the fortunes of the characters (191). Interesting here is then the combination of “Tale” and “Facts” in the subtitle “an Hibernian Tale Taken from Facts, and from the Manners of the Irish Squires, before the Year 1782”, which signals the blending of fact and fiction that Hägg already pays attention to by nuancing his definition. Firstly, as stated before, the novel is loosely based on Edgeworth’s grandfather’s ledger. Its portraits of her Anglo-Irish ancestors providing her with a wealth of material (Kirkpatrick xiii). However, the historical background in said ledger serves more as a peg on which to hang the story, rather than as information on influential historical events that changed or influenced the characters’ lives. Still, the historical framework does give the impression of being true due to Edgeworth’s proficiency at imitating the manners of the Irish tenants and the dialect of the Irish steward. She mastered the customs and dialect of the people during her stay at Edgeworthstown where she worked as rent clerk (see “Women Authors and the Literary Market”). The customs and the dialect of the people then serve as the realisation of the historical background, of the feel of the age.

As seen earlier, Scott understands historical accuracy as a means with which to make clear the necessity of a certain situation or event. Moreover, this accuracy was to be found in the psychology of the characters. When looking at the psychology of Thady Quirk, the observant reader notices how he does not come across as very reliable: his story contradicts itself. For example, Thady claims not to approve of his son’s exploits, but later helps him get a piece of land
from the Rackrent family (Edgeworth 22). He purposefully withholds information or tells events a certain way, colouring the reader’s perception of events. In the narrative, Thady “appears in the guise of the old faithful servant”, but provides the reader with enough clues to show that he understands the cause of the Rackrents’ improvidence (Solomon 69). These clues are found in what Egenolf calls the Irish “rhetorical dexterity” (47). Language, as such, becomes a weapon for the victims of colonization (Neill 81). Eagleton states that by only telling what is thought the superiors want to hear or what is judged they ought to hear, a denial of linguistic equality is formed (qtd. in Neill 81). This is exactly what Thady does: he uses language to reclaim the power that was taken away by the oppressor. In a similar way, Edgeworth applies to language and writing to claim for herself the power women normally do not have in patriarchal society. Through her novel, she enters the political dialogue of her time and, in this way, claims a position for women.

A Multi-Layered Dialogue

Castle Rackrent (1800) is a dialogic novel: “besides the narrative proper, … the novel is introduced and concluded by an ‘editor’, who also ‘speaks’ in the original notes at the bottom of the page … [and whose] presence is strengthened by … the Glossary” (Kirkpatrick xxiv-xxv). The struggle for dominance between the various parts of the novel shows an interesting underlying political current. First, the dialogue between the narrative and the glosses and notes show the struggle for dominance between the Irish and the English, but also Edgeworth’s ideas on a possible Union. The—often extensive—notes and glosses explain many of the customs present in the novel, from the Whillaluh and the wake to Banshees and fairy-mounts, in such a way that they come across as “justifiable mores of a now out-dated traditional or feudalistic society” (Easton 115). This way, the English editor seems to defend Irish culture in its glosses, while at the same time taking over control of the Irish narrative, because the glosses are so extensive. The reader, thus,
has to pause the narrative and divert his attention to the editor’s comments for a lengthy period of time. An example of this is the gloss on the Willaluh, an Irish funeral song lamenting the dead, which goes on for little over three pages (Edgeworth 99). So even though the glosses seem to “defend the Irish national character” (Easton 115), they also take over narrative control due to their length. This also happens in the very beginning of the narrative. The memoirs are dated “Monday Morning” (Edgeworth 7), and are immediately followed by a gloss: the narrative has not even started properly and is already interrupted by the English presence. “Thus, before Thady ‘speaks’ a word of his story, his authorial voice is undercut” (Kirkpatrick xxvii). A couple of lines further down, this process is repeated: Thady’s introduction of himself is interrupted by a note that is far longer than the narrative proper thus far (Edgeworth 7-8). In this way, the struggle for dominance between the narrative and the glosses and notes reflects the political struggle for English dominance in Ireland. By using the glosses, written by an English editor, to explain Irish customs, Irish culture seems to be granted legitimacy through English hegemony. The narrative is placed below the editor’s intermissions in the hierarchical ranking of social life. The Glossary portrays the native Irish as in need of governing restraint (Kirkpatrick xxvii). However, not only the political milieu is reflected, Edgeworth’s stance on the pending Union seeps through this dialogue as well. The editor’s emphasis on Irish foreignness can be found again in the editorial comment at the end of the novel, stating that “the domestic habits of no nation in Europe were less known to the English than those of their sister country” (Edgeworth 97). Nonetheless, that same comment ends “with a question suggesting something more porous” (Wohlgemut 647). Wohlgemut states that the final question of the novel weaves together nation-specific customs of Ireland (whiskey) and England (beer), thus opening the possibility of an overlap between the normally contending nations (647). Edgeworth believed that it was through a cultural learning on both sides of the
border that national improvement would be facilitated (Wohlgemut 647). This brings us back to Edgeworth’s belief in a system of benevolent hegemony in which the Anglo-Irish educate the Irish and the possible success of a Union if that Union is willingly accepted by the Irish. Now, this dialogue is mirrored in the relationship of the narrator and the editor who stand for the Irish classes and the Anglo-Irish landlord classes respectively. The editor, who ‘speaks’ before and after the narrator’s narrative, is effectively putting an English frame around the Irish narrative. This containment of Irish culture within an English frame again suggests a providing of legitimacy to Irishness through a system of benevolent patronage.

Secondly, the gender relationships present in the novel provide evidence of an underlying critique on patriarchal society. Both the relationships between the Rackrent heirs and their respective wives and between the female author and male narrator show this. Interestingly, all Rackrent heirs, whom are negative examples of landlords, fall to their demise while their wives prosper. According to Kirkpatrick, this is necessary to work out the ambivalence of the fact that Castle Rackrent (1800), in reconstructing an heir worthy of Irish legitimacy, fortifies a system of primogeniture that excluded women from attaining property (xix). This while Edgeworth advocated female independence. Kirkpatrick continues that the effect of this portrayal of negative examples is to “kill off the patriarchs in the narrative, which results in increased prosperity for the novel’s women” (xx). Sir Murtaghs’ wife, a widow of the family of the Skinflints, “had a fine jointure settled upon her … [and] sent all the feather-beds off before her, and blankets, and household linen, down to the very knife cloths, on the cars to Dublin” (Edgeworth 18-19). Sir Kit Stopgap’s wife, a Jewish lady, was locked up for seven years because she did not want to part from her diamond jewels, but was freed after her husband was killed in a duel. She “made up her mind to spend the rest of her days upon her own income and jewels in England” (Edgeworth 36). Lastly,
Sir Condy Rackrent’s wife, Isabella Moneygawl, leaves Condy after he is ruined, but Condy’s intention is that the “lady should have a clear five hundred a year jointure off the estate” (Edgeworth 70). Although scarred for life in her face due to an accident with the car, Isabella Moneygawl spent the remainder of her life in comfort, surrounded by family and friends. Notwithstanding the females’ sexuality or the promise of inheritance lands them a husband, they only prosper after said husband has died. On top of that, Sir Murtagh’s wife is shown to be proficient with the books of the estate and keeps a tight rein on things, as is suggested by her family name (Skinflint). She, as a woman, succeeds the best of all Rackrent wives in running the estate and finding opportunities to acquire wealth during her stay at Rackrent Castle: she collected duty work, accepted bribes to talk to her husband about abatements and renewals and had a privy purse (Edgeworth 12-14, 17). Ultimately, she built a small fortune for herself. This way, Edgeworth grants an uncommon power to women of the period for “they remind us that money, not sexuality, often proves to be the more permanent source of women’s power” (Brodie 699). Besides that, the gender critique is also found in the relationship between the male narrator and female author. The female author is similar to the male narrator, but at the same time controls him and is controlled by him. Edgeworth is like Thady due to their ambiguous status: he is “a man of divided loyalties and limited power” and she is “similarly subordinate, without property or political franchise” (Kirkpatrick x). Hence, her marginal status as a woman overlaps with that of the dispossessed Irish Catholic (Kirkpatrick xxvi). Edgeworth was “her father’s servant, confidant, assistant, estate agent, companion, flatterer, and eventually would become his biographer, living out aspects of Thady’s role” (Neill 90). This way, Edgeworth aligns herself to the subservient Irish narrator who is controlled by the English editor. By adopting the Irish voice with ease, she suggests a strong empathy with the subversive tale of her narrator (Kirkpatrick xxvi). Hence, similar to Thady (see
“A Sepulchre of Truth”), Edgeworth uses language to take back the power she lost due to the system of patriarchy. Only, whereas Thady uses a dialect unknown to his oppressors, Edgeworth uses the oppressor’s language to claim for herself a place in public life, to subvert the power relations. Thusly, Edgeworth aligns herself to the marginal status of her narrator to critique the lack of opportunities for (political) discourse for women in public life. Next, for the dual relationship of controlling and being controlled, a return to Edgeworth’s own remarks on the novel is necessary. She stated in one of her letters that, as she wrote, “[Thady] seemed to stand beside [her] and dictate; and [she] wrote as fast as [her] pen could go” (qtd. in Hack 149). In other words, “an Anglo-Irish estate-manager learns to mimic an Irish servant and then writes a tale in his voice by imagining herself to be his obedient amanuensis” (Hack 149). On the one hand, Edgeworth is controlled by her narrator who stands beside her and dictates, while she dutifully commits it to paper. In this situation, she elevates her Irish narrator to the position of the author, and puts herself in an inferior position. On the other hand, however, she mimics his personal speech and writes a tale “in his voice” (Hack 149). In this situation, Edgeworth performs a complete absorption of the other. More importantly, she takes over the defining characteristic that makes the other the other, his voice. As has been explained earlier, for the colonized, language is a weapon with which to take back the power from the oppressor. So, here Edgeworth performs the role of the oppressor and thus reverses the power relations present in the patriarchal society of late eighteenth-century Britain.
**Jane Porter’s The Scottish Chiefs**

As seen earlier, Porter was focused on a history of continuity in an effort to bring about consolidation between Scotland and Britain. Where Edgeworth focussed on the possibility and consequences of union, Porter wanted to strengthen the feeling of unity, so to put forth a united front against an outside threat. Published ten years after Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* (1800), Jane Porter’s *The Scottish Chiefs: A Romance* (1810) is located on the boundary between the first (1790-1810) and second generation (1811-1832) of the Romantic Period. Whereas Shelley, by the time *Valperga* (1823) is published, is disillusioned after Napoleon’s campaigns, Porter, through her belief in continuity of history, still believes in Wollstonecrafts’ revolution of female manners (Mellor 43). So, beside her attention to collaboration between the different parts of the British Isles, Porter puts her mind to gender relations as well, challenging “the elimination of women from the existing construction of history” (Mellor 44). Several of Porter’s works also seem to suggest that “behind every man’s story … there is an unrecognized woman” (McLean 93). Now, Porter’s novel tells the story of William Wallace and Robert the Bruce who struggle to free Scotland from English rule. The narrative begins after Scotland submitted to the authority of the English monarch in 1296. Wallace, residing at Ellerslie, is invited to meet Sir John Monteith at Douglas Castle, whom hands him an iron box, which is revealed at the end of the novel to contain the regalia of Scotland, that originally belonged to the defeated Scottish king Baliol. When returning home, Wallace saves Donald Earl of Mar from being killed by English soldiers, killing the English governor of Lanark’s nephew Arthur Heselrigge in the process, and brings the wounded man to his home. English revenge does not wait long to arrive. The castle is stormed and Lady Marion Braidfoot, heiress of Lammington, Wallace’s wife, is questioned on the whereabouts of her husband and the Earl by Gilbert Hambledon. He calls of the search when he hears that Wallace
justly attacked Heselrigge. However, not all Englishmen are of equal nobility and, the morning after, Lady Marion is murdered by the Governor of Lanark. In horror at this act, the veteran English soldier Grimsby foreswears his allegiance to his commander. Wallace’s servant Halbert, brings Wallace the news of his wife’s death and from that moment on he swears to free Scotland from these murderous tyrants and collects around him a band of faithful followers of both sexes. Halbert visits Lord Mar whom immediately rallies behind Wallace. His nephew, Andrew Murray, shall carry the banner made by his daughter Lady Helen. The Earl’s wife, Countess Joanna Mar, does not approve and fears repercussions from the English. Donald Mar’s castle is infiltrated by Lord Soulis, a treacherous Scot, and Lord Aymer de Valence, an English commander. The Earl and Countess are taken prisoner to Dumbarton castle. Lady Helen, Andrew Murray, Halbert and Grimsby flee the castle, but Soulis gets Helen in his hands. Helen is saved by a mysterious knight whom she thinks is Robert the Bruce. Later it will become clear that it was Wallace. Meanwhile, Andrew joins William Ker to save Wallace from the English in the Cartlane craigs. Once there, he meets other chieftains: Sir Roger Kirkpatrick of Torthorald, a loyal hothead who is bent on revenge; Edwin Ruthven, nephew of Lord Mar; and Sir Alexander Scrymgeour, the royal standard-bearer. Together they take back Dumbarton castle from De Valence’s control. The Countess of Mar falls in love with Wallace and makes it her duty to trick him into loving her. The chieftains are joined by Sir Eustace Maxwell and Malcolm, Earl of Lennox. Malcolm accepts the command of Dumbarton castle as Lady Mar and her family are conducted to the Isle of Bute by Wallace. While there, they receive the message that eighteen Scottish chiefs have been murdered at the Barns of Ayr. They make their way to exact their revenge and free the remaining prisoners. Berwick, under the protection of Ralph de Monthermer Earl of Gloucester, falls after a short siege. Wallace receives word that the Earl and Countess of Mar, Helen Mar and Lady Ruthven are held
prisoners by De Valence in Stirling and sets out immediately. After another victory, the ranks of the Scottish army swell even more with troops from almost every noble family in Scotland. The people proclaim Wallace their King, but he does not accept the honour, for “Bruce lives” (Porter 339). As Regent, he continues his march south, as far as Northumberland. However, under the leadership of Lord Athol and Lord March, a conspiracy against Wallace is formed. Helen apprises him of it and so a big battle ensues. Wallace meets Bruce and helps him to regain his royal standing. Once more, Wallace saves Helen, who is disguised as a page boy. Lady Mar disguises herself as the Green Knight, now to try and bring Wallace down.

**A Mediocre, Prosaic Hero**

To pinpoint the middling hero in Porter’s novel is a difficult task, because she puts emphasis on “self-sacrificing heroism” and “the promotion of patriotism” (Porter 19, 13). This way, the majority of her characters are similar to those of the epic stories of old. On the difference between the hero of the epic and the hero of the novel, Lukács turns to Hegel:

> “The heroes of the epic are, as Hegel says, ‘total individuals who magnificently concentrate within themselves what is otherwise dispersed in the national character, and in this they remain great, free and noble human characters’. Thereby ‘these principal characters acquire the right to be placed at the summit and to see the principal event in connexion with their individual persons’. The principal figures in Scott’s novels are also typical characters nationally, but in the sense of the decent and average, rather than the eminent and all-embracing. The latter are the national heroes of a poetic view of life, the former of a prosaic one” (36).

William Wallace serves as the epic hero and an important representative in the novel. More than that, he forms a substitute for the real-life heroes that have fallen from the ideal (Price, *Reinventing*
Liberty 214). Baliol is one of those fallen heroes. He sells his country to Edward I in exchange for the crown, but when this treason is completed Edward I removes him from the throne and throws him in prison, leaving Scotland shackled to Britain (Porter 45, 51). As the realisation of the ideal patriot, Wallace has to “avoid excessive hostility or acquisitiveness” (Price, “Innovation” 646). This fits with Porter’s wish for consolidation because Wallace, as the hero, concentrates that ideal in himself: he “begins to perform the dual motions of nationalism, possessing the patriotic energy to fight, on the one hand, with the morality to avoid violence once the crisis is over, on the other” (Price, Reinventing Liberty 214), acquiring the right to be placed at the summit. Moreover, the principal event—the Scottish war of independence—stands in connection to his individual person as he decides to take back Scottish liberty after the English murdered his pregnant wife, Marion. Upon hearing of her death, he pronounced himself God’s “avenger … Tremble tyranny, [Wallace] comes to hurl thee down” (Porter 87). He sets out to get his revenge and stood “on the cliff like the newly-aroused genius of his suffering country” (Porter 89). The outrage he feels for the death of his wife is transferred to the outrage he previously felt for the ‘death’ of Scotland, that is its loss of liberty. Also, Wallace’s appearance mirrors that of Charles Stuart, the ruler favoured by the rebellious Jacobites in 1745: “Charles’ own adoption of the guise of a patriot Highlander, his attempts to learn Gaelic and his decision to march with his men” make him resemble the character that functions as the hero of Scotland (Pittock 163). This way, a connection between the thirteenth century war and eighteenth century rebellions is formed: they both had a wish for independence and a change of rulers at the heart of their causes. Porter applies this connection to her novel to show that “the idea of the independent small nation works to defend the people against political oppression” (Price, Reinventing Liberty 210). The novel raises “the issue of monarchical (or political) regime change” and suggests for Scotland a ruler that works “for the prosperity and
liberty of [its] subjects” and “share[s] some common ground” with those subjects (Price, *Reinventing Liberty* 210). For her, this ruler can be found in the consolidation “of … two brave families [whom have] also consolidated their rival nations into one” (Porter 42). She refers to the English Plantagenets and the Scottish Bruces as the families to produce an heir for the newly formed nation, thus fixing it on lasting foundations (Porter 42).

Next in order, I propose that the fictional character Lady Helen Mar performs the role of the middling hero in Porter’s novel. Although not completely compatible with Scott’s type of hero, she does possess some of the core characteristics. She is the daughter of Donald Mar and is introduced in the sixth chapter (Porter 93-99). She does not conform to the typical middling hero, in that she does not advocate a middle way, but advocates the Scottish way. On top of that, she is a middling hero primarily because she stands between two characters, two forces and two men. First, she stands between two characters from the perspective of the Countess of Mar. She is convinced that Wallace would marry her if only Helen were to be gone, because “it was the youthful beauty and more lovely mind of [Helen] which [Lady Mar] feared” (Porter 233). Helen’s beauty seems a thing “which malignant fiends had conjured up to blast [Lady Mar’s] hopes” (Porter 322). Secondly, she stands between two opposing forces, because she is desired by both. The Scottish traitor Soulis and the English Lord Aymer de Valence, but also Andrew Murray, Helen’s nephew, feel sexual desire for her. Because of that, Helen is taken from and retaken by both camps and spends time hearing both sides: she is first at Saint Fillan, then taken by Soulis, retaken by Wallace, brought to her aunt Ruthven, to be taken by De Valence. However, she unwaveringly proclaims the Scottish cause throughout the narrative. This way, Helen influences the proceedings of war, for Wallace attacks where she is being held. Thirdly, she stands, or more specifically must choose, between two men: Wallace and Jesus Christ. This is a symbolical choice
to be made, because Wallace seems to be a reincarnate version of the Son of God to whom he compares himself: “do not believe … that [tears] disgrace [Wallace’s] manhood. The Son of God wept over the tomb of his friend” (Porter 237). This symbolical choice translates into Helen’s abjuration of sexual desire for fraternal/paternal love and patriotism. Helen “felt a confusion that disordered the animation with which she described [Wallace’s] patriotism and his bravery” (Porter 325). She chooses not to see him as a potential lover, but instead foregrounds the importance of his symbolic value as the liberator of Scotland, because “not to think of him was impossible; how to think of him was in her power … [T]he saint and the hero; … and as such would she regard him” (Porter 331). These examples enforce Porter’s wish for not only an inclusion of women in history, but especially an active participation in public life. Helen, as the middling heroine, has the power to influence where the war is going, but also the power to act in such a way as to help her country, unlike Lady Mar. By foreswearing sexual desire, Helen, in a way, foreswears her sex, and is thus able to enter the male space that is public life. If this is not done, she would, as a woman, be forced “to suffer in silence and seclusion” (Porter 347).

*A View of One’s Own*

The historical novel often contains a national tale. Here, Scott again takes centre position, with writers like Porter situated at the periphery (Monnickendam 100). However, others claim that, both in Ireland and in Scotland, the national tale was largely the province of female writing (Pittock, *Scottish Romanticism* 5). Monnickendam states that “[t]he Scottish national tale comprises of two elements” (100). They are geographical and aesthetical: the novel is situated in Scotland and is considered a tale, not a factual text (Monnickendam 100). This section will be concerned with the geographical element, focusing on landscape. The landscape can be found in background descriptions which Porter’s novel, in contrast to Edgeworth’s, contains extensively.
Interestingly, “novelists often use landscape as a metaphor” (Monnickendam 104). Now, the Scottish landscape is often described as terrifying and wild: a “solitary wilderness” with burns increasing in “depth and violence” and “prodigious craggy mountains … canopied with a thick umbrage of firs, beech, and the weeping-birch … [that] almost [excludes] the light of day (Porter 83). It is exactly this kind of landscape that aids the Scots since the plains of England “are the proper territories for tyranny; there the armies of a usurper may extend themselves with ease; leaving no corner unoccupied, in which patriotism might shelter, or treason hide. But mountains, glens, morasses, lakes, set bounds to conquest; and amidst these, is the impregnable seat of liberty” (Porter 105-106).

The metaphor here is that it is only in the minds of Scots, who are ferocious and free, that patriotism, but also treason, can exist. On the plains of England, there is no room for heroic sentiment, but neither disloyalty. Here, again, Porter’s belief in consolidation comes forth, for it is only in the coming together of the two nations that the best of both worlds can be had: the heroic sentiment and patriotism of the Scots and the loyalty that the English have for their own. Regarding contemporary politics, the setting shows that in combining the nations and their positive characteristics a stronger unit can be put up against the oncoming French.

Secondly, beside the physical milieu, historical events are brought into relationship with the characters. Some episodes of importance change the fortunes of the characters and influence their human development. For example, the abdication of the Scottish king Balliol—which John Balliol did as well in 1296—resulted in the withdrawal of Wallace to Ellerslie where “all the ambitions of youth were extinguished in his breast” (Porter 45). The event “checked [him] at the opening of life in the career of glory that was his passion” (Porter 45). However, Wallace will eventually still have his career of glory by avenging his wife and freeing Scotland. A murder which
resulted from Scotland’s vassalage to England. That historical events affect the everyday lives of people shows that war has become something in which the entire nation is involved. In this way, Porter establishes the need to involve all, both men and women, in public life: “the people who follow our standards … with willing spirits ought to know our reasons for requiring their services” (Porter 296). It also emphasises Porter’s wish for consolidation in as much as it is only because of “civil dissensions” that “the bonds of virtue” are divided in “a heart that knows no difference between friend or foe” (Porter 310).

A Time Long Past

Set in thirteenth-century Scotland, Porter can only have known about the historical facts through research, which she performed painstakingly according to her preface. However, Price states that Porter tried to instil in her readers a sense of national stability and tried to achieve improved relations between Scotland and Britain by displacing the conflict—the Jacobite rebellions of the eighteenth century—onto the distant past (intro. 19). This way a parallel between the rebellions and the thirteenth-century Scottish war of independence is forged, putting emphasis on a pattern of national struggle that bounds the people of the past and the present (Price, intro. 31). Thus, effectively allying tales of past triumph with the hope of future national success (Prince, intro. 30). Even though she displaces a contemporary political issue onto the past, it is still an issue she would have had to have researched. Born in 1776, she did not experience the rebellions of 1715 and 1745 and would only have learned about them in school or from people who took part in them. The rebellion of 1715 is also known as “Mar’s rebellion” (Donald 126), a name carried by several of the central characters in the novel as well: the Earl of Mar, Lady Joanna Mar, and the sisters Helen and Isabella Mar. Whereas an incompetent leader in the rebellion (Donald 127), the Earl of Mar is the one that unintentionally causes a chain reaction that leads to a war of
independence in the novel after Wallace saved him from his English attackers. Both the rebellion of 1745 and the novel’s rendering of the Scottish war for independence show a similar progression. Donald sums up the course of the rebellion of 1745 as follows:

“The landing of Prince Charlie with only seven followers—the rallying of the clans—the swift march to the south—the total defeat of Cope’s army—and the mimic court at Holyrood, all appealed to the imagination. Then the facts that the Prince’s army penetrated into the heart of England, and that by many it is still thought that if he had pressed on to London he might have seized the throne” (126).

William Wallace’s plot line resembles that of the Prince’s encounters in 1745 in Donald’s account. While Wallace does not ‘land’ in Scotland, he does start off with a low number of followers. Before he can begin his conquest, Wallace needs saving, which is done by a handful of loyal soldiers. When freed, the neighbouring chiefs rally to his call: Donald Mar, Roger Kirkpatrick, Alexander Scrymgeour and many others. A swift march to the south is what follows and “it would not be difficult for [Wallace’s] troops … to clear Annandale and Roxburghshire of the enemy; and so make the Cheviot hills and the ocean the boundaries of Edward’s conquests” (Porter 283). Wallace proceeds on his quest to the south “to reap the harvests of Northumberland … even to the very gates of York” (Porter 390, 399). A big battle follows and Edward has to retreat. Wallace refuses “the crown offered to him in the field by the people; he rejected it from Edward” (Porter 432). The envious Scottish nobility accuse Wallace of being a usurper and a mock trial is held (Porter 433 and further).

The similarities between both accounts strengthen Porter’s mission of bringing across history as continuous, almost cyclical even. Typically, the national tale in the historical novel “explores the relationship between two geographical regions, representative of different stages of
cultural development” (Price, intro. 17), which is the case in Edgeworth’s novel. As seen, Edgeworth favours a patriarchal system in which the Irish are educated by the so-called culturally superior English. So, what is generally stressed is the importance of history as a force for change, as a development from one stage to another. This way, Scott seems to suggest that change must be accepted, that adaptation to changing rulers is inescapable (Price, “Innovation” 639). In his work, the Jacobites are therefore treated nostalgically and are accepted as a thing of the past, with an overall emphasis on alteration (Price, “Innovation” 641). Porter’s novel, then, is about resisting the establishment of the new rulers after the Scots “signed the bond of submission to a ruthless conqueror” (Porter 45), that is to Edward I of England. Porter’s eighteenth-century readers would have had no trouble remembering the Jacobite rebellions and noticing similarities. By putting it in the distant past, historical development is, in this case, switched out for historical continuity. This kind of history is also called typological history: it places emphasis on the repetitive quality of events and is almost exclusively used by the marginalised and the defeated in the hope that times of glory will return (Pittock, Poetry 2-3). Porter tries to use this type of history to “promote a narrative of ongoing, disinterested patriotism” (Price, “Innovation” 640). This disinterested form of patriotism occurs because of the repetition of loss and heroism (Price, “Innovation” 640). Just like Scott, she sees history as an ongoing series of revolutionary crises. Only, where he sees it as necessary interruptions of peace to move from one phase of history to another, Porter sees the revolutions as repetitions of previous undertakings that occur when people forget about the suffering everyone goes through together. Then, when another revolution breaks out, the people are reminded again of that past shared suffering, which then instils in them a disinterested form of patriotism and self-sacrificing heroism. It is disinterested because this reminder of shared suffering withholds patriotism from evolving to more aggressive varieties of nationalism, like jingoism
(Price, “Innovation” 646). The background setting of war to the individual stories of the different characters then serves to remind the reader of the continuity of history and the need for heroism, even in everyday life and from everyday people. Especially because, since the French Revolution, war has become something that “involves the whole countryside rather than a few isolated fortresses, [something that] now necessitates mass armies” (Price, “Innovation” 640). Even though they are two violent periods in the history of Scotland and Britain, Porter voices through them a need for political strength through consolidation: Scottish and English characters are shown to appreciate each other’s strength and valour. Moreover, throughout the novel, Wallace continuously speaks of his wish for peace and his wish for peaceful surrender of the English, especially after hard-fought battles that are based on historical events. This way, an emphasis on reconciliation is maintained using historical events from the thirteenth and eighteenth century.

A Sepulchre of Truth

Porter’s The Scottish Chiefs (1810) is praised as well as condemned for its use of history. Critics praised her for mixing history and romance with great judgement and committing no intentional injustices (Price, intro. 15). Price states that other critics condemned Porter’s use of history because her characters did not resemble the manners of the age (intro. 15, 16). Porter herself takes on a position between the two extremes. While claiming that she “spared no pains in consulting almost every writing extant which treats of the sister kingdoms during the period of [her] narrative”, she does admit to having filled in the blanks “where time having made some erasure” (Porter 41). She kept the introduction of wholly imaginary characters to a minimum, while keeping the character of the historical figures intact (Porter 42). However, she again admits that she took “some liberties with time and circumstance” to keep her novel from getting too long (Porter 43). The adherence to truth is important for Porter because she used the historical novel to
teach her female readers about Scottish history (Mellor 44). Nonetheless, she adds a strong female fictional character, Lady Helen, to show that women too can have something to say. This attempt to include women in public life is given form by letting them influence political events: the fictional character of Lady Helen influences the historical story of William Wallace. This way she challenges the exclusion of women from history, mentioned earlier. She, for example, uncovers a conspiracy just in time for Wallace to rally his army and avoid a disastrous fate for the Scottish (449-452). Moreover, Wallace and Bruce “share their thoughts with Lady Helen … consulted her their plans, and hardly considered them as fixed till she had confirmed them by her approval” (Porter 578). However, not all female characters who actively influence the national cause, are considered good examples. Lady Mar is characterised as a scheming woman who uses her sexuality to get ahead in life. She betrays her husband to the English by sending a letter disclosing his promise of military aid to Wallace (Porter 143). This, together with promising Soulis Helen’s hand in marriage, she does in the hope that no attainder will befall Lord Mar and herself (Porter 144). However, they become captives and Wallace has to attack Dumbarton castle to free them (Porter 203-216). In a vain attempt to keep Wallace by her side, Lady Mar convinces him to conduct her, her infant son and Lord Mar to their territories in the Isle of Bute (Porter 241). Her hope is to re-awaken Wallace’s sensibility to a new (read: her) tenderness during the journey (Porter 241). They are surprised by a storm at sea and are shipwrecked (Porter 250). Wallace risks his life again to save them. While engaged with the Lady Mar’s wishes, “eighteen Scottish chiefs, have been treacherously put to death in the Barns of Ayr” (Porter 265). Lady Mar’s personal desires, thus, have repercussions on a national level: if she would not have betrayed her husband, they would not have needed saving; if she would not love another man, she would not keep him from freeing Scotland. Hence, one would conclude that Porter establishes the importance of female
presence in public life, but only if the women in question are upright and incorruptible. Lady Mar’s characterisation suggests that female sexuality is what makes a woman unfit for public life. In Shelley, it is sexuality as well which will bring ruin to one female character, while the other purifies the desire she feels. Still, Lady Mar’s tale is ambiguous and needs to be nuanced. Monnickendam states that even though Lady Mar can easily be seen as evil, her sexuality and schemes are the consequence of sexual harassment and abuse (103). Lady Mar states that she is “bound up with chains which [her] kinsmen forced upon [her]” (Porter 262). This way, a female character is given a history and a voice to tell that history (Monnickendam 104), which reminds of Porter’s goal of not only returning women to history, but giving them an active place in that history.

**A Multi-Layered Dialogue**

As seen earlier, Porter was “wary of the implications of the French Revolution” (Price, “Innovation” 641). As an answer to that, continuity in history is stressed. This becomes apparent in Porter’s treatment of the opposing armies and their generals. Through several dialogues, it becomes clear that “the threat to Scottish independence is not merely Edward and the might of his army. It is primarily disloyalty, division, and self-interest amongst the Scottish nobles” (Price, intro. 13). The dialogues show some of the English as noble and virtuous and some of the Scottish as base and traitorous. Gilbert Hambledon, in his “courteous address” to Lady Marion, “behaved himself so generously respecting the safety of the man he came to seize” that his nobility vanquished the vengeance Wallace “prayed might extirpate every follower of Edward” (Porter 68). In like manner, The English soldier Grimsby earns Murray’s approval by securing the iron box and helping to get Lady Helen and Halbert to safety. He is “anxious to quit a land … where [his] countrymen are committing violences which make [him] blush at the name of Englishmen” (Porter 123). Murray answers that he “will regard [the sword] as a memorial of having found virtue in an
Englishman” (Porter 123). The Earl of Gloucester is hailed as an “illustrious and virtuous Englishman” (Porter 286) by Wallace. The Earl points out the Scottish nobles’ conduct to Wallace stating that “the rights which [Wallace] believe[s] wrested from [him]” were lost because of “the traffic of [his] own venal nobles, and of the King who purchased a throne at the expense of a country” (Porter 287). This way, Porter stresses that enemies are sometimes enemies out of necessity, where they would rather be companions or allies. So, while the narrative tells a story of English oppression and Scottish liberation, the dialogue tells a story of compatibility and mutual understanding. Of course, this is only the case with worthy characters who show the heroic and patriotic characteristics inherent to great men (or women). The dialogues also show that Porter is concerned with the political danger that is the unfit Scottish aristocracy whose “pride in rank without pride in function” and “hubris” make them unpatriotic and disloyal (Price, *Reinventing Liberty* 137). The novel thus “implicitly questions (even while appearing to confirm) the hereditary distribution of power” (Price, intro. 13). Appearing to confirm because at the end of the novel Robert the Bruce, son of “the elder Bruce, Lord of Annandale” (Porter 168), follows in his father’s footsteps as a contender for the Scottish throne, which he eventually gets. He also wants to earn back the honour that befalls their name before he claims the throne. To accomplish that, he has to “prove [his] right to the crown by deeds worthy of a sovereign” (Porter 547). This, so that he is crowned for being a Scottish hero and not merely because of his lineage. Bruce kills the traitorous Lord March in battle (Porter 472), helps Wallace escape from Edward’s court (Porter 519) and assists in the liberation of Helen and of Scotland (Porter 551-559, Volume V).

Just like Edgeworth’s novel, Porter’s has a male narrator. However, she does not use that to comment on her position in society. Still, the power relations in patriarchal society are questioned. First, by using notes she makes visible the “unrecognized woman” (McLean 93)
behind every man. When some of the Scottish chiefs are introduced, a textual note at the bottom of the page apprises the reader of the source of their castle, name and power, which is through a marriage to a woman. John Cummin of Strathbogie, who convinces Baliol to surrender to the King of England, the reader learns in the accompanying note, is “Earl of Athol in right of his wife, the heiress of the Earldom” (Porter 52). Ralph de Monthermer, then, receives the title of Earl of Gloucester upon “his marriage with this princess”, Jane of Acre (Porter 286). Sometimes, “the unrecognized woman” (McLean 93) is mentioned in parentheses, rather than a separate note: “Robert (who was Earl of Carrick in right of his wife) returned to Britain” (Porter 170). This suggests that male power is nothing if there is no female power as well. So, a consolidation between and acceptance of male and female power in public life is what Porter strives for. Secondly, the triumvirate consisting of Lady Joanna Mar, Lady Helen Mar and Lady Marion Braidfoot shows an interesting relationship. The three women are put in a hierarchical relationship through characterisation. Wallace’s wife, Marion, seems almost inhuman, a creature come from heaven. She is continually associated with phrases like “angel”, “angel of peace and love”, “angel’s happiness”, “angel of my life” and “angel spirit” (Porter 46, 47, 64, 86). She is a saint-like figure, revered by all who knew her (Porter 90), which emphasises the atrociousness of her death. She, thus, seems to fulfil a symbolic role as a woman of virtue, purity and nobility that stands above lesser characters. Lady Helen Mar is first mentioned by Heselrigge, insinuating she will be his after her father and Bothwell Castle would fall (Porter 62). He, however, is killed by Wallace shortly after. Her beauty is what is referred to the most: she is “lovely”, “of resplendent beauty” and “fair” (Porter 62, 95, 99). In addition to being beautiful, she performs an “angel errand” and is of a “celestial purity” (Porter 103, 363). Lady Joanna Mar, lastly, is the opposite of the two other women. She is “narrow-minded”, “pitiless” and “obstinate”, but also “dazzling” and of a “majestic
beaut[y]” (Porter 108, 217, 240, 229, 205). She is the only female described with the adjective ‘majestic’. This puts her on one line with his Majesty Edward I of England and thus as an adversary to the Scots and their cause. Her own desires take precedence over virtue and patriotism. So, this hierarchical positioning of the female characters serves as a background to which the reader can interpret (the merit of) their actions. Lady Marion serves as a power to urge Wallace on, she “was to be immolated that [he] might awake! – [his] wife … must bleed for Scotland! And the sacrifice shall not be yielded in vain” (Porter 195). “She was wrested from [Wallace] that [he] might feel [himself] a slave” (Porter 238). Lady Helen, then, is characterised like Marion in terms of her virtue and nobility and like Joanna in terms of her resplendent beauty. This way, she is placed in between the other two women. Wallace and the Bruce welcome her input on political schemes and she is able to save her country from treason by intercepting correspondence between Lord Soulis and Lord March (Porter 449–452). Lady Joanna is characterised primarily through her beauty and sexuality. In Porter’s eyes, it is corrupt sexuality that takes away female possibility (Price, Reinventing Liberty 138). It is only through the denial of sexual desire that a woman can hold a place in public life. Along these lines, Porter advocates female presence in public life, but only if that presence is virtuous and patriotic. Thirdly, the relationship between Joanna and Helen Mar again shows Porter’s nuanced wish for a place for women in public life. This nuance is already found in the hierarchical ordering already discussed. Through that ordering, the reader already distinguishes Lady Helen as the superior character. Still, this is shown in other ways as well. Helen, as a page boy, and Joanna, as the Knight of the Green Plume, are able to influence political events while dressed up as men. Helen “took [interest] in even the minutest details of their design” to conquer Scotland (Porter 563). As the Green Knight, Lady Mar intercepts all messengers bearing news from Bruce and Perthshire (Porter 608). This crossdressing, thus, “attracts attention to the
complexities of female involvement in the national sphere” (Price, “Innovation” 646). Helen Mar at first feels sexual desire for the stranger who saved her from Soulis. Only, when she finds out her saviour is Wallace, she immediately renounces that desire and forces herself to love him like a brother and an awe-inspiring figure. Her love is redirected to the ideal of patriotism (Price, Reinventing Liberty 147). Joanna Mar, on the other hand, disguises herself as a full-grown, capable warrior because of her “sexual jealousy towards Wallace” (Price, Reinventing Liberty 147). In other words, Helen’s disguise as a boy, a “junior but masculinised figure”, and Joanna Mar’s as a “mature male warrior” show Porter’s emphasis on “modesty and sexual self-denial as a form of patriotic freedom” (Price, Reinventing Liberty 147). Where Joanna betrays her country in the hope of gaining Wallace’s hand in marriage, Helen’s advice is sound and always aimed to aid the cause, Scotland’s liberty. Hence, “[p]ersonal sexual fulfilment is impossible – and this is obvious to all but the most corrupt (Price, Reinventing Liberty 147). As Wallace states: “the affections are never criminal but when by their excess they blind us to superior duties” (Porter 238). All in all, female presence in public life is necessary, but only if the women involved measure up to a character like that of Helen.
Mary Shelley’s *Valperga*

Published in 1823, Shelley’s novel may have been influenced by Scott’s *Waverly* (1814), published almost a decade earlier. However, this cannot be said for certain because Shelley’s father’s interest for historiography rubbed off on her as well (Rajan 9). In Mary Shelley’s *Valperga: or, the Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca* (1823), the first scene depicts the eve of a great change in the life of the protagonist, Castruccio Castracani dei Antelminelli. His family and other Ghibelines, supporters of autocratic rule and the Holy Roman Empire’s imperialism, are banished from Lucca by the Guelphs, supporters of the Pope and local republican government, in fourteenth-century Italy. As he grows up an exile under the guiding hand of his father, he still remembers his childhood friend and Guelph, Countess Euthanasia of Valperga. Castruccio is sent to Europe to be taught in the arts of being a noble by Guinigi. Guinigi, who is like a father to Castruccio, has a son, Arrigo, who will later become Castruccio’s confidante. He leaves for England with Sir Ethelbert Atawel. A year later, he joins general Alberto Scoto’s troop in France and, while there, learns the traits of war and political intrigue. He returns to Italy to help the German emperor Henry re-establish the Ghibelines, meeting Benedetto Pepi along the way. The emperor dies and Pisa, in fear of a strong Florentine (and Guelph) power, engaged the condottiere Uguccione della Faggiuola to fight for them. For the next three years, Castruccio spent time with the Milanese lord Galeazzo Visconti. Meanwhile, Euthanasia becomes learned in history and classics by reading to her blinded father. They meet again when Castruccio is no longer an exile from Lucca and their friendship turns into love. When in Ferrara, Castruccio meets Beatrice, the heretical prophetess of Ferrara, and enters into an amorous relationship with her. He leaves her and returns to Euthanasia, in who’s mind Visconti has been planting the seed of doubt on the honesty of Castruccio’s character. Euthanasia eventually decides not to marry Castruccio because
of their opposing political loyalties and ideological convictions. Castruccio becomes cruel and unstoppable in his conquests. Beatrice visits Valperga as a pilgrim on her way to Rome. Valperga’s strategic position brought Florentine nobility to Euthanasia’s doorstep in the hope of convincing her to ally herself to their cause. Unwilling to do so, but also unwilling to ally herself to Castruccio, the nobles use her castle, without her knowledge, as a place from which they can weave a plot to bring about Castruccio’s downfall and put Leodino de’ Guinigi in his stead. However, the conspiracy is betrayed and they are thrown in prison. Euthanasia implores Castruccio to spare Leodino’s life. Castruccio does not assent and decides it is time for Euthanasia’s castle to fall. She is taken prisoner and is transported to Lucca. Beatrice is put in the Lucchese prison by inquisitors and requests Euthanasia to come see her. Euthanasia involves Castruccio to free the girl. She is freed, but dies sometime later. After Beatrice’s death, Euthanasia quits Lucca for Florence. Castruccio besieges Florence and Euthanasia is asked to be an accomplice in a conspiracy against him. The conspiracy is betrayed and Euthanasia is put in prison. Castruccio, however, does not want her blood on his hands and while putting all other conspirators to death, he exiles Euthanasia to Sicily. She is lost at sea after her ship perishes.

A Mediocre, Prosaic Hero

Shelley’s Castruccio Castracani is similar to Porter’s William Wallace. Not in character, because Wallace is as noble and virtuous as Castracani is ambitious and cunning, but in type of hero. Just like Wallace, Shelley’s hero is one of the old heroes, only because his deeds are often told from the perspective of Euthanasia, he does not remain a “great, free and noble human [character]” (Lukács 36). As a Guelph, she does not approve of the political strategies of the Ghibelline Castruccio and while his victories, through war or schemes, are hailed with approval in the imperial camp, Euthanasia dreads to hear of them. At the beginning of the novel, the story of
Castruccio is told by a narrator without the use of focalisation, or by focalising through Castruccio. As the narrative proceeds, Euthanasia takes over control of the narrative for the reason that it is being told more and more from her perspective. The occurrence of this shift of focalisation happens is foreshadowed in the title: the main title refers to Euthanasia, while the subtitle is all about Castruccio. Therefore, I propose, besides Castruccio as the historical figure and hero, Euthanasia as the fictional middling hero. It is Euthanasia’s experiences and concerns about Castruccio’s history that become increasingly important. She is a “[wo]man who, moving between two distinct ages, two different cultures, two opposite social forces, mediates the conflicts and embodies their impasses” (Vasconcelos 145). She moves between two ages because she lives in a period that is undergoing a major change in national politics. A transition from the old independent republic and tyrannical states to the new nation-state is made. “The Lords of Langusco, Pavia, Vercelli, Novara and Lodi … resigned their tyrannies and [gave] up the keys of their respective towns to Henry, and Imperial Vicars are every where established … [W]hen the emperor marches south, we shall see these proud republicans bow their stiff knees” (Shelley 110-111). The different governmental options entail different cultures that function as opposite forces: that of the Guelphs and the Ghibelines. Although a Guelph, Euthanasia advocates a general peace. Influenced by her father’s teachings, “[h]er young thoughts darted into futurity, to the hope of freedom for Italy, of revived learning and the reign of peace for all the world” (Shelley 70). Even though Euthanasia can assert herself by taking over the narrative perspective, in the narrative proper “the benevolent ruler Euthanasia, who wished to establish an egalitarian, communitarian state, drowns at sea, her kingdom of Valperga conquered by the tyrant Castruccio” (Mellor 45). In other words, just like Euthanasia is lost at sea, her republicanism disappears in the rise of the governmental form of hegemonic nation-states in which local governments, like hers, are being overtaken (Rajan 26).
This seems to suggest that Shelley has doubts about the possibility of realising a republican government in contemporary Britain: she comments on hereditary right to the throne. “Atawel … sketched the political state of England to his young companion, he painted with indignation the change from the spirited counsels of the late sovereign, to the puerile amusements and weak inaction of his son” (Shelley 88-89). Even though “a confederacy of nobles … for a while … assumed the royal power into their own hands” (Shelley 90), the king could still take care of his amusements. This way, Shelley shows that establishing control over the despotic ruler fails and the ideal of republicanism might die. A second death Euthanasia’s demise has to account for is that of human perfectibility, by Godwin defined in terms of “[m]an is perfectible, or in other words susceptible of perpetual improvement” (Rajan 39-40). As for Kant, the person who qualifies as the ideal is “the generally moral person … whose actions are always and only governed by the categorical imperative” (qtd. in Magnus 634), that is a moral rule or law that is not based on or limited by conditions (Singer 579). And such is Euthanasia for “her character was always improving, always adding some new acquirements” (Shelley 407). Yet, she moves away from that when entering the conspiracy against Castruccio. As a result, Euthanasia finds “the bold outlines of her character growing confused” (Rajan 32). It is this conspiracy that will lead to her exile and subsequent shipwreck. “Nothing more was ever known of the Sicilian vessel which bore Euthanasia. It never reached its destined port, nor were any of those on board ever after seen” (Shelley 437). To this extent, it can be said that the moment Euthanasia deviates from the course human development ought to take, she is doomed. If people (or history) are not guided by moral values, then the governmental form can never be that which the people need: a fair and just system of, in this case, republicanism. Following this train of thought, the contemporary governmental form then does not uphold either. This suggests that Shelley believes in the guiding strength of
moral values. This leads to the third death associated with Euthanasia’s downfall: that of moral (female) values. Rajan sees Euthanasia as “Shelley’s only example of feminist autonomy, of a woman not contained by marriage … through whom we can imagine a genuine place for women in the public sphere” (22). Because Euthanasia does not allow her love for Castruccio and the possibility of marriage to supplant her investment in the Guelph cause (Lokke 512), she is not limited by domesticity or destructive passion (Rajan 22). Euthanasia is the carrier of the text’s moral values. However, her feelings for Castruccio never fade completely and when she enters the conspiracy against his person she does it because she believes that she can change him, that she can make him a person she could feel affectionate towards again. For

“[s]he no longer loved the prince; his cruelty had degraded him even from the smallest place that he had still kept in her heart. But such was the force of early feeling, that she desired to restore her affections to him, when he should again become gentle and humane, as he appeared when she first knew him. Adversity might bring about this change … [S]he would save Castruccio” (Shelley 408, 412).

Only, the moment she decides this, the moral values of the text are compromised. Instead of acting on the behalf of the people, she acts on her own desires: by forsaking her obligation to others—she enters the conspiracy with her own agenda—her judgement becomes immoral (Singer 579).

A View of One’s Own

Again, Shelley’s novel is more like Porter’s than Edgeworth’s in this regard. While Porter’s landscape descriptions are a metaphor for a need for consolidation, Shelley’s “loving descriptions of the Italian landscape” remind of Italy’s tremendous cultural promise (Rajan 17). At the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century “Italy … began to emerge from the darkness of the ruin of the Western Empire, and to catch from the East the returning rays of
literature and science” (Shelley 57). The descriptions of the landscape often mimic the characters’ state of mind. As Castruccio left Ancona after his father’s death, he mused on the landscape and thought that he

“had passed swiftly through this country before … It was then adorned by the fresh spring; the sunbeams illuminated the various folds of the mountains, and the light waves coursed one another, dancing under the dazzling light. Castruccio remembered this; and he gazed sullenly on the sky obscured by a thick woof of black clouds, and reproached that with changing, as his fortune changed” (Shelley 76).

Euthanasia experiences something similar at the beginning of her relationship with Castruccio. He promises her peace with the Florentine Republic and makes a treaty. She loves him for it and “[n]ature was invested for her with new appearances; and there was a beauty, a soul, in the breeze of evening, the starry sky, and uprising sun, which filled her with emotions she had never before so vividly felt” (Shelley 168). However, as she comes to learn from Galeazzo Visconti that Castruccio never meant the peace between Lucca and Florence to last and seeks to defeat them in battle, she feels “the quick advance of winter that she now witnesses [and compared it] with its long delay of the preceding year” (Shelley 254). As her trust in Castruccio withers and the peaceful future of Florence seems unattainable, she

“[resolved], if the ambitions of Castruccio could not content itself except with the destruction of the liberties of Florence, that she would never be his; but this resolution gave her no calm … while the fear of evil flushed her cheek, and filled her eyes with unshed tears” (Shelley 254).
Euthanasia, suffused with grief, mirrors her declining trust and love for Castruccio in the landscape of the declining year:

> “the myrtle flowers had faded from the mountains ... and the sweet shades of green among which the purple grapes hung, were now pulled down, defaced and trodden upon ... and the chill mornings and evenings announced the near approach of hoary winter” (Shelley 254).

That the setting mirrors the inner turmoil of two of the most important characters in the novel is significant for Shelley’s republican experiment. As the novel progresses, Euthanasia’s outlook on the world around her becomes bleak, in accordance to the bleak future of the Florentine Republic. This way, Shelley entangles Euthanasia’s future with that of republicanism. Eventually, both will fall.

Secondly, on the one hand, the historical events that should mingle with and affect the fortunes of the characters for a novel to be historical (Hägg 189), are not as extensively portrayed as with Porter. Where Porter describes all the battles individually, Shelley’s novel focusses more on the effect the battles have on the characters than describing the actual events. This way, she describes the consequences without (always) extensively mentioning the historical events themselves. When Castruccio is fighting under the command of Scoto in the French war against Flanders, the narrator communicates to the reader that “[i]t [is] needless to detail the events of this campaign: several battles were fought, and some towns taken” (Shelley 99). Later, Castruccio “put[s] to death remorselessly those whom he suspected, and would even use torture, either to discover other victims, or to satisfy his desire of revenge. Several circumstances of this kind happened during [the] summer, which made Euthanasia more miserable than words or tears could express” (Shelley 328).
Interestingly, this way, the focus is put more on the consequences of the historical events on Castruccio’s development or Euthanasia’s (peace of) mind. Castruccio, during the war, is “pre-eminent in bravery, enterprize and success” (Shelley 99). Euthanasia, then, feels “humiliation and sorrow” (Shelley 329) at ever being betrothed to such a tyrant. As the narrative progresses, Euthanasia’s take on events take over from Castruccio’s. The later battles are narrated primarily from her perspective and reaction to them. Because of this type of narration, Shelley plays with the possibility of an active female presence in politics. In other words, she questions male glorification of power and ambition (Rajan 13). This suggests that Shelley still wants to give her mother’s female revolution a chance by experimenting with it in her novel. Unfortunately, Euthanasia is lost at sea at the end of the novel, suggesting that there is yet to be cultivated a place in society for this female revolution, for equality. On the other hand, she pays a lot of attention to detail, so much so that Hallam has called the novel a “labyrinth of petty facts” (qtd. in Rajan 32). This is evident in, for example, her description of where Este is situated:

“Este is situated nearly at the foot of the Euganean hills, on a declivity overlooked by an extensive and picturesque castle, beyond which is a convent; the hills rise from behind, from whose heights you discover the vast plain of Lombardy, bounded to the west by the far Apennines of Bologna, and to the east by the sea and the towers of Venice” (Shelley 77).

This abundance of detail is also found in her descriptions of historical events. At the beginning of the novel, the distinctions between Guelph and Ghibelline, Bianchi and Neri are explained as well as the fourteenth-century political situation in Lombardy and Tuscany (Shelley 57-58).
Valperga (1823) is set in the fourteenth century. Just like Edgeworth and Porter, Shelley projects contemporary politics to the past. The facts were meticulously researched in multiple languages and thus not remembered (Rajan 8). More importantly, however, is Shelley’s conception of historical development. Where Edgeworth and Porter have a more tangible opinion on politics, Shelley uses the historical novel as a medium in which “political justice is subjected to proof and “experiment’” (Rajan 18). The experiment is then the question whether a republic could come to exist in a world where the nation-state was gaining field rapidly. To accomplish this, Shelley chooses fourteenth-century Italy, a time in which the Florentine Republic was at the prime of its existence. Castruccio’s history is written down in history. Solely, by inserting Euthanasia into the narrative, the march of history is—temporarily—broken (Kelley 627). Temporarily, because Valperga—the place that makes the imagining of a different historical outcome possible—eventually falls to Castruccio, to a “history shaped by military conquest and authoritarian rule” (Kelley 626). This way, Shelley sees historical development not as linear, but as “competing narrative possibilities that exceed a single historical trajectory” (Kelley 627). Euthanasia “saw and marked the revolutions that had been, and the present seemed to her only a point of rest, from which time was to renew his flight, scattering change as he went” (Shelley 70). Along these lines, Scott’s belief in a linear succession of revolutionary crises as historical development is, following Shelley’s view, the outcome of competing possibilities in which one possibility has survived. Inserting Euthanasia in the story is, thus, imagining a different possibility to have survived: republicanism. Perhaps even a female republicanism, for Euthanasia aspired that “her voice or act could mingle aught of good in these changes” (Shelley 70). Moreover, for change to happen, liberty is needed. Euthanasia believes that “the essence of freedom is that clash and struggle which awaken
the energies of [their] nature, and that operation of the elements of [their] mind, which as it were given [them] the force and power that hinder [them] from degenerating, as they say all things earthly do when not regenerated by change” (Shelley 147). That freedom to think on possible political systems is found in republicanism. However, as said before, Euthanasia dies and with her the republican dream. This suggests that Shelley’s Britain did not provide the freedom needed to imagine change and, thus, could not possibly make room for a republican ideology.

A Sepulchre of Truth

As mentioned before, Valperga (1823) is “[m]eticulously researched on the basis of “fifty old books”’’ (Rajan 8). Shelley performed painstaking research in several languages and excelled at rendering a faithful image of the concrete epoch (Rajan 26). She did change the date of Castruccio’s birth to make him a child at the time of the exile and the death of his parents, which she admits in her preface (Shelley 55). In this, she is very similar to Porter who also moved around with time but kept it as historical as possible, or so Porter claimed. Be that as it may, Shelley stated that she acknowledges the public narratives of male historians, but that she based her narrative on the private chronicles of Euthanasia (Rajan 9). As Euthanasia is a fictional character, her chronicles are non-existent as well (Rajan 9). By mixing fact with fiction (“possibility” (Rajan 32)), Shelley added a feminist perspective to her novel: even though Shelley has detailed knowledge of the intricate workings of Tuscan politics and got that factual knowledge principally from men, she inserts a fictional female character to give voice to that knowledge. Shelley’s experiment is then “the insertion of Euthanasia in an otherwise historical story” (Rajan 19). This way, male historical political knowledge is given form through the sensibilities of a woman. This in turn, sheds light on Shelley’s opinions on patriarchy and contemporary politics. Not only does she question which governmental form is beneficial for society, she inserts a female character to shape that question.
A character of virtue and nobility who, just like Helen Mar in *The Scottish Chiefs* (1810), is able to transform her sexual desire into a patriotism that allows her to hold a place in public life. Euthanasia puts the protection of Valperga above her desires towards Castruccio. Valperga itself is first mentioned through its Countess and is inherited by her daughter Euthanasia. This way, Valperga becomes a female space and by putting it above Castruccio, Shelley puts Euthanasia’s female politics above the male politics of imperialism, emphasising the importance of female participation in public life, of female equality. Benedetto Pepi shows that imperialism is void of moral values saying “Impossible! … An emperor just! A prince impartial! Do not thrones rest upon dissentions and quarrels? … If [Henry] had meant to establish peace in Italy, he would have assassinated all of one party, to secure the lives of the other; but to unite [the Guelphs and Ghibelines], is to destroy both, and under the mask of friendship to get into his own hands all that each has possessed” (Shelley 110). However, Euthanasia eventually gives in to her feelings and enters into a conspiracy against Castruccio in the hope that his defeat could give her a chance to mould his corrupt person anew. The moment she gives in to that desire, she is doomed, for she forsakes her moral standard and is, thus, no better than the imperialists.

*A Multi-Layered Dialogue*

As Shelley’s political interest is more theoretical than the others, it is less clear that she refers to contemporary crises. However, she starts from the contemporary international (France) and national tensions (Ireland and Scotland), to explore the relationship between liberal democracy (Euthanasia) and autocracy (Castruccio). Lukács concerning this believes that “the split of the nation into warring parties always runs through the centre of the closest relationships: parent and child, lover and beloved, old friends…” (42). Castruccio is guided by one patriarchal figure after another. His father teaches him to fear nothing and disciplines “him betimes in all the duties of a
knight and a soldier” (Shelley 63). After his father’s death, he leaves Ancona and goes to Francesco de Guinigi at Este in Lombardy. He introduces Castruccio to a society “characterized by a simple yet sublime morality, which [laid] aside the distinctions of society” (Shelley 78-79). He tries to “impress on the mind of his pupil a love of peace, and a taste for rural pleasures” (Shelley 80). Fleeing England, Castruccio ends up in France where he joins Alberto Scoto’s troop who teaches him the arts of war and political intrigue. Castruccio is starting to forget the teachings of Guinigi. Unfortunately, “Scoto’s was an evil school; and, if his pupil gained from him a true insight into Italian politics, he at the same time learned the use of those arts which then so much disgraced that people” (Shelley 100). Back in Italy, Castruccio upholds a cordial friendship with the Milanese Galeazzo Visconti who told Castruccio the secrets of his heart. Only, these “secrets were such as to initiate [Castruccio] in the artful policy and unprincipled motives of the Milanese lord, and to make him regard treachery and cruelty as venial faults” (Shelley 131). All these influences make him the tyrant he became. Castruccio “[now] thought fraud and secret murder fair play, when it thinned the ranks of the enemy” (Shelley 280). However, his tyrannical behaviour is described as in part “the usage of the times” (Shelley 396). This suggests that even a strong character like Castruccio cannot operate outside the confinements and influences of the period in which he operates. Just like his author, he is guided by paternal figures. For Shelley those were her father, her husband and Byron. So, even when trying to obtain individual power, that power will situate itself within the system you belong to, suggesting Shelley’s issues with the limitations patriarchy puts on people, especially women. Moreover, Castruccio is often depicted as not being in control of what happens to him. A lot hinges on contingency. Castruccio’s party spirit, then, was formed on the eve of his family’s exile “while … too young to feel [his] own disgrace, [he] saw the misery of [his] parents, and took early vows of implacable hatred … keeping alive the feeling of passion
and hatred [against their persecutors]” (Shelley 62). Later, his father’s death is described as “chance thr[owing] Castruccio from his quiet nook into the wide sea of care, to sink or swim, as fate or his own good strength might aid him” (Shelley 74). That he is guided by circumstances, however, does not lessen his responsibility, “but it makes him culpable as a type” (Rajan 34). By generalising Castruccio, Shelley implicitly generalises her critique. Although not in favour of autocratic rule, like that of Napoleon in her own day, it is the governmental form that has, through contingency, survived. Out of the many possible narratives, the narrative of autocratic rule was strongest. However, this does not mean that there should be no change in politics. That said, the novel shows that no one particular political structure is the right one; all have advantages and disadvantages. The relationship between Euthanasia and Castruccio shows Shelley’s nuanced political views. Although convinced of the merits of republicanism, even in the times of medieval Italy “the republics were already contaminated by tendencies towards tyranny” (Rajan 28). This is shown through the love/hope that Euthanasia, a convinced Guelph, is still able to feel for the tyrannous Castruccio. A convinced republican and woman of virtue, she still decides to enter a base political scheme to bring about Castruccio’s demise. Throughout the novel, schemes are associated with the tyrannical Prince of Lucca and other imperialists like Benedetto Pepi. This way, Euthanasia takes over a characteristic typically associated with the tyrant: scheming. Other Guelph lords turn to scheming as well, in the hope of taking down Castruccio and replacing him with “a chief who would prove as faithful to the papal party, as Castruccio had been to the imperial” (Shelley 284). Rajan states that this contamination is a good thing, because “the reverse side of this coin was the survival of democratic potential within the tyranny” (28). Castruccio still loves Euthanasia, but he is unable to separate love from exercising control. Still, it is his love for her that has prolonged the existence of the Florentine Republic. At first unable to break his
promises, he leaves at peace the last Guelph stronghold in his tyrannical Tuscany. However, when a conspiracy against him found its origin in Euthanasia’s castle, he decides her independent reign must come to an end. He states: “Let her yield; and she will find the Castruccio whom she calumniates, neither a tyrant nor a monster; but, if she resist, on her be the burthen of the misery that must follow” (Shelley 295).

Secondly, she questions the difficult relationship women have with patriarchal society. Even though they, all three women writers, question the inequality of women they have to do it within the boundaries of patriarchal society. This difficult relationship is problematised through parricide. Shelley kills Mathilda’s father in her novel of the same name, but the heroine cannot escape his influence and “she remains passionately, yet crippling[y], bound to [him]” (Rajan 15). In the same way, Shelley tries to ‘kill’ patriarchy, but while only being able to operate within the limits of it she remains bound to it. In Valperga (1823), she returns to this “extreme, inconsolable protest against things as they are” (Rajan 15), but in a more positive way. She kills Euthanasia’s father Adimari, the character who mirrored Shelley’s father’s scholarly genius. Only, now the father figure instilled the daughter with a passion for classic literature and republicanism instead of fear. It is through the demise of the fathers that Shelley asserts the paradoxical relationship of (some) women (writers) to patriarchy: it shows “the discrepancy between women’s creative potential and their biological fate” (Rajan 22). Similarly, Euthanasia’s imaginary story is contained within actual history, because Valperga (1823) is still the narrative of Castruccio (Rajan 33). So, again, while asserting power to a female, that female is still bound by a male presence, just like women writers in patriarchal society are. Correspondingly, Beatrice, like Porter’s Lady Mar, is doomed the moment she puts her own (sexual) desires above the good of her people. Wallace never accepts Lady Mar’s advances, Castruccio, however, does accept Beatrice’s. Beatrice is left by
Castruccio and she can never return to what she was before she gave herself to him. The power she held as a prophetess has disappeared together with her virtue and innocence. By binding herself to a man, she loses her power. This reminds of Porter’s belief that sexuality is what keeps a woman from a place in public life. Interesting as well, is the relationship between Euthanasia and Beatrice. Where Euthanasia symbolises “utopianism, … enthusiasm … [and] perfectibility”, Beatrice symbolises “nihilism, … melancholy … [and] destructive passion” (Lokke 511). As the novel progresses, the focus shifts from that of political strife to the personal turmoil of Euthanasia and Beatrice, whom both love Castruccio (Schiefelbein 61). When Castruccio leaves Beatrice, she is devastated and ends up in a downward spiral which eventually results in her death. Now, that Beatrice dies is the consequence of (irresponsible) male actions. Schiefelbein bases his statements on Mellor’s study and believes that Shelley addresses “the inflated sense of self” of male romanticism and poets (67). Essentially, male romanticism celebrates the creative process, but does not think of the creative product (Schiefelbein 67). Beatrice is unable to cope with Castruccio’s abandonment, but Euthanasia adopts a new brand of romanticism. A romanticism, Mellor states, which celebrates “the education of the rational woman and an ethic of care that required one to take full responsibility for the predictable consequences of one’s thoughts and actions, for all the children of one’s mind and body” (qtd. in Schiefelbein 68). It is this brand of romanticism, Wollstonecraft called “a [revolution] in female manners” (Mellor 43). However, as Euthanasia dies, Shelley seems to question the possibility of such a romanticism to exist within male dominated society. In the end, both Beatrice, who did not uphold the ‘revolution’, and Euthanasia, the moral woman who swore by it, end up dead. They were both powerful and beloved, but die at the hands of male politics, without leaving behind any accomplishment (Twigg 483-484). Euthanasia loses her power as a ruler, and is brought to Lucca a prisoner, and Beatrice loses
her power as a prophetess. At the same time, Shelley seems to question this new brand of romanticism: the overly-rational Euthanasia and the overly-imaginative Beatrice do not temper their respective worldviews during their encounters (Twigg 483). This suggests that perhaps, with certain adjustments, this new brand of romanticism could entail a successful female revolution, and Shelley’s mother’s wish for female equality might be realised in the future.
Conclusion

This thesis’ goal was to prove that female writers of the Romantic Era adapted their novels to make room for their political opinions. This in an effort to enter into the political dialogue of their time, which was closed to them due to their gender. By singling out certain characteristics of the historical novel à la Scott, the three novels in question have been looked at more closely. Of course, the writers had no knowledge of these characteristics as the novels of Scott were not yet published. Nonetheless, they are historical novels and show that attention to female publications out to be a requisite for literary historians. First, Edgeworth’s ironic, first-person narration showed a two-layered narrative. The mediocre hero depended on the straightforward (Condy) or ironic (Thady) reading of the main text. Nonetheless, the hero serves to address latent fears of Irish power and power relations. Porter and Shelley made use of a female middling hero of high birth which diverts from Scott’s type. Porter’s Helen Mar links characters, the opposing camps, and a character to a symbol. This time not to address contemporary political anxieties, but to claim an active role for women in public life. Shelley appears to combine the political and patriarchal issues of Edgeworth and Porter. Euthanasia is a woman of high power and influence in political life, until she, unlike Helen Mar, forgets to forswear her sex and puts her desires before that of the people. Shelley, thus, claims a place for women in public life if they are fit for it. The republican fate is also mirrored in Euthanasia. Secondly, the setting translated the political view of the three writers. Although present to a limited extent in Edgeworth, it shows a logic of supplementarity that questions a possible loss of Irish singularity. Porter and Shelley use similar extensive background descriptions to show their respective views: a need for consolidation and male and female involvement for Porter and a republican experiment and female revolution for Shelley. Thirdly, all three novels are set in the past. Porters and Shelley are set a lot earlier than Edgeworth’s, but they
all use the time as a means to put contemporary politics in the past. However, they each view historical development differently. Edgeworth seems to follow Scott’s history as a linear succession of revolutionary crises that lead society from one phase of development to another. As she was in favour of the Union, she saw it as the necessary, although not straightforward, next step. Porter, then, argues for history as a cyclical succession of crises to bring forth consolidation. This, to protect Britain from the outside threat of the French. Shelley, finally, believes that history as we know it is the result of the victory of one possibility over countless others. Her work thus serves to question whether the right governmental form has ‘survived’. As fourth, the novels were reviewed concerning their historical accuracy. Edgeworth was the most lenient with historical facts. This does fit with her narrator, however, who is unreliable. That led to the use of language, which showed a critique on power relations in patriarchal society. Porter and Shelley use historical truth to comment on patriarchal society as well. They both insert a female character, Lady Helen Mar and Countess Euthanasia, to claim a place for (virtuous) women in public life. They ought not to be missing from either historical or contemporary politics. Lastly, the different relationships found in the novels were looked at. All three novels show comments on contemporary and gender related politics. Interestingly, all three writers advocate a place for women in public life, but not for any woman. The women involved have to earn their place in the public sphere through the correct application of their character. They each allude to their own political interests as well. Edgeworth is concerned with the idea of a possible union and its consequences. Porter focusses on consolidation in face of an outside threat and Shelley experiments with the idea of alternate governmental forms.

I conclude that Edgeworth, Porter and Shelley, although very different in style, show similar goals. They reflect on their status as women in patriarchal society and claim a place to offer
their opinions on contemporary politics. Moreover, it became clear that contemporary politics and gender critique were often conflated. That place, as the male public sphere was not an option, is their novels. I have focussed primarily on politics, but a comparison of the treatment of upcoming capitalism, and thus the issue of money and wealth, could yield interesting results as well. All in all, Edgeworth, Porter and Shelley say a lot more than is written down. Therefore, it can only be concluded that they are women writers that should definitely be written about.
Works Cited


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