

Tsvetelina PETKOVA

St Cyril and St Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo

Representing Woman as Nation in Two Novels by Sydney Owenson

Abstract

This paper discusses the woman-as-nation motif in two novels by Sydney Owenson, *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) and *Woman, or Ida of Athens* (1809), and aims to provide insights that may further the analysis of how modern Irish and Greek identities are shaped through gender representations. Attention focuses on the literary strategy of improvisation and its use in the portrayal of the novels' central female characters. It is contended that the novels' idealized feminized representations of Greekness and Irishness seek to highlight the disparity between the ancient splendour and the contemporary decline of the Greeks and the Irish, along with their cultures, while also addressing biased Western European views and promoting the emancipation of these nations.

Keywords: Sydney Owenson, Ireland, Greece, national identity, woman-as-nation, feminism, orality, improvisation.

I am a daughter of that land,
Where the poet's lip and the painter's hand
Are most divine, —where the earth and sky,
Are picture both and poetry—
I am of Florence.¹

Contemporary literary scholars have demonstrated that certain voices within Romanticism articulated the concerns of marginalized groups inside European and other societies and championed independence for oppressed nations (see, among others, Dawson 2010: 56–81). A defining aspect of the Romantic era in Europe was the construction of national identities. This is adeptly portrayed in literary works that examine political ethics and the safeguarding of land and culture, while maintaining a profound connection to history. And indeed, in the age of revolutions and nation-building, Sydney Owenson, along with other Anglo-Irish writers of the time, crafted versatile female characters who, by transmitting ancient traditions, become influential figures embodying oppressed nations that long for cultural recognition

¹ Quotation from the opening lines of Letitia Elizabeth Landon's poem *The Improvisatrice*.

and political sovereignty. For instance, through the character of Glorvina O'Melville in *The Wild Irish Girl*, Owenson presents a feminine portrait of the Irish nation and re-envisioned the union with Britain as a harmonious marriage based on love, cultural appreciation, and religious tolerance, which somewhat resonates with Mary Wollstonecraft's vision of "a marriage based on mutual respect, self-esteem, affection and compatibility" (Mellor 1993: 34). Similarly, in *Woman, or Ida of Athens* (henceforward referred to as *Woman*), Owenson engages with the discourse of Hellenism. Developing a character like Ida Rosemeli, she characterizes Greece as feminine, thus referencing its ancient designation of Hellas and correlating her text with numerous representations of the oppressed Greek nation as a suffering woman.

The significance of these insights in an Irish and Greek context can be established, in part, by acknowledging the momentous changes that happened on the political scene in Ireland and Greece around the turn of the nineteenth century. During the eighteenth century in Ireland, a succession of insurrections cultivated the stereotype of the rebellious Celt, regarded as a menace to the British administration and an impediment to the empire's territorial growth. The British perception of the Irish as savages was further reinforced by the 1789 United Irishmen Rebellion. This event, coupled with ongoing resistance to British rule, solidified the image of the Irish as a rebellious and dangerous people. The passing of the Act of Union (1800) – enacted as a response to the feared rising in the aftermath of the 1789 rebellion – formally opened a new chapter in the history of Anglo-Irish relations. The first major change was the dissolution of the Irish Parliament. Despite the promise of equal rights, the Union's primary concern was to integrate Ireland into Britain with the aim of obliterating all aspects of Irishness by establishing legal forms and regulations. In other words, the Kingdom of Ireland ceased to exist (Campbell 1988:14–15).

It is without doubt that the events surrounding the establishment of the Union and their aftermath, along with what Ina Ferris defines as a "continuing sense of unrest" (Ferris 2004: 21), sparked debates and controversy among members of the Irish and British societies. The Union, fragile, imperfect, and provoking unrest, was not just a political event but also a cultural and symbolic one. Insofar as it aimed to establish strong political and economic ties, it remained unstable both structurally and ideologically. In this sense, Ferris rightly observes, "[f]rom the start, then, the Union was an unstable and incomplete moment – indeed the motif of 'incomplete Union' became something of a mantra in the period" (Ferris 2004: 6). As a result, the increasing apprehension regarding national matters led to the emergence of a new literary genre, the national tale, which predominantly concentrated on the precarious and ambiguous relationship between Great Britain and Ireland, aiming to propose solutions to the escalating unrest stemming from the vanishing Irish identity. A prominent feature of the national narrative is the extensive utilisation of footnotes elucidating many aspects of Ireland. The premise was that the English audience would possess minimal knowledge of Ireland, necessitating comprehensive elucidations of its history, geography, and even botany.

Sydney Owenson was one of the writers who successfully blended the Union rhetoric into her Irish national tales. The utilization of gendered imagery, namely depicting Ireland as feminine, captivated Owenson's readers, reflecting the prevalent English opinion of the country as fragile and requiring protection or control by a dominant, masculine Britain. Mathew Arnold and other scholars have pointed out that the portrayal of the Irish as savage, weak, and inherently feminine became a recurrent motif in the travel narratives of British and Anglo-Irish writers of the day (see Arnold 1976: 86). Evidently, in her best-known novel, *The Wild Irish Girl*, which is the subject of this paper, Owenson adopts and adapts the concept of national character in order to introduce a powerful female figure to address prevalent English preconceptions and biases about Irish identity through a compelling and imaginative reinterpretation of Ireland's alliance with Britain as an allegorical marriage. In both *The Wild Irish Girl* and *Woman*, the female body representing the nation serves as the primary means through which a reconciliation between the representatives of two different nations is meticulously enacted and achieved.

In the introductory chapter to *Theorizing Ireland*, Claire Connolly reminds us that "Ireland has long been imagined in terms as female images: Mother Ireland, wild Irish girl, gentle colleen, old hag, wise woman. These have served to elicit both sexual and national desire, spurring Irish men on to activity on behalf of the nation" (Connolly 2003: 3). In *The Wild Irish Girl*, Owenson constructs a national heroine who embodies rationality, thereby aligning with Mary Wollstonecraft's idea of womanhood. Glorvina O'Melville is portrayed as an embodiment of idealized traits of Irishness: she's beautiful, well-read, fluent in Irish, Greek and English, and possesses a musical talent. Her nobility is apparent in the initial description presented in the text: "I cannot tell you what Lady Glorvina is for she is like nothing upon the face of God's creation but herself" (Owenson 2008).² However, it is the halo of Gaelic Ireland that makes her special. The title itself holds a promise that the novel centres on a female protagonist deeply connected to the Gaelic past, as her name is also Gaelic and means "sweet voice." Furthermore, the phrase "wild Irish" refers to the heroine's Gaelic origin rather than any suggestion of savageness (Campbell 1988: 65).

In the novel, Horatio, the libertine son of an English landlord, is sent to the family estate in Ireland in the hope that he will resume his studies and eventually pursue a legal career. As he journeys through Connaught, he encounters the native Irish. Through his interactions with them, he recognizes that his understanding of Ireland is inaccurate. His perceptions of the country are significantly contested upon encountering Glorvina, who thereafter educates him on diverse aspects of Irish history, culture, and plant life. In doing so, Glorvina serves as a bridge between the Englishman and Irish culture, which Horatio initially dismisses but eventually comes to appreciate and admire as a result of their interactions.

² All quotes from *The Wild Irish Girl* are taken from Owenson, Sydney. *The Wild Irish Girl*. Oxford UP, 2008. EPUB. accessed on an eReader app.

The narrative of *Woman* follows an English traveller, referred to as Lord B, as he explores the ruins and landscapes of Athens, encountering various individuals, including the archon Stamati and the French consul, each contributing a distinct perspective to the story. As the title indicates, the novel centres on a female protagonist of Athenian origin, which, given nineteenth-century perceptions of Greece, categorizes her as an Oriental figure (see Kostova 1997: 13). Scholars have repeatedly drawn attention to the representations of Oriental(ized) women in Romantic writing, Byron's *Turkish Tales* are a prime example. However, Owenson's approach differs from Byron's.

Despite attracting some critical remarks on the authenticity of the representation of Greece and the Greeks,³ *Woman* contributed to the historical evolution of a collective consciousness among Greeks as they endeavoured to forge their modern identity in the nineteenth century. While it is doubtful that Owenson's novel influenced the Greek War of Independence (1821–29), it certainly helped shape some of the modern perceptions of Greekness. Like numerous other Western writers, Owenson was fascinated by ancient Greece and advocated the liberation of modern Greece from foreign domination.

Set in both contemporary Greece and England, the story serves as a platform for revisiting Enlightenment ideas about liberation. In *Woman*, Owenson explores a variety of debatable themes, including the impact of social environment on individual identity, the intersection of sexuality and politics in aristocratic circles, the objectification of women through chivalric traditions, the susceptibility of uneducated women to romantic idealism, and many more. By weaving together philosophical, social, cultural, and historical elements, Owenson's work aimed to contribute to Greek independence, but also critique British policies in post-Union Ireland, introduce feminine perspectives into male-dominated discourses, and present the narrator as a female philosopher – roles previously embodied by Mary Wollstonecraft and Madame de Staël. Owenson's approach of feminizing masculine political discourses situates her writing within what Anne Mellor defines as “feminine” Romanticism. In this line of thinking, many scholars point out a tendency in the texts of women writers to privilege values of the family and community, and the survival of small nations. “Apart from being the guardian of national values,” Kostova writes, “woman could stand for the nation itself. In fact, the gendered (self-) representations of various ‘imagined communities’ and of the geographical terrains they identify with pre-date [modernity]. Throughout their long history, such representations have mostly depended on current privileged conceptions of femininity” (Kostova 1997: 17). On a further note, in *Romanticism and Gender*, Mellor builds on Mary Wollstonecraft's

³ As a matter of fact, Owenson wrote a novel about a modern Greek woman, despite having never been to Greece or encountered a Greek woman. The limitations of her knowledge of Greece and its people produced some inaccuracies which sparked funny comments from those who were more familiar with the region, including Lord Byron and his friend and fellow traveller John Cam Hobhouse.

feminist theories expressed in her revolutionary work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. “The female, both as metaphor and as pronomial gender,” she says, “has a way of reasserting her strength and priority in the unlikeliest of places” (29).

To reach further depth in the interpretation of the woman-as-nation motif it is necessary to consider the oral tradition of improvisation used in the two novels. In *Print and Performance* Angela Esterhammer examines improvisation as a mode of representation employed by poets and fiction writers during the Romantic period, specifically referring to spontaneous artistic creation, particularly the extemporized performance of oral poetry. This form of bardic narration, which she calls “cultural and historical phenomenon”, gained significant popularity across Europe in the 1820s, led by Italian poets known as *improvvisatori* (male) and *improvvisatrici* (female). These performers would create and deliver poetry—or even entire dramatic scenes—on the spot, often based on topics suggested by the audience (Esterhammer 2020: 13-14). The figure of the improviser derives from Italian tradition of publicly performing scenes from history. Initially, these performances were delivered in Latin before transitioning to vernacular Italian. This form of orality thrived during the Renaissance yet endured well beyond, to the extent that such performers were still prevalent in the 1800s. Serena Baiesi aptly describes the literary figure of the Italian *improvvisatore* or *improvvisatrice* as “a hybrid persona: an improvising actor who was often also the author of what he or she was staging, and associated with a prolific genius for both the content and the performance of the recited work of art. The presentation was supposedly spontaneous and melodramatic, and usually consisted of a song accompanied by an instrument: violin, lute or guitar” (Baiesi 2007: 171).

Associations of place can also augment the importance of improvisation. As noted previously, Connaught is the site of Glorvina’s improvisation. It is also a site in which there are signs of ancient history such as ruins. The setting of *The Wild Irish Girl* in rural Connaught points as much to its romantic modernity as to Ireland’s historical past. “For it was Connaught – or to hell”, as Campbell reminds us “that Cromwell banished the last of the Gaelic chiefs, hoping to hold native Ireland as a kind of penal colony” (Campbell 1988: 64). Owenson’s treatment of place explores questions of national character and imperialism through the representation of the land. This is evident in the description provided by the protagonist Horatio who defines himself as an “unknown in a strange country” in the following passage:

I came to Ireland to take views, and seize some of the finest features of its landscapes; that having heard much of the wildly picturesque charms of the north-west coasts, I had penetrated thus far into this remote corner of the province of Connaught; that the uncommon beauty of the views surrounding the castle, and the awful magnificence of its ruins, had arrested my wanderings, and determined me to spend some days in its vicinity: that having attended divine service the preceding evening in the chapel, I continued to wander along the romantic shores of Inismore, and in the adventuring spirit of

my art, had climbed part of the mouldering ruins of the castle, to catch a fine effect of light and shade, produced by the partially-veiled beams of the moon. (Owenson 2008)

The sharp contrast between the exquisite countryside and the decaying castle can be interpreted metaphorically as indicating the imminent demise of Ireland's divine beauty as a result of unjust British rule. Owenson thus politicizes her representation of the landscape and simultaneously imbues it with a sense of the continuity with the past.

In a similar manner, in *Woman* she provides a vivid depiction of the setting in Athens, contrasting the beauty of the remains of ancient architecture with later, much inferior buildings:

[N]arrow streets, ill-built houses, poor churches, mean oratories, gloomy mosques, and dervise convents, were scarcely endured, for the sake of those matchless and beautiful monuments of athenian grandeur and athenian genius with which they were indiscriminately mingled. (Owenson 1809: v. I, 11)

The above quotations testify to Owenson's fascination with the historicity of place. The historical landmarks of Ireland and Greece are rooted in specific sites, regions, or cities, and they establish a cultural consciousness shaped by the continuum of time. Owenson's texts evoke ancient civilizations, demonstrating an understanding for historical significance while simultaneously contributing to the formation of modern identities in Ireland and Greece. Significantly, here female characters embody aspects of the ancient past and this often involves the reactivation of mythic, folkloric, or historical identities. However, this embodiment is *improvisational*, as it adapts the ancient symbol to fit modern nationalist discourse, or to correct the biased perceptions of Irishness and Greekness that prevailed at the time. In her Preface to *Woman*, the author elucidates the reasons for choosing Greece as the novel's setting:

In attempting to delineate the character of woman in the perfection of its natural state, I have chosen her from a country most favourable to those lovely and feminine attributes which interest the feelings of society, contribute to its felicity, refine its pleasures, and command its admiration. A country where the genial influence of climate, the classic interest of scenery, and the sublimity of objects with which it abounds, finely harmonize with that almost innate propensity to physical and moral beauty, that instinctive taste for the fair ideal, and that lively and delicate susceptibility to ardent and tender impressions, which should distinguish the character of woman in its purest and highest state of excellence. (Owenson 1809: v. I, xi-x).

This highly idealized representation of Greece is typical of the early nineteenth century. However, in both novels, it seems that Owenson's antiquarian interest drives her to accentuate the social and political relevance of a national past and a national literature. To achieve this, she makes use of improvisation as a technique for narrating national history. Literary scholars suggest that the female improviser, often marginalized within historical narratives, becomes a site of narrative creativity, where the past is reimagined and reshaped through her embodiment. "Representations of improvisers", as Dana Gooley puts it, "increasingly constructed them as figures on the margins of cultural power [...] and all these characters were represented as virtuous or attractive because of their outsider status" (Gooley 2018:4). The act of improvisation in Owenson's text does not imply randomness but rather an adaptive, performative strategy through which the character negotiates historical silences and reclaims agency. Improvisation in literature often refers to a character's or narrator's spontaneous engagement with historical or cultural material, reshaping it to fit contemporary concerns. In the Preface to her valuable book *Bardic Nationalism*, Katie Trumpener describes the bards in Romantic imagination as living links to an ancient past, their songs preserving histories otherwise lost to written records. As she writes:

Responding in particular to Enlightenment dismissals of Gaelic oral traditions, Irish and Scottish antiquaries reconceive national history and literary history under the sign of the bard. According to their theories, bardic performance binds the nation together across time and across social divides; it reanimates a national landscape made desolate first by conquest and then by modernization, infusing it with historical memory. (Trumpener 1997: xii)

In simple terms, when a female character performs the ancient past, she becomes an improviser, that is, filling gaps in the historical record, challenging dominant narratives, and reclaiming forgotten voices. In her biography of Sydney Owenson, Mary Campbell notes that "[t]he old tradition of epic poems recited by a bard, or a story told by the cottage fire, brought the only form of dramatic experience to the people. In these performances the fine word and its delivery were of the utmost importance [...] In their manipulative eloquence these orators endlessly recounted the history of Ireland [...] playing the heroines of a never ending melodrama" (Campbell 1988: 27).

In line with this, we might infer that Owenson builds on the masculine bardic tradition of Ossian, Owenson to portray Glorvina and Ida as *improvisatrices*. However, the heroines' femininity disrupts the continuity of bardic narration to articulate the representation of the past in a way that engages more forcefully with the present, addressing the past through speech and silence. In the novels under discussion, improvisation is achieved through the narration of national histories. In each text, the author directly relates the arts to cultural development and civilization and appropriates to the individual an intrinsic spirit of liberty that provides a creative impulse.

Furthermore, in both plots, the temporal context reflects on the ancient past while also anticipating modern events. The desire for freedom is shown to be embedded in stories of the past and is thus part of the historical legacies of Greece and Ireland.

The significance of representations of the past in both works is paramount: Owenson's focus on history is central to her depiction of Irishness and Greekness. *The Wild Irish Girl* is replete with references to Gaelic language, music, and mythology, which aim to assert the cultural distinctiveness of Ireland. Glorvina's ability to sing and play the harp is central to her portrayal: "the low wild tremulous voice, which sweetly sighed its soul of melody o'er the harp's responsive chords, was the voice of a *woman!*" (Owenson 2008). The harp holds particular significance in the novel as Owenson treats it as an emblem of Celtic and Gaelic nobility, serving as a powerful marker of Irishness. The harp, as both a physical object and a cultural emblem, becomes a prominent element through which Owenson articulates the richness, dignity, and resilience of Irishness, as evidenced by the following quotation from the novel:

As I now was engaged in examining her harp, I observed that it resembled less any instrument of that kind I had seen, than the drawings of the Davidic lyre in Montfaucon.

[...] this is another collateral proof of the antiquity of its origin, which I never before heard adduced, and which sanctions that universally received tradition among us, by which we learn, that we are indebted to the first Milesian colony that settled here, for this charming instrument, although some modern historians suppose that we obtained it from Scandinavia.'

'And is this, Madam?' said I, 'the original ancient Irish harp?'

'Not exactly, for I have strung it with gut instead of wire, merely for the gratification of my own ear; but it is, however, precisely the same form as that preserved in the Irish university, which belonged to one of the most celebrated of our heroes, Brian Boru; for the warrior and the bard often united in the character of our kings, and they sung the triumphs of those departed chiefs whose feats they emulated [...] you see, that in all which concerns my national music, I speak with national enthusiasm; and much indeed do we stand indebted to the most charming of all the sciences for the eminence it has obtained us; for in music only, do you English allow us poor Irish any superiority; and therefore your King, who made the harp the armorial bearing of Ireland, perpetuated our former musical celebrity beyond the power of time or prejudice to destroy it. (Owenson 2008)

Owenson's emphasis on the harp reflects her commitment to enhancing her readers' awareness of Gaelic heritage. The harp serves as a metonym for Ireland, a nation with a historical and cultural heritage that extends back to ancient times.

The Greek lyre plays a similar part in *Woman*. In the novel's first volume, we encounter an episode in which Ida is given a Turkish guitar and invited to make a performance to display her musical talent. She rejects the guitar and asks for the Greek lyre: "Ida blushed her consciousness of the classical allusion, yet gently repulsed the instrument [...] Ida sent for her lyre. It was a simple instrument, but of sufficient compass to assist the voice with an accompaniment" (Owenson 1809: v. I, 64–65). Later, in the fourth volume, the Greek lyre is mentioned again. Ida, now a celebrity and a respected member of the English society, continues to long for her homeland:

She was surrounded by proficient in musical science, in every respect her superiors; but her song of national sorrow borrowed a charm from her feeling soul, which the heart acknowledged in defiance of the judgment, and her greek lyre, the most limited of instruments, became in her hands the most attractive, merely because it was seen in her hands only. (Owenson 1809: v. IV, 158)

As we see from the above quotes, the harp and the lyre are far more than musical instruments in the two novels. They represent Ireland's and Greece's cultural identities. The passage above might suggest that the lyre functions not only to preserve Ida's connection to Greece but also to accentuate her distinctive exoticism within her adopted country. Owenson, thereby, highlights the special status of her heroine: like Glorvina, Ida is depicted as the custodian of her native culture, embodying the spirit of Greece in its struggle against Ottoman oppression.

Significantly, the novels under discussion bear a resemblance to Madame de Staël's famous novel *Corinne, or Italy* (1807), which has been identified as one of the intertexts of *Woman* (see Sifaki 2008: 70–71). *Corinne* features a female figure who, through improvisation, redefines bardic narration by articulating national history. We may assume that Glorvina and Ida, too, improvise their nations' legacies. In fact, some scholars attribute Owenson's portrayal of improvisation to de Staël's influence. By bringing together Europe's past and present, the French-Swiss writer constructs a sentimental narrative that establishes a complex interaction between the two entities through action and feeling. The quest for national identity, the essence of literary characteristics that distinguish Northern and Southern Europe, and the gendering of the artistic genius are central to *Corinne*. The novel is also an expression of its author's political views.

In *The Wild Irish*, *Woman*, and *Corinne*, the heroines often serve as both conduits and interpreters of history. It could be said that the female body, voice, and experiences function as a site where historical traumas, myths, and ideologies are revisited, often with subversive intention. In his essay *Orality and Improvisation*, Erik Simpson aptly observes:

This figuration, however, needed to be invented. One major shift from antiquarian-inspired representations of male minstrelsy to the proliferation of female minstrels happened in 1806 and 1807 with the publication of *The Wild Irish Girl* by the Irish novelist and poet Sydney Owenson (later Lady Morgan) and *Corinne, or, Italy* by the French-Swiss writer Germaine de Staël. These works set their actions in the past, but it is the recent past: each novel takes place at the end of the eighteenth century. Owenson also domesticates her female minstrelsy by having her heroine, Glorvina, perform only for private gatherings. (Simpson 2018).

Framed in feminist terms, the literary technique of improvisation can also be read as a form of cultural resistance. When a female character reproduces aspects of the past through improvisation, she engages in a dialogue with previous texts and traditions, reinterpreting them from her own perspective. This act challenges patriarchal historiography, which often renders women invisible. In her pronouncements on intertextuality, Julia Kristeva does not explicitly discuss improvisation in the musical or performative sense, however, her reflections provide a framework for understanding improvisation as a dynamic process within language and identity formation. In her influential essay *Women's Time*, she discusses the relationship between femininity and the construction of time as she argues for the importance of recognizing the multiplicity of female experiences and expressions rather than homogenizing the concept of "woman." She writes:

[O]ne cannot speak of Europe or of 'women in Europe' without suggesting the time in which this sociocultural distribution is situated. If it is true that a female sensibility emerged a century ago, the chances are great that by introducing its own notion of time, this sensibility is not in agreement with the idea of an 'eternal Europe' and perhaps not even with that of a 'modern Europe'. Rather, through and with the European past and present, as through and with the ensemble of 'Europe', which is the repository of memory, this sensibility seeks its own trans-European temporality. (Kristeva 1986: 193)

This dialectic can be likened to a form of improvisation, where the fluid, dynamic energies of the semiotic disrupt and interact with the structured, rule-governed symbolic, leading to the creation of new meanings and expressions. In the above quote, Kristeva also approaches indirectly the concept of transposition, which refers to the process of shifting between different signifying systems or modalities. This concept is particularly relevant in the context of intertextuality, where texts reference and transform one another, creating a space for improvisational interplay between meanings. As Kristeva discusses concepts related to identity, gender, and the socio-symbolic contract, which may involve elements of transposition in terms of shifting identities, she points out the complexities of female identity, emphasising

how women's experiences and expressions are influenced by societal structures and historical contexts. It might be assumed that this implies a form of transposition where identities are not static but can shift and evolve based on different societal and cultural influences (see Kristeva 1986: 190–193, 195–197).

Apart from being *improvisatrices*, Glorvina and Ida are both educated and fluent in English. Education and fluency in foreign languages expose them to European influences, which reformulate their perspectives and cultural identities, thereby augmenting the uniqueness of their characters. What is more, proficiency in the foreign language allows them to perform their duties as intercultural mediators and represent their respective cultures to outsiders.

Improvisation is an effective approach for destabilizing temporal boundaries since it blurs the distinction between past and present. Owenson portrays female figures who, in effect, perform the past rather than depict it. At the same time, since they represent oppressed nations, Glorvina and Ida embody both personal and collective historical trauma. Besides, through their respective performances Owenson manages to reclaim narratives of the past from the silences of official history, illustrating how female embodiment can challenge dominating historical frameworks.

The theory of improvisation applied to female characters reflecting aspects of the past demonstrates how literature can challenge historical determinism. This technique reveals that the past is not static or monolithic, but rather fluid, allowing for reinterpretation and critique. Glorvina and Ida embody history as agents of narrative change, challenging established hierarchies and acquiring historical agency.

In conclusion, it should be noted that that the present analysis only skirts the edges of Sydney Owenson's two novels and does not do them justice in terms of their complexity and depth. Consequently, it sets the stage for further discussion to be undertaken in the future. Throughout this text, I tried to demonstrate that the representation of women as symbolic embodiments of their nations could be a powerful narrative strategy. This strategy is evident in the works of other Romantic period authors who chose to examine themes of national identity, cultural legacy, and the quest for independence, such as Byron, Walter Scott, and Thomas Moore, among others. Characters such as Glorvina and Ida exemplify the significant role of women in Romantic nationalist movements, illustrating their capacity to represent the spirit and aspirations of their nations. Finally, the comparison of the Irish and Greek heroines, which was one of my tasks in this paper, underscores the transnational aspects of Sydney Owenson's literary work.

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