

James Joyce and his Female Predecessors¹

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Abstract

For James Joyce the past was always present, and he acknowledged it by rewriting both the Irish and the Western literary tradition. This paper shows the connections between Joyce and two nineteenth-century women writers, Maria Edgeworth, and Lady Morgan, née Sydney Owenson. The common themes and techniques used in the construction of the Irish national tale mark them as antecedents of the modernist Irish novelist.

Keywords: James Joyce, Irish literature, Maria Edgeworth, Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan, *Castle Rackrent*, *The Wild Irish Girl*.

“The past is not past. It is present here and now.”
(E 223)

James Joyce had a complex relation with the past, and particularly with his historic and literary predecessors. His anxiety of influence, which did not allow him to acknowledge literary masters openly, has been widely studied in relation to male antecedents, such as Homer, Rabelais, Dante, Goethe, Shakespeare, and Dostoevsky (Keith Booker 1997, Boysen 2005), or James Clarence Mangan (MacCarthy 2010), Oscar Wilde, and George Bernard Shaw, to mention some Irish

writers (Deane 2004). Additionally, his female antecessors have not been clearly established so far. It has been stated that his familiarity with the whole tradition of his country was very limited (Ó Cléirigh 24). However, both his knowledge of the Irish traditions and the literature of the country —as an educated intellectual who imagined an altogether different future for his race— and the pervasive intertextuality of his creative texts and critical writings suggest the opposite. Our contention would be to show that there existed some female writers whose direct or indirect influence is present in his work mainly concerning two aspects, namely those of theme and technical approach to various issues tackled in his literary production. Maria Edgeworth (1767-1849) and Lady Morgan, née Sydney Owenson (1776-1859), constitute some of the neglected female predecessors of James Joyce, particularly in their so-called Irish novels, as they wrote a century before him, and focused these texts on the history, culture, and political situation of Ireland.

It is not always easy to discern which preceding authors James Joyce might have read in libraries during his literary education period with the Jesuits or in the Royal University of Dublin, although one may think that women writers were not fairly represented in the academic syllabus in Joyce's time.

However, David Pierce in his chapter "Joyce, Erudition and the Nineteenth Century" has pointed out that Joyce must have been influenced by his university tutor Thomas Arnold, brother of the poet Matthew Arnold, and author of *A Manual of English Literature* (1862), from which he must have heard about Maria Edgeworth's novels, equated in his handbook in artistic literary quality to those by Jane Austen (Pierce 49), and additionally offering "hardly less admirable stories of Irish life and character" (Arnold 324). Together with Tom More, Gerald Griffin, Charles Lever, William Carleton, Samuel Ferguson, Aubrey de Vere, among other Irish writers, Thomas Arnold

resented the Irish literary production in a positive way and considered that “the Irish [...] are a persecuted race who yet managed to preserve the faith of their forefathers and their ideal of nationality” (Arnold 466 qtd. Pierce 49). Additionally, the connection between Joyce and Edgeworth has already been established by A. Cronin, in that it reflects a complex and duplicitous central character’s thought process (21-23), together with the “unlikely precursor[’s]” powerful use of dialect for Irish low-class characters. Likewise, another possible trace of James Joyce’s awareness of nineteenth-century Irish female writers might be the direct references to their works in his texts. Although they are not abundant, some references to Maria Edgeworth’s novels may be read in

Finnegans Wake, in which both a novel title –*Castle Rackrent*– and its main character’s name are mentioned: “Translout that gaswind into turfish Teague, that’s a good bog and you, Thady, poliss it off, there’s nateswipe, onto your blottom pulper” (FW 281.F04). In “Anna Livia Plurabelle,” an allusion to

Edgeworth’s *The Absentee* is also present, and the English absentee lords of the big houses are presented symbolically as illegal possessors of Ireland, as it occurs in the novels by both Maria Edgeworth and Lady Morgan: “Letting on she didn’t care, sina feza, me absentee, him man in possession, the proxenete!” (FW 198.16-17). Regarding Lady Morgan’s literary production, it has been often attributed to her the phrase “Dear dirty Dublin” used by Joyce in *Ulysses* (183.19), and masked in *Finnegan’s Wake* as a paradigm of punning, for instance in “teary turty Taubling” (FW 7.05), “dour decent deblancer” (FW 49.21), or “Moirgan’s lady ... dirty dubs” (FW 60.35) among many expressions with a similar structure (Mink 294-295). Another instance may be traced in *Ulysses*, in which Edgeworth’s *Ormond* is mentioned, although it may be also referring to one of the quays in Dublin from which the Irish used to flee the country and go to the continent of Europe (*U*

339.3, 25). Another possible source of investigation could be the revision of his correspondence or private libraries in his different residences in Europe, although this is not a completely reliable avenue since many of his books were lost in his various house moves, and particularly during World War II.

The similar choice of topic by Edgeworth, Owenson, and Joyce was determined by the parallel contexts in which they lived, although publishing in different centuries. These three authors wrote about Ireland and its people in crucial moments of Irish history. In Joyce's early life, Ireland suffered from a profound political defeat, the fall of Parnell, and the fight for independence was marked by pervasive bitterness, which was clearly distilled into his texts. Published in the year of the Easter Rising (1916), *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* represents that atmosphere of collective resentment in a passionate family discussion over Christmas dinner. In it the worst aspect is that they are unable to find the ultimate reason for the nation's sadness, and they blame one another directly for the defeat of the country and their collective backward situation. Joyce dealt with Irish culture and traditions in all his texts, but particularly so in his essays, in which he covered many Irish cultural and historical fields such as poetry, politics and traditions as can be read in "James Clarence Mangan" (1902) (1907), "An Irish Poet" (1902), "Today and Tomorrow in Ireland" (1903), "The Soul of Ireland" (1903), or "Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages" (1907) (CW 153-174). He privileged the Irish contribution to culture, although it might not be valued in the metropolitan colonial capital:

Even today, despite her heavy obstacles, Ireland is making her contribution to English art and thought. That the Irish are really the unbalanced, helpless idiots about whom we read in the lead

articles of the *Standard* and the *Morning Post* is denied by the names of the three greatest translators in English literature — FitzGerald, translator of the *Rubaiyat* of the Persian poet Omar Khayyam, Burton, translator of the Arabian masterpieces, and Cary, the classic translator of the *Divine Comedy*. It is also denied by the names of other Irishmen — Arthur Sullivan, the dean of modern English music, [Feargus] Edward O'Connor, founder of Chartism, the novelist George Moore, an intellectual oasis in the Sahara of the false spiritualistic, Messianic, and detective writings whose name is legion in England, by the names of two Dubliners, the paradoxical and iconoclastic writer of comedy, George Bernard Shaw, and the too well known Oscar Wilde, son of a revolutionary poetess. (CW 171)

As is well-known, Edgeworth was of English origin but devoted part of her literary career to writing about Ireland, namely in *Castle Rackrent: An Hibernian Tale* (1800), *Essay on Irish Bulls* (1802), *Ennui* (1809), *The Absentee* (1812), and *Ormond: A Tale* (1817). For her part, the Irish-born novelist Sydney Owenson published various books about her homeland, such as *The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale* (1806), *O'Donnell, A National Tale* (1814) *Florence Macarthy: An Irish Tale* (1818) and *The O'Briens and the O'Flaherties: A National Tale* (1827). As the full titles of their novels attest, these two writers played a decisive part in the construction of the Irish novel, thus antedating James Joyce's fiction, also consecrated to Ireland. In the nineteenth century Maria Edgeworth presented in her Irish texts a similar atmosphere of defeat, together with economic crisis, famine, and dependence

that one can experience in Joyce. As the full title of Edgeworth's novel shows, *Castle Rackrent: An Hibernian Tale. Taken from Facts and from the Manners of the Irish Squires, before the Year 1782*, it is set before the year in which Irish independence had been established. This is also the year in which Maria Edgeworth settled in Ireland. It seems that she wanted to keep a record of the country in the years before a political change, which coincided with her direct perception of reality there and then. Moreover, the subject matter of her narrative would be especially pertinent as the publication of the text (in January) corresponds precisely with another drawback regarding nationhood recognition in Ireland, the discussions prior to the Act of Union of Great Britain and Ireland, which was passed in August 1800. Additionally, in the same line Sydney Owenson published her first national tale in the aftermath of the above-mentioned Union, at a historical moment when the Irish national identity seemed lost (Kirkpatrick vii). The same could be said about the subsequent national tales about Eire published by both Maria Edgeworth and Lady Morgan in the first decades of the nineteenth century.

Castle Rackrent is a case in point as it deals with the merciless abuse of the country and the people, who are extremely poor, and ruled by heartless administrators. The very title of the text alludes to economic exploitation by means of an excessive rent charged to the tenants of the house, and metaphorically to the country's inhabitants, who have the feeling of not owing their own land. As James Joyce would do later on, Maria Edgeworth's approach to the topic is an oblique one, in that she identifies the complex situation of the country, its status quo, but not necessarily its future. Dependency exists but –as in the *Portrait* dinner discussion– there are acid opinions regarding its cause and, above all, the possible solution. In fact, *Castle Rackrent* is one of Maria Edgeworth's texts about which more conflicting views have arisen. In this

the *Hibernian Tale* is also impaired with the novels by James Joyce, as their literary genre was often contended, since there is discrepancy regarding their very literary nature. Some critics consider that *Castle Rackrent* is a novel (Connolly 11), others a novella (Cahalan 2), others in between a novel and a tale (Deane 91), and others a moral or philosophical tale, as its subtitle suggests, *An Hibernian Tale*, although she published it independently, and not in one of her collection of *Moral Tales* (1801) or *Popular Tales* (1804).

Another controversial point appears regarding the different contradictory voices that appear in *Castle Rackrent*, which determine its final interpretation. On the one hand, there is the voice of a manuscript editor who tries to give an enlightened version of the text by adding to it a body of explanatory notes and a Glossary to make the work

“intelligible to the English reader” (98). On the other, there is an Irish servant, whose narrative transmits the plot. Thus, the text possesses a hybrid, ambivalent nature –in postcolonial terms (Bhabha 10)– as we perceive two conflicting voices, one by a learned editor –who tries to shed light on the Irish language and traditions, and who necessarily transmits an interpretation of the status quo–, and another one, by a low class native servant in a big house, who may play a covert subversive role masked with submission (Eagleton 165), and who may allow a different or complementary interpretation of the tale (Dunne 1984). This may be related to what is now referred to as the “Uncle Charles principle” in Joyce’s case. The phrase, coined by Hugh Kenner, refers to the maxim that

“the narrative’s idiom need not be the narrator’s,” i.e. the use of the language of a character even when describing him or her, as Joyce had done in the opening sentence of *A Portrait*, when using the archaic word “repaired,” as the character himself would have done: “Every morning, therefore, Uncle Charles repaired to his outhouse...” (Kenner 15-19). *Castle Rackrent’s*

intricate literary structure makes it a rather open text, an arena in which many interpretive views are possible for readers, and in which the “Uncle Charles principle” is somehow anticipated. The complexity extant in this text by Edgeworth proves to be one of the features which align it with James Joyce’s labyrinthine narrative.

However, the relationship between Edgeworth and Joyce may go beyond these similarities particularly regarding the interpretation of their respective works as it may be connected to the intertextuality of their respective novels. One of the main features of this text by Edgeworth is that its very encyclopedic structure determines its interpretation, i.e. the information given in the notes and Glossary –no matter how factual and philological it may seem– does not give neutral information for any type of implied reader. It is intended for an English audience who would not be aware of the meaning of the words described or of their context, but above all who would despise Irish speakers as uneducated and illiterate, and whose attitude she would change. It is in that tension that the book interpretation is inscribed. In order to understand *Castle Rackrent* one useful framework of study could be the one provided by Edward Said in *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, in which he proposes the concepts of “filiation” and “affiliation” (23). Maria Edgeworth, as a descendant of the Protestant Ascendancy, has an English filiation. In this novel she created the voice of the enlightened editor who represented that filiation mainly for the English audience but also for Irish readers (Tracy 1). Thenceforth, the character of Thady is ambivalent. On the one hand, he serves his successive masters in the Big house; on the other, he has a subversive attitude that shows not only his Irish filiation, but also his affiliation in that his attitude tries to vindicate the devolution of the estate to the Irish inhabitants. Thus, the interpretation of this novel may be in what has been referred to by Homi Bhabha as a hybrid or a

“third space,” or an arena of subversive struggle and negotiation of meaning (12). It can be contended that the meaning of the book lies in what has not been said, what one can understand in the interstice between an encyclopedic knowledge regarding the Irish culture and the vindication of a nation state, either with an English or an Irish “affiliation” in Said’s terms. In this, Maria Edgeworth can be equated to Joyce, as according to Morton Levitt his greatest success lies in “what he does not tell us, what he does not say at all, what he knows well enough [...] to leave out. [...] the great master of the vast, encyclopaedic Modernist narrative is distinguished most by what he omits; and we, his readers, must not only note in the text what is absent, but be wary about filling in too fully these gaps, for the gaps themselves, the absences in the narrative, may be the point.” (38)

The complex interpretation provided by the text is particularly relevant since this is the only novel by Maria Edgeworth in which her father did not have a direct intervention while it was written (Watson x). Some critics consider that Maria Edgeworth’s father –Richard Lovell Edgeworth– seems to be the author of the Preface to *Castle Rackrent* (Butler 347). This paratextual element, to use Genette’s terms, was felt to be necessary in order to make the book acceptable for English readers. In it Ireland is depicted as a nation leaving behind its own identity due to the Union, although this sad fact of a country disdaining her ancestors is filtered through irony

Nations as well as individuals gradually lose attachment to their identity, and the present generation is amused rather than offended by the ridicule that is thrown upon their ancestors. Probably we shall soon have it in our power, in a hundred instances, to verify the truth of these observations. When Ireland loses her identity by

an union with Great Britain, she will look back with a smile of good-humoured complacency on the Sir Kits and Sir Condys of her former existence. (5)

R. L. Edgeworth was a Member of the Irish Parliament, and had voted against the Union, which was not passed in the Irish chamber, and was finally approved by George III. The Preface presents the case of Ireland as that of a country whose ancestors are not paid due respect. In this *Castle Rackrent* paves the way for the same feeling expressed by Joyce in *Ulysses* when Stephen, a symbol of the Irishman, evokes his having refused to kneel with other members of the family praying at her mother's bedside

—Someone killed her, Stephen said gloomily.
— You could have knelt down, damn it, Kinch, when your dying mother asked you, Buck Mulligan said. I'm hyperborean as much as you. But to think of your mother begging you with her last breath to kneel down and pray for her. And you refused. There is something sinister in you. (*U* 1.108-14)

Thus, *Ulysses* echoes *Castle Rackrent* in showing that Ireland's sons do not respect their ancestors, and only have an ambivalent relation to their country. Subsequently, a feeling of not having done right, and the necessity of making amends will accompany the Irish in the future. Thenceforth, this "third space" or tension represents a subversive struggle which is both personal and collective. The same could be said of the postscript in *Castle Rackrent*, in which readers are provided with further assessment of the text tensions by means of the editor's voice. In using this editorial technique Maria

Edgeworth aligns herself with the first of novelists, Miguel de Cervantes, who had claimed to have found a text by Cide Hamete Benengueli in which the adventures of the Spanish hidalgo were narrated, and which the Spanish writer had merely edited. In *Castle Rackrent* the editorial voice ponders over his role as such, and evaluates his intermediary function between the text and the English readers, and subsequently presenting “the third space” between the Irish nation and England

He lays it before the English reader as a specimen of manners and characters, which are perhaps unknown in England. Indeed the domestic habits of no nation in Europe were less known to the English than those of their sister country, till within these few years. [...] It is a problem of difficult solution to determine, whether an Union will hasten or retard the amelioration of this country. (*Castle Rackrent* 96-97)

Additionally, Sydney Owenson’s *The Wild Irish Girl* develops this encyclopedic idea of providing information for the English audience, together with the necessary acceptance of Ireland as a nation. Thus, Lady Morgan shared the idea that Ireland’s ills had their source in the English domination of the country. Her Irish works reflect the sense of estrangement or alienation that most characters present. For instance, in *The Wild Irish Girl* the hero embodies the liminal position of an English man in love with Ireland and its people. He defines himself in terms of being estranged from himself (117). The novel will show how making amends to Ireland —by both showing respect and devolution of what the country had been deprived of— is the necessary way to live in peace both for the

colonizers and colonized. However, it would be argued that the way of healing injuries for the Irish people's suffering can cause disappointment since the novel ends with a marriage between a reformed English absentee landowner and an Irish princess, and not accepting Irish values per se (MacCarthy, "Lady Morgan and William Carleton" 123). It could also be contended that the novel message is a hybrid one, in which a negotiated meaning has to be extracted from the different views of the colonizers and the colonized, thus producing a "third space" in which the resulting meaning is most productive when it is most ambivalent (Bhabha 10). Thus, the novel may be interpreted by means of a new affiliation of an English character who embraces Ireland and its culture.

Maria Edgeworth and Sydney Owenson, as direct inheritors of the Enlightenment, try to place Irish culture in its due place, tracing the origins of the country on equal terms with other cultures in Europe, and communicating it to their English or Irish readers. In order to do that, they connect Irish culture with the Greek classic tradition. This would be followed a century later by Joyce. One of the key elements to understand from the beginning of the novel the behaviour of the character that ultimately expels the master from the big house in *Castle Rackrent* is to analyze the symbolic value of his name, Jason. It stands for the Greek mythological leader of the Argonauts who comes to claim his kingdom, which had been usurped by his uncle, in a Hamletian way. Thus, devolution of usurped land becomes a key issue in the text, and that is the reason why Thady –who as a servant is supposed to be loyal to his master– can neither blame his son Jason nor justify his attitude: "Well, I was never so put into my life between (these womens [sic]), and my son and my master, and all I felt and thought just now, I could not upon my conscience tell which was the wrong from the right. So I said not a word more..." (93)

One of the first issues in *Ulysses* is the intention to make something for Ireland, and the way devised is that of Hellenising the country, of connecting it with classical Greek knowledge (*U* 1.193). Likewise, this Orientalism tendency already present in William Butler Yeats was pervasive in other nineteenth-century Irish writers. According to the classic historians Herodotus and Strabo, and to the *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* or *The Book of the Taking of Ireland*, dated in the eleventh century, the Irish people descend from the Scythians, particularly from the Amergyans, who come to Ireland from Eastern Scythia through Europe, namely through the Iberian Peninsula. Thus, Irish writers try to find the loose link of their origins, and take from the country's collective imagination the idea of being connected to a cultivated antique culture other than the English, the Greek culture being their inspirational shrine. In *Castle Rackrent*, Edgeworth tries to connect the habits of the Irish with antique Irish traditions, in the line of giving value to Antiquarianism, although they are not directly connected to Greek mores. Likewise, in *The Wild Irish Girl* the interest for Irish and European traditions and cultures, both ancient and modern, is present from the very beginning of the novel: "[...] will do what I can to satisfy your antiquarian taste; and would take your advice, and study the Irish language

[...]— but, alas! ‘Se percaso a me stesso qualche acquisto/ Farò mai che mi piaccia.’ [Torquato Tasso]” (*The Wild Irish Girl* 25). Moreover, the equation of ancient Irish traditions and those of classical Greece is pervasive through the novel, as the heroine —Lady Glorvina— is said to be a direct descendant of “the true Milesians, bred and born, every mother’s soul of them” (*Wild* 28), and she impersonates the future of Ireland as a princess who is proud of her country, plays the harp, and has also been educated in classic languages.

Lady Morgan situates this aspect in the novel within the natural origin of the Irish, descendants of the Milesians, that is,

from Mil Spaine, whose stock originally came from the Mediterranean (Phoenicians) according to the novel (78). In it, there can be found open discussions about the nature of the Irish inhabitants and colonialism, in which the Irish may be depicted either as “a degenerate race” for whom there is no redemption (175) or as “a free, a great, a polished, and an enlightened people” (176). The inhabitants of the island are described in terms of their original filiation, being either “a true Milesian” or “a descendant of the *English Irish*” (emphasis in the text, 109) also referred to in terms of “we hear nothing of them till the wars of Cromwell” (110). As mentioned above, several characters in *Ulysses* define themselves as hyperborean (*U* 1.108-14), that is, of Celtic ethnicity connected for some with the Scythians. The same filiation is claimed by Sydney Owenson’s characters in *The Wild Irish Girl*, in this case –as in Greek legend– connected to Apollo, as he is believed to have spent his winter amongst the Hyperboreans, the inhabitants of a place beyond the Northern wind

“What then,” said I, “have you, like the Greeks, the festival of the spring among you?”

“It is certain,” said the priest, “that the ancient Irish sacrificed on the *first of May to Beal*, or the Sun; and that day, even in this period, is called *Beal*.”

“By this idolatry to the God of Light and Song,” said I, “one would almost suppose that Apollo was the tutelary deity of your Island.”

“Why,” returned he, ‘Hecatæus tells us that the **Hyperborean** Island was dedicated to Apollo, and that most of its inhabitants were either priests or bards, and I suppose you are not

ignorant that we claim the honour of being these happy **Hyperboreans**, which were believed by many to be a fabulous nation.

“And if the peculiar favour of the God of Poetry and Song may be esteemed a sufficient proof, it is certain that our claims are not weak; for surely no nation under Heaven was ever more enthusiastically attached to poetry and music than the Irish [...]” (*Wild* 133). (Boldface added)

Thus, in the novel, Irish traditions such as the festival of spring (133), the evil eye (123), ceremonies related to death (182), or enthusiasm for poesy and song (205) are directly connected to the traditions of classical Greece: “‘And most probably was brought hither,’ said the priest, ‘from Greece by our Phoenician progenitors; for we learn from Athenaeus, that the young Greeks hung garlands on the doors of their favourite mistresses on the first of May; nor indeed does the Roman *storalia* differ in any respect from ours’” (*Wild* 140). The same occurs with the adoration of fountains and wells, attributed to antique mythologies touching very closely on that of the Greeks and connecting it with the Hygeia, goddess of good health, cleanliness and sanitation usually represented feeding a large snake: “[...] The ancient Irish, like the Greeks, were religiously attached to the consecrated fountain; and our early missionaries, discovering the fondness of the natives for these sanctified springs, artfully averted the course of their superstitious faith, and dedicated them to Christian saints.” (*Wild* 149-50). The relationship between these two distant cultures is so strongly emphasized in this novel that contemporary Irish mores are also related to those existing in modern Greece: “It is certain, that the habit of confirming

every assertion with an oath is as prevalent among the Irish as it *was* among the ancient, and *is* among the modern Greeks [...]” (*Wild* 113, 123, emphasis in the original). Another aspect that may antedate Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* is the definition and exploration of Irish wakes both in *Castle Rackrent* and *The Wild Irish Girl*. It is defined in dual terms, both as “the season of lamentation and sorrow, and of feasting and amusement” (*Wild* 183), “In Ireland a wake is a midnight meeting, held professedly for the indulgence of holy sorrow, but usually it is converted into orgies of unholy joy” (*Castle* 113). It is always tinged with a negative connotation –as it is an Irish funeral-, but also positive since it is a meeting in which people get together, exchange information, sing and drink. Thus, a wake becomes a time or a state in which people revise their lives with mixed feelings, as it occurs in Joyce’s novel. Thenceforth, the relationship between Irish and Greek traditions, a path later trodden by James Joyce in *Ulysses*, in that he conceived his enlightened, defeated, homeless Irish hero travelling towards Ithaca, and undergoing different episodic adventures following its classical Greek model, Homer’s *Odyssey*, is a trace of his female predecessors who had trodden the same path a century before him.

One issue in which these writers may also share a common view is that regarding the role of women in men’s redemption, and subsequently making the future of the country possible. *The Wild Irish Girl* is a novel in letter form with male epistles from the only existing correspondent. As a consequence, a male conscience is perceived through the novel. However, the novel presents women as active agents not only in menial work or working in the fields and bogs out of poverty (187), but in all activities including acting as druids as well as men (139). As the plot progresses, the initial misogynous opinions against all women evolve progressively by means of an infatuation with the heroine, in tune with the Romantic

vogue characteristic of the period in which the novel was produced: “For, to think well of *her*, is a positive indulgence to my philanthropy, after having thought so ill of her sex” (112). Therefore, Glorvina is seen in the novel as a princess that would represent the future of the country joining both passion and duty in the new Ireland to be constructed in the future. Thus, love redeems mankind and the country, as she embodies the future of the nation in her capacity of true Milesian princess. As a result, nation and gender become joint issues as it is the woman the one who provides the redemption of the country, while the misogynous colonial male is to be refined and taught by the rural Irish heroine

But the fact is, I begin to fear that I have imported into the shades of Inismore some of my London presumption; and that, after all, I know as little of this charming *sport of Nature* as when I first beheld her. Possibly my perceptions have become as sophisticated as the objects to whom they have hitherto been directed; and want of refinement and subtlety to enter into all the delicate *minutiae* of her superior and original character, which is at once both *natural* and *national* (Wild 112, emphasis in the text).

She is defined as both virtuous and having a genius, whilst the man –presumably due to the conqueror’s vices, as he represents the metropolis– lacks the necessary vision to contribute to the salvation of the race. From a thematic point of view, these texts represent very clearly Spivak’s concept of the subaltern in literary discourse (1998), some of the Irish dispossessed try to represent themselves, and construct another discursive world in Foucault’s terms, trying to give voice to the silenced native

speech of the Irish poor population. Following Declan Kiberd (1995) these female predecessors of James Joyce are inventing Ireland in that their discourse constructs different possible worlds, as well as constitute an alternative canon for the Irish novel. Thus, both Edgeworth and Owenson antedate Joyce in their treatment of gender issues. These women writers represent active women who are self-possessed, and who present new gender roles for female characters. A case in point is *Castle Rackrent*. In it different women appear in subaltern positions. One of them is Lady Rackrent, who is presented as a Jew, who suffers xenophobia as well as misogyny, and is described as a “heretic Blackamore” (16). As she is a non-conformist in terms of religion and keeps her fortune in diamonds for herself, her husband has her closed in the attic for seven years, thus antedating *Jane Eyre*, published forty seven years later. She is equated to Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice*, who had escaped from her family in order to be free, married for love and became a slave. Another character who uses her sexuality in a rather free manner, as men do in the text, is Judy, taking advantage of whatever the master can offer her. The presence of a female Jew in Edgeworth’s novel may also be considered an epitome of the outcast, later chosen by Joyce for both Leopold and Molly Bloom. Edgeworth resorts to irony in order to transmit the suffering of the woman and the double standard suffered by those in distress

But to return to my lady.- She got surprisingly well after my master’s decease. No sooner was it known for certain that he was dead, than all the gentlemen within twenty miles of us came in a body as it were, to set my lady at liberty, and to protest against her confinement, which they now for the first time understood was against her own consent. The ladies too were as attentive as

possible, striving who should be foremost with their morning visits; and they that saw the diamonds spoke very handsomely of them, but thought it a pity they were not bestowed, if it had so pleased God, upon a lady who would have become them better (*Castle* 35)

These two female writers antedate James Joyce in their early use of various literary techniques later exploited by the author of *Ulysses*. While Maria Edgeworth presents an early use of interior monologue, which can also be traced in Sydney Owenson, the latter is particularly relevant due to the use of literary allusions, her highly conscious style that includes polyglottal terms and various linguistic registers, both in the texts and in the explanatory notes. As far as the interior monologue is concerned the character of Thady is a case in point, as there can be found different examples of the use of this technique. For instance, in the following excerpt in which he ponders on his master's business, and how he manages it, he makes a statement regarding his extraordinary abilities and – immediately after– his serious economic difficulties are described. This is done with a parodic intention, in which the sentence referring to his legal knowledge has to be understood ironically:

He was a very learned man in the law, and had the character of it; but how it was I can't tell, these suits that he carried cost him a power of money –in the end he sold some hundreds a year of the family estate– **but he was a very learned man in the law**, and I know nothing of the matter except having a great regard for the family. (*Castle* 16, emphasis added)

A second example is provided to the reader when referring to his son's business, and his legal activities by means of which his master will end up with no property at all in the big house. The interesting point here is how he tells about it indirectly, barely allowing himself to think what he cannot help thinking, i.e., that we are before a process of devolution, that the servant's family is dispossessing the master of all his landed property

The house and living in London too was not to be had for nothing, and my son Jason said Sir Condy must soon be looking out for a new agent, for I've done my part and can do no more –if my lady had the bank of Ireland to spend, it would go all in one winter, and Sir Condy would never gainsay her, though he does not care the rind of a lemon for her all the while. (62)

The same type of technique can be found repeatedly interspersed with parody, emphasized by the use of an idiolect according to the social extraction and country of origin of the servant. The following quotations refer to situations suffered especially by the Irish due to the famine, i.e. absence of food, and death, whose dark effects are psychologically sublimated by means of humour

I must say for her she made him the best of wives, being a very notable stirring woman, and looking close to every thing. But I always suspected she had Scotch blood in her veins, any thing else I could have looked over in her from a regard to the family. She was a strict observer for self and servants of Lent, and all Fast days, but not holidays. (*Castle* 12-13)

He was very sanguine about that suit with the Nugents of Carrickashaughlin. He would have gained it, they say, for certain, had it pleased Heaven to have spared him to us, and it would have been at the least a plump two thousand a year in his way; [...] He was a great speaker, with a powerful voice; **but his last speech was not in the courts at all.** (*Castle* 16-17)

Thus, traditional Irish humour is presented in Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* as an intrinsic feature of the native Irish population as descendants from the Milesians (121), a pervasive characteristic both in Edgeworth's works, particularly in *Castle Rackrent*, and in Joyce's texts.

For Joyce, as for Edgeworth and Owenson in their national tales, novel writing was a means to an end, they were creating a new species of writing in which heroes –and heroines– could domesticate the epic adventure of creating a novel literary canon for a Celtic country, which did not have one. The task was made by means of an antiquarian, encyclopedic, enlightened prose which would resort to parody, as great novelists had done from Cervantes onwards, and which would re-create fictionally the roots and traditions of a new Ireland by ascribing it to a cultivated, independent, classical origin. The early use of techniques, such as the interior monologue and the use of the language of a character even when describing him, by both Edgeworth and Owenson, were to be exploited later by high Modernism, and by Joyce in particular. The significance of these texts lies in their ambivalent nature and their meaning is derived from the conflicting voices that provide different and complementary interpretations of their messages. Thus, the emergence of a subaltern culture that looks for a literary affiliation, independent from the colonial metropolis, is brought about in

the nineteenth century by two women writers who built the foundations for twentieth-century novel writing in Ireland, and whom James Joyce's texts show he was directly or indirectly indebted to.

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Note

¹ This research has been carried out within the funded project of the Spanish government FFI-2012-35872, which is hereby gratefully acknowledged.