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the serial potential of the genre while pioneering new methods of approaching reality, of analyzing the interaction between the milieu and the individual, of looking for general explanatory mechanisms. Indeed at that stage (in 1895 and 1903), Moore's methods had evolved from a doctrinaire application of experimental science as they were revealed in his previous novels. However, his short fiction tends to prove that French Naturalism was the cornerstone of his literary formation and remained an enduring influence on his writing.

CLÍONA Ó GALLCHOIR

Germaine de Staël and the Response of Sydney Owenson and Maria Edgeworth to the Act of Union

Historians and literary critics have become so used to reading the early nineteenth-century novels of Maria Edgeworth and Sydney Owenson in the context of the 1801 Act of Union between Great Britain and Ireland that the unusual conjunction between fictional and political discourse in their work may be taken for granted. The claim of their novels to comment on political matters and the public sphere was of course not entirely without precedent; indeed the intensely politicised 'jacobin' novel of the 1790s, exemplified by William Godwin's *Caleb Williams; or, Things as they Are* (1794), must be regarded as an important source and precursor for the Irish fictions of the early nineteenth century. *Caleb Williams* had demonstrated that the novel could be topical and highly political; the politics of gender in the period, however, meant that Edgeworth and Owenson challenged discursive boundaries in a very particular and arguably more profound way. Whilst novels like *The Wild Irish Girl* and *Castle Rackrent* are indebted to the women writers of the 1790s, to the pioneering proto-feminism of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays and Elizabeth Inchbald, none of these writers focused on the nation as the object of critique or scrutiny.[1]

Looking beyond the anglophone world, however, we encounter another woman writer in this period whose commentaries on post-revolutionary national culture were articulated from a complex but unmistakeably feminine perspective. Germaine de Staël's fame (and notoriety) were international, and in the early nineteenth century she was much better-known than any other woman writer of the day. She was an acknowledged influence on Sydney Owenson and a figure of ambiguous

1 See Gary Kelly, *English Fiction of the Romantic Period, 1789-1830* (Harlow: Longman, 1989), pp.26-42.

fascination for Maria Edgeworth.[2] This article proposes that the discourse of union which is central to her *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* (1800) helps to illuminate the commentary on union which we find in *The Wild Irish Girl* and *Castle Rackrent*. Her work, as I hope to show, resonated in a very particular way for Edgeworth and Owenson, to the extent that Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) is heavily indebted to *De la littérature*. The Staëlian quality of Owenson's text must be regarded as one of the major sources for the contrast between her treatment of union and that found in Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (1800). Recovering and exploring Staël's influence on *The Wild Irish Girl* adds, moreover, to the growing sense of Ireland's connections with Europe in general and France in particular. Historians have already begun to challenge the view that the Union between Britain and Ireland was somehow unique in Europe: according to one historian, the Act of Union should be regarded 'not as the second of two moments in the creation of the United Kingdom but as one of a plethora of European territorial dismemberments and integrations performed between 1770 and 1815'.[3] The discourses of union that we find in Edgeworth and Owenson are, likewise, not purely or uniquely Irish. They derive from the common European language of Enlightenment, and, in the manner of Staël's work, seek to investigate what becomes of progress in the aftermath of violence.

Staël's *De la littérature*, a pioneering treatise of literary sociology, described the invasion of the Roman Empire by the barbarians of the North as follows:

2 Staël was, according to Mary Campbell, 'everything [Owenson] admired'; see Mary Campbell, *Lady Morgan: The Life and Times of Sydney Owenson* (London: Pandora, 1988), pp.84-5. Edgeworth disapproved of some aspects of Staël's life and writings, but there can be no doubt of her deep admiration for Staël, expressed when she visited Coppet in 1820: 'There is something inexpressibly melancholy! – awful! in this house in these rooms where the thought continually recurs "*Here genius was*! Here *was* Ambition! Love! All the struggles of the fury [sic] passions! Here *was* Mme de Staël!"' *Maria Edgeworth in France and Switzerland: Selections from the Edgeworth Family Letters*, ed. by Christina Colvin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p.253.

3 James Livesy, 'Acts of union and disunion: Ireland in Atlantic and European contexts', in *Acts of Union: the causes, contexts and consequences of the Act of Union* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), ed. by Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan, pp.95-105, p.101.

> L'invasion des barbares fut sans doute un grand malheur pour les nations contemporaines de cette révolution; mais les lumières se propagèrent par cet événement même. Les habitants énervés du midi, se mêlant avec les hommes du nord, empruntèrent d'eux une sorte d'énergie, et leur donnèrent une sorte de souplesse, qui devoit servir à compléter les facultés intellectuelles.[4]

In the words of the *Edinburgh Review*, she described an 'amalgamation of the two races that produced a mighty improvement on both'.[5] Staël's reconceptualisation of European history was motivated by her need to see the French Revolution, not as the end of progress, but as a necessary step towards further progress and improvement. The post-union fiction of both Edgeworth and Owenson has been described as attempting to further or complete the union between Ireland and Britain, through devices such as the allegorical 'national marriage', depicted so successfully in *The Wild Irish Girl*, and in characters such as Colambre in Edgeworth's *The Absentee* (1812), who is described as a hybrid, mixing the best traits of the English and the Irish character. As a political measure, the union was introduced as a means to safeguard the power of the minority Protestant establishment: thus Edgeworth and Owenson's fictions of union have often been read as the projections of a fantasy in which the claims of the disaffected 'natives' could be reconciled with the continued power of the minority settler class.[6] It is however worth looking beyond this specifically local context, in order to realise that the desire to see beyond conflict and division towards a prospect of reconciliation and progress was hardly exclusive to the Anglo-Irish. By 1800, the year in which *De la littérature* was published, France had experienced a decade of almost unimaginable violence and conflict. The execution of the royal family, the Terror, civil war and revolutionary war had all contributed to the violence and bloodshed. Although on a much smaller scale, the events of 1798 involved brutality and violence on both sides of the conflict, and, in Edgeworth's case, this violence was experienced at very close quarters.[7]

4 Germaine de Staël, *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales*, ed. by Axel Blaeschke (Paris: InfoMédia Communication, 1998), p.130.

5 *Edinburgh Review* 21 (1813), p.9.

6 See Seamus Deane, *A Short History of Irish Literature* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p.90.

7 For an account of how the events of 1798 impacted on the Edgeworth family, see Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon

The potential for reading the union between Ireland and Britain in the light of Staël's work is further facilitated by Staël's own fascination with English culture and society. Whilst her underlying thesis, that of the advances in civilisation brought about by the union of two opposing groups, clearly invites the reader to interpret the revolution positively, as having brought about the union of *sans culotte* energy with aristocratic French culture, a more persistent analogy is the description of the 'North' and the 'South' of medieval Europe in terms of present-day England and France, at war following the French revolution.[8] Staël, like her father Jacques Necker, belonged to a tradition of French anglophilia, exemplified by Montesquieu. In her remarks on the literature of the North and the literature of the South, Staël presents an encoded political commentary urging the merits of English society. Staël's text is, however, divided and ambivalent. In spite of the fact that her text is premised on the idea of progress and perfectibility and that it constructs the revolution as having contributed to this process, there is an elegiac note in her references to the *ancien régime*. Her ambivalence is focused specifically on the ways in which the revolution undermined the status of certain women – intellectual and socially well-connected women (such as her own mother, Suzanne Necker) who had formerly played an influential role in politics and culture, primarily through the Enlightenment salon. This social and cultural phenomenon, and its disappearance, is a hugely complex subject which has preoccupied scholars in many different fields, and which can only be noted rather than discussed here.[9] What concerns us is Staël's account of this transformation, and the reasons she provides for it. Staël, like other female contemporaries, recognised that the rise of a bourgeois public sphere did not necessarily entail social gains for

Press, 1972), pp.137-41. Kevin O'Neill's research on the journals and letters of Mary Shackleton Leadbeater has also uncovered vivid accounts of the brutality of this period, viewed, like Edgeworth's, from a liberal, non-combattant perspective. See Kevin O'Neill, '"Woe to the oppressor of the poor!": Post-rebellion violence in Ballitore, Co. Kildare', in *1798: A Bicentenary Perspective*, edited by Thomas Bartlett, David Dickson, Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), pp.363-77.

8 See John Isbell, 'The Painful Birth of the Romantic Heroine: Staël as Political Animal, 1786-1818', in *Romanic Review* 87 (1996), pp.59-67.

9 See, for instance, the discussion of salon culture in Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

women. In the comparative structure which governs her discussion, however, 'bourgeois' effectively becomes synonymous with 'English'. The 'progress' that the revolution is supposed to have initiated has resulted in France not only becoming more bourgeois, but more British as well, a change that is signified by a more limited sphere of action for women. Read from this angle, Staël's text posed troubling questions for the Irish woman writer.

Commenting on northern literature (and arguing, of course, that literature reflects social and political institutions), Staël presents an image of a culture explicitly other than French, and in many respects, she argues, superior to that of France. Its hallmark is secure enjoyment of political liberty. Staël claims that northern literature is of a piece with a population who will not tolerate servitude and subjection: 'la poésie du nord convient beaucoup plus que celle du midi à l'esprit d'un peuple libre'.[10] Staël also claims that the position of women in this society was also vastly superior to that in 'Southern' societies:

> les peuples septentrionaux [...] ont eu de tous temps un respect pour les femmes, inconnu aux peuples du midi; elle jouissoient dans le nord de l'indépendance, tandis qu'on les condamnoit ailleurs à la servitude.[11]

These are, therefore, some of the qualities with which the 'barbarians' are supposed to have enriched and ultimately transformed European culture, contributing to its dramatic progress and improvement. The optimistic proposal that a similar productive union will take place in post-revolutionary France and Europe is however undermined both by ambivalence in her comments on English culture and character and in her evident regret that the 'new and improved' social order supposed to emerge from the union of opposing forces will in fact represent a loss for women.

Staël's positive view of English culture is troubled by her observation that the English character, although so praiseworthy, is not in fact amenable to the mechanism of perfectibility that her text is designed to describe. Staël's theory of progress relies on the union of two previously opposed elements – and yet she describes English culture as characterised by a stubborn refusal to incorporate foreign influences. She

10 *De la littérature*, p.180.

11 *De la littérature*, p.185.

observes that they have rarely displayed an interest in the tastes and opinions of other nations, partly as a result of their position as a European island – 'séparés du continent' – and says that they 's'associèrent peu, de tout temps, à l'histoire et aux moeurs des peuples voisins'.[12] Claiming that, as a general principle, the spread of literature and information by means of print contributed to a cosmopolitan European culture, Staël makes the following statement about the persistence of English insularity:

> La découverte de l'imprimerie a nécessairement diminué la condescendance des auteurs pour le goût national; ils pensent davantage à l'opinion de l'Europe; et quoiqu'il importe que les pièces qui doivent être jouées aient avant tout du succès à la représentation, depuis que leur gloire peut s'étendre aux autres nations, les écrivains évitent davantage les allusions, les plaisanteries, les personnages, qui ne peuvent plaire qu'au peuple de leur pays. Les Anglais cependant se soumettront le plus tard possible au bon goût général; leur liberté étant fondée sur l'orgeuil national plus encore que sur les idées philosophiques, ils repoussent tout ce qui leur vient des étrangers, en littérature comme en politique.[13]

For Staël, European culture is ideally conceived of as a union between Northern (English) and Southern (French) characteristics. Her commitment to the very idea of progress relies on this foundation; progress itself is, therefore, thrown into question by her paradoxical assertion that England remains uniquely resistant to external influence.

Staël's description of the position of women in post-revolutionary France also disrupts her optimistic thesis, in two distinct ways. Firstly, it is by no means clear that Staël welcomes the role allotted to women within a bourgeois, 'English' social structure, in which the division between public and private spheres is clearly gendered. In fact, her comments about the change in women's roles since the revolution present the greatest challenge to the theory of progress that her text apparently sets out to prove. The 'respect' for women which she claims is characteristic of Northern (English) culture may not translate into freedom of action, and her portrayal of the place of women in this social order suggests that the health of the public sphere relies on its exclusively masculine character. In her posthumously published *Considerations on the French*

12 *De la littérature*, p.213.
13 *De la littérature*, p.199.

Revolution (1818), Staël, significantly, returns to this theme and expresses the paradox of bourgeois democracy in one pithy sentence: 'in a free country, men preserving their natural dignity, females feel themselves much subordinate'.[14] In *De la littérature*, however, the ideas are nuanced slightly differently, with Staël referring to the widely-held idea that the advance of civilisation in general should be reflected in improvements in the position of women: in the chapter entitled 'Des femmes qui cultivent des lettres', she observes:

> si l'on vouloit que le principal mobile de la république française fût l'émulation des lumières et de la philosophie, il seroit très raisonnable d'encourager les femmes à cultiver leur esprit.[15]

However this 'reasonable' position, which would conform to enlightenment goals, is according to Staël remote from reality: 'depuis la révolution, les hommes ont pensé qu'il étoit politiquement et moralement utile de réduire les femmes à la plus absurde médiocrité'.[16] Staël affirms that under the *ancien régime* women were powerful social arbiters, and concedes to critics of that past era that 'elles avoient, sans doute, dans l'ancien régime, trop d'influence sur des affaires'.[17] According to Staël's logic of progress, a union of French and English qualities in women, as in other aspects of culture, would represent a post-revolutionary ideal, but, again, this ideal union has failed to materialize:

> Si les Français pouvoient donner à leurs femmes toutes les vertus des Anglaises, leurs moeurs retirées, leur goût pour la solitude, ils feroient très bien de préférer de telles qualités à tous les dons d'un esprit éclatant; mais ce qu'ils pourroient obtenir de leurs femmes, ce seroit de ne rien lire, de ne rien savoir, de n'avoir jamais dans la conversation ni une idée intéresante, ni une expression heureuse, ni un langage relevé.[18]

Staël's apparent optimism, her stated conviction that conflict can further enlightenment by uniting contrasting values and characteristics, is thus

14 Staël, *Considerations on the French Revolution*, 3 vols (London: Baldwin, Craddock and Joy, 1818), III, p.280.
15 *De la littérature*, p.328.
16 *De la littérature*, p.238.
17 *De la littérature*, p.330.
18 *De la littérature*, p.328.

undermined in her own text. The key areas in which this doubt is manifest – the essentially insular nature of English culture, and the dubious benefits to women of post-revolutionary reconstruction – could hardly be more ominous from the point of view of her female Irish contemporaries, contemplating a union between Britain and Ireland which was designed to stifle the revolutionary discontent of the 1790s.

Sydney Owenson's representation of the union in *The Wild Irish Girl* relies heavily on Staël's concept of the distinction between Northern and Southern Europe, adapting and applying it instead to England and Ireland. The novel is based on the impressions of its narrator-hero, Mortimer, an English heir to Irish estates, on his first trip to Ireland, a country which he had formerly dismissed as utterly devoid of interest and even as barbaric. The novel's focus is thus on what makes Ireland different from England, and it is this difference which captures Mortimer's interest and changes his attitude towards Ireland. The fact that Ireland occupies the place of 'Southern Europe' is made clear when Mortimer accompanies the priest, Father John, on a journey to the north of Ireland. In the north of Ireland, Father John claims, Scottish character has been 'engrafted' upon the 'true' Irish character.[19] The priest subsequently lectures Mortimer on the difference between the north and the south of Ireland:

> Here [...] [t]he bright beams which illumine the gay images of Milesian fancy are extinguished; the convivial pleasures, dear to the Milesian heart, scared at the prudential maxims of calculating interest take flight to the warmer regions of the south; and the enduring socialities of the soul, lost and neglected amidst the cold concerns of the counting-house and the bleach green, droop and expire in the deficiency of that nutritive warmth on which their tender existence depends. (192)

Mortimer's guide freely admits that this region is 'the palladium of Irish industry and Irish trade', and presents a crass contrast with the 'Southern provinces', in which the 'wretched native [...] either famishes in the midst of a helpless family, or begs his way to England' (192). In spite of this he concludes that, although a visitor might admire and respect the 'Northerns of this island', 'on the heart they make little claim, and from

19 Sydney Owenson, *The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale*, ed. by Claire Connolly and Stephen Copley (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2000), p.168. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

its affections they receive but little tribute' (192, 193). This journey to the North serves little purpose other than to establish the South of Ireland as the 'real Ireland', and to reinforce its characterisation as feminine. The emphasis on the masculine qualities of English culture we find in Staël's text is reflected in Owenson's portrayal of the charms of feminized Ireland, embodied in the figure of Glorvina, the Gaelic 'princess of Inismore', to whom the Englishman Mortimer is deeply attracted.

The gendering of the relationship between Ireland and England is of course not unique to Owenson – her work can be placed in a tradition spanning several centuries. It is however clear that the precise configuration of this relationship owes a great deal to Staël, not least when we consider Owenson's emphasis on benefits to be gained from 'union'. A key symbol of union in the novel, often overlooked by critics who focus on the marriage between the two principals, is the phenomenon of James Macpherson's 'Ossian' poetry. First published in 1760, *The Poems of Ossian* were presented to the world by Macpherson, a Scot, as translated fragments of an ancient Scottish epic, preserved in oral tradition. Scholars of the Irish language reacted furiously, claiming that the tales belonged to the cultural heritage of Ireland and had in any case been bowdlerized by Macpherson's very free translation. Glorvina's comments on what was, at the time, a very live controversy, proclaim her enthusiasm for hybrid cultural forms; the 'union' between traditional forms and eighteenth-century taste which angered many Irish scholars is described by Glorvina as part of the necessary progress of poetry, a progress symbolized as the shift from speech to writing:

> Long before I could read, I learned on the bosom of my nurse, and in my father's arms, to recite the songs of our national bards, and almost since I could read, the Ossian of Macpherson has been the object of my enthusiastic admiration. (111)

Glorvina goes so far as to 'acknowledge the superiority of Mr Macpherson's poems, as compositions, over those wild effusions of our Irish bards whence he compiled them' (111), and concludes by saying that 'when my heart is coldly void, when my spirits are sunk and drooping, I fly to my English Ossian, and then my sufferings are soothed' (112). Glorvina's reference to Macpherson's text as the 'English Ossian' differentiates it linguistically from the Irish-language originals which she first

experienced, but conveniently obliterates Macpherson's Scottishness. Together with the marginalization of the 'Scottish colony' in the north of Ireland, this makes it very clear that what is at stake is the desired union between Ireland and its dominant, masculine Other, England.

Owenson's desire to replicate Staëlian structures is further emphasised by Mortimer's decision to introduce his beloved to the seductive charms of French fiction. He makes a gift to her of several novels, 'all precisely such books as Glorvina had *not*, yet *should* read, that she may know herself, and the latent sensibility of her soul' (139). These novels include Rousseau's *La nouvelle Héloïse* and, with the exception of Goethe's *Werther*, all are French novels, which prompts Mortimer to remark:

> Let our English novels carry away the prize of morality from the romantic fictions of every other country; but you will find they rarely seize on the imagination through the medium of the heart. (139)

Mortimer soon observes the 'sentimental sorcery' of Rousseau at work in the behaviour of Glorvina, who, he conjectures, 'begin[s] to feel she has a heart' (143). Owenson thus establishes a parallelism between Ireland and France, in terms of what they mean for Mortimer, in this context representative of England. However, one might note that in order to complete the romantic and erotic connection between them, Mortimer has to introduce Glorvina to French reading material, to awaken the 'latent sensibility' of her soul. Whereas the ideal of union imagines two opposed forces combining to create something greater than the sum of the parts, the union of Mortimer and Glorvina could more accurately be described as one party uniting with a fantasised projection of itself. One could also question Mortimer's claims to resemble any 'John Bull' English stereotype: he has, for instance, been sent to Ireland as a form of punishment because of his total failure to succeed in his chosen profession of the law, and adopts the disguise as a travelling artist. Mortimer thus resembles not so much the conservative English ideal of self-disciplined masculinity, but the other aspect of England's relationship with her others, the troubling francophile (here, 'hibernophile') whose devotion to all things

foreign in art, clothing, literature and language aroused anxiety and hostility in conservative circles throughout the eighteenth century.[20]

Owenson's representation has already been described, in Joep Leerssen's useful phrase, as 'auto-exotic', a phrase which captures the peculiarity of a text which carries the subtitle 'A National Tale' but which is governed by the self-projections of another nation, England. Leerssen focuses on the union as the source for the rise of auto-exotic discourse, of which *The Wild Irish Girl* is the most important early nineteenth-century example. Reasons or explantions for this auto-exotic turn centre on the idea that as legislative power and decision-making had shifted from Dublin to London, writers felt compelled to address an English, rather than a local, Irish audience. In this respect, Leerssen's account of post-union writing (as he himself acknowledges) does not differ from that offered by much earlier critics such as Thomas Flanagan, writing in 1959.[21] But the fact that Owenson's discourse of difference and union, as I hope to have shown, owes a great deal to Staël, offers a somewhat different perspective on this post-union phenomenon and opens up a space within which to consider *The Wild Irish Girl* as a specifically female-authored text. The positioning of the text as 'Other' to England is, I would argue, a strategy which permits the woman author to make an intervention in the public sphere. In *De la littérature*, Staël describes the novel as a form that is characteristically English, insofar as the confinement of women in England to the private sphere produces an intensity and complexity around domestic life that are absent in France:

> Il est un genre d'ouvrages d'imagination, dans lequel les Anglais ont une grande prééminence: ce sont les romans sans merveilleux, sans allégorie, sans allusions historiques, fondés seulement sur l'invention des caractères et des événements de la vie privée. L'amour a été jusqu'à présent le sujet de ces sortes de roman. L'existence des femmes, en Angleterre, est la principale cause de l'inépuisable fécondité des écrivains anglais en ce genre.[22]

20 See Robin Eagles, *Francophilia in English Society, 1748-1815* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

21 Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), p.33.

22 *De la littérature*, p.222.

The Wild Irish Girl is a manifestly 'unEnglish' novel, judged according to these criteria. Given Staël's emphasis on the public invisibility of English women and the failure of her optimism when it came to women's post-revolutionary condition, one could argue that Owenson's 'auto-exoticisation' is as much a function of gender as of the cultural politics of the post-union period. In *The Wild Irish Girl*, Owenson was clearly responding to *De la littérature*, and being other than English was, in Staël's paradigm, a position from which a female voice could be articulated.

Critics have tended to draw sharp lines of distinction between Owenson and her contemporary, Edgeworth, pointing out that Edgeworth does not fully endorse what has come to be called the 'Glorvina solution'. Edgeworth's *The Absentee* for instance is clearly indebted to *The Wild Irish Girl*, and appears to build towards a climax in which the Anglo-Irish Colambre marries his Catholic cousin, Grace Nugent – except that, at the last minute, Grace is discovered to be an English protestant. Differences between the two writers are almost always attributed to their levels of support for the Anglo-Irish establishment: Kevin Whelan has recently described Owenson as 'jacobin-feminist' and Edgeworth as an 'effete Whig'.[23] But both writers faced the same challenge: how to bridge the divide between public and private spheres. Owenson confounded these distinctions through the use of allegory, which enabled her to write novels which dealt on one level with sentiment and feeling, and on the other with politics and history, creating what Claire Connolly calls 'a knot of erotic and political energy'.[24] Edgeworth's form is different: she does not place private and public in allegorical relationship to one another, instead she questions the relative value accorded them. The preface to *Castle Rackrent* argues for private, domestic narratives as a source of 'truth' with greater claims to our attention than the apparently authoritative discourse of history. History is associated with the public, and with a corresponding degree of falsehood:

> The heroes of history are so decked out by the fine fancy of the professed historian; they talk in such measured prose, and act from such sublime or

23 Kevin Whelan, 'Foreword', *The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale*, ed. by Claire Connolly and Stephen Copley, p.xv.

24 Claire Connolly, Introduction to *The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale*, ed. by Claire Connolly and Stephen Copley, p.xliv.

> such diabolical motives, that few have sufficient taste, wickedness or heroism, to sympathise in their fate. [...] We cannot judge either of the feelings or of the characters of men with perfect accuracy, from their actions or their appearances 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.[25]

Castle Rackrent was composed in the 1790s and the fact that its publication coincided with the passing of the Act of Union is partly a matter of historic coincidence. Edgeworth, however, deliberately prompts her readers to place this quirky narrative, 'pour[ed] forth [...] with all the minute prolixity of a gossip in a country town', in the context of the union, making reference to it both in the Preface and in the concluding paragraphs of the narrative itself. Edgeworth's form, that of a first-person, vernacular narrative framed by a commentary in the assumed voice of an 'editor', makes *Castle Rackrent* a 'first' in the English-language tradition, but it has been interpreted by some critics as a structure which implicitly attributes moral and intellectual superiority to the editor, who (after all) writes in standard English, in contrast to the Hiberno-English of the illiterate narrator, Thady Quirk. This hierarchical relationship, it has been argued, reflects Edgeworth's sense of the post-union relationship between Ireland and England, and has been contrasted with Owenson's portrayal of an Ireland united with England through the dynamics of attraction and desire. 'English' readers, however, could only imagine themselves to be united with the editor in a position of cosy superiority with respect to the Irish narrator if they failed to notice the editor's sly observation that 'we never bow to the authority of him who has no great name to sanction his absurdities' (6). By claiming that the public are disposed to accept 'great names' as authorities, Edgeworth undermines one of the fundamental principles of the 'Republic of Letters', in which ideal, rational subjects are imagined to be able to discriminate between texts and utterances on the basis of reason.[26] Implicitly,

25 *The Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth*, ed. by Marilyn Butler and others, 12 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999-), I: *Castle Rackrent, An Essay on Irish Bulls, Ennui*, ed. by Jane Desmarais, Tim McLoughlin and Marilyn Butler, p.5. Subsequent references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

26 Kant's 'What is Enlightenment?' articulates this idea particularly clearly: '"Have courage to exercise your own understanding!" – that is the motto of enlightenment'.

Edgeworth also suggests that the attribution of authority to a speaker or writer is culturally and socially determined rather than arising as a result of the operations of enlightened reason. The voice of the Preface, therefore, far from positioning itself in unambiguous superiority to Thady's narrative, suggests some of the ways in which hierarchies of gender, genre and locale operate either to include or exclude texts and speakers from the realm of public discourse. Rather than making clear and unambiguous distinctions between reliable and unreliable speakers, *Castle Rackrent* takes huge risks by bringing readers face to face with the difficulty of establishing a reliable point of view. Like Owenson, Edgeworth seized the moment of Ireland's union with Britain to produce a text that announced its 'Irishness' and its 'Otherness' by bringing private and public into startling conjunction. The two writers thus have a great deal in common; their differences, which have often determined where they are positioned on a political spectrum ranging from unionism to nationalism, acquire a different complexion when Staël's work is adopted as a point of reference. As I hope this discussion has shown, their response to the union must be considered in a broader and more complex context than has hitherto been the case, in order to appreciate the ways in which gender and the cultural prescriptions imposed on the woman writer helped to produce these genre-defying and genre-defining texts.

BRIGITTE LE JUEZ

Art, écriture et moralité: Flaubert modèle d'Oscar Wilde

Dans *The Artist as Critic*, Wilde déclare « *Considered as an instrument of thought, the English spirit is coarse and undeveloped. The only thing that can cure it is the growth of the critical instinct* ».[1] Cet article se propose de montrer comment Wilde, comme certains de ses contemporains, en se détachant des préceptes artistiques anglais, s'attacha à la littérature française de son époque, et à Flaubert en particulier, afin de créer une forme artistique, littéraire, qui lui soit propre, c'est-à-dire un style qui soit à la fois novateur et digne de la culture irlandaise moderne qu'il participait ainsi à définir.

En Irlande, l'influence de Flaubert s'étale de George Moore à Samuel Beckett, en passant par, entre autres, James Joyce, W.B. Yeats, Elizabeth Bowen et, naturellement, Oscar Wilde. Chacun à sa manière, ces auteurs développèrent leur écriture au contact du style flaubertien, style basé sur quelques principes élémentaires, notamment que tout sujet est bon à traiter et que l'auteur ne doit pas apparaître dans l'écrit, autrement dit que la création artistique doit se réaliser sans l'influence de la moralité et dans l'impersonnalité. L'influence de Flaubert fut très importante et pas seulement en France où, comme Nathalie Sarraute l'a clairement énoncé, il est considéré comme « le Précurseur »:

> En ce moment, notre maître à tous, c'est Flaubert. Sur son nom l'unanimité s'est faite: il est le précurseur du roman actuel. Son œuvre, dit-on, répond aux préoccupations et aux exigences des écrivains d'aujourd'hui. Ceci est un point indiscuté.[2]

1 Ellman, Richard (ed.), *The Artist as Critic*. (London: W.H. Allen, 1970), p.45.
2 Sarraute, Nathalie, « Flaubert le Précurseur », *Preuves*, N° 15, février 1965, pp.3-12.