Writing Ireland: Reading England

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By the mid-nineteenth century, the stadial schema developed by the Scottish Enlightenment was a well entrenched element of categorical reason.[1] The Scottish model predicated a progression from 'savagery' through 'barbarism' to 'civilization', which in turn was defined by distinct modes of subsistence – from hunter/gatherer to pastoral, to landed, to commercial society. William Robertson and especially John Millar developed an explicitly materialist conception of history. As modes of production change, so do attitudes to law, property and politics, and to customs, manners and morals. The crucial distinction was in attitudes to property. 'Savagery' could be defined as the lack of a concept of poverty. 'Barbarism' evolved a concept of moveable property (herds) but only 'civilization' developed the idea of fixed and heritable property, stabilized and protected under the aegis of the law and therefore of the state. In political terms, savagery involved anarchy, barbarism embraced the clan, while civilization necessitated the state. As Adam Ferguson explained: 'He who first said "I will appropriate this field; I will leave it to my heirs" did not perceive, that he was laying the foundation of civil laws and political establishments.'[2] Civilization was an inspired choice of term for the apex of social and political evolution, seamlessly merging the French emphasis on manners (civility) with the English commitment to civil law.[3]

Stadialism also provided a convenient methodological principle for 'philosophical history'. History proper could now be joined by geography as a means of tracing human evolution in all stages and periods. Edmund Burke congratulated William Robertson for achieving this breakthrough in his *History of America* in 1777:

> The great map of mankind is unrolled at once, and there is no state or gradation of barbarism, and no mode of refinement which we have not at the same moment under our view; the very different civility of Europe

1 Ronald L. Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (London, 1976). 2 Cited in Gladys Bryson, *Man and Society: The Scottish Inquiry of the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1968), p. 48. 3 G. Caffentzis, 'On the Scottish Origins of Civilisation' in Silvia Federici (ed.), *Enduring Western Civilisation: The Construction of the Concept of Western Civilisation and its Others* (Westport, Conn., 1995), pp 13–36; Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (eds), *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1983); David Daiches, Peter Jones and Jean Jones (eds), *The Scottish Enlightenment 1730-1790: A Hotbed of Genius* (Edinburgh, 1986); M.A. Stewart (ed.), *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Oxford, 1990).

and of China; the barbarism of Persia and of Abyssinia; the erratick manners of Tartary and of Arabia; the savage state of North America and of New Zealand.[4]

To travel in space would now be to travel in time: travel literature became one of the principal discursive forms of the Enlightenment.

From a Scottish perspective, this stadial schema also provided (and was indeed elicited by the need to provide) a highly serviceable Unionist argument. The crucial task of Scottish life, in the opinion of its intelligentsia, was to civilize its flagrantly barbaric Highland fragment, thereby sealing Lowland Scotland's enthusiastic embrace of English 'civility'. The clannish Highlands, with their embarrassingly outmoded commitment to pastoralism, communalism and martialism, must be brought to accept commerce, self-interest and political docility. If they could not be weaned from their childish allegiance to the clan, they must be forcefully reminded of the realities of British life by the adult state. The Scottish Enlightenment therefore endorsed the military terror of the state in the 1740s, as a necessary intrusion to shatter the encapsulated culture, ideological introversion and aboriginal archaism of the Highlands. Torn from the hypnotic attraction of the clan, the Highlanders could then be reoriented to the field of force of the state – thereby achieving both personal and national maturity, and modernity. The narrative of the Scottish Enlightenment can then be seen in a crucial sense as a national *Bildungsroman*, in which the 1746 campaign marks the crucial moment of maturity. Total military obliteration, co-option of chastened clan leaders and the rapid transition to a useful civil society were all ameliorative – the salutary shock therapy of an ultimately benign state intervention, as seen in subsequent investment in education, infrastructure and remodelled agrarian systems.[5] A generation after Culloden, Samuel Johnson could gush glowingly about the sheer rapidity of change:

> There was perhaps never any change of national manners so quick, so great and so general, as that which has operated in the Highlands by the last conquest and the subsequent laws. We came hither too late to see what we expected – a people of peculiar appearance and a system of antiquated life. The clans retain little now of their original character: their ferocity of temper is softened, their military ardour is extinguished, their dignity of independence is depressed, their contempt of government subdued, and their reverence for their chiefs abated. Of what they had before

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4 Cited in Meek, p. 173.   5 Alan Macinnes, *Clanship, Commerce and the House of Stewart 1603-1788* (East Linton, 1996); Robert Dodgshon, *From Chiefs to Landlords: Social and Economic Change in the Western Highlands and Islands 1493-1820* (Edinburgh, 1998); T.M. Devine, *Clanship to Crofters' War: The Social Transformation of the Scottish Highlands* (Manchester, 1996); Caffentzis, 'Scottish Origins'.

the late conquest of their country, there remains only their language and their poverty.[6]

The central thrust of the Scottish Enlightenment can then be seen as an attempt to rationalize these changes, within an explicitly unionist agenda. Hume, Monboddo, Kame, Ferguson, Millar and Smith all shared an interest in explaining 'how from being a savage, man rose to be a gentleman' and how, by extension, Scotland moved from a rude to a refined state.[7] An emotional as well as a political economy of Union is obviously in play here. Acquiescence in the Union required a shedding of cultural and psychological baggage: the Highland clearances were not just physical but psychic.

Seen from this perspective, the Scottish Enlightenment's ostensible concern with origins carefully masks its real (and *realpolitik*) interest (and self-interest) in destinations. One can also see how readily – and ruthlessly – this Enlightenment ethos consigned regional cultures to erasure under the sign of progress – and endorsed military or state power in inflicting that erasure. Viewed in this way, there is a continuum between the British assault on Highland Scotland, the French ferocity in La Vendée, and the state-sponsored Enclosure movement in England (all justified as obliterations of obsolete fragments of barbarity).[8] By consigning such 'barbarous' cultures to the dustbin of history, this eminently rational discourse also endorsed ethnocide – the deliberate destruction of embedded cultural formations in the name of stadialism and inexorable progress.[9] Cultural erasure occurred under the pressure of a politics of time: the state forcibly broke open the encapsulated, stagnant time of a stranded stage, releasing it into linear, historical time: the dynamic of progress and its logic of remaindered cultures provided the essential alibi for this form of internal colonialism.

The politics of stadial ethnography endorsed a hierarchical version of cultures, arrayed on a continuum from savage to civilized, and endowed with the cultural authority achieved by science during the Enlightenment. Such views acquired a deadly venom when the vitriol of race was added. The crucial text here was John Pinkerton's *Enquiry into the History of Scotland* in 1789.[10] Pinkerton racialized the stadial mode by assigning different origins to the Lowland (Goths or Teutons) and Highland (Celtic) Scots. From Pinkerton, a long teutonomaniac line extended to embrace such key figures as the Arnolds *père et fils* and

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6 Samuel Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, ed. Mary Lascelles (New Haven, 1971), p. 57.   7 Cited in Bryson, p. 89.   8 Macinnes, *Clanship*; Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (New York, 1989); J.M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Rights, Enclosures and Social Change in England 1700-1820* (Cambridge, 1993).   9 Luke Gibbons, 'Doing Justice to the Past' in Tom Hayden (ed.), *Irish Hunger: Personal Reflections of the Legacy of the Famine* (Dublin, 1997), pp 258-70. The concept of ethnocide is discussed in Judith Shklar, *The Faces of Injustice* (New Haven, 1990).   10 John Pinkerton, *An Enquiry into the History of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1789).

Thomas Carlyle.[11] Stadialism and racialism merged in evolutionism, locating Saxon culture as the apex of human progress. Two discourses of distance were thereby fused: evolutionism (distance in time) and racial diffusionism (distance in space). That sense of distance was crucial to the construction of the other: distance *is* difference, in these formulations.

In his *Time and the Other*, Johannes Fabian demonstrates the ways in which anthropological discourse creates a different time for its objects – underpinning an allochronicism which suppresses coevality.[12] By denying simultaneity, this discourse promotes the concept that each society is encapsulated in its own time, demonstrated by recourse to taxonomic binaries (civilized/savage, here/there, now/then, text/orality, subject/object, mechanical/organic, Gemeinschaft /Gesellschaft, traditional/modern, rational/irrational; see Table 1). These neat taxonomies are always hierarchalized between categories and are therefore instruments of power. Power has a temporal as well as a spatial inscription, and it is the capacity – usually vested in the state – to impose and act upon constructions of the other which constitutes power. Fabian's conclusion is that time is crucial to the construction of the other, and that its deployment in making the other is really a form of making ourselves. Michel de Certeau has similarly demonstrated that 'space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it [and] temporalise it'.[13] The urgent necessity then is to historicize geography and to spatialize history.

TABLE 1: TAXONOMIES OF POWER

Civilized	*Savage*
Present	Past
Here	There
Now	Then
Text	Orality
Truth	Fantasy
Subject	Object
Religion	Superstition

11 Hugh MacDougall, *Racial Myth in English History: Trojans, Teutons and Anglo-Saxons* (Montreal, 1982). 12 Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Objects* (New York, 1983). I have also benefited from Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Civilization* (Ann Arbor, 1995); Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London, 1995); and Luke Gibbons, 'Race Against Time: Racial Discourse and Irish History' in *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork, 1996), pp 40-64. 13 Michel de Certeau, 'Ethno-graphy: Speech as the Space of the Other' in *The Writing of History* (New York, 1998), pp 209-43.

Regions are therefore forms of spatio-temporality – not stable configurations. It is the intersection of the trajectories of space and time that creates and defines regions. All regions are unstable and shifting, not static permanences, and they are equally embedded in time as in space. Political agency is comprised of the relationship among material produces, symbolic forms and narrative strategies, which becomes very clear when we analyze Ireland under the Act of Union. Consider the narrative options open to Irish writers in the post-Union period, operating under the disabling weight of British perceptions. Their self-imposed function became the representation of Irish life for the education and edification of an invincibly ignorant and incredulous British audience, which had to be brought to a proper realization of its Irish responsibilities.[14] This didactic burden was both epistemologically fraught and aesthetically disruptive, oscillating between a dull earnestness and a comic 'Irishness'.[15] The polemical function characteristically generated stylistic ruptures – notably an extensive paratext, which riveted the fractured discourses together. The auto-exotic or auto-ethnographic imperative created an unstable tone – at once moralizing, apologetic, defensive and didactic – an external target audience, a buffered authorial voice (inserted between subjects and readership) and a strident emphasis on national character – on the absolute particularity of the Irish as a people (see Table 2).[16] This obsessive discursive focus on cultural differences ensured that Irish national character – itself described by Seamus Deane as 'one of the supreme fictions of the century' – became the central theme of Irish fiction.[17] This concern to exhibit national character was inhibiting, with the possibility of easy collapse into caricature, resentful humiliation or pathology – the levity of a Lover, Lever or Boucicault, which deployed the native Irish as John Bull's blundering double – child-like simpletons, incapable of moral seriousness or consistency of character. Even in more skilled hands – like the Banims, Griffin, Carleton or Edgeworth – the technical problems of writing Ireland while reading England could be insurmountable. It created a fractured mode of address (lively idiom and edgy editorializing) and schematic or melodramatic plot lines, desperately struggling to encompass the wildly divergent class divisions of pre-Famine Ireland within one fictive frame. These formidable formal and linguis-

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14 Seamus Deane, 'National Character and National Audience: Races, Crowds and Readers' in Michael Allen and Angela Wilcox (eds), *Critical Approaches to Anglo-Irish Literature* (Gerrards Cross, 1989), pp 40-52. This is admirably caught in the reported (admittedly by the author's father) reaction of George III to *Castle Rackrent*: 'He rubbed his hands and said "what, what, I know something now of my Irish subjects"'; cited in Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent*, ed. George Watson (Oxford, 1981) p. xvii. 15 Seamus Deane, 'Irish National Character 1790-1900' in Tom Dunne (ed.), *The Writer as Witness: Literature as Historical Evidence* (Cork, 1987), pp 90-113. 16 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London, 1992); Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork, 1996). 17 Seamus Deane, 'Fiction and Politics' in *Gaeliana*, vi (1984), pp 77-103.

tic problems were accentuated by the estranging effect of the lack of a national Irish audience or publishing industry, symptomatic of the celebrated black hole of the Irish nineteenth century – the lack of a middle class, the absent centre of the nineteenth-century Irish novel.[18] Dublin's pronounced role in the Anglophone publishing world of the eighteenth century shrank drastically in the nineteenth. Between 1800 and 1870, London published 240,000 books, while Dublin managed only 13,000 – half of what was produced in Edinburgh.[19]

TABLE 2: AUTO-EXOTICISM

1. Paratext
2. Buffered authorial voice
3. Stratified culture zones within spatial frame
4. Allochronism
5. Particularism
6. External target audience

Writing in the shadow of the Union, Maria Edgeworth cleverly utilized stadialism as a means of bridging the gap between Britain and Ireland. Ireland for her was a bistadial society – in which the Protestant landed class occupied the same civilized stage as their British counterparts, while the 'Hibernians' (the native Irish) languished in an earlier feudal stage. That feudalism then presented a moral choice to the advanced landed class: regression into 'bad' feudalism, embracing its excessive libidinalism, secure in the clannish loyalty of their tenants; or to embrace an enlightened leadership within 'good' feudalism, performing an emulatory plutarchan role which would advance the ancient order of Hibernians into the modern British stage and state of civilization. In Edgeworth's scheme, the backsliding Irish gentry had first to save themselves, shedding their inappropriate feudal privileges and lifestyle; only in this way could they recuperate the Hibernians, leading both groups into a newly created state of Irishness entirely compatible with Britishness. By properly playing their civilizing leadership role, the Irish gentry could also wean the native Irish from clan to state loyalties, their assent thus ensuring the hegemony of that landed

18 C. Benson, 'Printers and Booksellers in Dublin 1800-1850' in Robin Myers and Michael Harris (eds), *Spreading the Word: the Distribution Networks of Print 1550-1850* (Detroit, 1990), pp 47-59; David Lloyd, 'Violence and the Constitution of the Novel' in *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Dublin, 1993), pp 125-62; Terry Eagleton, 'Form and Ideology in the Anglo-Irish novel' in *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London, 1995), pp 145-225.   **19** Simon Eliot, 'Patterns and Trends and the N.C.S.T.C.: Some Initial Observations' in *Publishing History*, xlii (1997), pp 79-104.

class, masking the nature of power within a patriarchal structure. As in Scotland, the result would be an emollient convergence on Britishness, an asymmetric absorption into the Union.

Edgeworth's bistadialism also informed her use of national character. It was Hibernianism which inflicted backwardness on Ireland: its national character needed to undergo remedial education, tutored by a responsible Protestant landed class. By a proper balancing of Hibernian and English traits, a new reconciliation within Britishness could be achieved. Edgeworth's novels – *Ennui* (1809), *The Absentee* (1812), *Ormond* (1817) – deploy bistadialism through the tour motif, where the principal character is offered moral and political choices made explicit by travelling through stratified and spatialized stadial zones.[20] The desired balance is symbolized by the national marriage which concludes all three novels. Edgeworth's stadialism also dictates her use of allochronic discourse to describe Ireland. The 'Hibernian' mode of existence is always seen as antiquated, archaic, doomed to obsolescence. They can only be rescued from it by external agency.

However, the conflation of national character with stadialism creates what Deane has called 'the Edgeworth Problem'.[21] In Edgeworth's analysis, Ireland is poor, violent and politically turbulent, not because of its asymmetric relationship with Britain but because of its national character – because it is unchangingly 'Hibernian'. But if national character is adamantine, what had happened to the supposedly invariable English character of the landed class in Ireland since the seventeenth century? If, as *Castle Rackrent* suggests, they had become the Hibernicized Rackrents, then the inescapable conclusion was that history created national character, not the other way round. The ambivalent end of *Castle Rackrent* broaches this pivotal issue of whether national character is in fact socioeconomically determined: 'Did the Warwickshire militia, who were chiefly artisans, teach the Irish to drink beer, or did they learn from the Irish to drink whiskey?'[22] The question gnaws at a critical political issue. If the national character issue is misspecified, then Edgeworth's entire output is symptomatic rather than diagnostic of the disease for which it claims to be the cure. Her Burkean essentialism merely generates a moral and political illusion, disguised in the form of a national stereotype which 'like a barium enema, brightly outline[s] the cultural indigestion of which the national patient so bitterly complains.'[23]

From Edgeworth's perspective, the very idea of leadership emerging from within the Hibernian fragment is preposterous: these people are spoken for, not speaking, requiring external intermediaries even to state their case. But what

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20 Leerssen, pp 33–67. **21** Seamus Deane, *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing Since 1790* (Oxford, 1997), pp 31–35. **22** Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent*, p. 127. **23** Michael Herzfeld, 'Hellenism and Occidentalism: The Permutations of Performance in Greek Bourgeois Identity' in James G. Carrier (ed.), *Occidentalism: Images of the West* (Oxford, 1995), pp 218–33; Michael Herzfeld, *Anthropology through the Looking Glass: Critical Ethnography in the Margins of Europe* (Cambridge, 1987).

happened if the benevolent Edgeworthian smile of cultural acquiescence turned instead into an Irish snarl of cultural refusal – the snarl of Watty Cox, of Denis Taaffe, of Mathew Carey, of John Mitchel – the refusal of Britishness, and the denial of any political or cultural role for the Irish landed gentry? What happened if the Hibernians insisted self-consciously on carrying their historical baggage, of constantly pointing at the open wounds rather than the cicatrix of colonialism? What happened if they assaulted stadialism as a teleological political closure which bandaged the cultural amputation of a significant portion of the Irish body politic? What happened if a charismatic political leader emerged from within this Catholic nation, whose principal target was precisely the demolition of the political privilege of the Protestant landed gentry (see Table 3)?

TABLE 3: GENERIC GENEALOGY

National tale	*Historical novel*
Passage through space	Passage through time
Stable Place	Changing place
Passive time	Active time
Excess of tradition	Invention of tradition
'Thick' description	Analytic
Romantic	Realist
Accretive	Progressive
Paratext	Single-focus narrative
Present-Centred	Past-Centred
Female	Male
Ireland	Scotland
Jacobin	Tory
Anti-Imperial	Imperial
Morgan	Scott

For Edgeworth, such developments were phantasmagoric; an O'Connell could only be a *lusus naturae*, and such developments would not be represented within the prevailing genres of the 'national tale'. These conditions created an epistemological opacity which permanently distorted the optics of perception, so that Ireland could only be seen 'through a glass darkly':

> It is impossible to draw Ireland as she is now in the book of fiction – realities are too strong, party passions too violent, to bear to see, or care to look at their faces in a looking glass. The people would only break the glass, and curse the fool who held the mirror up to nature – distorted nature in a fever.[24]

24 Cited in Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography* (Oxford, 1972), p. 452.

Harriet Martineau establishes the point in her discussion of the fall in popularity of the didactic fiction of Mary Leadbeater:

> Some years ago, the great authority on Irish peasant life was Mrs. Leadbeater, whose, 'Cottage Dialogues' was the most popular of Irish books till O'Connell's power rose to its height. In the suspicion and hatred which he excited towards the landlords, and the aristocracy in general, works like Mrs. Leadbeater's, which proceed on the supposition of a sort of feudal relation between the aristocracy and the peasantry, went out of favour, and have been little heard of since.[25]

Edgeworth's conservative politics and aesthetic of actuality operating within the frameworks of national character and bistadialism were eventually overtaken by the realities of Irish life under the Union. A different stance was taken by Sydney Owenson, notably in her *Wild Irish Girl* (1806), widely canvassed as the 'first national tale', and also a remarkable exercise in gender politics.[26] Owenson's text established a tension between presence and representation. Presence asserts the primacy of experience, requiring the sharing of time and place – real space and simultaneous time, not tabular or prefabricated taxonomies of time and space, like stadialism. Presence creates a witness against representational distance. The collapse of such devices in *The Wild Irish Girl* becomes literally the fall of the epistolary narrator into real time, where his 'there and then' become 'here and now', bridging the distance between categorically imposed and experiential otherness. The newly levelled playing pitch permits reciprocal and horizontal, rather than vertical and hierarchical exchanges. The 'native Irish' suddenly become co-eval, co-present and co-subjects – no longer the contemplative object of detached representation. The narrative voice – that external intermediary – can no longer hover above and outside the text.

Owenson is shrewdly aware of the politics of time: she refuses the temporal distancing of allochronic discourse by establishing the importance of simultaneous cultural time. She is equally aware of the politics of space, of the tension between distance and proximity. In the colonial setting, representation is frequently visual – an aesthetic of distance created by the separating function of the gaze. By contrast Owenson stresses an ethic of proximity – of the implicating function of dialogue, where speech becomes the space of the other.[27] William Godwin had given this memorable expression:

25 Harriet Martineau, *Letters from Ireland* (London, 1852), p. 67. My thanks to Rolf and Magda Loeber for this reference. **26** Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton, 1997); Katie Trumpener, 'National Character, Nationalist Plots: National Tale and Historical Novels in the Age of *Waverley* 1806-1830' in *E.L.H.* lx (1993), pp 685-731; Ina Ferris, 'Narrating Cultural Encounter: Lady Morgan and the Irish National Tale' in *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, li (1996), pp 287-303. **27** Susan Stewart, *Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation* (New York, 1991).

> It is in the reciprocation of answer and rejoinder that the power of conversation especially lies. A book is an abstraction. It is but imperfectly that we feel that a real man addresses us in it, and that what he delivers is the entire and deep-wrought sentiment of a being of flesh and blood like ourselves, a being who claims our attention, and is entitled to our deference. The living human voice, with a countenance and manner corresponding, constrains us to weigh what is said, shoots through us like a stroke of electricity, will not away from our memory, and haunts our very dreams.[28]

Voices emanate from the landscape – women's spinning songs, the massed voices of the chapel, the eerie wail of the keen, Glorvina's ethereal singing. Owenson unsettles the male metropolitan figure by exposing him to the specificity of female voice and body. Glorvina (Glór-bhinn) is the 'sweet voice' of that milesian world, the beautiful princess whose lively Irish body invigorates the flaccid Englishman. Reversing stage-Irish tropes, the Englishman is now the isolate, outside his social context and floundering to establish his identity and coherence as a subject.

In this fashion, Owenson deliberately inserts herself between audiences, making explicit and thereby engaging her address to the other. By self-consciously – almost hyper self-consciously – stressing her in-betweenness, Owenson is able to make this positioning a liberating rather than debilitating one. Her space is the no-woman's land between cultures: the hesitant, hybrid, hyphenated crossing between binaries, the space of the encounter. Through her intelligence, Owenson is able to inhabit the Anglo-Irish hyphen rather than being inhibited by it.

Owenson also makes innovatory use of the chronotope as an anti-stadial device.[29] She is well aware of the oppressive power of allochronic discourse, its ability to evacuate the politics of time through its fiction of stadial encapsulation. She is equally alert – as her footnotes constantly remind us – that the dominant Enlightenment discourse envisages such chronotopes as obsolete earlier stages to be cited only as antitheses to modernity, inhabited by cultures without history, archives, authority or civility. Owenson's response is to create a positive chronotope, a realm of precolonial and prelapsarian plenitude set against the depleted present, abraded under the pressures of colonialism.

Glorvina inhabits this timeless space of the fairytale and folklore: Bakhtin calls it 'a dense and fragrant time, like honey'.[30] This 'spot of time' of discursive chronicity is condensed in the chronotope into thick description, dense with the specificity of place. The visitor enters this erotic zone, this locus of desire, by

28 Cited in David Simpson, *Romanticism, Nationalism, and the Revolt Against Theory* (Chicago, 1993), p. 135. **29** Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Forms of the Chronotope and of the Chronotope in the Novel' in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin, 1981), pp 84–258. **30** Ibid., p. 103.

being entranced and then ravished by the Gaelic glamour of Glorvina, herself a striking updating of the *Aisling* figure of a female Ireland, also partaking of aspects of Burke's Marie Antoinette and the French Revolution's Marianne.

Owenson is also acutely aware that this rapture could easily abort into rupture – the colonial rupture in which the chronotope figures as the scene of the historical crime, and therefore of the return of the repressed. One can see emerging here an originating moment in the genealogy of the Irish Gothic. Her treatment of ruins is politically explicit: they are materializations of the colonized's defeat, the presence of absence, in which the long-term effects of historical trauma have become fixed in place. Colonial guilt would then establish the gulf which traverses these multiple layers of time sedimented in space: ruins become mausolea of memory, the site of rupture rather than aesthetic rapture, where the uncanny oozes out of a living landscape. We are then in the realm of the Gothic, where time becomes a revenant, eerily repetitive, rather than the complacent erasure of history, the past leaking uncontrollably into the present from the original and unstaunched wound, not the dead but the living weight of history. Owenson's reading of ruins, as well as its aesthetiquarian dimension, is always heavily inflected by Constantin de Volney's *Ruins of Empire*, with its resolutely anti-colonial politics.[31] This was a deeply influential radical text in the 1790s, with its allegorical reading of the twin trajectories of priestcraft and despotism, its espousal of toleration and internationalism and its 'new republican' reading of antisocial divide between the useful (productive) and the parasitic (aristocratic) classes. Its famous fifteenth chapter ('a vision of a new age') struck a deep chord in Ireland; it soon appeared in Russell's and Porter's *Billy Bluff*, where it has mutated into *Aisling* mode, and appeared in popular ballads like 'Rights of Man' well into the nineteenth century.[32] Owenson's use of de Volney therefore positions her in radical circles (Owenson was playfully described by her sister as 'a radical slut').[33] She constructs the Irish landscape as mnemonic, saturated in cumulative history, and still shuddering under the impact of adverse forces, of which she is the seismographer.

In explicitly political terms, Owenson disrupts the teleological schema of the stadial model, by deepening Irish political time to include the precolonial 'mile-

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31 Constantin de Volney, *Ruins of Empire*, 2nd ed. (London, 1795); Laurence Goldstein, *Ruins and Empire: The Evolution of a Theme in Augustan and Romantic Literature* (Pittsburgh, 1972); Anne F. Janowitz, *England's Ruins: Poetic Purpose and National Landscape* (Cambridge, 1990).   **32** E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1968), pp 107-8; Kevin Whelan, *Tree of Liberty* (Cork, 1996), pp 78-9; 'Rights of Man' (broadsheet ballad, Bradshaw Collection, Cambridge University Library).   **33** Lionel Stevenson, *The Wild Irish Girl: The Life of Sydney Owenson* (London, 1936), p. 250. The full quote is 'An elegant artist, a radical slut and a great Bonapartist.' A nineteenth-century biographer accuses her of having 'a vivid imagination, an inaccurate memory and a constitutional inability to deal with hard facts' (George Paston, *Little Memoirs of the Nineteenth Century* [London, 1902], pp 95-155. For a more recent biography, see Mary Campbell, *Lady Morgan: The Life and Times of Sidney Owenson* (London: Pandora, 1988). Morgan awaits a good modern biography.

sian' past. In doing so, she advances an anti-imperial project, narrating the Irish nation as one which had regressed rather than advanced under colonialism. This strategy neatly inverts the standard barbarism/civility tropes, claiming parity of esteem for Gaelic culture. It also formulates a refusal of the Scottish model of cultural convergence under the Union as represented by MacPherson, Burns and especially Scott.[34] Owenson argues in her *Patriotic Sketches* that 'the devoted enthusiasm of the Irish to letters, to the arts of poetry and song ... left them ill qualified to oppose an hostile and savage enemy'.[35] Attaching them to the cultural authority of ancient Greece, she describes them, like the Greeks beset by the Romans, as 'a polished nation' sunk beneath the daring inroads of such barbarians. Politically disempowered, Ireland was then subjected to 'calumny and defamation' which systematically obliterated its ancient record of being 'the most enlightened country in Europe'.[36] Owenson then allies herself with that scholarly effort of the late eighteenth century, which sought to retrieve cultural precedence for Ireland, and thereby buttress Irish political claims to enhanced autonomy. As early as 1784, an English antiquary had asserted these links:

> In my travels on the continent last year, I fell in with many Irish officers, ecclesiastics and others, who seemed big with expectation of their island recovering that independence and pre-eminence which it once had, as they supposed, over its sister island. To what do Vallancey's researches tend, but to prove [Ireland] is the elder sister?[37]

The Irish claims were met by English recourse to the authority of texts – caricatured by Owenson in *The Wild Irish Girl*: 'But while your days and nights are thus devoted to milesian literature ... what becomes of Blackstone and Cole?'[38] Vallancey had already provided an answer, using a Roman/Carthaginian analogy that was to become a nationalist staple:

> Almost all the Carthaginian Manuscripts were committed to the flames, and the History of this brave and learned People, has been written by their most bitter Enemies, the Greeks and Romans; in this too they resemble the Irish.[39]

This answered for Owenson the adversarial question why 'so few monuments of your ancient learning and genius remain? Where are your manuscripts,

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34 Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism*, pp 128-60. **35** Sidney Owenson, *Patriotic Sketches of Ireland Written in Connaught*, 2 vols (London, 1807), vol. i, pp 108-9. **36** Ibid., p. 109. **37** M. Lort to T. Percy, 19 Aug. 1784, in John Nichols, *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century, Consisting of Authentic Memoir and Original Letters of Eminent Persons, and Intended as a Sequel to the "Literary Anecdotes"*, 8 vols (London, 1817-58), vol. vii, pp 465-6. **38** Owenson, *Patriotic Sketches*, vol. i, p. 99. **39** Charles Vallancey, *An Essay on the Antiquity of the Irish Language being a Collation of the Irish with the Punic Language* (Dublin, 1772), p. 3.

your records, your annals, stamped with the seal of antiquity, to be found?' The priest replies: 'Manuscripts, annals and records, are not the treasures of a colonized or conquered country ... it is always the policy of the conqueror (or invader) to destroy those mementoes of ancient national splendour, which keep alive the spirit of the conquered or the invaded'.[40] As a result, 'we are now obliged to have recourse to our memories, in order to support our own dignity'.[41] Owenson claims that her aim in writing *The Wild Irish Girl* had been 'to authenticate the questioned refinement of ancient habits by the testimony of living modes'.[42]

The voice in Owenson is not just a gesture of presence, but an ontological source of historical verity, 'the corroboration of living testimony.'[43] This contrasts markedly with Edgeworth, who values silence against 'the sound of various brogues, the din of men wrangling, brawling, threatening, whining, drawling, cajoling, cursing, and every variety of wretchedness'.[44] In *Ennui*, the Irish voice is reduced to a level of brute animality: 'the dog barked, the geese cackled, the turkeys gobbled and the beggars begged, with one accord so loudly that there was no chance of my being heard'.[45]

But Owenson is also perturbed by the insecure anchoring of Gaelic claims in either the Bible or the classics – the two traditional sources of supreme cultural authority. She returns again and again to comparisons of the Irish with the Greeks and also, more successfully, seeks to locate the Irish situation in a wider spatial frame, thus avoiding the entropy of cultural introversion and self-absorption. She compares the expulsion of the Moors from Spain, the conversion of the Mexicans in America, the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes and the establishment of the popery laws in Ireland.[46] She also attacks the idea that Irish discontent is racial in character, claiming that it 'derives its source less from natural vice than political grievance'[47]: 'The line of demarcation which severs the lower from the higher orders' of the Irish nation does not derive from the racial and religious 'bigotry' of the indigenous Irish; 'it is drawn by poverty and discontent'.[48]

As a result, the Irish can never be coerced into changing their religion 'under the chilling influence of the penal laws'[49] nor 'oppressed into loyalty' by 'the lash of power or the insolence of office'.[50] Similarly, a speculative benevolence or 'enlightened' farming experiments will never advance the condition of the

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40 Owenson, *Wild Irish Girl*, p. 172. **41** Owenson, *Patriotic Sketches*, vol. i, p. 110. **42** Ibid., preface, p. viii. **43** Owenson, *Wild Irish Girl*, p. 77. **44** Maria Edgeworth, *The Absentee*, ed. W.J. McCormack and Kim Walker (Oxford, 1988), pp 161-2. **45** Maria Edgeworth, *Ennui*, ed. Marilyn Butler (Oxford, 1992), p. 186. **46** Owenson, *Patriotic Sketches*, vol. i, p. 72. Owenson may have known Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *Pizarro*, a play published in Dublin in 1799, in which the Spanish colonization of Mexico provides an oblique account of English colonization in Ireland and the 1798 rebellion. The nature of representation is at the heart of Sheridan's play, with its central character being Las Casas, the historiographer. **47** Ibid., p. 91. **48** Ibid., p. 55. **49** Owenson, *Wild Irish Girl*, p. 49. **50** Ibid., p. 89.

Irish poor: she questions 'how far this country has been benefited morally, politically or physically by the increased weight of its sirloins, the additional rotundity of its hogs, or the delicate ossific construction of its sheep' while the plight of the poor has been neglected.[51] And in a passage which seems directly to bait Richard Lovell Edgeworth, she mocks the whole enterprise of 'improvement' in Ireland:

> An Irish gentleman distinguished by his farming enthusiasm, invented a trough of peculiar construction, to induce the pigs to eat with propreté; failing in the attempt, I heard him seriously declare that there was a radical principle of filth in the animal, which neither care nor education could vanquish.[52]

While Owenson constantly praises the United Irishmen (that 'Union of power and influence'),[53] her political analysis operates within the ambit of the Union and there is no other suggestion as to how to energize her vividly represented but entirely static stadial spectacle except through acquiescence in the Union. Her freeze-frame, then, cannot be animated by the dynamic of history without succumbing to the Enlightenment's teleology, and asymmetric absorption into the Union. Her Gaelic spool can only reel obsessively backwards. Her analysis differs finally from Edgeworth's only in suggesting that the 'sensitive pride, tenacious reserve, suspicion, timidity and irritability of spirit' which the native Irish naturally exhibit as a result of being both haunted and humiliated by a colonial history can 'only be dissipated by the conciliating advances of that superior influence' which the Union has placed over them.[54] They are 'only to be seduced into amity or warmed into confidence, by the open, ingenious, volunteering liberality of the supreme power'. In those circumstances Owenson, like Edgeworth, falls back weakly on the national marriage as a *deus ex machina*:

> Let the names of Inismore and M — be inseparably blended and the distinctions of English and Irish, of Protestant and Catholic, for ever buried. And, while you look forward with hope to this family alliance being prophetically typical of a national unity of interests and affections between those who may be factitiously severed, but who are naturally allied, lend your own individual efforts towards the consummation of an event so devoutly to be wished by every liberal mind, by every benevolent heart.[55]

51 Owenson, *Patriotic Sketches*, vol. ii, p. 57. **52** Ibid., pp 61-2. **53** Owenson, *Patriotic Sketches*, vol. i, p. 41. **54** Ibid., p. 59. **55** Owenson, *Wild Irish Girl*, p. 253.