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Evgenia Sifaki

- 1 This paper considers three of Sydney Owenson's early novels: *The Wild Irish Girl: a National Tale* (1806)¹, which established the conventions of the genre mostly associated with her name, the "Irish National tale", *Woman or: Ida of Athens* (1809) and *The Missionary: an Indian Tale* (1811)², which transfer the basic generic conventions and concerns of the national tale outside the territory of Ireland. Just like the *Wild Irish Girl*, the later novels exploit the legacy of the eighteenth-century sentimental tour, which they integrate into a basic romance plot structure; they engage historical and political questions, such as imperialist violence and the resistance of the oppressed, both directly and through displacement onto the narration of a passionate albeit contentious romantic encounter between a privileged colonial male traveller and a colonised, indigenous woman³.
- 2 Here these texts are read in the context of an ongoing theoretical as well as vehement political debate, which sets universal values (variously construed) against those of an ethnocentric nationalism and propounds an anti-essentialist notion of subjectivity relative to multiple cultural affiliations against the Romantic nationalist assumption of an exclusionary identity dependent on ethnic origins and religious traditions. Furthermore, I employ Pierre Macherey's elaborations on Germaine de Staël's ideas concerning transnational and transcultural relations in his important essay "A cosmopolitan imaginary: the literary thought of Mme de Staël"⁴, to elucidate Sydney Owenson's complex conjoining of nationalism and cosmopolitanism and conclude that even though she does project herself as an Irish patriot her texts effectively undermine the German Romantic faith in the so called *Volksgeist*. An appreciation of the literary affinity and mutual admiration between Owenson and De Staël is required for a better understanding of their respective projects (De Staël's *Delphine* was published in 1803 and Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl*, which had impressed De Staël much, in 1806, that is, a year before the publication of *Corinne ou l'Italie*, while *Woman or: Ida of Athens* can be read as Owenson's tribute to *Corinne*)⁵. The two writers have a lot in common; nation and gender are

continually staged and performed throughout their texts, reiterating and challenging at once tacitly normalising and naturalising discourses. Owenson's heroines, like De Staël's, are famously audacious performers or even "actresses", but so are her male heroes, a fact that has been underestimated, I think, by recent criticism. Both writers produced texts that blend creatively historical reality and fiction and both employed a distinctively "feminine" kind of rhetoric as a means to express a quintessentially public and political voice.

- 3 It is interesting to note how critics today project onto Owenson's early nineteenth-century texts a late twentieth-century critical debate over, on the one hand, the problem of the increasingly violent manifestations of resurgent nationalisms and, on the other hand, the fear that "the current celebration of cosmopolitanism by the political left is [...] too often entangled with an implicit endorsement of global capitalism".⁶ In an article about the *Wild Irish Girl*, Elmer Andrews, for example, holds Owenson responsible for sectarian violence in the North of Ireland. His position is that in the nationalist discourse of the 1970s and 1980s in Belfast or Derry

you hear played out [...] the old clamant sound-track of Romantic Ireland, the old ancestral myth of origin, a spiritual heroics [...] expressive of the Hegelian notion of an inner essence or spirit which has lent itself to and become the justification for nothing less than a declaration of war. For at the heart of the conflict in the North [...] is a political theology, the paradigms of which were laid down in Lady Morgan's originative literary stereotyping of a myth of Irishness ⁷.

- 4 Other critics, however, like Kathryne Kirkpatrick, stress the significance of this novel's ending, the marriage of an English Protestant to an Irish Catholic, and argue that an essentialist definition of Irishness "is radically challenged by a marriage which will produce children of mixed, English and Irish ancestry".⁸ More recently, Ann Mellor places Owenson's novel in the context of several works by British women writers of the Romantic period, to argue that the persistent theme of "international, interfaith and inter-racial marriages" in their work is no less than the manifestation of a consciousness that is "profoundly cosmopolitan" though "deeply buried in their texts":

Confronted with national wars, doctrinal religious battles, and the racial prejudice underpinning the African slave trade and the East India Company's depredations in India, Malaysia and China, many British women writers of the Romantic period suggested a radical solution to such internecine struggles. This solution – so profoundly cosmopolitan and so deeply buried in their texts that it has hitherto received little attention – was this. If one is a "citizen of the world", "in all climes the same", then one manifests that consciousness not only theoretically, as a matter of political ideology, but also physically and emotionally, as a matter of sexual practice, a sexual practice that produces hybridized children. Enduring international, interfaith and inter-racial marriages – these become the hallmarks of a truly cosmopolitan subjectivity, what I am calling an "embodied cosmopolitanism ⁹".

- 5 Mellor's article is important because it historicizes effectively the literary texts she examines. But a third type of response to *The Wild Irish Girl* hints at the dangers of, so to speak, romanticising cosmopolitanism, overlooking its allegedly ideological function as a cover-up of aggressive, imperialist, capitalist expansion; for Lisa Moore (following Fredric Jameson's re-casting into literary form of the Marxist definition of ideology as "false consciousness"), in the last analysis, romance in Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* turns into "the narrative device of resolving political conflict and muffling political violence by directing our attention to a transcendent experience of desire, the union between two

lovers of different nationalities ¹⁰". The symbolic use of international and interfaith marriages in Romantic fiction may actually be no more than a mark of imperialism's achievement of hegemonic status.

- 6 So how can one novel produce such different, opposed readings? To answer this question, it is necessary, in the first place, to investigate further the historical context of Owenson's input to the conceptualisation of nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Today we generally assume that these terms are oppositional, but, as Pheng Chea reminds us, that was not the case in the eighteenth century, because both the usage of term "cosmopolitanism" in the context of the work of the French *philosophes* and the elaborations of the cosmopolitical by Immanuel Kant are "formulated too early to take into account the role of nationalism in the transition between the age of absolutism and the age of liberalism. [...] The original antagonist of Kant's cosmopolitanism is therefore absolutist statism." And he continues:

In the initial moment of its historical emergence, nationalism is a popular movement distinct from the state it seeks to transform in its own image. Thus, before the nation finds its state, before the tightening of the hyphen between nation and state that official nationalism consummates, the ideals of cosmopolitanism and European nationalism in its early stirrings are almost indistinguishable. As late as 1861, Giuseppe Mazzini would emphasize that the nation is the only historically effective threshold to humanity: "In labouring according to the true principles for our Country we are labouring for Humanity; our Country is the fulcrum of the lever which we have to wield for the common good ¹¹."

- 7 So it is not surprising to find the co-habitation of particularist-nationalist imperatives with universalist and cosmopolitan premises in texts written in the early nineteenth century. Owenson's writing belongs, indeed, to a continuum with today's political debate on nationalism vs. cosmopolitanism, but it is important not to read her work anachronistically. Her passionate, imaginary identification with the plea of oppressed peoples clashes systematically with the violence of the imperialist state: for example, as Sylvia Bordoni rightly observes, the narrator of *Woman or: Ida of Athens* (a novel programmatically written to support the Greek national uprising against Ottoman rule) makes clear that "had Greece been a free and independent country, Ida would not have been an ardent patriot ¹²". That is to say, conditions of freedom would render nationalism an obsolete ideology, while the central figure of Ida, the female patriot in this novel, is constructed primarily as a form of resistance. Additionally, in *Woman*, elaborations on "patriotism" and arguments for Greek independence positively converge with the interests of humanity at large. This is clearly manifest in her position against religious intolerance and for a universal "religion of the heart", which is most vehemently argued by the Greek revolutionary Osmyn, in his dispute with those of his compatriots who support an alliance of the Greek revolutionary movement with the Greek Orthodox church. He fears that such an alliance will both cause the persecution of various Christian heresies in Greece and also turn the revolution, effectively, into a kind of crusade against Islam. This is the end of his long speech:

What are the countless distinctions in opinions merely speculative, and unconnected with the moral or physical good of the human species, which dare assume the name of religions, and obstinately assert the obvious impossibility, that each is in itself infallible? What are they in his eyes, who knows no religion but that which is of the heart, which in theory is so comprehensible, in practice so divine? (Vol. III, 83-83)

- 8 *Woman* contains an exposition of Owenson's theory of nationalism, which, though programmatic, is also interestingly ambiguous; it embodies the paradox Benedict Anderson describes as "the objective modernity of nations to the historian's eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists" and anticipates her elaboration of "competing nationalisms", which Julia Wright has located in Owenson's later Irish tale, *The O' Briens and the O' Flahertys: a National Tale*. Wright distinguishes in that novel two competing versions of nationalism; the first, which she terms "antiquarian", "fulfils the conditions of the [...] commonly called romantic nationalism" and is "at odds with modernity because of its investment in antiquity"; the second, which she terms "inaugural nationalism", emphasises, on the contrary, "the necessity of decisively breaking from the past. Inaugural nationalism is not based on derivation or evolution, but transformation – especially revolutionary or apocalyptic transformation¹³". Antiquarian and inaugural nationalism in *Woman* compete for prevalence within the same character, Osmyn, who is frequently used by Owenson as her mouthpiece.
- 9 In the first place, the figure of Osmyn, the idealised hero, symbolises, precisely, a power, "that resembled omnipotence itself, capable of a transformation that appeared like an effort of the magical art" (Vol. IV 35). We learn that he is a foundling, who lived in a monastery until he was five, then became a Turkish slave for twelve years, later he disappears and then re-appears, for the most part sliding in and out of the plot in disguise, only to save Ida and her family from danger. His various guises include that of a Turkish guard, a Janissary or a Janissary hidden beneath a Dervish robe and even "in the habit of an Armenian" (Vol II 78). In fact, he has served as a Janissary for two whole years, during which he had an illicit love affair with the daughter of the local Aga, the Governor of Athens.
- 10 Ida's father is against her marriage to Osmyn, because of his dubious origin as "an alien, whom none e'er knew but as the purchased slave of Achmet-Aga" (Vol III 45). There is also an interesting scene in the mountains where the Greek partisans initially refuse Osmyn the leadership, once more because he is an alien and a slave: "No alien leader! – no slave! – no foundling for our chief!" they "vehemently cry"; but at that point, they are threatened by the approach of a Turkish armed force, and Osmyn proves himself the bravest and most reliable leader in the face of danger. The patriots change their mind: "'We call upon you [...], to direct and lead us' cried the general voice. 'Do you', he exultingly returned, 'for myself alone do you elect me?'" (Vol III 85, 87, 88). First he makes sure that they elect him for his individual charisma, regardless of his origin, and that they also accept his position that the national cause should not identify with any one particular religion. And then, he reveals his true origin, as the grandson of a noble Athenian. So the tale falls back to the premises of romantic nationalism, as Osmyn's heroic quality proves intrinsic to his ancient origin. However, he never changes his typically Turkish name (his original Greek name, Theodorus, is mentioned only once in the whole of the four volumes), and his many impressive performances, as a Turk and a Muslim, crucial to the development of the plot, haunt the novel and disrupt the homogeneity of his Greekness. Despite the conventional outcome of his personal story, which collapses the difference between ancient and modern Greece, the figure of Osmyn retains its power to provoke incongruent cultural references, and thus it both confirms and undermines essentialist nationalist stereotypes. Contrary to critics who dismiss the revolutionary Osmyn as Ida's own "creation", the outcome of her schooling and propaganda¹⁴, I argue that he rather resembles Owenson's polysemous female heroines.

- 11 Frequently, in Owenson's work, the alliance of the national, transnational and universal is marked by productive tension, a dynamic field of interrelated and, at times, incompatible features and ideas, which is inscribed, in the first place, in her experimentation with genre and characteristic invention of narrative devices. An example is provided by the settings of her stories: the island of Inismore, Athens and Kashmir serve a double purpose; passionate romance transforms them into Utopias, ideal no-places of love and freedom, explicitly compared to the lost Eden before the Fall, and hence defying equally both the claims of colonialist appropriation and any nationalist right to ownership. At the same time, they are historicised carefully and meticulously, if not always convincingly, through the amassment of an awesome amount of historical and geographical information and also information about local traditions and culture, art, music, dance, and so on; thus, they are represented as places with a unique cultural physiognomy and concrete social and political problems. Ireland and India emerge as oppressed and colonised nations with a long history and important cultural legacies that deserve respect and admiration; Greece as the place where an oppressed people is in the process of developing an empowering nationalist discourse. Critics generally assume that Owenson dislocates political conflicts such as religious intolerance and imperialist aggression from her main sphere of interest, nineteenth-century Ireland, and addresses them in the contexts of other places or historical periods, such as Ottoman Greece, or seventeenth-century Portugal and India¹⁵. In addition to the project of appealing for the cause of Ireland though, Owenson systematic conjoining of universal values with concrete, irreducible cultural manifestations, amounts to much more than a mere universalisation of the particular; in the last analysis, it involves a generous effort to understand and sympathise with other peoples and civilisations.
- 12 The romance trope itself (which by definition assumes universal values) is adapted and transformed into a way of bringing about cultural exchange; the lovers, who belong to different and even hostile nations, become involved in a communication that epitomises what Amanda Anderson calls "expansively inclusionary cosmopolitanism[s] [where] universalism finds expression through sympathetic imagination and intercultural exchange"¹⁶. Also, the fact that these novels are generically hybrids, since Owenson's fiction is conjoined to, and disrupted by, a plethora of references and citations from mainly non-English European sources, such as travel and historiographical texts, often quoted in the original French or Italian, can be read as an example of what Pierre Macherey calls "a shattered aesthetic of the disparate"¹⁷.
- 13 Macherey's reading of De Staël provides a useful perspective for approaching Owenson; he reads, for example the Anglo-Italian Corinne's incessant role-playing as an artist, as the means whereby she displays and concurrently explains the "characteristic values of quite alien sensibilities", English or Italian, which "complement one another, mingle without merging and project their virtues outwards without renouncing the particular identity that constitutes them, and without corrupting it". In Mme de Staël's texts, Macherey argues,
- A new culture is born after having undergone the ordeal of a linguistic, ideological and poetic migration. It facilitates comparisons and exchanges between elements that were originally quite foreign to one another by bringing them together on the basis of their reciprocal foreignness (p. 21).
- 14 Glorvina, the famous Wild Irish Girl, is, precisely, a perfect illustration of what Macherey calls a "composite character". Just like Mme de Staël's Delphine and Corinne, she

embodies the theoretical preoccupations just quoted. Glorvina has been notably recorded in literary history as a national character who expresses spontaneously a form of ancient, Gaelic Irishness. But, as Thomas Tracy insightfully observes, the princess Glorvina is much more than that. She is a powerful political ruler feared by her Irish subjects even more than her father the prince, because of her so-called “great learning”, which aligns her character with Enlightenment thought and more specifically “with the radical views of Mary Wollstonecraft ¹⁸”, as in the following extract, where Father John, Glorvina’s teacher, expositis the principles that had guided his educational practices:

I only threw within [Glorvina’s] power of acquisition [he explains], that which could tend to render her a rational, and consequently a benevolent being; for I have always conceived an informed, intelligent, and enlightened mind, to be the best security for a good heart (TWIG 79).

- 15 Then again, even though Glorvina has undergone a vigorous education of the intellect, she is concurrently constructed as a character through her reading of mainly French, but also German Romantic novels such as “*La Nouvelle Heloise*, de Rousseau – the unrivalled *Lettres sur la Mythologie*,” de Moustier – the “*Paul et Virginie*” of St Pierre – the *Werter* of Goethe – the *Dolbreuse of Loasel*, and the *Attila* of Chateaubriand” (TWIG 144) ¹⁹. These have been given to her by her lover Horatio, the English narrator, who at this point serves blatantly as the mouthpiece of Owenson herself and explains that Glorvina should read these novels so “that she may know herself, and the latent sensibility of her soul”. And he continues:

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; and as for their heroines, I confess that though they are the most perfect of beings, they are also the most stupid. Surely, virtue would not be the less attractive for being united to genius and the graces’ (TWIG 144).

- 16 It is worth noting that the above quotation clearly indicates Owenson’s strong sense of belonging to a European rather than an English literary *milieu*.
- 17 Both Glorvina and Ida of Athens are, indeed, rational women with a mind that is (as the narrator of *Woman* puts it) “dependent on itself – [...] accustomed to rely upon its own resources for support and aid under every pressure” (WOIOA IV, 76); but they equally rely on their sheer, forceful physical presence, their enchanting sexuality, manifest in body language, facial expressions, artistic creativity, dancing, singing, and so on. This is, for example, how Glorvina’s singing is described: ‘She can sigh, she can weep, she can smile, over her harp. The sensibility of her soul trembles in her song, and the expression of her rapt countenance harmonizes with her voice’ (TWIG 146). The fact is that Glorvina’s character is composed of conflictual ideological components, Enlightenment and Romantic. To these, we should add the multiple literary references she invokes in the mind of the English narrator. Heather Braun, in a recent reading of this novel that is different but compatible to mine, observes that

Responding to her appearance, Mortimer envisions Glorvina as a floating apparition, a playful nymph, a sexualised Egyptian Alma and a hideous monster. Such a chaotic “heroic” concoction demonstrates how foreign and familiar, ancient and modern, dangerous and domestic can reside in a single body and, by extension, in a single nation ²⁰.

- 18 The point here is that the national character Glorvina should not be reduced to and explained away as merely an expression of an Irish *Volksgeist*. Her many aspects, English,

Irish and French, Enlightenment and Romantic, cultural and literary, incomplete and inadequate in themselves, synthesise a non-organic whole. As a consequence, the composite figure of the Irish Glorvina simultaneously reproduces and undermines Irish stereotypes, while her composite femininity disrupts and dislocates the boundaries of established categories of gender. We can associate the figure of Glorvina then, with De Staël's "composite characters", and the new cosmopolitan culture they establish, according to Macherey, which breaks with the notion of the *Volksgeist* and represents another kind of synthesis, that very "compositionality" itself, a kind of whole which does not totalize its elements, as expressions of an inner essence or spirit, (in which case we would have the impossibility of an equally exclusionary, homogeneous "universalism"), but holds them together in their irreducible reciprocal foreignness - which, according to Macherey, is the very condition of the possibility of their mutual comparisons and exchanges. It is also the basis for the educational processes that are central to Owenson's national tales.

- 19 Education in a language and a culture other than one's own is extremely important in Owenson's work. Glorvina, Ida and Ida's lover, Osmyn, are educated in various European languages and Enlightenment thought. The English Mortimer is educated systematically in Irish language and literature; Hilarion, the Portuguese missionary, studies with a Brahmin teacher even before he travels to India, so the ground is already prepared for him to receive further education on Hinduism by the woman he loves, the Hindu priestess Luxima, while, of course, introducing her to Christian values at the same time. Julia Wright has shown that Hilarion and Luxima acquire a profound understanding of Hinduism and Christianity respectively but without actually and truly converting (Luxima is christened in order to marry Hilarion, but only nominally). The lovers in the National tale educate one another in their respective cultures; in fact, the progression of their relationship, for the most part, coincides with the course of this mutual education, which enriches their characters, but, crucially, without corrupting them. In the scene of Luxima's death, the Christian cross she is wearing, covered with blood, recedes into the background and into insignificance while she holds tight on her Hindu rosary, sending a clear message that she dies a Hindu. Hilarion understands perfectly and exclaims: "Oh Luxima, are we to be eternally *disunited* then?" Maybe Hilarion worries that the two of them will not end up in the same place after death. But if their relationship worked in the course of the novel to some extent, it is because the cultural and religious limits that kept them apart simultaneously united them by establishing the conditions of mutual communication.
- 20 The outcome of the romance, which is usually controversial, firstly depends on whether and to what extent it is possible to imagine a truly egalitarian marriage of equal minds; furthermore, the progress of the romantic relationship in the national tale always allegorises a redistribution of power between coloniser and colonised and so it depends on the historical and political conjuncture that embeds the love story. This means that Owenson's texts never endorse any form of withdrawal into a private enclave of imagination and feeling - she takes pains to place her heroines in the domain of public life and discourse. After all, this is the quintessence of her female national characters: they may act out an impersonation of their nations, and they certainly speak on behalf of their nations, so their involvement in the public sphere and discourse is foregrounded. In *The Wild Irish Girl*, "She reimagines the [Union of England and Ireland] as [...] a transformation of the political dispensation in the future ²¹". In *Woman*, Ida faces a choice

of lovers, who also represent and perform their own gendered nations: a presumptuous English traveller is enchanted and educated by her into an understanding of Greece, but he, nevertheless, proves incapable of combining desire with respect; the barbarous and lecherous Ahmet Aga is obsessed with her, but marriage to him amounts to slavery and imprisonment in a harem. She marries the Greek Osmyn and they move to Russia, the incubator of revolutionary societies, where they are going to work together to prepare the Greek national revolution. They will have a happy family, but this marriage does not confine Ida to the domestic sphere, because their common revolutionary cause makes possible a marriage of equals based on both politics and passion, and as such it also provides a means whereby the strict divide of private and public life is diminished. The tragic ending of *The Missionary* is blamed on the coloniser's violence and barbarity. It is seventeenth-century Spanish Inquisition which in this text blatantly symbolises colonial power that murders Luxima. *The Missionary* exemplifies the thesis of Ann Mellor that frequently in literary texts by women of the Romantic period "the cosmopolitan ideal of religious and international harmony through romance is thwarted primarily by western chauvinism – sexual, religious, and national ²²".

- 21 It is wrong, however, to assume that the ending condenses fully the meaning of the National tale. Owenson's novels invite us instead to concentrate on those moments of narration, description or character construction, where ambiguity, contradiction and paradox reveal the limits of those institutionalised naturalising and normalising discourses that regulate violent, oppressive politics and sexual politics.

NOTES

1. Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan, *The Wild Irish Girl*, (1806) ed. Kathryne Kirkpatrick. Oxford University Press, 1999.
2. Sydney Owenson, *Woman: or Ida of Athens* (Four Volumes). London, Longman, 1809; Sydney Owenson, *The Missionary: An Indian Tale* (1811), ed. Julia Wright, Broadview Press, 2002.
3. For more on Owenson's contribution to the development of the national tale see Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire*, Princeton University Press, 1997, p. 128-156 and Ina Ferris, *The Romantic National Tale and the Question of Ireland*, Cambridge University Press, 2002.
4. Pierre Macherey, *The Object of Literature*, trans. David Macey, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 13-37. [*A quoi pense la littérature*, Presses Universitaires de France, 1990].
5. For a comparative reading of *Corinne ou l'Italie* and *Woman or: Ida of Athens* see Evgenia Sifaki, "A Gendered Vision of Greekness: Lady Morgan's *Woman or: Ida of Athens*." Vassiliki Kolokotroni & Efterpi Mitsi (eds.), *Women Writing Greece: Essays on Hellenism, Orientalism and Travel*, Rodopi, 2008, pp. 55-75.

6. Craig Calhoun, "The Class Consciousness of Frequent Travellers: Towards a Critique of Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism." Steven Vertovic & Robin Cohen (eds.) *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism - Theory, Context, and Practice*, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 92.
7. Elmer Andrews, "Aesthetics, Politics, and Identity: Lady Morgan's *The Wild Irish Girl*", *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 12, 1987, p. 8. Quoted in Kathryne Kirkpatrick, "Introduction" to her edition of Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan, *The Wild Irish Girl*, *ibid.*, p. VII-XVIII, p. XIV.
8. Kathryne Kirkpatrick, "Introduction", *ibid.*, p. XVII.
9. Ann K. Mellor, "Embodied Cosmopolitanism and the British Romantic Woman Writer", *European Romantic Review*, 17/ 3, July 2006, p. 289-300, p. 292.
10. Lisa L. Moore "Acts of Union: Sexuality and Nationalism, Romance and Realism in the Irish National Tale", *Cultural Critique* 44, Winter 2000, p. 113-144, p. 118.
11. Pheng Chea, "Introduction, Part II". Pheng Chea & Bruce Robbins (eds.), *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, University of Minnesota Press, 1998, p. 20-40, p. 25. Chea quotes from Mazzini's *The Duties of Man*.
12. Sylvia Bordoni, "Lord Byron and Lady Morgan", The Centre for the Study of Byron and Romanticism, University of Nottingham, 2006. URL: [<http://byron.nottingham.ac.uk>].
13. Julia Wright, "'The Nation Begins to Form': Competing Nationalisms in Morgan's *The O'Brien's and the O'Flahertys*", *ELH* 66/4, 1999, p. 939-963, p. 941.
14. See Sylvia Bordoni, *ibid.* and Malcolm Kelsall, "Reading Orientalism: *Woman or: Ida of Athens*", *Review of National Literatures and World Report* 1, New Series, 1998, p. 11-20.
15. For relevant discussions see Hepworth Dixon, *Lady Morgan's Memoirs Vol 1*, London 1862, p. 321 and Julia Wright's "Introduction" to her edition of *The Missionary: an Indian Tale*, *ibid.*, p. 9-57.
16. Amanda Anderson, "Cosmopolitanism, Universalism, and the Divided Legacies of Modernity". Pheng Chea & Bruce Robbins (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 265-289, p. 268.
17. As Wright puts it, "Owenson's version of India is de-anglocentered. Owenson directs her audience to an overtly cosmopolitan body of scholarship in which firsthand accounts from a variety of national perspectives, rather than British scholarship, are given priority". Julia Wright, "Introduction" to *The Missionary: an Indian Tale*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
18. Thomas Tracy, "The Mild Irish Girl: Domesticating the National Tale", *Éire-Ireland* 39/1&2, 2004, p. 81-109, p. 97.
19. Here some of Owenson's references to European novels (i.e. *The Sorrows of Young Werther*) and novelists (Joseph-Marie Loasel) are misspelled; the most important mistake is in the title of the novel by René Chateaubriand, *Atala*. This passage illustrates a paradox in her literary idiom, which combines an impressive number of references to literary and non-literary sources with some degree of unreliability. It is also interesting as an awkward blend of French and English.
20. Heather Braun, "The Seductive Masquerade of *The Wild Irish Girl*", *Irish Studies Review* 13/1, 2005, p. 33-43, p. 35-36.
21. Thomas Tracy, *ibid.*, p. 82.
22. Ann Mellor, *ibid.*, p. 294.

ABSTRACTS

Sydney Owenson's early novels, *The Wild Irish Girl: a National Tale* (1806), *Woman or: Ida of Athens* (1809) and *The Missionary: an Indian Tale* (1811), displace the question of imperialist violence onto the narration of a passionate albeit contentious romantic encounter between a privileged colonial male traveller and a colonised, indigenous woman. This paper argues that her manipulation of the Romance trope and construction of "national character" (which is comparable to the way Mme De Staël creates her fictional heroines) inscribe a dynamic, productive tension between discourses of nationalism, universalism and cosmopolitanism.

Les premiers romans de Sydney Owenson, *The Wild Irish Girl: a National Tale* (1806), *Woman or: Ida of Athens* (1809) et *The Missionary, an Indian Tale* (1811), déplacent la question de la violence impériale sur le récit de la rencontre romantique, passionnée et pourtant antagoniste, entre un voyageur mâle, colonial et privilégié et une femme indigène. Le présent article montre, que la manipulation de la trope du roman et de la construction du « caractère national » par Sydney Owenson (qui est comparable à la manière dont Mme De Staël crée ses propres héroïnes de fiction) inscrit une tension dynamique et productive entre les discours du nationalisme, de l'universalisme et du cosmopolitisme.

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Mots-clés: Morgan Lady, Owenson Sydney, identité nationale, impérialisme/colonialisme, histoire et fiction

Keywords: national identity, imperialism/colonialism, history and fiction

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