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From Antiquarian Text to Fiction's Subtext: The Extended Afterlife of Spenser's *View of the Present State of Ireland*

This article analyzes significant traces of the *View of the Present State of Ireland* in Irish novels published in the aftermath of the Act of Union of 1800. Written by Protestants, they aimed to explain the Irish problem to an English audience, and thereby foster more harmonious relations between the two islands. Spenser's *View*, which had long been a resource for antiquaries, was taken up by these novelists in a variety of ways, ranging from plundering his hostile descriptions of Gaelic Irish mores to add color and an alleged authenticity to their characters and plots, to engaging with his politics and pointing to his complicity in the colonial project in Ireland. That some novelists employed both of these approaches simultaneously shows not only the continuing Protestant ambivalence toward the Gaelic Irish, and particularly the still-threatening peasantry, but also the centrality of Spenser's *View* to fictive depictions of early nineteenth-century Ireland.

In 1805, the Revd Edward Ledwich proclaimed the importance, even uniqueness, of Edmund Spenser for understanding the Irish past: "'Civilisation having almost obliterated every vestige of our ancient

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manners, the remembrance of them is only to be found in Spenser; so that he may be considered, at this day, as an Irish antiquary.' "[1] This emphasis on the ongoing relevance of Spenser has continued into our own era, with critics such as Jane Grogan probing his influence on Irish poets from Yeats to Heaney.[2] Taking Ledwich's claim as its starting point, this article investigates the impact of Spenser's *View of the Present State of Ireland* on Irish novelists of the early nineteenth century. It builds on previous published work that tracks the imprint of the *View* on Irish antiquarianism and on the beginnings of the discipline of folklore studies, which, together with the novel, were among the principal vehicles by which the "problem of Ireland" was explained to an early nineteenth-century English metropolitan audience.[3]

In proclaiming the centrality of Spenser to Irish antiquarian studies in the early nineteenth century, Edward Ledwich was underlining the persistence of traditional modes of interpreting Irish history and the legacies of its colonial experience. The same fundamental debate shaped antiquarianism at the turn of the nineteenth century as in Tudor times: were the writings of English commentators from Gerald of Wales onward regarding the native Irish—with their allegations of inveterate Gaelic barbarism used as a justification of conquest—to be trusted, and could their prescriptions about the necessity of English rule in Ireland continue to be applied to the modern situation? In the seventeenth century the answer from Catholic Old English writers, whether based in Ireland, such as Geoffrey Keating, or, like John Lynch, on the continent, had been a resounding negative.[4] This evolving debate was influenced and updated by events such as the 1641 rebellion and the Williamite wars, which could be read as reinforcing the paradigm of irredeemable Irish treachery and violence, a paradigm for which the *View* was a key source. From the 1690s a further layer was added when a range of penal legislation was gradually enacted over two decades that targeted, with varying degrees of success, Catholic religious practice, landholding, and political rights.[5]

In the mid-eighteenth century, in the wake of the final Jacobite uprising of 1745 when Ireland had remained quiet, Catholic antiquaries began to challenge the dominant Protestant historical narrative as part of a wider argument about the injustices of the penal laws. Writers such as Charles O'Conor and Sylvester O'Halloran wrote accounts of precolonial Ireland as a golden age of civility and sophistication that only came to an end with the violent and destructive invasions of the Vikings, who were cast as the precursors of the English adventurers of 1169. Just as O'Conor's friend John Curry argued that the 1641 rebellion had not been an expression of Irish

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lawlessness, but rather had been caused by cruel and unjust government policy in Ireland (that had driven the native Irish into revolt), so these antiquaries aimed to show that the colonial allegation of inveterate Irish barbarism since time immemorial had no basis in historical fact. Colonialism, they implied, had been the cause of Ireland's problems rather than the solution to them.[6] These Catholic antiquaries tended not to engage directly with the *View*, just as they did not openly controvert colonial ideology, for fear of being branded as incipient traitors.[7] Rather they stressed their loyalty to Ireland under the Hanoverian monarchy, in which light their critique of the penal laws as an injustice that held the country back could be defended as no more than honest patriotism.

Traditionally, Protestant antiquarianism had upheld the status quo by employing the colonial discourse of a benighted and backward Ireland that was introduced to civility by English colonizers from Henry II onward. In the eighteenth century, conservative Protestant antiquaries, such as Edward Ledwich, employed a range of colonial writers, including Spenser, to dismiss the Catholic claims of precolonial civility, which they accurately interpreted as forming part of the argument against the penal laws. Toby Barnard has drawn attention to the unsuccessful attempt of a descendant of Spenser, Edmund Spencer, to get subscriptions for a new Irish edition of Spenser's complete works in 1744, and suggests this indicates "the limited interest in the old Elizabethan" in Ireland at that time.[8] Within twenty years of that failure, however, the *View* was republished by a Dublin publisher at a time of serious agrarian protest, which was construed as an attempt by Catholics to wipe out the Protestant landowners of Munster.[9] This was not a coincidence, and the appearance of the *View* at this juncture points to continuing perceptions of its relevance to the problems of social, religious, or political unrest in Ireland.

By the late 1770s, however, a new and more liberal Protestant opinion developed and was represented by a number of writers who were curious about Gaelic culture; not the culture of the numerous and at times menacing poor around them, but rather the medieval literary heritage of the shrunken remnant of the Gaelic elite. These writers interested themselves in Gaelic manners and customs, and consulted Spenser's *View*, ignoring by and large its advocacy of the military subjugation of the Irish and instead treating it as an invaluable source of ethnographic information about the Gaelic world. Joseph Cooper Walker based his *Historical Essay on the Dress of the Ancient and Modern Irish* (1788) on many of the descriptions of manners and customs found in the *View*, but sought to neutralize its hostile

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standpoint. Thus, for example, he referred to Spenser as strongly recommending "the abolition of the ancient Dress" and included a lengthy illustrative quotation that contained the now-famous passage where Spenser describes the "mantle" or cloak worn by the native Irish "kern" or foot-soldier, in its connection to lawlessness and rebellion, as a "a fit house for an outlaw, a meet bed for a rebel, and an apt cloke for a theife."[10] Even as he cited Spenser, however, Walker was undercutting this emphasis on the mantle's potential for subversion and criminality by also quoting, in a lengthy footnote, from "a beautiful inedited [*sic*] Irish romance" entitled "The Adventures of Faravala, Princess of Scotland," which had been given to him by a leading member of the Irish Whig aristocracy, Lady Moira. In this tale, according to Walker, the heroine disguises herself by wrapping her cloak around her face and visiting her lover in prison, where her father has consigned him. The mantle was thus transformed into a harmless romantic trope.[11] As part of his *Historical Essay on Dress*, furthermore, Walker included a "Memoir on the Armour and Weapons of the Irish," which drew on Spenser's depictions of the Irish soldiery of his time but which displayed an antiquarian desire to list and describe what were confidently assumed to be the artifacts of bygone troubled times.[12] Thus, Sir James Ware's presentation of the *View* in its first appearance in 1633 as a work of history rather than of polemical argument for a colonial military strategy can be seen to have been effective, at this particular time at least.[13]

This attempted reduction of Spenser's *View* to a mere ethnographic tract, however, did not survive the trauma of the 1798 rebellion. Liberal antiquaries like Walker, who had sought to present the Gaelic world in a more positive light, were at least embarrassed, if not discredited, by that rebellion, which demonstrated the enduring vulnerability of the Protestant governing minority and which recalled earlier traumas such as the 1641 rebellion.[14] The fraught political situation after the 1798 rebellion, which included the passing of the Act of Union of 1801, followed by a growing campaign to achieve Catholic emancipation, explains the appearance of new editions of a number of classic colonial texts in the early nineteenth century. Sir John Temple's lurid account of the atrocities committed on settlers in the 1641 rebellion, which had been regularly reissued since its first publication in 1646, came out in London in 1812 in direct response to a parliamentary petition for Catholic emancipation, and the new preface reminded readers of "the continued and incurable spirit of hostility which the Roman Catholics, or Papists . . . have always entertained against the Government of England, when administered by Protestant Sovereigns."[15] John Derricke's *The Image*

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of Irelande (1581) also resurfaced at this time, in the first volume of Walter Scott's edition of *A Collection of Scarce and Valuable Tracts on the most Interesting and Entertaining Subjects: but chiefly such as relate to the History and Constitution of These Kingdoms* (1809). In this, the second edition of a collection of pamphlets and tracts that had first appeared in the mid-eighteenth century, Scott inserted *The Image of Irelande* because it provided, he explained, "a singular and highly unfavourable, yet but too just an account, of the Wood-Kerne, or native Irish in the reign of Queen Elizabeth," and he drew heavily in his footnotes on Spenser's *View* to further elucidate Derricke's portrayal of the native Irish.[16]

Almost concurrently, in Dublin in 1810, a reprint of the original 1633 edition of *Pacata Hibernia: Ireland Appeased and Reduced* appeared. This account of Sir George Carew's military campaign of 1601–3 against Hugh O'Neill was brought out by Sir Thomas Stafford in 1633, the same year as the first edition of Spenser's *View*.[17] Just the previous year, 1809, the same printing house, Hibernia Press, had released a two-volume work entitled *Ancient Irish Histories*, consisting of the *View* and the histories of Campion and Hanmer that had made up Sir James Ware's 1633 compilation *The History of Ireland Collected by Three Learned Authors*. Also included in *Ancient Irish Histories* was Henry Marleburrough's "Chronicle of Ireland."[18] The edition of the *View* used in this 1809 work, however, was that of Henry John Todd, a well-known Milton expert, who had edited and published the complete works of Spenser (London, 1805). Todd had contacted Irish antiquaries for assistance while preparing that edition. For example, Joseph Cooper Walker had interceded with the librarian of Trinity College Dublin so that Todd was supplied with extracts from a manuscript of the *View* held there.[19] While his editorial interventions mainly concern textual and linguistic matters, Todd took unusual trouble to add to Spenser's ethnographic descriptions by incorporating the findings of contemporary antiquaries, notably his chief Irish correspondent, Walker.[20]

By this stage, however, the liberal antiquarian project espoused by Walker and others had been all but extinguished, as the 1798 rebellion had created a politically dangerous association between research into the Gaelic world and the recent recrudescence of native Irish violence and sedition.[21] Walker, and others like him, found it necessary to take up safer fields of scholarship, in his case Italian literature.[22] Indeed, there was a general hiatus in elite Protestant (and Catholic) antiquarian scholarship lasting up to two decades after the rebellion. Significantly, the Royal Irish Academy's Antiquities Committee, which had sponsored the English translation of medieval Gaelic manu-

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scripts in the more open climate of the late 1780s, became moribund in the febrile atmosphere of the run-up to the rebellion, and remained inactive until the 1820s.[23] But if, post-1798, Protestant antiquaries were reluctant to explore the Gaelic world and its history, this was not the case with Irish novelists. Most of the themes and debates to be found in late eighteenth-century liberal Protestant antiquarian scholarship turn up in the Protestant fiction of the post-Rebellion and Union era. In effect, the post-Union novel became the main discursive site of elite Protestant antiquarianism for some two decades.

The Irish novel, or "National Tale" (as it was often known in this period), was invariably published in London, with writers addressing themselves particularly to an English audience in an effort to explain this neighboring, yet exotic and sometimes alien island. The result of this greater understanding, it was hoped, would be policies that would prevent further traumatic rebellion and lead to harmonious relations between the two islands. Even when set resolutely in the present, the post-Union novel was centrally concerned with the past and its legacies, which were seen as critical to questions of allegiance and identity.[24] All three main post-Union Protestant novelists, therefore—Maria Edgeworth, Charles Robert Maturin, and Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan—had read widely in the antiquarian works of the previous two centuries, and all were clearly influenced by Spenser's *View*.

When the young Maria Edgeworth moved to Ireland with her family in 1782, Spenser's seminal text was on the reading list her father gave her to help her understand her new home. It was likely, therefore, to have been one of the first works on Ireland that she read. It undoubtedly had a profound effect on her first published work, *Castle Rackrent* (1800), one of the foundation texts of the Big House novel.[25] She was writing *Castle Rackrent* when the 1798 rebellion broke out, and like Spenser in 1598, she and her family had to flee their home, in this case Edgeworthstown, Co. Longford, following news of the French landing in Co. Mayo.[26] Additionally, in *The Absentee* (1812) she has the shrewd and cultivated English army officer Sir James Brooke recommend the *View* to the hero, Lord Colambre, who came from a returning absentee-landlord family (as she had done herself). The *View* was, Brooke maintained, one of the books on Ireland that "afforded him the most satisfaction" and offered a guide to "different representations and misrepresentations" of the country.[27]

In *Castle Rackrent*, subtitled "An Hibernian Tale taken from facts, and from the Manners of the Irish Squires, before the year 1782," she relates the history of several generations of a landowning family of native Irish stock,

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their decline into penury, and the taking over of their estate by the rising Catholic attorney Jason Quirk. This short but complex text includes a preface, advertisement to the English reader, lengthy glossary, and its own footnotes to the text, thus allowing for a series of competing voices and perspectives. The very first page signals the immediate relevance of the *View* to her "tale," as she decks out the subversive narrator, Thady Quirk (an old family retainer, but also father of the parvenu Jason), in a "long great coat" worn cloak-fashion; in a footnote, Edgeworth likens the coat to the "mantle" that Spenser had identified as the attire of the native Irish "kern" or soldiers in his day. Edgeworth makes the Spenserian connection explicit by quoting the author at length, in her first footnote, on the usefulness of the mantle to the disaffected, but she also refurbishes his message about the native Irish threat by amending the quotation, substituting "black bogs" for Spenser's "thick woods" as the outlaws' den.[28] This plays on the contemporary perception of bogs (such as surrounded her father's estate) as the locus as well as symbol of backwardness and potential subversion in Ireland, rather than the (by this time) depleted woodland.[29]

Like many, Edgeworth's father had made bog drainage a central part of his improving landlordism in the 1780s, and he was involved in 1807–9 in the drawing up of an official government report on this form of land reclamation.[30] In *Castle Rackrent*, the Rackrents signal their Gaelic ancestry by refusing to remedy the expanse of bog situated a short distance from their castle; they have only half-heartedly screened it with some shrubs. When the newly arrived English wife of Sir Kit Rackrent condemns the bog as "a very ugly prospect," it is Thady, in his Spenserian mantle, who lectures her on its ancestral importance: "But, my lady, you must not quarrel with any part or parcel of Allyballycarricko'shaughlin, for you don't know how many hundred years that same bit of bog has been in the family, we would not part with the bog of Allyballycarricko'shaughlin upon no account at all; it cost the late Sir Murtagh [Rackrent] 200 good pounds to defend his title to it, and boundaries, against the O'Learys, who cut a road through it."[31] Thus, both family and peasant retainer are represented as fiercely attached to the unimproved bog, with the former having gone to law to prevent that signifier of modernity and civilization—a road—being constructed on it.

There are further Spenserian motifs a little more buried in the text. For example, in his disquisition on the customs of the native Irish, Spenser ascribes the "hubub," or battle cry of the Irish rebels, to their alleged descent from the fearsome Scythians who were notorious, in legend and literature

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since classical times, for their savagery. Equally, the funeral lamentations of the Irish are described as "dispairfull out-cryes, and immoderate waylings" that savored greatly of "the Scythian barbarisme."[32] Edgeworth rather slyly connects these two forms of crying by having Thady relate his great grandfather's account of the funeral of an earlier Rackrent ancestor, Sir Patrick O'Shaughlin, in which keening women in their red cloaks resembled red-coated British soldiers: "you would have taken them for the army drawn out."[33] The sense of these women with their alien custom as a dissembling and disorientating force is reinforced in the glossary commentary on this scene, where Edgeworth alleges that large groups of female mourners were still in her day to be found lamenting loudly at Irish funerals, although they often had no knowledge of the deceased and joined in "the universal cry with all their might and main for some time" before asking around them "'Arrah! Who is it that's dead?—who is it we're crying for?'"[34] For Edgeworth, this false expression of grief is proof of the inexorable degeneration of the "customs and ceremonies" of the "lower Irish."[35]

In the novel the arch dissimulator is the narrator, Thady Quirk, known to the Rackrent family as "honest Thady," as he records in the opening paragraph. His surname may be an indirect recalling of the *View* and its author, in this case of a passage where Irenius holds forth on the "subtiltyes and slye shifts" of the "wylie-headed" Irish, who are always employing "some quirke . . . some evasion" in their duplicitous dealings with the English.[36] While wringing his hands and lamenting the Rackrent decline, honest Thady actively assists in the ruination of the last of the old family owners, Sir Condy. By ensuring that information about the extent of Sir Condy's debts is made known to speculators, Thady assists his son, Jason Quirk, to become the chief creditor and thus have Sir Condy sign over the estate to him. Meanwhile Thady minds the meager store of money that is left to Sir Condy: the funds are wrapped in a handkerchief in the pocket of his greatcoat, or mantle, making it truly "an apt cloke for a theife" as Spenser had maintained.[37]

In *Castle Rackrent* and *The Absentee*, the 1798 rebellion and the resurgent barbarism it represented is the absent referent for Edgeworth's renovation of Spenser's ethnographic perspective on the Irish. Other novelists were not as reticent. Charles Robert Maturin employed the opening statement from the *View*, voiced by Eudoxius, as an epithet on the title page of *The Wild Irish Boy* (1808): "But if that country of Ireland from which you lately came, be of so good and commodious a soil, as you report, I wonder that no course is taken for the turning thereof to good uses

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and reducing that nation to better government and civility."[38] However, the book is not the meditation on the Spenserian theme of imposing civility through state policy that this epithet promises. Instead, it was a calculated attempt by the struggling Maturin to cash in on the huge commercial success of Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl*, which had appeared two years earlier in 1806. He borrowed not only his title but also whole scenes from Owenson's book, which he then subverted in a number of ways. The inclusion of Spenser on the title page was very likely part of that commercial appeal to a readership who would expect the popular post-Union Irish novel to address themes found in the *View* and still regard them as relevant.

Maturin's later novel of 1810, *The Milesian Chief*, while more reliant on Spenser's central message and on his delineation of Gaelic customs and dress, makes no mention of the Elizabethan writer. The one authority cited, however, in the small number of footnotes, was Edward Ledwich, that conservative Protestant antiquary renowned for his hostile take on Gaelic history and culture, who most resembled a contemporary version of Spenser. As with many examples of the national tale genre, in *The Milesian Chief* the past is defined not by the passage of time but rather by geography. To move from the present into history is a matter of traveling from urban Dublin westward to the Atlantic seaboard, where the Elizabethan encounter with exotic Gaelic mores and, of course, language can be reenacted. But this world that Maturin creates, while wildly theatrical, romantic, and derivative, never lapses into pure fantasy, because he situates it in the aftermath of the 1798 rebellion.

Thus, the eponymous hero, Connel O'Morven, is that still-potent Protestant nightmare, the dispossessed Catholic, who resides in a hovel at the foot of the ruined castle of his ancestors, and whose lands are now in the hands of an English proprietor. He will go on to lead an unsuccessful peasant uprising, will belatedly repent, and die a tragic death. Locked into an age-old mind-set of unrelenting hostility to government because of that dispossession, O'Morven signals his politics by his "ancient Irish" dress. Walker's *Historical Essay on Dress* was plundered by all these novelists for ideas on how to clothe their characters.[39] Maturin's version of ancient Irish dress is complicated by the need to highlight O'Morven's heroic qualities as well as his weaknesses. This is done by intermixing classical motifs with Gaelic, and therefore barbaric, norms. Thus, his costume "consisted of drawers of a vivid yellow, closely adapted to the limbs, and terminating in buskins, whose complicated braids gave to the feet and ancles [*sic*] the appearance of those of an ancient statue. . . . The mantle of regal purple, flowing back

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from one broad shoulder, displayed an arm that seemed formed to bear the ensigns of war or empire."[40] The buskins—laced half-boots—may have appealed to Maturin because they were worn by actors of Greek and Roman, and, later, Shakespearian, tragedies, and therefore pointed to O'Morven's fate. Some of the rest of the detail is from Walker but originates in Spenser, particularly the yellow dye used for clothing, which Spenser said derived from the Spanish (or Milesian) ancestry of the Irish.[41] Maturin also dresses his hero in a mantle, albeit one of a more luxurious quality—to signal his noble status—than the example described by Spenser.

In a like manner, Maturin gives the Milesian chief a coiffure that is a romanticized version of one on offer in the *View*: "his hair, closely cut behind . . . poured all its dark and wavy volume to the front, and parting on the marble forehead terminated in the *coulin*—the long, loose curl, so much the favourite of the ancient Irish."[42] What Maturin, following Walker, mistakenly calls the "coulin" (which actually meant hair that was allowed to grow long at the back[43]), Spenser had termed the "glibbe," meaning the long fringe of the native Irish, which, along with the mantle, he had advocated banning, since, he claimed, both were used by outlaws as a form of disguise.[44] But in addition to its usefulness as a method of concealment, Spenser also identified the glibbe as a substitute for armor, and another indication of Scythian descent: "likewise their going to battle without armor on their bodies or heads, but trusting to the thicknes of their glibbs, the which (they say) will sometimes beare off a good stroke, is meere Scythian."[45] The barbarian origins of the Milesian Chief are further emphasized when he leads his men into battle, where the tactics he uses are an elaboration of Spenser's brief account in the *View*. Spenser shared the typical Elizabethan disdain for the native Irish warfare, which was characterized as ill-disciplined and relying solely on the Highland charge or headlong rush at the enemy.[46] In their first engagement, O'Morven leads the rebels in the charge and, abandoning all weaponry except for their pikes, they defeat the infantry. At the appearance of the cavalry, however, O'Morven swiftly updates his tactics, in the light of experience learned from the still recent rebellion, and "remembering the event of the engagement in 1798, in which the Lords O'Neil and Mountjoy fell, drew up his wounded and scattered ranks in as close order as the broken ground admitted, and received the charge upon their extended pikes: these the cavalry, after every effort of skill and courage was exhausted, found it impossible to penetrate, and at length retired."[47] Underlining this threatening weave of ancient and modern, O'Morven is dressed for battle in a "cavalry uniform of green"—calling to mind

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the United Irishmen, and also the more recent Emmet rebellion of just nine years before—but over it all he wears the mantle.[48] Thus, *The Milesian Chief*, and before it *The Wild Irish Boy*, can be seen as attempts to update the message of Spenser's *View* for a nineteenth-century readership that was primed to see the Irish problem as a product of atavistic barbarism.

Of the Protestant novelists most associated with the national tale genre, only Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan, set out in her fiction to challenge the characterization of the native Irish and their culture as uncivilized and to do so by engaging directly with Spenser's *View*. Owenson's background, as the daughter of a well-known Irish-speaking actor from Co. Mayo who passed on to her his love of the harp and of Irish song, may explain her more critical approach to the *View*.[49] Like the other novelists, however, she borrowed from Spenser's ethnographic descriptions to emphasize the exoticism of Gaelic Ireland. Her novels, particularly the two in question here, *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) and the later *Florence Macarthy* (1818), with their prolific and extended footnotes, parade her immersion in the antiquarian writings of her own and earlier times. In *The Wild Irish Girl*, set, as Maturin was to copy, in the remote west of Ireland—again, a place out of time—a young Englishman, Horatio Mortimer, is making a first visit to the family estate that was won by their Cromwellian soldier ancestor during the wars of the mid-seventeenth century. Ignorant of Irish history, he quickly realizes, once he arrives and immerses himself in antiquarian writing, that the Mortimer land was confiscated from the ancestors of the Prince of Inismore, who now lives nearby in a ruined castle with his daughter, Glorvina, and a Catholic chaplain, but who remains highly aggrieved at his family's dispossession. Mortimer falls for the beautiful Glorvina, and he gradually also succumbs to her highly romantic version of Gaelic history and society.

But before that cultural surrender, he is effectively made the mouthpiece of Spenser on Irish barbarism, so that the counterargument can be put in response. Thus, in the *View*, when Irenaeus says that the Irish were literate long before the English, Eudoxius replies: "Is it possible? how comes it then that they are so unlearned still, being so old schollers?"[50] Replicating that dialogue format, Owenson has Mortimer argue with the Catholic chaplain and pose the question: "But granting that your island was the *Athens* of a certain age, how is the barbarity of the present day to be reconciled with the civilization of the enlightened past?"[51] *The Wild Irish Girl* was, among other things, an extended answer to that Spenserian challenge, and could be read, on one level, as a reassertion of the interpretation of Irish history as a golden age familiar from Geoffrey Keating in the seventeenth century

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and reinforced in the more recent works of Charles O'Conor and Sylvester O'Halloran.[52] The chaplain thus contends that early Christian Ireland possessed "the most devout and learned ecclesiastics in Europe" and was thereby dubbed "the Island of Saints."[53] Mortimer's question also provokes the ire of the prince, who is the voice of enthusiastic and partisan Catholic antiquarianism, and who blames the decline in the reputation of the Irish solely on malignant English colonial writers: "Once we were every where [*sic*], and by all, justly famed for our patriotism, ardour of affection, love of letters, skill in arms and arts, and refinement of manners; but no sooner did there arise a connexion between us and a sister country, than the reputed virtues and well-earned glory of the Irish sunk at once into oblivion."[54] While, in her footnotes to this exchange, Owenson works hard to defend the "golden age" narrative of traditional history against skeptics, she also aims to undermine the appropriation of the recent rebellion as proof of inveterate Irish barbarism. She asserts in her notes that any "atrocities . . . chiefly occurred in the county of Wexford," which "is an English colony planted by Henry the second, where scarcely any feature of the original Irish character, or any trace of the Irish language is to be found."[55] No more Spenserian riposte could be devised by Owenson than to heap blame upon the Old English for sedition over two hundred years after the *View* had been written, and in circumstances where any general consciousness of that separate ethnic identity had long disappeared.[56]

Owenson's memoirs record that she had read the *View* in preparation for her third Irish novel, *O'Donnel*, which came out in 1814: "I am extracting from Edmund Spenser, who loved Ireland *tant soit peu* [only so slightly]."[57] This was part of her research into the life of Red Hugh O'Donnell, "Chief of Tir Connell in the reign of Elizabeth," her intended subject, which she abandoned because it conjured up "*too* many fearful images," that is, of Irish barbarism and English oppression. She opted instead for a fictional modern hero, one of Red Hugh's "polished descendants in a more refined age," and made him a spokesman for Catholic acceptance of the Elizabethan conquest.[58]

But it was in her next novel, *Florence Macarthy: An Irish Tale* (1818), that she engaged most directly with the *View*, and Spenser himself is a shadowy presence in this quasi-Elizabethan national tale, which is, in part, a rewriting of history to undo the damage caused by the disunity of the Gaelic and Old English Catholic elites in the sixteenth century. The novel revolves around another journey to the west and back into the past, which is taken by two men, strangers to each other and hiding their real identities, who arrive

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together by ship in Dublin. One appears to be a poet and dreamer, who has spent the voyage from Plymouth reading *The Faerie Queene* and the *View*, and who relies on the other, described only as "the Commodore" who is in charge of the vessel, for information on "the natural advantages of Ireland." The Commodore, who as it turns out is the hero of the novel, warns him against "viewing Ireland through Spencer's [*sic*] pages" and reminds him of Spenser's murky colonial past: "He was one of those, whose policy it was to revile the country he preyed upon, to spoil, and then to vituperate . . . Spencer . . . is no author for impartiality to judge by; and when he stoops to eulogize the 'dreadless might' of his ferocious patron, Grey, one of Ireland's Herods, when he defines power to 'The right hand of Justice truly hight,' however he may please as a poet, he is contemptible as an historian, and infamous as a politician."[59]

Owenson made more complicated use of Spenser than her hero's denunciation would suggest, however. The response of his young companion is to shrug and reply, "The *Fairy Queen* of Spencer [*sic*] will . . . survive, when his State of Ireland [*sic*] shall be wholly forgotten" and to announce his intended pilgrimage to "the ruins of . . . Kilcoleman," Spenser's Munster estate. Owenson footnotes this: "Originally the principality of the *Macarthies More* [*sic*]; afterwards the palatinate of the Fitzgeralds, Earls of Desmond; forfeited by them, and given to new spoliators. . . . The spoils which fell to the poet Spencer [*sic*], as secretary to Lord Arthur Grey . . . were three thousand acres of rich land in the County of Cork, with the beautiful Castle of Kilcoleman, the seat of the Earls of Desmond."[60] In the novel, therefore, Spenser's estate symbolizes the multilayered history of colonialism in Ireland, and points to one of the central issues in Owenson's analysis of the Irish problem, that is, the continuing divisions between ruling elites, native Irish (the MacCarthys), Old English (the Desmonds), and New English, Spenser's descendants (of which a number remained in Ireland).[61] In the novel, this disunity, at least between native Irish and Old English, will be resolved by the device of a marriage alliance. While this form of resolution was a hackneyed trope of the national tale genre,[62] it had an added resonance here, in that the historical Florence MacCarthy had secretly contracted a controversial marriage by eloping with his cousin Ellen MacCarthy in 1588, thereby uniting two branches of the MacCarthy family, MacCarthy Reagh and MacCarthy Mór, and allowing Florence to claim the lands and title of the latter through his heiress wife. Enforcing this claim was to be his primary objective, necessitating, during the Nine Years War, a policy of shifting alliances with the crown, on the one hand, and Sir Hugh O'Neill on the

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other.[63] The threat posed by the MacCarthys and other Munster native Irish families to Spenser's Kilcoleman estate is an insistent backdrop to his analysis in the *View*.[64]

If part of Owenson's project in her fiction is to question the relevance of Spenser to any resolution of the problem of Ireland, she nonetheless embraces his ethnography as still apposite to early nineteenth-century Ireland; as one of her characters in *Florence Macarthy* says, "For its all one in Ireland . . . ould times or new: the men changes, but the measures never."[65] Thus, the great number of military barracks which the travelers in the novel observe in and around Dublin suggest to them that "the whole country be one great fortress" and that little has changed since "Elizabeth's day."[66] Moreover, scenes are set up that echo elements of the *View*. On their way from the port into the city of Dublin, the Commodore and his *Faerie Queene*–loving passenger walk through the impoverished village of Ringsend, while the latter reads out from the *View* Spenser's conventional eulogy of Ireland's rich natural resources. The description of the Ringsend poor—"hordes of wretched and filthy creatures crept from beneath the dark roofs of their earthy dwellings, to solicit the charity of those who passed above them"[67]—recalls Spenser's notorious and harrowing pen portrait of the starving people of Munster, in the aftermath of Grey's scorched earth policy: "Out of every corner of the woods and glynnes they came creeping forth upon their hands, for their legges could not beare them."[68] The Spenserian mantle makes its inevitable appearance also, not to signal subversion but rather to challenge traditional prejudices derived from Spenser. Terence Oge O'Leary, hedge-school master, antiquary, and self-appointed *seanachie*, or historian, to the Macarthy family, wears "an old great coat fastened with a wooden skewer at his breast, the sleeves hanging unoccupied," and speaks English "as it might have been spoken in the days of James or Elizabeth." To buttress the realism of at least the latter part of this portrayal, in a footnote Owenson observes that "Several of the obsolete terms of Shakespeare and Spenser are to be found in daily use among the Catholics of Ireland."[69]

O'Leary's style of dress and "wild, unregulated"[70] character seem of a piece, but appearances in this case are deceptive. He is accused of inciting rebellion among the peasantry on the basis of papers found in his cottage that "betrayed a regular plan of insurrection, aided by several catholic gentlemen of the country, in correspondence with Spain and France."[71] His trial for sedition is abandoned, however, when it is proved that these papers are actually material about the MacCarthy family transcribed from Stafford's

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Pacata Hibernia by O'Leary as part of his antiquarian investigations. Here Owenson was recycling research she had carried out for *O'Donnel*, using what she called "a magnificent edition of the *Pacata Hibernica* [*sic*]" (almost certainly the Hibernia Press reprint of 1810) from which, she reported, "I am extracting till I am black in the face."[72] *Pacata Hibernia* gave a detailed account of the machinations of Florence MacCarthy in the Nine Years War, and in particular his "trayterous behaviours" in falsely swearing loyalty to Elizabeth while intriguing with Hugh O'Neill.[73] Owenson's attempt to undermine the latter-day authority of colonist accounts such as *Pacata Hibernia* and the *View* involved the creation of a nineteenth-century Florence Macarthy who subverts the stereotype of barbarous Irish on a number of levels.

This Florence Macarthy, for example, is not only female but an improving landlord, and the only one in a district replete with scions of Old and New English descent.[74] According to O'Leary, the family historian, she is like "her great ancestor, Illen Macarthy, the first Countess of Clancare, only child to the great Florence" and she has kept aloof from the neighboring landowners, the Fitzadelms, for fear they would treat her "as the Saxon King John and his Norman gallants did the great Milesian O'Connors, and O'Briens, and O'Byrnes, and Macarthies, who set the Irish chiefs at nought, laughed at their mantles and truises, mocked their glibbs and beards . . . and . . . discourteously received the courtesies of the native nobility of the land."[75] However, this long-term schism between native Irish and Old English elites, based largely on such inherited colonial prejudices, will be healed by the marriage of Florence with the Fitzadelm heir, who, according to the *seanachie* O'Leary, is "noble by blood, by birth, and by descent; and though no Irishman, but of Norman breed, a true Geraldine."[76] The novel not only rejects the Spenserian prescription of the necessary destruction of the Catholic elites, but suggests, in true Whig fashion, that the real threat comes from the growing dominance of a Protestant commercial bourgeoisie, who have no understanding of, or interest in, improving the condition of the Irish peasantry, which is the key to good government.

Whether as acts of renovation, refutation, or adaptation, therefore, these early nineteenth-century novels demonstrate the continued importance of Spenser's *View* to the process of Irish Protestant engagement with the Gaelic world and with the resonances of its past. The growth of folklore studies as an offshoot of antiquarianism in the 1820s provides further evidence of the centrality of Spenserian ethnography to all Anglophone attempts to understand the culture of the still largely Gaelic-speaking peas-

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antry. Like the antiquaries before them, however, the early folklorists were often uncomfortably aware that in collecting and publishing popular tales they were at risk of being seen to validate the very culture that, since Spenser's *View*, had been placed at the heart of the Irish problem.[77] Fiction was one way of avoiding this dilemma, and this helps to explain why these novels provide us with particularly rich insights into the impact of Spenser's *View* on the nineteenth-century Protestant mind.

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Notes

1. Letter quoted in H. J. Todd, "Some Account of the Life of Spenser," in *The Works of Edmund Spenser*, ed. H. J. Todd, 8 vols. (London, 1805), 1:cxxvi. Unfortunately, no trace of this letter has been found in the extant correspondence of Edward Ledwich.
2. See, for example, Jane Grogan, "After the Mutabilitie Cantos: Yeats and Heaney Reading Spenser," in *Celebrating Mutabilitie: Essays on Edmund Spenser's Mutabilitie Cantos*, ed. Jane Grogan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 295–314.
3. Clare O'Halloran, "Recalling the *View*: Edmund Spenser and Ireland in the Eighteenth Century," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 114C (2014): 215–34, doi: 10.3318/PRIAC.2014.114.10; O'Halloran, "Negotiating Progress and Degeneracy: Irish Antiquaries and the Discovery of the 'Folk', 1770–1844," in *Folklore and Nationalism in Europe during the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Timothy Baycroft and David Hopkin (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 193–206.
4. Geoffrey Keating, *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn: The History of Ireland*, ed. and trans. David Comyn and P. S. Dineen, 4 vols. (Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 1902–14); John Lynch, *Cambrensis Eversus* (n.p. [? St. Omer], 1662).
5. Maureen Wall, "The Penal Laws," in *Catholic Ireland in the Eighteenth Century: Collected Essays of Maureen Wall*, ed. Gerard O'Brien (Dublin: Geography Publications, 1989), 1–60.
6. Clare O'Halloran, *Golden Ages and Barbarous Nations: Antiquarian Debate and Cultural Politics in Ireland, c. 1750–1800* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2004), 84–85, 92–93, 144–45.

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7. O'Halloran, "Recalling the *View*," 217–18.

8. Toby Barnard, "Edmund Spencer, Edmund Spenser and the Problems of Irish Protestants in the Mid-eighteenth Century," in *Irish Protestants: Ascents and Descents, 1641–1770* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), 290–302.

9. On the Whiteboy unrest, see J. S. Donnelly, "The Whiteboy Movement, 1761–5," *Irish Historical Studies* 21 (1978–79): 20–54; on the impact of this unrest on publishing, see Thomas P. Power, "Publishing and Sectarian Tension in South Munster in the 1760s," *Eighteenth-Century Ireland/Iris an Dá Chultúr* 19 (2004): 75–110.

10. Joseph Cooper Walker, *An Historical Essay on the Dress of the Ancient and Modern Irish: addressed to the Right Honourable Earl of Charlemont. To which is subjoined a Memoir on the Armour and Weapons of the Irish* (Dublin, 1788), 52–56. The quotation is from the Ware edition of the *View*. For more on English representations of the mantle, see John R. Ziegler, "Irish Mantles, English Nationalism: Apparel and National Identity in Early Modern English and Irish Texts," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 13, no. 1 (2013): 73–95.

11. Walker, *Historical Essay*, 54.

12. Ibid., 101–36.

13. Deana Rankin, *Between Spenser and Swift: English Writing in Seventeenth-Century Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 82–86.

14. O'Halloran, *Golden Ages*, 179–81.

15. Sir John Temple, *The Irish Rebellion; or, an History of the Attempts of the Irish Papists to Extirpate the Protestants in the Kingdom of Ireland, together with the Barbarous Cruelties and Bloody Massacres which ensued thereupon. Written from his own Observations, and Authentic Depositions and other Eyewitnesses, by Sir John Temple, Knt . . . Now reprinted for the Perusal of all Protestants, as the most Effectual Warning-Piece to keep them upon their Guard against the Encroachments of Popery* (1746; London, 1812), vi.

16. *A Collection of Scarce and Valuable Tracts on the most Interesting and Entertaining Subjects: but chiefly such as relate to the History and Constitution of These Kingdoms. Selected from an infinite number in print and manuscript, in the Royal, Cotton, Sion, and other Public, as well as Private, Libraries; particularly that of the late Lord Somers. The second edition, revised, augmented, and arranged, by Walter Scott, Esq.*, 13 vols. (London, 1809–15), 1:559.

17. [Thomas Stafford], *Pacata Hibernia; or, a History of the Wars in Ireland, during the Reign of Queen Elizabeth. Taken from the Original Chronicles. Illustrated with the Portraits of Queen Elizabeth and the Earl of Totnes, and Fac Similes of all the Original Maps and Plans. First published in London, 1633*, 2 vols. (1633; Dublin, 1810).

18. *Ancient Irish Histories: The Works of Spencer, Campion, Hanmer, and Marleburrough*, 2 vols. (1633; Dublin, 1809).

19. Todd, "Life of Spenser," cxxvii.

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20. See, for example, *Works of Edmund Spenser*, 8:372, 374, 393.
21. For more on this, see Clare O'Halloran, "Harping on the Past: Translating Antiquarian Learning into Popular Culture in Early Nineteenth-Century Ireland," in *Exploring Cultural History: Essays in Honour of Peter Burke*, ed. M. Calaresu, F. de Vivo, and J.-P. Rubiés (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 327–43.
22. O'Halloran, *Golden Ages*, 179–80.
23. Ibid., 181.
24. See Ina Ferris, *The Romantic National Tale and the Question of Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Miranda Burgess, "The National Tale and Allied Genres, 1770s–1840s," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel*, ed. John Wilson Foster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 39–59.
25. Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 91.
26. Ibid., 137–40.
27. Maria Edgeworth, *The Absentee* (1812; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 81.
28. Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent* (1800; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 7–8; Tom Dunne, "'A Gentleman's Estate should be a Moral School': Edgeworthstown in Fact and Fiction, 1760–1840," in *Longford: Essays in County History*, ed. Raymond Gillespie and Gerard Moran (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1991), 98.
29. On this see Nigel Everett, *The Woods of Ireland: A History, 700–1800* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014).
30. Dunne, '"A Gentleman's Estate'," 103; Harriet Jessie Butler and Harold Edgeworth Butler, eds., *The Black Book of Edgeworthstown and Other Edgeworth Memories, 1585–1817* (London: Faber and Faber, 1927), 161, 198–99.
31. Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent*, 27–28.
32. Edmund Spenser, *A View of the State of Ireland*, ed. Andrew Hadfield and Willy Maley (Oxford, 1997), 59–61.
33. Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent*, 11.
34. Ibid., 101.
35. Ibid., 101–2.
36. Spenser, *View*, 31. I am grateful to Thomas Herron for this suggestion.
37. Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent*, 95. Tom Dunne, *Maria Edgeworth and the Colonial Mind*, 26th O'Donnell Lecture (Dublin: National University of Ireland, [1984]), 9.
38. Charles R. Maturin, *The Wild Irish Boy*, 3 vols. (1808; New York: Garland Publishing, 1979), 1: title page.
39. For a detailed description of the "Dress of the ancient Irish," see Walker, *Historical Essay*, 3–12.
40. Charles R. Maturin, *The Milesian Chief*, 4 vols. (1812; New York: Garland Publishing, 1979), 1:127–28.

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41. Spenser, *View*, 65. Specifically, the Irish shirts were saffron-dyed and mordanted with urine. The fashion was outlawed in the sumptuary statutes of Henry VIII, and Camden remarks upon them being worn by Shane O'Neill's entourage at the English court in 1562. See Thomas Herron, "Plucking the Perrot: *Muiopotmos* and Irish Politics," in *Edmund Spenser: New and Renewed Directions*, ed. Julian Lethbridge (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006), 87–88.
42. Maturin, *Milesian Chief*, 1:128–29.
43. Robert Bartlett, "Symbolic Meanings of Hair in the Middle Ages," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., 4 (1994): 46; see also "Cúilin," in *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla: An Irish-English Dictionary*, ed. and comp. P. S. Dineen (Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 1927), 284.
44. Spenser, *View*, 59.
45. Ibid., 62.
46. Ibid. See also Thomas Bartlett, *"The Academy of Warre": Military Affairs in Ireland, 1600–1800*, 30th O'Donnell Lecture (Dublin: National University of Ireland, 2002), 9.
47. Maturin, *Milesian Chief*, 3:108–9.
48. Ibid., 3:87.
49. Joep Leerssen, "Owenson, Sydney (Lady Morgan)," *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, ed. James McGuire and James Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a5972.
50. Spenser, *View*, 47.
51. Sydney Owenson, *The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale*, ed. Claire Connolly and Stephen Copley (1806; London: Pickering and Chatto, 2000), 171.
52. O'Halloran, *Golden Ages*, 24, 109–10.
53. Owenson, *Wild Irish Girl*, 171.
54. Ibid., 172.
55. Ibid., 171.
56. On Spenser's denigration of the Old English in the *View*, see Richard McCabe, *Spenser's Monstrous Regiment: Elizabethan Ireland and the Poetics of Difference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 133, 170, 187–90.
57. *Lady Morgan's Memoirs: Autobiography, Diaries and Correspondence*, ed. William Hepworth Dixon, 2 vols. (London, 1863), 1:131.
58. Sydney Owenson, *O'Donnel: A National Tale*, 3 vols. (1814; New York: Garland Publishing, 1979), 1:ix–xii.
59. Sydney Owenson, *Florence Macarthy: An Irish Tale*, 4 vols. (1818; New York: Garland Publishing, 1979), 1:13–15.
60. Owenson, *Florence Macarthy*, 1:15–16.
61. Todd, "Life of Spenser," clii; See also Barnard, "Edmund Spencer, Edmund Spenser and the Problems of Irish Protestants in the Mid-eighteenth Century," 290–305.

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62. Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).
63. Aidan Breen, "Florence MacCarthy Reagh," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, www.oxforddnb.com.
64. On the threat of the MacCarthy clans to the New English community of Munster and Spenser in particular, see Thomas Herron, "Native Irish Property and Propriety in the Faunus Episode and *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*," in *Celebrating Mutabilitie: Essays on Edmund Spenser's Mutabilitie Cantos*, ed. Jane Grogan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 139–52.
65. Owenson, *Florence Macarthy*, 4:117.
66. Ibid., 1:86.
67. Ibid., 1:42–43.
68. Spenser, *View*, 101.
69. Owenson, *Florence Macarthy*, 1:283, 285–86.
70. Ibid., 1:285.
71. Ibid., 3:15.
72. *Lady Morgan's Memoirs*, 134.
73. [Stafford], *Pacata Hibernia*, 1:62; 2:305–12.
74. Owenson, *Florence Macarthy*, 3:269–70.
75. Ibid., 3:207–8, 213–14.
76. Ibid., 1:292; 4:230–32.
77. O'Halloran, "Negotiating Progress," 204–5.

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