

'The Years of the French: The French Revolution as a Spatio-Temporal Event', for a collection entitled *Franco-Irish Connections in Space and Time: Peregrinations and Ruminations*, edited by Eamon Maher and Catherine Maignant, Oxford: Peter Lang, pages 93-116

## **The Year(s) of the French: The French Revolution as a Spatio-Temporal Event**

Intellectual and political connections between Ireland and France have been long-established at all levels of societal, linguistic and cultural interaction. In terms of historical specificity, the French Revolution has been seen as a template for the actions and ideological position of the United Irishmen, whose 1798 rebellion owed a lot, in both form and substance, to the revolution that began in Paris on July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1789. In this chapter, I will look at how the French Revolution travelled to Ireland, and also at how what I term the 'real' of the revolution has, with time, exerted very different effects on the Irish and French public spheres.

In a historical context, Theobald Wolfe Tone, the leader of the 1798 rebellion in Ireland, said that his political position was influenced largely by the French Revolution, which, as he wrote later 'changed in an instant the politics of Ireland', dividing political thinkers from that moment into 'aristocrats and democrats'.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the central socio-political influence of the French Revolution was the libertarian and emancipatory thrust of its informing secular Enlightenment ethic. Enlightenment theories of society and government, embodied in practice by the French Revolution, offered an example of how a seemingly stratified and hierarchical society could be completely changed in accordance with the will of the people. They also offered an ethical demand that alterity, in the shape of the people, be protected by the force of law.

It was through the shaping of this will of the people that the United Irishmen sought to achieve their aims. Drawing again on the example of revolutionary France, the press would be a forum wherein conflicting ideas and ideologies would be debated and mediated in the light of the Kantian *credo* of the Enlightenment, *Sapere Aude*, 'have courage to use your own reason'.<sup>2</sup> That

<sup>1</sup> William Theobald Wolfe Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1826), p.43.

<sup>2</sup> Isaac Kramnick (ed.), *The Portable Enlightenment Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), p.1.

most of the sources of this Enlightenment knowledge came from locations outside Ireland further underpins the cosmopolitan impetus of the United Irishmen, as well as the French connection. To this end, pamphlets, which distilled the writings of Enlightenment thinkers, were distributed among the peasants of the north of Ireland, between 1795 and 1797, and these contained the writings of Godwin, Locke (especially his notion of the implied contract between ruler and ruled), and Paine, along with those of Voltaire and De Volney.<sup>3</sup> The selection of writers distributed and read by the United Irishmen makes for an impressive list of liberal thinkers on social and political issues, and the Francophone origin of so many of these writers further underscores the point: Raynal, Condorcet, Rousseau, Diderot, Sieyès and de Montesquieu.

Print and reading were crucial to the disseminating of such ideas, and the logistics of this enterprise were impressive, with a whole print-based culture set up to broadcast the United Irishmen's agenda. Kevin Whelan cites at least fifty printers in Dublin, thirty four Irish provincial presses and some forty newspapers in print,<sup>4</sup> all of whom were sympathetic to the United Irish cause. The United Irishmen's own paper, *The Northern Star*, a vehicle for the spread of Enlightenment and revolutionary ideals, at its peak sold some 4,200 copies per issue. It is reckoned that, due to collective reading of each copy by at least ten people, the effective readership was some 42,000.<sup>5</sup> Arthur O'Connor enunciated the power of the press to disseminate ideas which, in turn, created an educated social community, and the will for political change, when he asked what had overturned the despotism of France, and answered: 'the Press, by the writings of Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Seyes [*sic*], Raynal, and Condorcet', and he went on to note that it was 'the Press and *The Northern Star*' that illumined 'Belfast, the Athens of Ireland'.<sup>6</sup>

So the ideas of the French Revolution were significant for the United Irishmen, but there was also the prospect of a more practical form of French aid, which arrived on August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1798, in the shape of three French frigates (*Concorde*, *Médée*, and *Franchise*), which sailed into Killala Bay in northwest county Mayo. On board was 'a small French expeditionary force of, according to the embarkation docket, only 1,019 soldiers (80 officers and 939 soldiers) armed with 2,520 muskets,

<sup>3</sup> Kevin Whelan, *The Tree of Liberty: Radicalism, Catholicism and the Construction of Irish Identity 1760 - 1830*, Critical Conditions Series (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), p.63.

<sup>4</sup> Whelan, *Tree of Liberty*, p.63.

<sup>5</sup> Whelan, *Tree of Liberty*, p.66.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur O'Connor, *The Beauties of the Press* (Dublin: Press, 1800), p.34.

under the command of General Jean Joseph Amable Humbert'.<sup>7</sup> After an initial success, this force surrendered on September 23<sup>rd</sup> after defeats at Ballinamuck, on September 8<sup>th</sup>, and at Killala on September 23<sup>rd</sup>. On September 16<sup>th</sup>, James Napper Tandy landed 'with 270 French troops on Rutland Island, off the west coast of county Donegal', but he just issued a proclamation and then sailed back to France. On October 12<sup>th</sup>, a more substantial French invasion force of 2,800 men under General Hardy, arrived in Donegal Bay in a fleet of ten ships commanded by Admiral Jean Baptise Franoise Bompard, but it was defeated by a British fleet under Sir John Warren, and it was after this battle that Wolfe Tone was captured aboard the flagship *Hoche* in Lough Swilly.<sup>8</sup>

While French aid resulted in a military failure, the importance of the French influence on Tone, and on Irish political thought, cannot be underestimated. Tone himself spent over two years living in revolutionary Paris and he met a significant number of important members of the French government. He tells us himself of the importance of the revolution:

I do not look upon the French Revolution as a question subject to the ordinary calculation of politics; it is a thing which is to be; and, as all human experience has verified that the new doctrine ever finally subverts the old; as the Mosaic law subverted idolatry; as Christianity subverted the Jewish dispensation; as the Reformation subverted Popery; so, I am firmly convinced, the doctrine of Republicanism will finally subvert that of Monarchy, and establish a system of just and rational liberty, on the ruins of the thrones of the despots of Europe.<sup>9</sup>

For Tone, the revolution is a paradigm-shift in terms of the way in which the societies of his time were structured, but it would be a mistake to locate this influence purely and simply in the historical past. As Slavoj iek notes, the 'real' effect of the French Revolution is not to be found in the 'immediate reality of the violent events in Paris, but in how this reality appeared to observers and in the hopes thus awakened in them'. He sees the account of what happened in Paris as belonging to the 'temporal dimension of empirical history; the sublime image that generated enthusiasm belongs to Eternity'.<sup>10</sup> And Walter Benjamin makes the parallel point that the true task of Marxist historiography, apropos the French Revolution, is 'to unearth the hidden potentialities (the utopian

<sup>7</sup> Guy Beiner, *Remembering the Year of the French: Irish Folk History and Social Memory* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), p.6.

<sup>8</sup> Beiner, *Remembering the Year of the French*, p.110.

<sup>9</sup> Wolfe Tone, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, vol. 1, p.274.

<sup>10</sup> Slavoj iek, *Defense of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2008), p.15.

emancipatory potentials) which were betrayed in the actuality of revolution and in its final outcome (the rise of utilitarian market capitalism)'.<sup>11</sup>

It was at this level of thought that Francophone influence is to be found in the Irish political *imaginaire*. The whole purpose of the United Irishmen's efforts to educate the populace is underpinned by a belief in the ability of the thinking individual to improve his or her lot, and in the understanding of the equation, later to be codified by Michel Foucault, of power and knowledge. The selection of writers distributed and read by the United Irishmen reinforces the claim that their views on identity were necessarily pluralist – their aim was to broaden the notion of Irishness and to 'abolish the memory of all past dissensions, and to substitute the common name of Irishman, in place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter'.<sup>12</sup>

In terms of the ethics of alterity, the United Irishmen were clearly engaged in a protreptic discourse wherein the other, be that other in the form of outside influences or of different secular and sacred ideological identities, was to be included in the creation of a new definition of Irishness. Ethically, the place of the other in United Irish epistemology was assured and constitutive of their project. The Bastille Day celebrations of July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1791 in Belfast, brought the confluence of French influences to a head, and the decision was taken by a number of Belfast reformers to form a political alliance to seek a representative reformed parliament. The only difficulty here lay in Presbyterian doubts about the ability of Catholics to overcome sectarian bigotry and obedience to Rome. It was with this in mind that Wolfe Tone wrote his pamphlet entitled *An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland*. This pamphlet was probably inspired by the success of Paine's *The Rights of Man*, which, by May 1791, had sold 10,000 copies of the three Dublin editions,<sup>13</sup> and by its attacks on religious intolerance. The main thrust of his argument was that the French Revolution should have demonstrated to all that Catholics were capable of making common cause with a secular movement which was essentially national in character. By referring to the French Legislative Assembly, where Catholics and Protestants sat together, Tone was able to promulgate his view that Catholic alterity must become part of the identity of the United Irish view of Ireland. He made the point that 'Popish bigotry', and obedience to the 'rusty and extinguished thunderbolts of the Vatican', was no more in France, and that by extension, they could be no more in Ireland as well. He went on to state that no serious

<sup>11</sup> Slavoj Žižek *The Parallax View*, Short circuits (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), p.78.

<sup>12</sup> Wolfe Tone, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, vol. 1, p.52.

<sup>13</sup> Marianne Elliot, *Wolfe Tone: Prophet of Irish Independence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p.123.

measure of reform in Ireland could ever be obtained which would not ‘comprehensively embrace Irishmen of all denominations’.<sup>14</sup>

For the United Irishmen, racial and religious criteria of identity were to be eschewed in favour of more legislative and political ones. In 1791, in Belfast, Tone spelled out the necessity of reform, and significantly, reiterated the idea that ‘a cordial union among ALL THE PEOPLE OF Ireland’ [*capitalization original*] would be both a methodological and political necessity as well as a philosophical aim of their society. He went on to add that reform could only work if it was inclusive of ‘*Irishmen* of every religious persuasion’ [*italics original*].<sup>15</sup> For Tone, rights and duties were central to this new sense of Irishness: ‘let every man, rich and poor, possess his rights by equal laws, and be obliged to perform the duties of a citizen.’<sup>16</sup> Despite the mythical euhemerism that Tone underwent at the hands of Patrick Pearse (where he is seen as a god-like saviour of his people), and later more religiously-oriented, salvific versions of republicans, Tone’s movement was firmly centred on civil society. As Napper Tandy aphorised: ‘the object of this institution [the United Irishmen] is to make a United Society of the Irish Nation; to make all Irishmen Citizens, all Citizens Irishmen’.<sup>17</sup> To underscore the secular nature of the movement, which hoped to unite the three religious divisions of Catholicism, Protestantism and Presbyterianism (Dissenters), Tone advocated that ‘we would have no state religion, but let every sect pay their own clergy voluntarily’.<sup>18</sup>

The influence of French thinking is very clear here, and it is part of the intellectual capital of France that philosophy and critique have been central to their notion of society, and that such philosophical thinking is not located in the abstract, but rather at the core of the French public sphere. Travelling spatially across Europe, these seeds would eventually fuel the movement that would give rise to an Irish republic in 1949, albeit a republic which was very different to that envisaged by Tone and Napper Tandy. Far from being a country in the secular image of France, the Irish constitution guaranteed the special position of the Catholic Church, and Irish health, education and social policies were shot-through with Catholic influence at overt and covert levels. I would argue that the reason for this is that the French Revolution in the Irish public sphere became hypertrophied in that it was

<sup>14</sup> Wolfe Tone, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, vol. 1, p.351.

<sup>15</sup> Wolfe Tone, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, vol. 1, pp.367-68.

<sup>16</sup> Wolfe Tone, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, vol. 2, p.297.

<sup>17</sup> James Napper Tandy, *The Northern Star*, December 5th 1791.

<sup>18</sup> Wolfe Tone, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, vol. 2, p.151.

seen as an episode from the past and nothing more. Tone was selected from the synchronic structure of the revolution, and his narrative was reshaped by Pearse and later republicans into that of a salvific and messianistic figure who had an almost mythopoeic status. In what Alison O'Malley-Younger calls his soapbox oration, given at Tone's grave at Bodenstown in 1913,<sup>19</sup> Pearse made this connection overt by saying that he has 'come to one of the holiest places in Ireland; holier even than the place where St Patrick sleeps in Down. Patrick brought us life, but this man died for us. He was the greatest of Irish Nationalists ... we have come to renew our adhesion to the faith of Tone: to express once more our full acceptance of the gospel of Irish Nationalism which he was first to formulate in worldly terms'.<sup>20</sup>

I have deliberately chosen the adjective 'messianistic' as opposed to 'messianic' to describe his position, as I am following the distinction made by Jacques Derrida in this regard. For Derrida, speaking at Villanova University in 1994, the messianic structure is 'a universal structure',<sup>21</sup> which is defined by waiting for the future, by addressing the other as other, and hence, by refusing to base notions of the present and future on a lineal descent from a particular version of the past. He notes that the messianic structure is predicated on a promise, on an expectation that whatever is coming in the future 'has to do with justice'. What he terms the messianistic, on the other hand, is culturally and temporally limited and constrained to the 'determinate figures' of 'Jewish, Christian, or Islamic messianism.' He goes on:

As soon as you reduce the messianic structure to messianism then you are reducing the universality and this has important political consequences. Then you are accrediting one tradition among others, and a notion of an elected people, of a given literal language, a given fundamentalism.<sup>22</sup>

Pearse's version of Tone, which is the hegemonic one in Irish history, consigns Tone and his influence to a specific time and place, and only aspects of Tone's thinking have been allowed to travel; with respect to the ideas and philosophies of the French revolution travelling to Ireland, Pearse's border security is particularly strong.

<sup>19</sup> Alison O'Malley-Younger and John Strachan (eds), *Ireland at War and Peace* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2011), p.3.

<sup>20</sup> P. H. Pearse, *Collected Works of Padraic H. Pearse*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Dublin: Phoenix Publishing, 1917), p.53.

<sup>21</sup> Jacques Derrida and John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, Perspectives in Continental Philosophy (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), p.22.

<sup>22</sup> Derrida, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, p.23.

The result is that in the contemporary Irish public sphere, the revolutionary zeal which Tone embodied in his Franco-Irish alliance against the imperial designs by England has been sadly lacking in the period after the decline of the Celtic Tiger and the bailout by the *troika* of the European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund. In a process of socialising private debt, and placing the onus of repayment on the people as opposed to the institutions, swingeing austerity measures have been brought in; measures which would have the French out in the streets demonstrating, but these have been quiescently accepted by the Irish people. The Irish public sphere has not reacted with anger or outrage at the lack of responsibility or of any form of process which sought accountability from the elite of politicians, bankers and developers. The debts of private banks, some 70 billion euro, have been socialised, and the Irish taxpayer will be paying for this for future generations. I think the reasons for this are precisely related to Derrida's distinction between the messianistic and the messianic. For Irish thinking, guided by the suasive rhetoric of Pearse, Tone's failed rising was a historical fact which has been attenuated narratively in order to fit a salvific republican teleology; for the French public sphere, the revolutionary zeal that saw General Humbert and Admiral Bompard sent to Ireland to help liberate the country from monarchy has remained intact. I would suggest that a messianic view of the French revolution is one that allows Žižek's sense of the real of that event, and Benjamin's utopian perspective, to become operative, not as historical fact but as a philosophical and ideological event, and I am using the term 'event' in a very specific sense, following the work of Alain Badiou. For writers like Badiou and Jacques Rancière, the French Revolution was more than just a happening which can be consigned to the past; rather it was a paradigm shift whose effects can still be felt today. Temporally, the revolution is still a significant aspect of the French public sphere, as debates about its effect and its significance retain traction in French public discourse. It is, I would argue, no accident that both of these cultural thinkers were seminally involved in *les événements* of May 1968. As Kristin Ross notes, in her detailed study of these events: 'May '68 constituted a pivotal if not a founding moment in their intellectual and political trajectories',<sup>23</sup> and I would further argue that May '68 can be seen as an example of how temporally, aspects of the French Revolution have made the journey into the public sphere of France in a way that has been remarkably different from what occurred in Ireland. So when

<sup>23</sup> Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p.7.

Napper Tandy sailed back to France in 1798, he was returning to a country where the Revolution was an event, and leaving a country where it was just a historical occurrence.

It is precisely this distinction that is at issue in Badiou's discussion of François Furet's *Interpreting the French Revolution*, which explains it as the outcome of the 'complexity of the French situation in the late eighteenth century, depriving it of its universal scope'.<sup>24</sup> Furet looked for a 'cooling off' of the interpretations of the Revolution,<sup>25</sup> which for him meant a movement away from the utopian and emancipatory aspects of the narratives of the revolution. To do this, Furet needed to conceptualise the history of the Revolution by beginning 'with a critique of the idea of revolution as experienced and perceived by its actors, and transmitted by their heirs, namely, the idea that it was a radical change and the origin of a new era'.<sup>26</sup> To endorse this view, Furet turned to Tocqueville's *The Old Regime and the Revolution*,<sup>27</sup> whose main thesis was that the Revolution had brought nothing new to France. The Jacobins may have thought that they were creating a new society but they were actually completing the work of the state consolidation of power begun with Richelieu.<sup>28</sup> This is the perspective that attenuates the force of the revolution and allows it to be narrated as just one more in a series of acts that are past and that achieved little in the way of change; it is a perspective which has been operative in the narration of 1798 in an Irish context. At the core of Furet's book is this claim that participants in the revolution had no real understanding of their actions. To rethink the French Revolution, according to Furet, one must first reject the Revolutionaries' perception of their action. One must deny that they knew what they were doing.<sup>29</sup>

For Badiou, on the other hand, the only way that one can truly understand the impact of the event of the Revolution is to look for what he calls its 'truth', and for him, the point from which such a politics of truth can be thought which:

<sup>24</sup> Peter Hallward, *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2004), p.176.

<sup>25</sup> François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.10.

<sup>26</sup> Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, p.14.

<sup>27</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*. Translated by Alan S. Kahan, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>28</sup> Jean-Philippe Deranty, *Jacques Rancière: Key Concepts* (Durham: Acumen, 2010), p.106.

<sup>29</sup> Deranty, *Rancière: Key Concepts*, p.106.

permits, even after the event, the seizure of its truth is that of its actors, and not its spectators. It is through Saint-Just and Robespierre that you enter into this singular truth unleashed by the French Revolution, and on the basis of which you form a knowledge, and not through Kant or François Furet'.<sup>30</sup>

Badiou sees the truth of the French Revolution as an event. This term, which he uses in a specific way, involves a break with the usual, an act or performance which shatters the *habitus* of the norm, and which signifies something new which will reverberate through the socio-cultural sphere. As he puts it, for the process of 'a truth to begin, something must happen', and this happening must break with the normal 'situation of knowledge as such':

It is unpredictable, incalculable. It is beyond what is. I call it an event. A truth thus appears, in its newness, because an eventual supplement interrupts repetition.

For example the appearance, with Aeschylus, of theatrical Tragedy; the irruption, with Galileo, of mathematical physics; an amorous encounter which changes a whole life; the French Revolution of 1792.<sup>31</sup>

For Badiou, the event belongs to the undecidable, to a range of experience which has not yet been fully grasped; it is beyond the calculability of a given situation and it changes the present and the future, and crucially, it brings about a change in the human beings as subjects with whom it comes into contact: 'a subject is what fixes an undecidable event, because he or she takes the chance of deciding upon it.'<sup>32</sup> It is the people involved who identify and call into being the event as such, and this is also true of the French Revolution.

Thus Napper Tandy, as he sailed away from Donegal, on the *Anacréon*, having given an oration in English to a largely Irish-speaking population, did not call into being the event of the Revolution, and his act became a fact of history and never attained the status of an event. The same could be said of Tone's invasion, because after his death it was not his voice but the ventriloquized version of that voice as enunciated by Patrick Pearse that became dominant in the historical present. For Badiou, this is precisely the difference between an event and something that is not an event. In *Being and Event*, he asks what is to be understood by the term 'French Revolution', and goes on to suggest that this term 'forms a one out of everything which makes up its site; that is, France between 1789 and, let's say, 1794', and goes on to mention different elements like the sans-culottes of the

<sup>30</sup> Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics* (London ; New York: Verso, 2005), p.23.

<sup>31</sup> Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return to Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2003), p.62.

<sup>32</sup> Badiou, *Infinite Thought*, p.62.

towns, the members of the Convention, the Jacobin clubs, the guillotine, the effects of the tribunal, the massacres, the English spies, the Vendéans, the theatre, and the *Marseillais*. But he notes the danger of this approach which is that itemising the ‘inventory of all the elements of the site’ may be in danger of causing ‘the one of the event being undone to the point of being no more than the forever infinite numbering of the gestures, things and words that co-existed with it.’<sup>33</sup> For Pearse, the revolution is just another signifier in a broadly mythical and salvific story, as opposed to a truth-making event which would change all of the previous notions of social, political and cultural organisations; it is a link in the chain as opposed to a rupture in that chain. This is the type of interpretation that allows the evental nature of the revolution to be attenuated, in a manner that was aphorised by Louis Antoine de Saint-Just, in 1794 when he said ‘the Revolution is frozen’.<sup>34</sup>

There is a connection to be made here between this notion of the event and the Lacanian real, as mentioned by Žižek earlier, when he spoke of the real of the Revolution, and with Tone, who saw it as not subject to the ordinary calculation of politics but as ‘a thing which is to be,’<sup>35</sup> as something ‘ontologically undecidable’ which is more than just a name. The French Revolution is not one multiple among others, nor is it an accretion or aggregate of a number of acts. As Sam Gillespie observes, it is what unifies these disparate multiplicities under the banner of its occurrence; ‘the event takes these elements and adds something more that exceeds direct presentation’.<sup>36</sup> But because this ‘something more’ is a break with the discourse, an irruption of truth, it cannot be clearly represented. This sense of the unrepresentable in the event is obliquely captured in some of the evental narratives such as the description of how Fauquier-Tinville, on condemning Lavoisier, the creator of modern chemistry, to death, declared ‘the Republic does not need scientists’. Badiou explains this in terms of the revolution as an event by abbreviating them to an imperative: ‘the Republic does not need’. For him, evental politics, ‘when it exists, grounds its own principle regarding the real, and is thus in need of nothing, save itself’.<sup>37</sup> What happens is that a ‘true revolution considers that it has itself created everything it needs, and we should respect this creative absolutism’.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (London: Continuum, 2005), p.180.

<sup>34</sup> Badiou, *The Century*. Translated by Alberto Toscano (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p.104.

<sup>35</sup> Wolfe Tone, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, vol. 1, p.274.

<sup>36</sup> Sam Gillespie, *The Mathematics of Novelty: Badiou’s Minimalist Metaphysics* (Melbourne: Re.Press, 2008), p.111.

<sup>37</sup> Badiou, *The Century*, p.63.

<sup>38</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis* (London: Verso, 2010), p.130.

For Badiou, events such as the revolution give rise to what he calls evental time, and the event proceeds to influence the future in a messianic way. So, while Irish students have been taught the Pearsean version of Wolfe Tone, French students are taught in terms of the maxim inscribed over the front door of every public school: *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, as teachers attempt to understand the revolution, ‘and what it entails, in the field of education. The French revolution is not yet closed. *Aux armes citoyens!* The revolution is not yet over’.<sup>39</sup> It is this sense of connectedness with the revolution as an event that makes it significant through evental time, and it provides a sense of fraternity between those who come after the revolution and those who were involved in it; for Badiou, the truth of the event is that of its participants: it should be sought for or listened to in the living words uttered by Robespierre or Saint-Just, rather than in the detached commentaries produced by Furet and the Thermidorian historians.<sup>40</sup> Badiou uses the term ‘Thermidorian’ to refer to that month in the French Revolutionary Calendar when power and initiative ‘slipped from the hands of the radical vanguard and events started to take a regressive or increasingly counter-revolutionary turn’.<sup>41</sup> This period, covering mid-July to mid-August just after Robespierre’s reign of terror, became a broader term for Badiou, signifying a distinctive form of subjectivity, one based on the cessation of a previous and also always possible revolutionary fervour: ‘thus, the Thermidorian is not just any political conservative, but someone who is saying no to something he or she once encountered, to something he or she once was, or to something he or she once believed’.<sup>42</sup>

I certainly think there is a case to be made for seeing the Irish public sphere as Thermidorian in character, as after the main revolutions, there ensued periods of straitened economic, political, cultural and religious conservatism. The election of 2011, which saw the governing parties electorally annihilated, has been termed a democratic revolution, with the advent of a new government which had a mandate for political and social reform. The two government parties were eviscerated, with Fianna Fáil dropping from 78 seats to 20, while the Green party lost all its TDs. However, this new government proceeded to implement the policies of the old Fianna Fáil one, and also to demonstrate an allegiance to elitism and conservatism by paying their own advisors above the pay-ceilings which they themselves had set, as well as refusing to aggressively investigate the

<sup>39</sup> Oliver Feltham, *Alain Badiou: Live Theory* (London: Continuum, 2008), p.103.

<sup>40</sup> Hallward, *Think Again*, p.95.

<sup>41</sup> Christopher Norris, *Badiou’s Being and Event: A Reader’s Guide* (London: Continuum, 2009), p.156.

<sup>42</sup> Ed Pluth, *Badiou: A Philosophy of the New*, Key Contemporary Thinkers (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), p.2.

financial irregularities that were causal factors in the financial crisis in Ireland. The voices of revolution from the opposition benches have assumed a distinctly Thermidorian tone once ensconced in the government benches in Dáil Éireann, and one could well use the terms of Badiou to describe their attitudes: they wanted the end of the revolution, the reign of corruption, and suffrage for the wealthy alone.<sup>43</sup> There seems to be little evental time in the Irish public sphere and perhaps this is because, unlike France, where revolutionary ideals are still taught, and where the debate, among people like Furet, Badiou and Rancière, is about the significance and effect of the revolution, in Ireland, 1798 and 1916 have been taught more as historical actions and each revolution is seen as part of a grand narrative of postcolonial liberation. Indeed, neither of these has ever been termed a ‘revolution’ *per se*, but rather has been called a ‘rising’, and the nomenclature is significant in that a ‘rising’ seems almost organic and reactive as opposed to a revolution which has an ideology and an intellectual rationale to drive it. In France, the evental time of the revolution still influences the present and future in a messianic sense, whereas in Ireland, the risings are messianistic and seen as in the past.

An example of this ongoing evental influence can be seen in *les événements* of May 1968, events which can be seen to derive from the ideology of the French Revolution, and which was: ‘something that arrives in excess, beyond all calculation, something that displaces people and places, that proposes an entirely new situation for thought’.<sup>44</sup> And I would suggest that the fact that this revolutionary activity has become known as ‘the events’ is no accident. It was something that shaped people’s lives and introduced elements of undecidability into the French public sphere, elements whose effects are still being felt today. Jacques Rancière has recounted that his Althusserian perspective began to crumble when faced with the mass revolt in which 9 million people, without the support of the Party or trade unions, went on strike across France.<sup>45</sup> For Rancière, one of the most important aspects of May ’68 was the overt change in subjective identity that was part of the event (and I am using this term deliberately in the sense indicated by Badiou). Rancière notes that on May 25<sup>th</sup>, Minister of the Interior Christian Fouchet referred to the rioters as *pègre* [riff-raff, scum, the underworld], ‘that crawls up out of the lower depths of Paris and that is truly enraged, that hides behind the students and fights with murderous madness’, and he went on to call on Paris to ‘vomit up

<sup>43</sup> Badiou, *Infinite Thought*, p.144.

<sup>44</sup> Ross, *May ’68 and its Afterlives*, p.26.

<sup>45</sup> Joseph J. Tanke, *Jacques Rancière: An Introduction* (London: Continuum, 2011), p.15.

the *pègre* that dishonors it'. This attempt to criminalise the protests was met by one of the action committees which included Marguerite Duras, Maurice Blanchot, and Dionys Mascolo, who declared that 'we are all rioters, we are all "*la pègre*"'.<sup>46</sup> Here, the eventual nature of the protests is clear as new subjectivities are formed, and the systematic fissure between the workers and the students, between labour and the intellectual paradigm, is voluntarily broken down. This adoption of the signifier *la pègre* transforms its signified: what had been a term of disparagement has become an agent of transformation, one which inserted a chink into the very socio-political structure which used the term in the first place. By embracing the improper name, the name now stands in for a group that is 'not sociologically identifiable'; the *pègre* becomes what Rancière would call an 'impossible identification' as 'political subjects acting in the gap or interval between two identities, neither of which can be assumed'.<sup>47</sup>

One could see an important aspect of this event as the French students revolting against their own societal context, that of bourgeois knowledge. By so doing, they were similarly altering the meaning of the signifier 'student' which, up to then, had been umbilically associated with bourgeois knowledge. For Rancière, one of the core aims was 'to abolish the division of labour that separated intellectual from manual labour'. He tells of how intellectuals 'transformed themselves into manual labourers or professional revolutionaries. They decided to become proletarians (*se prolétarianiser*)',<sup>48</sup> and goes on to see the French Revolution as a seminal force in the conception of communism, which he defines as 'the search for the promise of freedom and equality in the form of a sensory community of common intelligence that would supersede the boundaries separating the various worlds of common experience', and he goes on to locate the writing of the Communist manifesto in the interval between two political revolutions: 'the French Revolution of 1789 and the European revolutions of 1848'.<sup>49</sup> One of the major political legacies of May was to disrupt the boundaries thought to exist between manual and intellectual labour. Rancière's work of the 1970s should be understood as an

<sup>46</sup> Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, p.108.

<sup>47</sup> Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, p.108.

<sup>48</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson*. Translated by Emiliano Battista (London: Continuum, 2011), p.121.

<sup>49</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Translated by Steve Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2010), p.80.

attempt to hold open the possibilities created by the dislodgment of the representational mechanisms through which intellectuals attempted to guide political movements.<sup>50</sup>

But such is the evental nature of the French revolution that this embrace of the proletarian subjectivity has its genesis in the trial of a revolutionary activist in 1832, and ultimately in the French Revolution's sense of equality and fraternity. In *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, Rancière recounts an exemplary dialogue occasioned by the trial of the revolutionary Auguste Blanqui in 1832. Asked by the magistrate to give his profession, Blanqui simply replies: 'proletarian':

The magistrate immediately objects to this response: 'That is not a profession'; thereby setting himself up for copping the accused's immediate response: 'It is the profession of thirty million Frenchmen who live off their labor and who are deprived of political rights.' The judge then agrees to have the court clerk list proletarian as a new 'profession'.<sup>51</sup>

Blanqui gives the word a different meaning: a profession is a profession of faith, a declaration of membership of a collective. For Rancière, this profession of proletarianism should not be confused 'with a social group'. The name 'proletarian' is neither a set of properties, nor a class description. As he paradoxically explains they are the 'class of the uncounted that only exists in the very declaration in which they are counted as those of no account'; what this subjectivity enunciates is 'the simple counting of the uncounted, the difference between an inegalitarian distribution of social bodies and the equality of speaking beings'.<sup>52</sup> This is the real, the utopian core of the French Revolution, a core that can be traced from 1789 through 1832 to 1968 and beyond. A revolution that is driven by notions of inequality is an event and is also something which has the power to transform the conditions of many people living in the contemporary European public sphere.

I would contend that it is the depiction of this real of the revolution that is part of its evental nature, and part of the way in which its effect was felt in Blanqui's responses and indeed in *les événements*. Just as Badiou took issue with the work of Furet in depicting the significance of the French revolution, so too does Jacques Rancière take issue with the work of another historian, the Romantic Jules Michelet, whose work gave voice to the ordinary people as well as those who shaped events. Rancière, while enthusiastic about Michelet's mode of writing, is worried that by speaking

<sup>50</sup> Tanke, *Jacques Rancière*, p.22.

<sup>51</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p.37.

<sup>52</sup> Rancière, *Disagreement*, p.38.

about history in the present tense, he neutralizes what Rancière calls ‘the appearance of the past’.<sup>53</sup> By speaking in maxims, these grammatical bundles of truth, the historian is erasing the speech, the events and the irregularities and singularities of the past. Michelet shows the paperwork of the poor, but in his paraphrases he papers over ‘the democratic disturbance of speech’.<sup>54</sup> While impressed by Michelet’s mastery of ‘anonymous collective speech’, which is supposedly in opposition to the dominant voices of the day’, he takes issue with the fact that this speech is never actually given voice ‘in its own terms’, the speech is seen as a voiceless single voice which does not do justice to the change in subjective enunciation that we have seen to be part of the evental nature of the revolution. While granting the ‘poetico-political’ effect of Michelet’s work, he sees a problem in his presentation of the ‘silent masses (as distinct from the noisy people)’.<sup>55</sup>

The presentation of the revolution as plural, as contentious, and as full of debate is at odds with the messianistic story told by Pearse of how Tone is a type of Christ-like figure who has come to redeem his people. The doubts and many alliances set up by Tone among different members of the French governing and military classes; the plural influences of Enlightenment debate; the contentious nature of how best to set up a new social order; the concerns over the terror; the worries about attempting to fuse Catholic, Protestant and Presbyterian ideologies: these have all been subsumed into a type of what Rancière has termed the silent masses – here it is a silent plurality which has been subsumed into a messianistic teleological narrative which talks of renewing our ‘adhesion to the faith of Tone’ and of expressing acceptance of ‘the gospel of Irish nationalism’ which he was the ‘first to formulate in worthy terms.’<sup>56</sup> There is no sense of any debate or dispute here; Tone is part of the seamless, salvific gospel of Irish nationalism and is carried along in its narrative wake. His revolution, which had strong utopian dimensions which set out to transform the way Ireland was governed and organised, is made to look like a stepping stone in the path of Irish nationalism. Analogies can be seen between what Michelet does for the voices of the revolution and what Pearse does to the voice of Tone; debate and disagreement and plurality are all attenuated into a single narrative which is seen to encompass all difference. Pearse’s narrative could be seen as a

<sup>53</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge*. Translated by Hassan Melehy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p.49.

<sup>54</sup> Rancière, *The Names of History*, p.90.

<sup>55</sup> Peter Hallward, ‘Politics and Aesthetics: An Interview with Jacques Rancière’, in *ANGELAKI: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 8: 2 (2003), pp.191-211 (pp.202-03).

<sup>56</sup> Pearse, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, pp.53-54.

Thermidorian reading of the revolutionary connections of Tone – for Pearse he is Irish and a nationalist and the influences of other philosophical events is not to be part of this narrative. I would suggest that this is a way of enunciating an event which will result in the event being attenuated into a fact of history, into a messianistic occurrence whose influence on the present is lessened considerably.

This is why Rancière is so focused on the mode of narration used by Michelet as he sees it as simplifying the debates that went on around the revolution. For him, the event of the revolution is precisely the series of transforming debates, discussions and altered notions of subjectivity that both create the revolution and are encouraged by the revolution. In this sense, he is close to Badiou's sense of the event of the revolution. For him, the voice of Olympe de Gouges, who famously argued that since women were qualified to mount the scaffold they were also qualified to mount the platform of the Assembly, was just as important as the more mainstream revolutionary voices, as she was redefining the subjectivity of women through the event of the revolution: 'on the scaffold everyone was equal; women were "as men"'. For Rancière, the universality of the death sentence underlined the 'self-evident distinction between political life and domestic life'. Women could therefore 'affirm their rights "as citizens"'.<sup>57</sup> It was through such debates about the roles of subjectivity in evental time that the real of the revolution has travelled temporally through the French public sphere. The narration of the revolutions in France and Ireland has been very different and it is this difference, I would contend, that has shaped the different trajectories of these revolutions in the two countries. In Ireland, revolution is seen as part of a teleology which achieved its aim with the removal of the British in 1922. Thereafter, any form of revolutionary fervour was displaced into orgies of commemoration and messianistic worship at the feet of the dead patriots. For Pearse, it is the grave of Wolfe Tone that has been the object and destination of the pilgrimage, and not the ideas of Tone and the radical ideology and philosophy of the United Irishmen. Debate, discussion and any interrogation of the different philosophies had no part in this narration – in a gospel there can only be one messiah and he cannot be contradicted. The key difference between the ways in which the revolution travels is that in the Irish context, it is one step on a pre-ordained journey; it is interpreted as such and any dissonant aspects are not part of the narration; discussion and disagreement are repressed. Tone is made to fit the template that Pearse has set out and any aspects of his thought that do not fit this template are quietly elided. In Pearse's narrative, patriotism is 'at once a faith and a

<sup>57</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus*, p.57.

service’; it is a faith ‘kindled flaming as if by the miraculous word of God; a faith which is of the same nature as religious faith’.<sup>58</sup> The singulars here are worth noting, as there is a single faith which is revealed by the single word of a single god; there is no room for debate or dissensus in this narrative of Tone. Rather than being the source of new ideas and a possible template for the future, Tone is seen as ‘the greatest of Irish men’ whose grave is now ‘the holiest place in Ireland’, as it must be ‘that the holiest sod of a nation's soil is the sod where the greatest of her dead lies buried’.<sup>59</sup> For Pearse, it is Tone as dead historical fact, as opposed to Tone as an eventual transformer of how a society sees itself and organises itself and looks to the future that is of prime importance. All of his ideas and influences are places in the service of a pre-existing notion of patriotism, a quality that is not defined, but which is seen as all-encompassing and which overwhelms any individual act or idea, and which demands service of its adherents: ‘patriotism needs service as the condition of its authenticity, and it is not sufficient to say “I believe” unless one can say also “I serve”.’<sup>60</sup>

In the French context, the revolution is an event, it is transformative and its legacy is still a site of some contestation. For Badiou, it is an event which has transformed its context and its aftermath and one which is still relevant today, and whose legacy is to be seen in the events of May 1968. Rancière agrees and further sees its importance in setting forth an impossible identification between the people of France in terms of a transformed notion of subjectivity which the revolution enunciates. Oliver Davis terms this as ‘heterologic disidentification’, which involves the idea that political subjectivation always involves an ‘impossible identification’ with a different subject, or with otherness in general, the idea that subjectivation is never the straightforward assertion of identity. Thus in the Algerian war, for the French people the choice was to identify with the Algerian dead or with the French, or notion of France, in whose name they had been killed. This was the impossible identification for Rancière, and one which categorises the post-evental politics of the French Revolution; it can be seen as a consequence of the fraternity and equality that served as transformative signifiers for the action of the people as they attempted to transform the structures of power in their country.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Pearse, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, p.65.

<sup>59</sup> Pearse, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, p.54.

<sup>60</sup> Pearse, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, p.65.

<sup>61</sup> Oliver Davis, *Jacques Rancière Key Contemporary Thinkers* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), p.87.

Rancière sees this identification as embodied in the cries of the May '68 demonstrators crying out: 'We are all German Jews'. This phrase is a good example of the 'heterological mode of political subjectification' as a phrase which has been traditionally used to disenfranchise a community is adopted by a patently different community as a way of transforming the power-dynamics of a situation. This phrase, traditionally used to count out a minority is now transformed and turned into 'the open subjectification of the uncounted, a name that could not possibly be confused with any real social group'.<sup>62</sup> Impossible identifications rely upon tactical, world-opening devices such as this. These declarations create subjectivities that are capable of lifting individuals out of their positions in the police order. Political names are at once poetic and polemical; they outline a shared world, and relate its inhabitants in a manner different from the one to which they are accustomed. Declarations such as 'we are *le père*', or 'we are all German Jews', create political subjects and redraw sensible parameters; it is a way of transforming the group by taking on a new form of subjectivity, and thus by inverting the existing value-system. I would contend that when Tone looks for 'a cordial union among ALL THE PEOPLE' of Ireland, and when he wishes to substitute 'the common name of Irishman' he is engaged in precisely this transformative process of impossible identification and of heterologic disidentification. There is a genuine transformative potential in his desire for an Ireland where religion is voluntary and is neither a help nor a hindrance to advancement. If such a project had been initiated, the history of the country would have been qualitatively different as the religious and sectarian dimensions of Irish life would have been very different. Tone's concept of participant citizenship is also transformative, as he imbricates liberty with rights and duties to the common polis, with reform inclusive of '*Irishmen* of every religious persuasion', and with a rights-based notion of subjective identification: 'let every man, rich and poor, possess his rights by equal laws, and be obliged to perform the duties of a citizen.' Clearly his mode of organising a revolution in Ireland was evental in that it would be transformative of the social sphere and his thinking had clearly gone beyond the 'Brits Out' mentality which has characterised so much of the Irish republican mind-set. I would suggest that Tone's republicanism was as radical and evental as that of the French Revolution, and that his thinking was radical at the level of transforming subjectivity in Ireland from the religious to the secular, as instanced by his use of the term 'sect' to delineate the different religious traditions in Ireland. However, this dimension of his thinking did not travel beyond his own time and instead of

<sup>62</sup> Rancière, *Disagreement*, p.126.

being seen as a messianic radical, he has become a messianistic totem of Irish republicanism whose grave, as opposed to whose ideas, has become the fetishised destination of pilgrimage.

As Rancière has tellingly put it, ‘the same intelligence is at work in all the acts of the human mind.’<sup>63</sup> With this in mind, it would seem that this intelligence, if focused on the evental nature of revolutions and on a sense of the intellectual as someone who is capable of real-world change and engagement, needs to be applied to examining the evental nature of important revolutions in a culture, and to ensuring that revolutions like the French Revolution and *les événements* become templates for the cultural encoding of the emancipatory and egalitarian ideals implicit in, and I use the term deliberately, the attempted revolution of 1798. Only by seeing this as an event and by following through on this transformative potential of creating an egalitarian and secular state where religion is tolerated but is not a constituent of the public sphere, can the Irish public sphere ever come to terms with the possible reals of 1798 and 1916. In all of the contemporary debates on the role of religion in Ireland, I have not once seen any adverting to Tone’s idea that in a Republican constitution there should be a ‘declaration of perfect security and protection to the free exercise of all religions, without distinction or preference, and the perpetual abolition of all ascendancy, or connection, between church and state’.<sup>64</sup>

In the midst of the most severe financial crisis to threaten Ireland, and in the wake of a series of cataclysmic reports on clerical sexual abuse of children in care, there has been no discussion of Tone’s ringing enunciation in 1796 that:

The unnatural union between church and state, which has degraded religion into an engine of policy, will be dissolved. Tythes, the pest of agriculture, will be abolished; the memory of religious dissensions will be lost, when no sect shall have an exclusive right to govern their fellow citizens. Each sect will maintain its own clergy, and no citizen will be disfranchised for worshipping God according to his conscience. To say all in one word, Ireland shall be independent. We shall be a nation, not a province; citizens, not slaves.<sup>65</sup>

These words, apposite in their own time, have a telling relevance in contemporary Ireland, where there is again a sense of slavery to an outside power and where the public sphere has not really confronted this but has repressed it. I think the connections with the evental nature of Badiou’s views

<sup>63</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (California: Stanford University Press, 1991), p.16.

<sup>64</sup> Wolfe Tone, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, vol. 2, p.196.

<sup>65</sup> Wolfe Tone, *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, vol. 2, pp.286-287.

on the revolution, and with Rancière's ideas on reclaiming a sense of subjectivity which is transformative, are crystal clear here, but these aspects of Tone's thought have not travelled temporally in the Irish public sphere. It is clear that his idea of a revolution involved mass engagement with new theories of society and with an on-going sense of the Revolution as an event which would messianically influence the Ireland of the future. It is also clear that his attempts to substitute the 'common name of Irishman' for the different religious divisions in the country constituted a transformation of subjectivity and identity, but again, neither of these perspectives is associated with Tone. As it stands, the Irish public sphere is inhabited by a Thermidorian ideology which is willing to commemorate the historical acts but not to take on and engage with the evental nature of those acts. Because it is in the real of these acts, in the events, that the possibility lies for a 'philosophic or theoretical commitment that would lay claim to real – as opposed to merely notional – world-transformative power.'<sup>66</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Norris, Badiou's Being and Event, p.154.

## **“Close connections: nationalism and artistic expression in the *opere* of Sydney Owenson/Lady Morgan and Augusta Holmes”**

It is noteworthy that, despite the temporal, genre, and stylistic divides that exist between the compositions of Sydney Owenson/Lady Morgan (1776?-1859) and Augusta Holmes (1847-1903),<sup>67</sup> these two creative and remarkable women employ kindred artistic approaches, ones that are calculatedly political and nationalistic, and also clearly feminist. At opposite ends of the nineteenth century, and with their home bases in Ireland and France, Owenson/Morgan and Holmes constitute models of independent, liberal thought and action. With confidence and determination, they assume prominent public profiles, weather virulent critical attack, and craft and disseminate their work. The impact of their personal Hiberno-French links is evident in the *œuvre* of each woman, as is their understanding of history, and the resultant interweaving of nationalism and inspiration evinces distinctive qualities, with some interesting similarities in the word and music messages aimed at disparate audiences.

The influences of French and France on Sydney Owenson were multiple and it is probable that they began with her attendance at Madame Terson’s Huguenot school in Clontarf House on the outskirts of Dublin.<sup>68</sup> As she opines in her memoirs, “the dispersion of the French Huguenots who, for reasons very assignable, settled in Ireland, was one of the greatest boons conferred by the misgovernment of other countries on our own” (*Memoirs*, 106). If that judgment from her adult self relates to the presence in Ireland of “eminent preachers, eminent lawyers, and clever statesmen” (*Memoirs*, 106), it was surely her ability to converse in French and to read French literature which would inflect her political understanding and preferences, and would lead her to France first as a novelistic backdrop, as a source of literary and national models, and later as the subject of one of her

<sup>67</sup> The date of Sydney Owenson’s birth is disputed and several dates have been suggested. Sydney Owenson married in 1812 and henceforth was known as Lady Morgan; Augusta Holmes published some early compositions under the name of Hermann Zenta and later became known in France as Augusta Holmès, officially so when she took out French citizenship in the 1870s, after the Franco-Prussian war.

<sup>68</sup> Lady Morgan mentions that all conversation was in French and she refers to discipline at the school as “founded on that of St Cyr”. Lady Morgan, *Lady Morgan’s Memoirs:Autobiography, Diaries, and Correspondence* (London: Wm. H. Allen & Co., MDCCCLXII), pp.103, 105, 106. All subsequent reference to this text will be to *Memoirs*.

best-selling but most controversial books, *France*. In sum, Owenson's initial voyages to France were in spirit and in theme, and only later, as *Lady Morgan*, were they undertaken in person.

In one of Sydney Owenson's first publications, a 4-volume novel, *The Novice of St. Dominick* (1805), several of what would be seen as her abiding interests and concerns are revealed.<sup>69</sup> The setting is in 16<sup>th</sup>-century France and, very early in the story, the novice hears a Provençal troubadour playing magical music on a harp (*Novice*, 6-10). This heroine, Imogen, is an early version of Owenson's many other female characters, women who are portrayed as capable of analysis and action; disguised as a troubadour, Imogen escapes from enclosure in a convent and ultimately, although only in very protracted *bildungsroman* fashion, she achieves knowledge, position and happiness. In addition to depicting the power of music and the capability of a woman in this tale, Owenson foregrounds the value and virtue of the Provençal people whose culture and language were repressed in France, and thereby intimates similarly undervalued qualities in the subjugated Irish. Whilst Irish connections to France are numerous in her writing, it appears that three elements - music, feminine ability, and national cultures and self-determination – are central to her life and message, and they will appear and reappear many times, and in different circumstances, in her work.

The pursuit of national freedom for Ireland, and demanding respect for a rich Irish culture, underpin the construction of her 'national tales' and, forty years after the first appearance of the most famous 'national tale', she defines those writings as "fictitious narrative, founded on national grievances, and borne out by historic fact"<sup>70</sup> They include *The Wild Irish Girl : a national tale* (1806), and *O'Donnel: a national tale* (1814)<sup>71</sup> in which the protagonist serves in the French army , and *The O'Briens and the O'Flahertys: a national tale* (1827)<sup>72</sup> which features a patriotic hero, a United Irishman who goes to France following the 1798 rising. That latter very successful text was immediately translated into French.<sup>73</sup> It is in her most celebrated publication, *The Wild Irish Girl: a national tale*, that music and nationalism are most prominently linked. In clear response to any and all depictions of the Irish and Ireland as inferior, the text foregrounds the riches of the culture in

<sup>69</sup> Miss Owenson, *The Novice of Saint Dominick*. (London: Richard Philips, 1806. <http://www.archive.org/details/noviceofsaintdom04morg>. Accessed 22 July 2011). All subsequent references to this text will be to *Novice*.

<sup>70</sup> *Lady Morgan*, (1806) *The Wild Irish Girl: a national tale*. (rev. ed., London: Henry Colburn, 1846), p.xxvi. This definition of national tales was not in the original 1806 edition but was given in a new Prefatory Address written by Morgan for the 1846 revised edition of *The Wild Irish Girl*. All subsequent references to this text will be to *WIG*.

<sup>71</sup> *Morgan, Lady, O'Donnel : a national tale* (London : H.Colburn, 1814).

<sup>72</sup> *Morgan, Lady, The O'Briens and the O'Flahertys : a national tale* (London : Henry Colburn, 1827).

<sup>73</sup> *Morgan, Lady, Les O'Brien et les O'Flaherty, ou l'Irlande en 1793, histoire nationale* (Paris : C.Gosselin, 1828).

ancient Ireland and the nobility of its surviving families. Centre-stage in the novel is accorded to Glorvina, a heroine who plays the harp and dances Irish dances. These accomplishments too were those of Sydney Owenson who, by that time, was known as a harpist but who could also play the guitar and piano and had collaborated in a successful operetta, *The Whim of the Moment* (*Memoirs*, 316).<sup>74</sup>

Musical and national interests are also to the fore in *Twelve Original Hibernian Melodies*, published by Owenson in 1805.<sup>75</sup> In that volume, she provided words in English for the melodies, thus setting a model and a template for Thomas Moore whose much more famous *Moore's Irish Melodies* would follow.<sup>76</sup> As she wrote, "I really believe this country to have a music more original, more purely its own, more characteristic, and possessing more the soul of melody than any other country in Europe" (*Memoirs*, 265).<sup>77</sup> One example of her emphasis on the strong communicative power of music in varying circumstances is expressed by the character of the novice, Imogen: "And her harp, whose tones she had taught to imitate the strains of her own awakened feelings, and speak to his heart the impassioned nature of her own" (*Novice*, vol 4, 239). In a different genre, Owenson's aim of giving publicity and wide circulation to a positive image of Ireland, of valorising its musical treasury, and thereby justifying and promoting Ireland's right to independent existence, would continue with a marked French accent in *The Lay of an Irish Harp, or metrical fragments* (1807)<sup>78</sup>. Her Prefatory Sketch to this book of poems has the following lines:

"I believe the French language above any other abounds with those metrical trifles which, as the offspring of minds elegantly gay and intimately associated, have obtained the name of "*vers de société*," and which frequently possess an exquisite finesse of thought, that does not exclude nature, and is most happily adapted to the delicate idiom of the language in which it flows." (*Lay*, viii)

<sup>74</sup> Reference to her collaboration with John Cooke on this operetta is actually part of an editorial comment rather than text written by Morgan. The Lord Lieutenant attended the opening night in 1807. The memoirs also make reference (*Memoirs*, vol. 1: 112) to her musical education with Tommaso Giordani whom Axel Klein identifies as a towering figure in music in Dublin before 1800, and composer of *L'eroe cinese*, the first *opera seria* performed in Ireland. Axel Klein, *Irish Classical Recordings: a discography of Irish Art Music*, (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), p,73. Giordani (1738-1806) is probably best remembered today for his aria 'Caro mio ben'. Cooke was also a student of Giordani.

<sup>75</sup> Miss Owenson, *Twelve Original Hibernian Melodies*, from the Works of the Ancient Irish Bards (London: Preston, 1805).

<sup>76</sup> The first volume of Moore's melodies appeared in 1808.

<sup>77</sup> This statement was made in the course of a letter to Mrs Lefanu, March 28<sup>th</sup> 1806. The letter is reproduced in the memoirs.

<sup>78</sup> Miss Owenson, *The Lay of an Irish Harp; or, Metrical Fragments* (London: Richard Philips, 1807. <http://www.archive.org/details/noviceofsaintdom04morg>. Accessed 22 July 2011). Subsequent reference to this text will be to *Lay*.

She gives French titles to some of her poems, including *La rose flétrie*, (trans. *The Faded Rose*) the second poem in the collection; several are preceded by quotations from Rousseau, Voltaire, Le Jeune and others. Anticipating criticism, Owenson admits “the *too frequent* admission of French quotations” (*Lay*, x) but claims that “the *poetical badiers* of France came “*skipping rank and file*” to my aid, and illustrated MY (LESS felicitous) trifles by theirs, in a language which above every other is constructed: “D'éterniser la bagatelle.” (*Lay*, xi) <sup>79</sup>

It is not clear whether it was the author or publisher who was responsible for affixing the La Fontaine tag “Vrai papillon de Parnasse” to the title page but, in any case, the French –flavoured poetic efforts reflect Morgan’s interest in France. <sup>80</sup> However, not far from the surface is the condition of Ireland, and especially its new inferior status since the Act of Union. The first poem in the collection is ‘The Irish Harp’ and it opens thus:

Why sleeps the harp of Erin’s pride?  
 Why with’ring droops its Shamrock wreath?  
 Why has that song of sweetness died  
 Which Erin’s harp alone can breathe? (*Lay*, 1)

The penultimate stanza in the same poem refers to “the ills that flow/ From dire oppression’s ruthless fang” (*Lay*, 6), and the concluding line is “And *Erin go brach* he boldly sung.” (*Lay*, 7). Its sympathies could not be clearer. In the poem ‘The Irish Jig’, a footnote underlines Irish musical talents with a quotation from the esteemed 18<sup>th</sup>-century dance theorist, Frenchman Jean-Georges Noverre (*Lay*, 140). <sup>81</sup> By adducing this expert opinion, Owenson seeks to further boost the status of Irish native talent and ability. Her poetry is not just illustrative of her personal patriotism, it is designed to stimulate and support that loyalty in others, it is again linked to music for the harp, and it embraces a wider world through its French references. Moreover, it is a public engagement by a

<sup>79</sup> Capital letters and italics are Owenson’s. Owenson uses the phrase “D'éterniser la bagatelle” (trans. ‘to immortalise a mere trifle’) as an epigraph to her poem “The Musical Fly” (*Lay*: 66), crediting the lines “De pouvoir sans nous ennuyer/Éterniser la bagatelle” (trans. ‘to achieve, without tedium/ the immortalisation of a mere trifle’) to De Moustier.

<sup>80</sup> In addition, it has been remarked that there were “innumerable French quotations in her novels in which France bore no relation to the subject, nor exerted any influence” Patrick Rafroidi, *Irish Literature in English, The Romantic Period 1789-1850, Vol I* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1980) p.44. Subsequent references to this text will be to Rafroidi.

<sup>81</sup> Noverre (1727-1810), acquaintance of Mozart, Frederick the Great, Voltaire, David Garrick and others, is still viewed as one of the fathers of ballet. On the Irish, Owenson quotes him as saying, “such a natural and native taste for music as I have spoken of, is usually accompanied by, or includes in it, a similar one for dancing”. (*Lay*, 140).

woman with nationalism and with politics, an intervention accomplished within the ostensibly uncontroversial and apolitical framework of a book of poems.

The range and extent of Owenson/Morgan's focus on French society in the post-Napoleonic period is revealed in her travel book *France* (1817).<sup>82</sup> "In 1816 all doors opened before Lady Morgan" (Rafroidi, 245) but perhaps it was her approval of 'revolutionary' ideas which was rather too apparent and hence the book drew severe criticism from supporters of the British government – the most lengthy and vitriolic assault being delivered by John Wilson Croker in the *Quarterly Review* wherein the political nature of condemnation was writ large, commencing with his comment on the book's title: "it is appropriate to the volume which it introduces, for to falsehood it adds the other qualities of the work, - vagueness, bombast, and affectation".<sup>83</sup> Croker was again on the attack in the *London Literary Gazette* in 1830 following publication of a revised view of France in *France in 1829-30*: "the style is abominable, being no more English than a brindled cow or a Danish dog are white; all is overcharged; and we have to regret the foolish exposure of a naturally clever woman, eaten to the core with the most excessive vanity".<sup>84</sup> The assortment of people with whom Morgan consorted in France is reflective of her strong musical, artistic, political, and feminist interests. When first she went to gather material for the travel book, she was befriended by the Marquise de Villette who arranged that Morgan became a member of the Freemasons, a truly groundbreaking initiation.<sup>85</sup> Later, the Morgans were invited to stay with General La Fayette and his family at La Grange. Evening entertainment at the La Fayette's frequently consisted of the General's stories and those of Lady Morgan, and music by Carbonel.<sup>86</sup> The Dutch painter Ary Scheffer was also there and he painted a portrait of Lady Morgan.<sup>87</sup> The General's reputation as republican and liberal, as well as a

<sup>82</sup> Lady Morgan, *France* (London: H.Colburn, 1817).

<sup>83</sup> John Wilson Croker, review of *France* in *Quarterly Review* Vol XVII of April-July 1817, Art XI. (London: John Murray, 1817). np.

<sup>84</sup> John Wilson Croker, review of *France in 1829-30* in *The London Literary Gazette & Journal of Belles Lettres, Arts, and Sciences &c.* no 712, (London: Saturday 11 September, 1830: 585-589), p.589. The personal and political antipathy of John Wilson Croker had commenced publicly with his scathing review of *Woman, or Ida of Athens* when it first appeared.

<sup>85</sup> The Marquise was 'La Belle et Bonne' of Voltaire; the Adoptive Freemason Lodge at her residence in the Faubourg St. Germain was also called 'La Belle et Bonne' *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry vol 1*, ed. Robert Ingham Clegg, (New York: Masonic History Company, 1909; Kessinger, 1946, <http://books.google.ie/books?id=IU5eE6wBeEC&dq=encyclopedia+of+freemasonry>. Accessed 8 February 2011), p.30.

<sup>86</sup> Lady Morgan would undoubtedly have been interested in Joseph-François-Narcisse Carbonel (1773-1855) who had arranged music for the harp, one such work being Luigi Cherubini's 'Duo des deux Journées' for piano or harp in 1801.

<sup>87</sup> He produced a portrait of General Lafayette at the same time. Scheffer's art was much admired in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century and his portrait of Charles Dickens (1856) is in the National Portrait Gallery, London.

distinguished military man who had participated in the final victory over the English in Virginia, would not have endeared him to the government in Dublin. It could be said that Morgan's 'travel' volume linked the social improvements in France to the Revolution, that it outlined the French class and gender structures, and that it suggested potential political parallels for Ireland. However, the book is also a record of her contacts with leading literary, scientific and political figures, especially in Paris in 1816-17. On her various visits between 1816 and 1829, she mentions encounters and soirées with Merimée, Beyle, Dumas, Tolstoy, Stendhal, Rossini, David and many others.<sup>88</sup> The style of her writing is effusive and, to the modern reader, affected and excessively verbose – but hostile reception of the text by Tory Britain is indicative both of its contemporary daring and of its appeal for some Irish nationalists, and thence of its political sensitivity, given the perceived danger of French (and Irish) rebellions. It must also be remembered that Lady Morgan's sympathies were known for many years. As early as 1809, she had published *Woman, or Ida of Athens*, a novel set at the time of Turkey's subjugation of Greece; despite no explicit connection to Ireland's situation, the analogous position was patent, and the favourable presentation of Ida's involvement in efforts to free Greece could leave one in no doubt about the author's nationalist leanings, not to speak of her feminist ones.<sup>89</sup> Around the time *France in 1829-30* was published, it was reported that the Morgan's house at No. 35 Kildare Street<sup>90</sup> was under surveillance by government agents because it was considered a meeting place for liberal sympathisers with revolutionary politics. In the light of Morgan's writings and contacts, this was not surprising.<sup>91</sup> However, the danger posed by the situation was one of the factors that led the Morgans to leave Ireland in the 1830s.

Morgan's foregrounding of the ability of women, and of their engagement with their own national interests, was not confined to the three novels already mentioned. The difficulties of another small nation are mentioned in *The Missionary: an Indian Tale* (1811)<sup>92</sup> where there is reference to

<sup>88</sup> Patrick Rafroidi judges that Morgan's writings on France "rendered this country the notable service of freeing it from the ostracism to which Burke and the conservatives had condemned it" (Rafroidi, 44)

<sup>89</sup> Miss Owenson, *Woman, or Ida of Athens* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees & Orme, 1809).

<sup>90</sup> Now number 39, where a blue plaque on the building commemorates Lady Morgan and her time there.

<sup>91</sup> Morgan's *Italy* (1821) seemed to present itself, to some extent, as a travel book but her political views were, once again, much in evidence. *Italy* was banned by the Austrian Emperor and the papal powers on account of the author's multiple references to oppression by those and other powers. Lady Morgan, *Italy* (London: H.Colburn, 1821. [http://www.archive.org/stream/italymorgan03morgiala/italymorgan\\_djvu.txt](http://www.archive.org/stream/italymorgan03morgiala/italymorgan_djvu.txt). Accessed 27 July 2011).

<sup>92</sup> Miss Owenson, *The Missionary: an Indian Tale* (London: J.J. Stockdale, 1811).

the plight of Portugal at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>93</sup> Marguerite, the central character in *The Princess, or the Béguine* (1835)<sup>94</sup> takes very active part in working for her country, Belgium, at a crucial juncture in its history in the early 1830s. The intention and import of referring to the positions of Belgium and Portugal vis-à-vis their more powerful neighbours would seem to be an obvious invitation to discussion of the comparable situation of Ireland.<sup>95</sup> However, in her magnum opus, *Woman and her Master* (1840),<sup>96</sup> Morgan takes a direct historical route, rather than the novelistic one. No longer does she use the three-volume fictional approach to deliver a lesson that might be missed, no longer does she provide women in disguise or women on long learning curves as she sets out the case for the beneficial effects of political participation by women in their various countries. The cases she adduces range far and wide and start with biblical and ancient history, with examples including the successful rules of Deborah and of Nicaulis, Queen of Sheba, as recorded in scripture (*WHM*, 48; *WHM*, 74-76); the triumphs of Agrippina (*WHM*, 180-182) and Plotina (*WHM*, 214-216) in Rome and of Boadicea in Britain (*WHM*, 200-201), and of Helena, mother of Constantine (*WHM*, 301-304). Her argument might be summarised in the quotation (given in French!) from Plato's *de Republica*, and which she places as an initial epigraph to the work:

Ce sexe, que nous bornons à des emplois obscurs et domestiques, ne serait-il destiné à des fonctions plus nobles et plus relevées ? N'a-t-il pas donné des exemples de courage, de sagesse, de progrès dans toutes les vertus et dans tous les arts ? [ . . . ] s'ensuit-il qu'ils doivent être inutile à la patrie ? Non, la nature ne dispense aucun talent pour le rendre stérile (*WHM*, 1)

(trans. Could not this sex, which we restrict to lowly and domestic tasks, be destined for more noble and elevated office? Have they not given proof of courage, wisdom, of being advanced in all virtues and arts? does it follow that they must be useless to the country? No, nature does not bestow a talent for it to be left unused)

The projection and encouragement of nationalist or republican ambition, the representation of music as a particular badge of Irish identity, the obvious affinity with French literature and political example,

<sup>93</sup> This is far from being the main message of the novel but, given its minor relevance, the tangential mention is all the more important in terms of underlining the author's preoccupations.

<sup>94</sup> Lady Morgan, *The Princess, or the Béguine* (London: Bentley, 1835).

<sup>95</sup> I share the view of Raphael Ingelbien on Morgan's continuing involvement with the situation in Ireland after 1830. Raphael Ingelbien, "Paradoxes of National Liberation: Lady Morgan, O'Connellism and the Belgian Revolution" in *Éire/Ireland*, Vol. 42, 3 & 4, Fómhar/Geimhreadh / Fall/Winter 2007. (pp.104-125).

<sup>96</sup> Lady Morgan, *Lady, Woman and Her Master*. (Paris: A. & W. Galignani, 1840). Subsequent references to this text will be to *WHM*.

the promotion of women's ability - these were what Sydney Owenson started to propagandize in a period not long after the French Revolution, and immediately following the 1798 rebellion in Ireland, and the Act of Union between Britain and Ireland. It was an era when the rhetoric of freedom was a common currency. However, despite the proximity in time of the famous Parisian salons, liberty for a woman was generally tightly circumscribed, her educational opportunities were limited, and the public discourse decreed a feminine role to be domestic. Yet, the young Sydney Owenson managed to breach many barriers so that she could embrace and work for causes in which she believed. It is arguable that, over and above her native abilities and ambition, two particular circumstances facilitated her: the death of her mother before Sydney reached her teenage years, and the involvement with her father who was an actor and who did not set bounds to what his daughter could achieve. Relative freedom from traditional role models, close association with a male parent, and exposure to the arts, all assisted in honing her talents and in engendering the self-belief that led to extraordinary success. It could hardly be coincidental that Augusta Holmes should experience similar early bereavement, grow up in an artistic milieu, perceive no limit to her possible attainments, and go on to major musical feats. "Ce météore dérangent"<sup>97</sup>

When she was born in Paris in 1847 (and thus about seventy years after the birth of Sydney Owenson/Lady Morgan), it might not have been expected that the career of Augusta Holmes would be so interwoven with Franco-Irish connections, or that it would evince close links with nationalism, or even that there would be a career in any sphere other than genteel and cultured domesticity for Augusta Mary Ann Holmes. It would hardly have been anticipated that she would blaze a trail as a composer of music and libretti because, despite any hoped-for change over the course of the nineteenth century, the years of her lifetime still remained a period when women were firmly excluded from serious music and were consigned and confined to lighter offerings. Both the known facts and the multiple stories around her parentage and upbringing, however, combine to suggest an atypical childhood and education. Her father was a retired army man, Major Charles William Scott Dalkeith Holmes (possibly born in Youghal, Co Cork, or maybe in Dublin, or perhaps in Craven Street, London, and with connections to Co Tyrone and, more fancifully, to the O'Briens, kings of

<sup>97</sup> This 'disturbing star' description is given by music critic Gérard Gefen (who is also a biographer of Augusta Holmès) in the sleeve notes for *Augusta Holmès: Orchestral Works* (München: Marco Polo, 1994), p.9.

Ireland)<sup>98</sup> who moved to Paris; there he married Tryphina Shearer, a beautiful sixteen-year old of Scottish descent. When Augusta was born twenty years later, her godfather was Alfred de Vigny who lived beside the Holmes family in Paris. It is possible that her godfather was also her father; Vigny continued to be closely involved with her life and her education.<sup>99</sup> The artistic atmospheres to which Augusta was exposed from a very young age were certainly multiple: the combination of the poet Vigny, Augusta's mother who painted and published in prose and in verse,<sup>100</sup> and the major, a polyglot father with a library of twelve thousand books (Géfen 1998,35),<sup>101</sup> together with the literary and artistic circles in which they mixed, furnished an eclectic cultural capital on which Augusta could and did draw. However inspiring were the literary influences, it would be in musical composition that she would make her name.

The unusually wide nature of her musical education provided Augusta Holmes with tools not commonly available to female students. Steered towards painting and drawing, she was prevented from studying music until her mother died; aged just eleven, she then embarked on piano, harmony, composition, orchestration and singing studies with the most prestigious musicians, amongst them

<sup>98</sup> Biographical details provided by several different sources do not accord. Even the account given by her son-in-law, Henri Barbusse, manages to err on the place of birth of Augusta There is general agreement, however, that Holmes was not unhappy to have a number of conflicting or fanciful stories in circulation. Michèle Friang, *Augusta Holmès ou la gloire interdite: Une femme compositeur au XIX siècle* (Paris: Autrement, 2001), p.21 ; Gérard Géfen, *Augusta Holmès, l'outrancière* (Paris : Belfond, 1988),pp.53-55. Subsequent references to these texts will be to Friang, and to Géfen 1988.

<sup>99</sup> The physical resemblance of Augusta to Vigny was often remarked upon, as was the similarity of her daughters both to their father Catulle Mendès and to Vigny. A Renoir painting of their three daughters, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art New York, is suggestive of the likenesses. Auguste Renoir, *The Daughters of Catulle Mendès* (1888), <http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/110002470>. Accessed 8 February 2011).

<sup>100</sup> A report on the annual exhibition of painting and sculpture at the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1837 mentions an exceptional self-portrait by Mrs Dalkeith Holmes "which may fairly meet public inspection, and come off with honour" (*Freeman's Journal*, 26 May 1837, p.3). Her article entitled "French Literature: Henri Beyle (de Stendhal)" appeared in *The Dublin University Magazine* (Vol. XXII, October 1843, pp.403-420). It was presumably that article which gave rise to the comment in a book by Marcel Moraud that "En 1843, Mrs Dalkeith Holmes célèbre Stendhal". Paul de Reul, review of Moraud, Marcel, *Le Romantisme français en Angleterre, de 1814 à 1848* in *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, Vol. 13, 3-4, (1934), pp.799-803. Furthermore, she is identified as the author of *A Ride on horseback to Florence through France and Switzerland, Letters by a Lady* (London: John Murray, 1842) through her name, Mrs Dalkeith Holmes, being written in on the title page of the copy in Oxford University. However, the British Library catalogue gives the author's name as Augusta McGregor Holmes. Google Books have a 63-page book by Augusta McGregor Holmes (sic) called *The Law of Rouen: a dramatic tale*, published by Mrs D. Holmes in 1837; the British Library catalogue adds the information that the book was privately printed but gives the author's name as Mrs Dalkeith Holmes. Augusta Holmes's own copy of that text appeared in the June 2008 catalogue of a French bookseller, priced at €450 ([http://www.librairie-bertran-rouen.fr/V\\_Catal/catalogue\\_juin\\_2008.pdf](http://www.librairie-bertran-rouen.fr/V_Catal/catalogue_juin_2008.pdf). Accessed 8 February 2011).

<sup>101</sup> The major was also a Shakespeare enthusiast and an amateur artist. He had a model of Westminster Cathedral in their garden at Versailles, one that he lit with candles at night (Friang, pp.21, 24). A contemporary, Henrietta Corkran, remembered him as "jolly old Captain Dalkeith Holmes . . . reputed to be a great gossip with *la chronique scandaleuse* (trans. the latest scandals) at his fingers' ends". Rollo Myers, "Augusta Holmès: a Meteoric Career" in *The Musical Quarterly* 53.3, (July 1967), pp.365-376.

Hyacinthe Closé, eminent clarinetist, and Guillot de Sainbris, her voice teacher, at whose house she met Charles Gounod, Ambroise Thomas, Camille Saint-Saëns, poets, novelists and painters. At the age of twelve, she conducted her own short composition for brass band in Versailles. That achievement speaks of self-belief, drive and ability, perhaps even of over-confidence at a very young age. However, it was those qualities that facilitated her self-fashioning (somewhat akin to that realised by Lady Morgan) and propelled her to ignore convention, to disregard the assumption of masculine pre-eminence in musical composition, to merit the admiration and encouragement of fellow composers and musicians like Wagner, Liszt, Franck, Saint-Saëns, Gounod and D'Indy, and to produce a significant opus of symphonies, lyric dramas, symphonic poems, orchestral and vocal works. Attracting large numbers of prestigious admirers in the fields of politics and painting, as well as music and poetry, can only have further bolstered her assurance even as it complicated her life.<sup>102</sup>

In her compositions, Augusta Holmes retained extensive control by writing the words of her songs, the libretti of her operas, choral works and symphonic odes, and she determined stage instructions. Although it might be considered a post-Wagnerian model (or a pre-Beckettian one), it permits additional understanding of the thinking behind some of her musical scores. The sentiments of her war song *Vengeance*, written during the siege of Paris while she worked as a nurse, are strongly nationalistic:

“Pour tes champs ravagés/ Tes palais saccagés/ Tes drapeaux outragés/ Ô France!/ Pour les mères en deuil/  
Pour les fils au cercueil/ Pour le sang sur le seuil/ Vengeance! Vengeance! Vengeance!” (trans. O France,  
For your devastated countryside, your ransacked halls, your insulted flags, for mourning mothers, for sons  
in their coffins, for blood on the doorstep, Vengeance! Vengeance! Vengeance!)

While composed some years later, that same nationalistic emotion underpins *Lutèce*, her symphony for voice and orchestra (with recitative in verse) which depicts the battle of the Gauls against the Romans. Both compositions accept, and even encourage, bloody battle in the cause of freedom. That belief seems also to underlie the feelings and actions of Jason in Holmes's very successful *Les Argonautes* (1880) as he seeks to gain the Golden Fleece and so recover his kingdom. Clearly, and up to this point, the matters of national freedom, foreign oppression, uprising, and the

<sup>102</sup> The list of those who were thoroughly smitten by Augusta is lengthy and, in addition to Catulle Mendès (father of their children), it includes poets, statesmen, musicians and painters. Notable amongst them were Villiers de l'Isle Adam, Camille Saint-Saëns, Émile Deschamps, Henri Régault, Henri Cazalis, George Clairin, Émile Ollivier, Frédéric Mistral, Hans Richter, Stéphane Mallarmé, and César Franck.

heroic, are important ones for the composer who became a naturalised Frenchwoman in 1879<sup>103</sup> and from then wrote her name as Augusta Holmès, in solidarity with the country of her birth. Questions must be asked about someone who up to then had technically been a British citizen, but yet who was almost always described as Irish: to what extent did national identity impinge on her thinking, emerge in her compositions, and feature in her public profile and endeavours?

Perhaps one obvious answer is to be found in a symphonic poem entitled *Irlande*, published in 1882 at the height of the Land War, in the year following the arrest of Michael Davitt, the passing of the Coercion Acts at Westminster, and the arrest of Parnell who was on the way to attaining hero status. Moreover, *Irlande* was not her sole work in connection with Irish national events, nor was it an isolated 1880s intervention in the cause of smaller nations and their repression by adjacent powers. It was followed in 1883 by another symphonic poem, *Pologne* (a divided Poland was ruled by Prussia, Russia and Austria and the first two imposed German and Russian languages).<sup>104</sup> 1888 would see the public performance of her *Ludus pro Patria/ Patriotic Game* (named after and inspired by the paintings by Puvis de Chavannes). 1889 marks the apogée of her nationalistic, patriotic, and republican involvement, when Holmès is *the* artistic initiator, composer, designer and producer of France's spectacular celebration of the Revolution's centenary with a cast of over 1200 in her *Ode triomphale* in a specially built auditorium. Her politico-musical record did not end after two decades: *Le chanson des gars d'Irlande* (1892) is replete with traitors, tyrants, revolt and victory; the backdrop for the opera *La Montagne noire* (1895) is that of the fight of the Montenegrins against Turkish oppression – and therein perhaps one might discern some shades of Sydney Owenson and *Ida of Athens*. The sympathies of la Holmès seem indisputable and the detail of their presentation in *Irlande* and *l'Ode triomphale* is fascinating and more than convincing in terms of her ability and drive. L'Ode triomphale<sup>105</sup>

Camille Saint-Saëns wrote of *l'Ode triomphale*: “Il fallait plus qu'un homme pour chanter le centenaire ; à défaut d'un dieu impossible à rencontrer, la République française a trouvé ce qu'il lui fallait: une Muse! ” (trans. Something more than an ordinary mortal was required to celebrate the

<sup>103</sup> In March 1879, according to Philip Hale. Philip Hale, ed., *Modern French Songs v.II* (Boston: Oliver Ditson, 1904), p.x: Or was it in 1873? (Géfen, 123).

<sup>104</sup> Unrest was in the air and the previous year was one when artists deployed some significant nationalistic ‘weaponry’: for example, the exhibition of a painting, ‘The Prussian Homage’ by Polish nationalist Jan Matejko, and the first public performance of Smetana’s *Ma Vlast*.

<sup>105</sup> The success of this composition and event led to an invitation from Florence to compose a cantata for celebrations of Dante and Beatrice the following year. That *Hymne à la Paix* was a tremendous triumph for Holmès.

centenary; in the absence of the impossible-to-find God, the French Republic found what was needed: a muse.) He praised Holmès for “la sûreté de main, la puissance et la haute raison avec lesquelles l’auteur avait su discipliner ces formidables masses chorales, dompter cette mer orchestrale”.<sup>106</sup> (trans. her sure hand, the power and discernment with which the composer controlled the tremendous massed choirs and mastered the vast orchestra.) Those ‘formidables masses chorales’ numbered 900 from twelve different choirs while there were 300 in the orchestra. Some idea of the scale and grandeur of the production whose like was never achieved before or since, can be gleaned from the verbal description by Hugues Imbert :

Voici qu’elle était la disposition de la scène : un amphithéâtre entouré de colonnes chargés de trophées auxquels s’entremêlent des palmiers et des lauriers énormes, des rampes établies à droite et à gauche enveloppant un autel de forme ancienne, dressé au centre de la scène. - Au milieu un large escalier conduisant à cet autel qui domine une plate-forme. Au dessus, un gigantesque drapeau tricolore, suspendu à des trophées d’armes, de fleurs, et de drapeaux ; autour, quatre trépieds où brûlent des parfums. Enfin, derrière l’autel, une seconde plate-forme et, tout au fond de la scène, des montagnes lointaines avec leurs forêts et leurs cités (les Vosges). (Imbert, 146.)

(trans.)The stage was laid out as follows: an amphitheatre surrounded by urn-bearing columns, interspersed with enormous palm trees and laurels; ramps were set to the right and left, wrapping around an altar of antique design which was erected at centre stage; in the middle, a grand staircase led to that altar which dominated the platform; above was an enormous tricolour flag, hung from weaponry and floral trophies and from flags. surrounding them were four incense burners on trivets. Finally, behind the altar was another platform and at the very back of the stage, distant mountains with forests and towns (the Vosges).

The audience numbered twenty-two thousand on 11<sup>th</sup> September 1889 (Friang, 15) and Holmès gave her services free.<sup>107</sup> Those crowds were sent home with her words for the final anthem ringing in their ears: “Gloire à toi, Liberté, Soleil de l’Univers”. (trans. Glory to you Liberty, Light of the World).

Irlande, poème symphonique.

*Irlande* is one of Holmès’s most frequently played compositions. Much interest resides in its nationalistic intent and its musical innovation, but also in the subtle and skilful way in which Holmès

<sup>106</sup> Hugues Imbert, *Nouveau Profils de Musiciens* (Paris : Librairies Fischbacher, 1892), p.159. All subsequent references to this text will be to Imbert.

<sup>107</sup> Elaine Fine, ‘Augusta Holmes’, <http://www.kith.org/jimmosk/misc.html#Holmes>, np. Holmes donated the profits from the one performance that was not open to the public to flood victims in Antwerp. All subsequent references will be to Fine.

intertwines Irish and French history and literature.<sup>108</sup> The origins of Irish national feeling and its musical expression would appear to have been instilled in the young Augusta Holmes by her father who, rather remarkably, was described by Cosima Wagner as “the old Fenian”.<sup>109</sup> (Géfen 1998,112). Holmes herself said that as a rather solitary child, she “grew to love the oppressed and to hate the oppressor; and it would seem that those feelings are now inextinguishable in me for the dominating ideas in all my works are those of liberty and of fatherland.”<sup>110</sup> In *Irlande*, there are the subjugated people, the reminiscences of former times before oppression, and then the hope for future liberty through action that will be stimulated by music and verse. In terms of musical originality, *Irlande* has at least one ground-breaking facet: the score begins with a one-minute long clarinet solo through which Holmes intends to depict the lament of a lonely shepherd for Ireland’s days of former glory. Such a wind solo was unprecedented in orchestral composition, and the feature would not be repeated by any composer for a decade.<sup>111</sup> It can be postulated that it is the sounding of this clarinet which links the Irish and French nations, and does so through Alfred de Vigny, ‘Le Chanson de Roland’ and Thomas Moore’s *Irish Melodies*. In the light of Holmès’s declared Irish sympathies, her closeness to Vigny and his poetry, and the wide circulation of Moore’s melodies in France in the nineteenth century, there appears to be a strong case for these suggested relationships.

Alfred de Vigny’s poem *Le Cor* opens with the line “J’aime le son du Cor, le soir, au fond des bois” (trans. I love the sound of the horn in the evenings, deep in the woods) and in the final stanza that line mutates to “Dieu! que le son du Cor est triste au fond des bois!” (trans. God! how sad is the sound of the horn deep in the woods) . Vigny’s evocation of *Le Chanson de Roland*, and thence of the national importance of that tale, is suggested by Holmès in that plaintive clarinet solo and thereby

<sup>108</sup> The piece continued to enjoy popularity. A performance is on record at the first Feis Ceoil in Dublin in May 1897, and it was the music chosen to be played at the burial of César Franck.

<sup>109</sup> It is curious that the word ‘Fenian’ also occurs in connection with a Holmes grave in Imphrick church graveyard, south of Buttevant in Co. Cork. A testimony (given in 1919) by Mr. Langley Brasier-Creagh J.P. of Streamhill, Doneraile, Co. Cork records: “At the time of ‘the Fenians’, all the arms that were raided about the country were stored in the Holmes tomb in Imphrick churchyard, and in this way baffled the most strenuous efforts of the authorities to trace them” ([www.corkpastandpresent.ie/places/northcork/grovewhitenotes/shinanaghtowoodville/gw4\\_206\\_221.pdf](http://www.corkpastandpresent.ie/places/northcork/grovewhitenotes/shinanaghtowoodville/gw4_206_221.pdf). Accessed July 2011).

<sup>110</sup> “A Great Irishwoman”, *Freeman’s Journal*, 16 January 1886, p.6. This article was written by George Moore although not signed. All subsequent references to this article will be to A Great Irishwoman. Recollecting his first visit to the Holmes house at Versailles, Villiers de l’Isle Adam mentions the “hymnes irlandais que la jeune virtuose enleva de manière à évoquer en nos esprits de forestières visions de pins et de bruyères lointaines” (Imbert,143). (trans. the patriotic Irish songs performed brilliantly by the young virtuoso and which evoked for us forest-clad visions of fir trees and distant heathers)

<sup>111</sup> As Elaine Fine has noted, Claude Debussy commences his *Après-midi d’un faune* (1892) with a 30 second flute solo. (Fine, np).

she conjures up for her symphonic poem the centrality of heroism in the pursuit of national independence, the vicissitudes of national progress and history, the possibilities for Ireland in the future. The initial clarinet solo is not the only element in the symphonic poem which is reminiscent of this Vigny composition; two thirds of the way through the composition, there is a reminder yet again of ‘le son du cor’. In support of the putative poetic and national connections, it is probably not coincidental that, in the same year, Ange Flégier published his song ‘Le Cor’, an adaptation of the Vigny poem; national stirrings were in the air, le cor was sounding in France.

*Irlande* has many other different ingredients and aspects, and in the space of its short fourteen minutes, it has beautiful long lyrical phrases, it has intimations and threats of war, and it has elements of what has been called the fashionable ‘Irish Pastiche’ that were popular toward the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>112</sup> Not a pastiche however, but a noticeable echo, is the incorporation of a tune to which Thomas Moore put the words of “Let Erin Remember”, the opening lines of which are: ‘Let Erin remember the days of old,/ Ere her faithless sons betray'd her; / When Malachi wore the collar of gold,/ Which he won from her proud invader, / When her kings, with standard of green unfurl'd, /Led the Red-Branch Knights to danger!’<sup>113</sup> The choice of that song, rather than any other of Moore’s, would seem to be a definite response from Holmès to the problems of Parnell and Ireland in 1882. Its stirring martial air, woven into the symphonic poem, is intentionally inspirational and as Holmès phrased it: “Sing ye wretched people your ancient song of triumph for the heroes of ancient Ireland are rising from their tombs to set their people free”(‘A Great Irishwoman’).

It is possible that Augusta Holmes physically travelled to Ireland on only one occasion but she found the memory of that visit to be “ineffaceable”. Memory became dream, and dream gathered detail and life: “scene after scene grew clearer, until the patriotism that has survived as generation followed generation to the grave, the roar of the Atlantic surges, and the many misted aspects of Ireland’s mountains at length resolved themselves into verses and cadences” (A Great Irishwoman). She re-visited Irish images on numerous occasions, in 1880 with her libretto for a 4-act opera *Norah*

<sup>112</sup> I am indebted to Dr Una Hunt, musician and musicologist, for information on these pastiches and their prevalence; she also commented on the lush orchestration of *Irlande* and its suitability for film soundtrack. (personal communication: 10 May 2011). The quality of orchestration was an aspect also noted by Sir Henry Wood who once produced Augusta Holmes’ symphonic poem *Irlande*, “which was very fine and admirably orchestrated.” Quoted by W.George S. Whiting ‘Letter to the Editor’ in *Gramophone* (November 1930) p.58. In turn, Whiting was quoting the recollection of English composer Ethel Smyth in her article in *London Mercury* (October 1921).

<sup>113</sup> In his *Irish Melodies vol 2*, Moore put his own words “Let Erin Remember” to a melody called ‘The Red Fox’ from the Holden collection. Moore’s melodies were very well known in Paris in the nineteenth century.

*Greena*, and with songs such as *Le chanson des gars d'Irlande* at the height of the Land War of the 1880s, and *Le Noël d'Irlande* in 1890. As might be expected, vengeful bloodshed, hope of liberty, revolt and victory mix in *Le chanson des gars d'Irlande*: “ Mais il viendra, le jour béni,/ OÙ l'esclave sera le maître,/ OÙ les martyrs auront puni/ L'Étranger, le Tyran, le Traître !/ OÙ c'est leur sang en criant 'Hourrah'/ Nous boirons à l'Irlande”. (trans. But the blessed day will come/ When slave will be master, When the martyrs will have punished/The tyrant and the traitor! /Wherever their blood might be, shouting Hurrah, /We'll drink to Ireland).

Less anticipated might be the entwinement of misery and hope in *Le Noël d'Irlande*, the text of which is supplied below:

Noël d'Irlande	An Irish Christmas
Rêvez, rêvez,	Dream, dream
Que le divin Noël vous apporte du pain	That holy Christmas will bring you bread
Rêvez, rêvez,	
Que sur la lande vous chauffez vos pieds nus	Dream, dream,
Aux flammes du sapin.	That you may warm your bare feet at a wood fire on the moors
Rêvez, rêvez,	
Chanteurs d'Irlande	Dream, dream,
Que les temps reviendront des Héros et des Rois.	Those who sing Ireland
Rêvez, rêvez,	That the time of heroes and kings will return.
Que Dieu commande et qu'il vous rend	Dream, dream
La Harpe et le Trèfle, et la Croix.	That God will rule, and deliver to you
Rêvez, rêvez,	The Harp, the Shamrock and the Cross.
Martyrs d'Irlande	
Que le jour est venu de gloire et d'équité !	Dream, dream
Rêvez et que le Noël vous rende	Irish Martyrs
La force des aïeux avec la Liberté.	That the day of glory and equity has come

	Dream too that Christmas will give you The strength of your ancestors and Freedom. <sup>114</sup>
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This is not one of Augusta Holmes's best-known musical works but the words, of course composed by her, are indicative of her continuing passionate involvement with Ireland. The text conveys the hunger and cold of a disheartened people and intimates that a fight requiring martyrs is envisaged. The underlying motivation is further reinforced by the multiple messages in the musical score: for instance, the piece is written in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time, thus suggesting a waltz, but yet it is marked 'Largo', and its beat structure is nearer to a dirge than a dance and therein is the warning that Christmas enjoyment is far from certain. The song has been described as one of hope,<sup>115</sup> possibly on account of the repetition of the lines "Rêvez, rêvez" (trans. Dream, dream) but it may be more accurate to read this purported Christmas prayer as bitter-sweet, as an unmistakable and unapologetic accusation and a not-so-subtle cry for redress. Holmès's technical stressing and underpinning of her verbal meaning is meticulous: there is melodic and harmonic variation in each of the six stanzas for the "Rêvez" calls; key words especially 'gloire' and 'd'équité', (trans. glory, equity) are emphasised by their allocation to sustained notes (McCann, 48).<sup>116</sup>

By all accounts, Augusta Holmes was a brilliant pianist, with a wonderful singing voice and style, and was a major force in French music especially from the 1880s, showing enormous personal ambition and courage in a narrow music world that did not want to make room for a woman composer. In relation to *La Montagne Noire* in 1895, one Parisian critic was blunt: "Nous ne souhaitons pas ouvrir les portes de nos théâtres et de nos opéras à des femmes auteurs" (Géfen 1988, 222). (trans. we do not wish to open the doors of our theatres and opera houses to women composers). Women soloists were acceptable, and especially so if they confined themselves to light music, drawing room pieces, and interpreting the work of others; otherwise, the opposition was overt, unambiguous, and strong. It took a resilient, gifted and determined person to pursue a successful creative career in the face of such opposition and it is most probably that the political convictions of la Holmès fed into, and derived strength from, her musical talent and verse ability. Nationalism, and

<sup>114</sup> Augusta Holmes, ed., Philip Hale *Modern French Songs v.II*, (Boston: Oliver Ditson, 1904), pp.49-52.

<sup>115</sup> Karen Jee-Hae McCann, *Cécile Chaminade : a composer at work* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2003), p.47. Subsequent reference to this thesis will be to McCann.

<sup>116</sup> I am indebted to Karen Jee-Hae McCann for this significant point concerning sustained notes.

perhaps especially Irish nationalism, was extremely close to her heart and was insistently promoted by her in her compositions. With a surprising, if slight, reflection of Lady Morgan who had deployed the harp to such propagandist effect, a line in one of Holmès's last songs reads: "Dans mon cœur est la Harpe d'Or" (trans. The golden harp is in my heart). With some resemblance to the actions of two Irish nationalists and feminists, Constance Markievicz and Maud Gonne, Holmès converted to Catholicism in 1901, taking the baptismal name of 'Patritia' in honour of her Irish ancestry.

At different ends of the nineteenth century, Sydney Owenson/Lady Morgan and Augusta Holmès moved in prominent social and creative circles, they were more than adept at presenting images of themselves, they chose artistic expression in different genres, and had very dissimilar lifestyles. Similarly, both women were frequently attacked in life and almost forgotten after their deaths. They were exceptional in the very public positions they occupied in a century when it was extremely rare and difficult for women to do so. Although divided by decades, they are close in many of their Franco-Irish and liberal connections. Their nationalist impulses had much in common in that they were focused on Ireland, on France, and on other countries beyond those shores. Moreover, their engagement with history and culture, and their particular intertwining of political aims and nationalistic sympathy with words and music, distinguish and distance their artistic endeavours from what is often called musical nationalism.



## Sydney Owenson and Alain de Lille:

### Traversing Philosophical Terrains in *France* and *De Planctu Naturae*

Sydney Owenson (Lady Morgan), an Anglo-Irish writer of the nineteenth century, illustrates dualities associated with philosophical influences upon societal dictates within her travelogue, *France: 1829-1830*. Alain de Lille, the twelfth century French philosopher, educated in Paris, Cistercian monk and author of the medieval allegory, *De Planctu Naturae*, writes of the conflict between the sensual and intellectual experience associated with human desire. A strong correlation between the philosophies of Owenson and de Lille indicates a shared objective of enlightening aristocratic communities. Through their placement of realistic iconic figures within realistic settings that are not the accepted reality in which their audiences commonly associate the iconic figures, they bring awareness of an element of culture that needs reform, for instance, the evolution of French democracy and its advocacy of human rights. While Alain alludes to ancient philosophers and mythological characters in his text to present messages to his audience, members of medieval French aristocracy and the powerful Catholic Church, his rhetoric focuses on sensory perceptions within medieval French society. On the other hand, Owenson's nineteenth century observations of the 'old and new France' transport the reader philosophically from France to Ireland to Great Britain as she attempts to unify and elevate her readers' consciousness in both the Irish and the British communities. Although centuries apart, in both instances, these writers vacillate between their own humanist philosophical perceptions of society and their observations of the intense relationship between human laws established by the aristocracy and laws of nature in the form of *lumen naturae*, or having an enlightened sense of self.

For instance, living and learning within the boundaries of a strict social structure creates an opportunity for one element of society to control another. During the medieval period, this instruction takes place within the parameters of Catholicism. Thus, writers of this era use elements common with their readers, mostly aristocratic and closely aligned with the Church, in order to explain paradoxes that exist within religious and political communities. However, the concepts of virtue and wisdom thrive when restrictions are lifted, liberating the mind to take risks as part of the process of understanding the significance of contradictions when they appear.

Hence, Alain de Lille begins his tale in an iconic garden, a living paradox, where life is restricted, yet through natural evolution, freedom resides. His feminine, spiritual character is the one who instructs the male, listing the many contradictions present in the natural environment:

Plurality returned to unity, diversity to identity, dissonance to harmony, discord to concord in peaceful agreement. But after the universal Maker had clothed all things with the forms for their natures, and had wedded them in marriage with portions suitable to them individually, then, ...there should to perishable things be given stability through instability, infinity through impermanence, eternity through [transience]... continually woven together in unbroken reciprocation of birth... that similar things stamped with the seal of clear conformity, be brought from their like along the lawful path of sure descent.<sup>117</sup>

This contradiction of purpose illustrates the frustration that society has with authority, for de Lille points out that these established contradictions lead only to humanity's *descent*. Here, the term may indicate a moral or ethical decay, or he could be using this term to indicate a certain bloodline as deficient. As Rosalyn Voaden points out, the mindset of the Middle Ages is biologically enclosing: "there is a space within women which can be entered, a space where children are conceived, sheltered and nourished [and] ...in their use of this image...on that space within, their sense of love being enclosed within, of union and creation occurring inside."<sup>118</sup> Thus, the Church and the aristocracy of this period instil within the societal mindset a need for restraint in order to provide nurture, support, and control.

As de Lille educates his reading audience, he develops a pattern of lexical and semantic choices, transporting his readers through an exploration of this societal terrain. From a fertile medieval environment designed by social dictates, humanity's wisdom and virtue, classical feminine qualities rely on the presence of the masculine attributes of intellectual, carnal and spiritual prowess as a means of propagation. Even though the general medieval view of women limits them to procreation, the glorification of their purpose as the source of life provides an impetus for numerous symbolic representations of spiritual renewal. Thus, the metaphorical medieval garden in which de Lille's feminine spirit dwells provides an intellectual authority in conjunction with that of masculine

<sup>117</sup> Alain de Lille, *De Planctu Naturae: The Complaint of Nature*, translated Douglas M. Moffat (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University, 1908) Prose IV, p. 14.

<sup>118</sup> Rosalyn Voaden "All Girls Together: Community, Gender and Vision at Helfta," *Medieval Women in Their Communities*, Diane Watt, ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), p. 83.

fortitude through which creative thought begins as a germ of an idea and moves on to form the development of revolutionary fervour. As Gregory Sadlek describes:

Love's labor, for Alan, is not agricultural labor but rather the labor of scribes and artisans, people who work with their hands but in cities, not in the fields. Although morally conservative with respect to the uses of sex, Alan's discourse is also ideologically progressive in that it consistently reflects changes in the ideology of labor and laborers evolving in the twelfth century. <sup>119</sup>

As Sadlek illustrates, through Alain de Lille's interweaving of verdant setting with philosophical consciousness, he unfurls the petals of a flowering gender discussion, extending to such enlightened writers of the nineteenth century as Sydney Owenson.

Desire and curiosity become the descendent of the union between masculine and feminine thought sensually, intellectually, and spiritually, and this is most obvious in the creative release of inter-textual and inter-sensual stimulus. For instance, when one reads Alain de Lille's and Owenson's works, immediately one is brought into the mind of the artist on a superficial level. All the while, through writers' lexical choices, variable levels of comprehension stimulate the reader on spiritual and intellectual levels that originate with the writers' and the readers' past experiences of the subject matter found within texts. In Prose V, De Lille's heavenly muse elucidates for the main character the rules of human interaction through her use of grammatical rule as a metaphor:

The Dionean conjugation should not admit into its uniform use of transitive construction either a defective use, or the circuitry of reflexiveness, or the excess of double conjugation- it being rather contented with the direct course of single conjugation- nor should suffer by the eruption of any wandering influences to such degree that the active voice should become able by a usurping assumption to cross over into the passive, or the latter by an abandonment of its peculiar nature to turn into the active, or, retaining under the letters of the passive the nature of the active, to assume the law of the deponent. <sup>120</sup>

The muse addresses the 'art of Venus,' clarifying the variance between those rules contrived by God, gods, goddesses and humanity, demonstrating that perceptions of human interaction depend on the intellectual as well as physical and spiritual elements. Helen Cooney observes: "Alain de Lille's *De Planctu Naturae* comprises an extensive discussion of the workings of natural law, together with a

<sup>119</sup> Gregory M. Sadlek, *Idleness Working: The Discourse of Love's Labor from Ovid through Chaucer and Gower* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004) p. 261.

<sup>120</sup> Alain de Lille, *Du Planctu Naturae*, Prose V, p. 16.

sustained inquiry into the cause of evil in the world.”<sup>121</sup> Since the word ‘evil’ was not a part of de Lille’s medieval vocabulary, Cooney’s reference illustrates a more modern interpretation of de Lille’s work, which presents the conflict that humanity’s complete experience of love may include a certain presence of ill will.

De Lille takes an authoritative position as an educator and spiritual leader, as he adheres to the precepts of the powerful medieval Catholic Church, yet he has an opportunity to illuminate the dichotomy associated with blind devotion and the innately catholic quality of human love. Frederick Artz asserts:

Close to the heart of the Middle Ages was its love for allegory and symbolism. This had early come into Christian thought from Platonism and Stoicism, and, from the beginning, Christian writers and artists had always looked behind external reality to hunt the purposes of God’s ways and will. God’s universe was all of a piece, and the greater is always somehow reflected in the lesser. So all human experience is packed with meanings at various levels and one function of the writer, the artist, the teacher, and the preacher was to try to interpret the unknown from the known.<sup>122</sup>

Through the mystical process of an unconstrained dream, De Lille’s human character communicates with allegorical creatures within the natural setting of a medieval garden. In this manner, he is able to create a fantasy of love and its connection with dimensions of human interaction, both negative and positive. As William Burgwinkle points out that De Lille, a contemporary of both Matthew de Vendôme the French medieval poet and Geoffrey de Vinsauf the medieval grammarian, correlates the influence of these two writers to illustrate that “men are ultimately responsible for their own behaviour, even when Nature has been negligent in the exercise of the divine plan.”<sup>123</sup> De Lille structures his precepts within this unstructured environment, emphasizing the contradictions between religious doctrine and natural spontaneity of medieval human demeanour. His placement of his character and apparition in this unusual setting enlightens his audience of the dichotomy between medieval secular and religious communities while he demonstrates similarities in their behaviours as he conveys their human frailties. This configuration illustrates the three essential components of the theory of iconic realism:

<sup>121</sup> Helen Cooney, “The Parlement of Foules: A Theodicy of Love” in *The Chaucer Review* (32.4, 1998) p 340.

<sup>122</sup> Frederick B. Artz, *The Mind of the Middle Ages: AD 200-1500, An Historical Survey* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, p. 376.

<sup>123</sup> William Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p. 148.

1. The artist creates a realistic iconic figure within his/her work of art that represents an aspect of the culture within a specific community.
2. The artist situates this iconic figure within a realistic setting not accepted by the community as the typical setting in which the figure is generally situated.
3. The artist situates this iconic figure within this unusual setting to bring awareness of the need for cultural reform within the audience's community.

Utilized by writers, artists and musicians to instruct their audiences of an aspect of their culture which is in need of transformation, this semiotic theory creates the opportunity for significant interpretation.

Similarly, Sydney Owenson illustrates the theory of iconic realism within her novels and poetry. Owenson's romantic, graceful style of writing demonstrates iconic realism through the interaction of her characters as she awakens her society to effective conflict resolution that begins with the self. Moreover, her travelogues deal with perceptions that link political and societal concepts with literary works, defined by the combined interpretations of the reader and writer, classified as contextual clues. A reading audience experiences the literary work, interprets its meaning, commits it to memory, and then moves on to either discuss it with another reader, who then repeats the interpretation process, or alters it slightly to reflect individual thought processes. The senses, then, are primary in receiving, retaining and delivering information with regard to any form of artistic expression. This becomes evident in the humanist writers, such as de Lille, and eventually influences Owenson's writing as well.

One aspect of the intellectual terrain of medieval and early modern humanists is the importance of debate. This exercise of logic and reason becomes a sport among educated men. Because of this vast interest in the human potential, a focus on humanism evolves, causing many people to trust their own instincts and to rely less on their faith. Society, in general, becomes concerned with potential in the human spirit, rather than the Holy Spirit. This, in turn, leads to a questioning of moral codes and ethics, a discovery of what Jung would define as the 'anima' that believes in 'the beautiful and the good.' Unfortunately, as he points out, "It took more than a thousand years of Christian differentiation to make it clear that the good is not always the beautiful and the beautiful not necessarily good."<sup>124</sup> Thus, Alain de Lille uses the technique of iconic realism

<sup>124</sup> Carl Jung, *Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious*, translated by R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 29.

to illustrate that understanding oneself begins with understanding the contradictions that exist within the confines of social parameters.

Owenson makes similar differentiations as she uses iconic realism to observe numerous cultural ramifications of political evolution. She is the iconic Irish traveller of an aristocratic kind, observing the reality of post-Revolutionary France. As a pacifist who nevertheless desires change, she calls into question the actions of this post-revolutionary period of 1830:

The forms of popular government cannot be observed without the tolerance of such open channels for the emission of individual sentiment, as must hasten political education... In these forms, too, the people find a strong entrenchment; while to the spot they are embarrassing obstacles; and he cannot stir a step to extend his power, or to punish the sturdy opponent of his will, without crushing them to the earth. <sup>125</sup>

Owenson's observations address the political aristocracy through the process of linguistic discourse, for she attempts to warn Ireland of the political challenges which face France and desires to use her memoirs, poetry and tales to instruct as to recreate a particular moment in Ireland's history. Julia Kristeva describes this process:

History, as a succession is partitioned into experiences. Sketched out, it is replaced by atoms of flux, full of desires that are legible through their oral or object-related attachment. These atoms are present in their own time, but in a time that does not flow, a time that brings them or takes them away but does not bind them, does not empty them except to fill them up all the more. <sup>126</sup>

As Owenson reveals her personal story through her travelogue, *France*, she erases the constraints of time and brings her readers into her own experience. The result is an understanding of and psychological link to the reader. Writing, then, transcends elements of time and allows the reader to unite with the writer in a temporary alignment of mind. Aesthetic exchange of knowledge can be classified as *justification*. Imre Lakatos observes:

All brands of justificationist theories of knowledge, which acknowledge the senses as a source (whether as one source or *the* source) of knowledge are bound to contain a psychology of observation. Such

<sup>125</sup> Sydney Owenson Morgan, *France: 1829-1830* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1830) p. 173.

Any future references to this book will be cited as *Fr.*

<sup>126</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 107.

psychologies specify the ‘right’, ‘normal’, ‘healthy’, ‘unbiased’, ‘careful’, or ‘scientific’, state of the senses or the rather the state of mind as a whole in which they observe truth as it is.<sup>127</sup>

Owenson justifies the knowledge gained through her travelling experience as she assimilates the thought processes with her memories and concludes with a personal interpretation of her feelings. She demonstrates that humanity needs an amount of knowledge of a primary reasoning in order to make a logical assumption about furthering a self-righteous quest for a specified focus.

Throughout her travelogue, *France in 1829-1830*, Sydney Owenson configures lexical combinations of Irish, English and European colloquialisms, drawing upon the historical and philosophical perceptions of Descartes, Locke, and Kant to transform her observations into political inquiry. She incorporates the German philosophical influences of Goethe, Hegel, and Schopenhauer, initiating innovation in her awareness of the cultural transformations that she encounters. Her nineteenth century contemporary scientific approach of recognizing human dignity resonates with Auguste Comte’s philosophy, revealing her personal experience with societal expectations. Her feminine voice maintains a necessary fortitude, placing Irish ideology at the centre of English culture at the onset of the rise of the Protestant Ascendancy while she illustrates foresight in challenging the political stance of the United Kingdom in the early decades of the nineteenth century. She observes: Various sects of political economists, the two factions of romanticists and classicists in literature, the innumerable subdivisions of party in politics – royalists, Jesuits, republicans, constitutionalists, and doctrinaires – shew society to have been an epoch of transition, opinion in suspense, and the remaining modes of thought, upon all great questions, temporary and provisional. (*Fr* 118)

Owenson’s language reveals her awareness of the consistency within Irish culture during this literary Romantic period. As a means of presenting her work with authority and authenticity, Owenson makes observations using specific language variations that demonstrate the attribute of nonconformity, as she brings awareness of the changes that have taken place within French culture, referring to the two forms of “imaginative philosophy” as “theological and eclectic.” (*Fr* 121) and proceeds to explain the cultural dilemma and thus conflict of consciousness between structured authority and physiological awareness. She refers to the continuing evolution through philosophical discussion within the French government as a “touchstone of truth, constantly necessary to prevent

<sup>127</sup> Imre Lakatos, *The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes*, edited by John Worrall and Gregory Currie (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 15.

indifference, and to shake the ever-growing influence of authority.” (Fr 127) Her observations of the evolving French philosophy reflect those of the Irish philosophy in her 1807 book, *Patriotic Sketches of Ireland*:

To the whole great scale of civil society, and demonstrating the close-linked dependencies of its remotest parts, affords to the benevolence of the human heart, and the comprehension of the human understanding, a social system, gratifying to the feelings of the one, and ennobling to the faculties of the other. <sup>128</sup>

Clearly, she has great concern for authoritative entities to understand the faculties that underlie the human condition and the rights of individuals to express themselves freely.

Within eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain dwell empirical forces that attempt to limit the elevation of human consciousness within its colonial interests, namely Ireland and colonial America. Owenson chooses to align her consciousness with those European philosophers who have observed the political upheavals in central Europe and Great Britain. Descartes’ focus on the interconnection between mind, body and soul leads to Locke’s and Kant’s understanding of humanity’s need for awareness of a higher consciousness and human connection with natural elements. Goethe’s influence examines the manner in which the complexities of life reflect scientific and natural laws. Hegel and Schopenhauer observe the spiritual consciousness connected with acquired intellect and represented by societal associations. Comte synthesizes the alignment of science and order present in elevated consciousness through his careful analysis of scientific data available during the mid-nineteenth century. As Mike Gane refers to Comte’s synthesis:

There are striking discontinuities of two types. The first is the creative formation of the theoretical organisation of the new science itself- the foundation of the object and domain, a decisive process of discovery which involves the overthrow of metaphysical ideas in this domain, Then second these revolutionary new ideas, which are also organised in a new metaphysical state as a long revolutionary transitional phase of western society, in which the French Revolution is just one important episode... [Comte’s] elaboration of scientific method was a search for a way to deal with and to analyse a very specific kind of theoretical complexity. <sup>129</sup>

Comte, then, matches his data, collected to bring his audience in alignment with an enhancement of their consciousness of autonomy prevalent throughout Europe and the United States during the late

<sup>128</sup> Sydney Owenson, *Patriotic Sketches of Ireland* (London, Printed for Richard Phillips by T. Gillet, 1807) p. 33.

<sup>129</sup> Mike Gane, *Auguste Comte* (New York: Routledge, 2006) pp. 29-30.

eighteenth, early nineteenth centuries. His writing attempts to capture the scientific explanation for the international fervour that spurs a desire for individuals to realise their personal potential and challenge the governmental hold on citizens' rights. Auguste Comte sees the individual possibility to create change and supplies his readers with the scientific knowledge available to prove that history unfolds through the positive works of individuals within their immediate surroundings, leading to constructive innovation.

As a contemporary of Comte, Owenson elucidates for her reading audience the historical relevance of fervent rhetorical expression as a means of establishing a semblance of societal autonomy. Likewise, Auguste Comte presents his scientific observation of historical discourse:

If we contemplate the positive spirit in its relation to scientific conception, rather than the mode of procedure we shall find that this philosophy is distinguished from the theologico-metaphysical by its tendency to render relative the ideas which were at first absolute. This inevitable passage from the absolute to the relative is one of the most important philosophical results of each of the intellectual revolutions, which has carried on every kind of speculation from the theological or metaphysical to the scientific state.

130

According to Comte, then, audience interprets the rhetoric in a piece of writing, which leads to the message perceived by each individual reader based on his/her past experience. Now, the artist and the reader unite, persuaded to engage in the creative thought process by the educator's choice of words. Therefore, drawing from the necessity to cope with societal expectations, through rhetorical choice, the artist communicates her/his experience with the audience while inspiring through fresh ideas. Comte further explains this evolution of revolutionary rhetoric:

Thus the natural history of humanity involves the history of the globe and all its conditions, physical, chemical, and everything else: while the philosophy of society can not even exist till the entire system of preceding sciences is formed, and the whole mass of historical information offered as material for its analysis. The function of Sociology is to derive from this mass of unconnected material information, which, by the principles of the biological theory of Man, may yield the laws of social life... in order to transfer it from the concrete to the abstract.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>130</sup> Auguste Comte, *The Positive Philosophy* from translation of *Cours de philosophie positive* (New York: C. Blanchard, 1855), this edition translated by Harriet Martineau, AMS Press, 1974, p. 453.

<sup>131</sup> Auguste Comte, *The Positive Philosophy*, p. 543.

This collected material influences the consciousness of a community and originates in the actions of the community members. Often, these actions take on characteristics that create detrimental circumstances to affect certain members of the community. Educators utilize rhetoric to raise the consciousness of the community and thereby form the essence of change, **which is** through iconic realism. The educators' use of an aspect of the community recognized as an icon, placed in a setting within the community that is uncommon for this figure, can raise questions regarding some aspect of the culture, which needs attention.

Like Comte, Owenson as educator places iconic figures in unique situations for her reading audience to learn a specific cultural lesson. This literary anomaly focuses the students' attention on the matter, which Owenson, the travelling educator, wishes to emphasize and thus alters their consciousness by the placement of iconic structures in unusual settings to jolt her readers into an awareness of possibilities for change to occur within themselves as individuals and ultimately those who represent them in the government. Once the consciousness of her students has been altered, the effect filters into the community. The power, then, does lie with the pen, and much change in the mindset of a community occurs through, gentle, rhetorical persuasion of the enthusiastic members of a society. Within the framework of creative expression, writers such as Sydney Owenson have had the opportunity to incorporate the human experience within their art through multiple channels of sensory stimulation, tapping into the consciousness of humanity on multiple levels. Often, exploration of this link between consciousness and stimulation leads to discoveries that integrate science with philosophy, a form of integration historically repelled by the Catholic Church. William Grassie reveals:

Comte proposed a theory of cultural history understood as staged developments in which religion would be replaced by science. Thus, science was seen as the rational and natural successor to religion. It was in this milieu that the social sciences arose in the nineteenth century, including the notion of the scientific study of religion.<sup>132</sup>

This philosophical link connects the enlightened minds of the eighteenth century with those searching for truth in the nineteenth century, which spawns the international yearning for a voice from the

<sup>132</sup> William Grassie in *Zygon* (volume 43, number 1, March, 2008) p. 132.

This quote includes a reference to Eric J. Shape, *Comparative Religion: A History* (Chicago: Open Court, 1986).

common citizen, a revolution revelry restrained by the fiscal and philosophical strength of the aristocracy.

Both Alain de Lille and Sydney Owenson transport their reading audiences to awareness of the need for cultural reform by employing the technique of iconic realism as they traverse the philosophical terrain of human rights advocacy and the need for self-knowledge demonstrating the struggle between logical mind and emotional sensitivities. De Lille's medieval protagonist receives advice from a strong, supernatural feminine personality in order to define the societal trait of virtue and the inspirational human quality of wisdom:

For thou seest how men debase the original dignity of their natures ...and transgress humanity's privileged state... and how, in following their own desires in the pursuit of lust, going to shipwreck in the whirlpools of intemperance, seething in the heat of avarice, flying upon the false wings of pride, giving way to bites of envy, gilding others with hypocrisy of flattery, they fall far from their natural and noble state.<sup>133</sup>

Six centuries later, this discussion of individual freedom and interpretation of law continues as Sydney Owenson is an Irish traveller, but she travels as a member of the aristocracy and thus draws from the variety of societal observations of a *new France* to illustrate the necessity for confidence to prevail within any nation weakened by the ambitions of a select few.

For example, Owenson observes that this restraint of freedom within the confines of her native country, Ireland, parallels the restraints evident in the revolutionized France. To illustrate with the garden metaphor, the weeds of aristocracy encroach upon the fruitful potential of the garden's inhabitants, but with change comes possibilities, as Owenson describes:

The Rue de Rivoli, with the beautiful gardens in which it opens, and the noble views it commands, from the Champs Elysées to the palace of the Tuileries, stands less a triumphal testimony of the victory its name recalls, than of the physical and moral advancement which a few years of self-government can impress on a nation. (*Fr* 31)

Owenson's literary contributions generate definitive and relevant philosophy of change through the careful utilisation of rhetoric and composition. As she explores the influence of French philosophy during her travels to France, she remarks:

<sup>133</sup> Alain de Lille, *De Planctu Naturae*, Prose VIII, p. 26.

With respect to the nature of truth, the greatest certitude we possess, concerns the reality of self, and the reality of our sensations; and next to that, if not perhaps in an equal degree, the reality of the external world. (*Fr* 119)

Her thoughts echo those of the medieval writer, de Lille, in that they both explore the possibilities associated with sensory perceptions and human parameters. Within the spiritual context, de Lille establishes the concept of the universal union between body, mind and spirit:

The eternal Being has begotten and produced with the everlasting kiss of His spirit, and has given me an own sister. Not only the natural tie of blood binds her to me, but the connection of pure love links us also. And because of this, thine even judgment does not allow thy will to wander from the consideration of my will. For such a union in symmetry, nay, a symmetry in unity, harmonizes our minds in firm peace, that not only is that union clothed in the express image of union but even puts aside mere outward unity and tends towards the essence of identity.<sup>134</sup>

De Lille's focus here is on the qualities of humanity that elevate the collective consciousness to a place in which an eternal peace exists only when one consciously allows the unity to exist uninhibited by external constraints. His revolutionary ideas embrace the individual spirit of all humanity, regardless of station in medieval human society.

Similarly, Owenson's nineteenth century focus on advocacy of human rights begins with understanding the human mind, as she interprets the experiences of life based on historical responses to specific stimuli. When one is subjected to adverse stimuli, the feeling of constraint encloses on one's perspective, and opportunities cease to function as positive motivations for continued success. On the other hand, when there are decisions that have been made to the betterment of one's life, those become focal points for active and varied participation in life. Owenson witnesses this in her observations of the 'new France' following the Revolution:

Facility of communication, safety, certainty, the mastery over space and time... unimpeded by the superstition that once made the discovery of a truth the signal for persecution, and the happiness of the many subservient to the unrestricted power of the few... How I longed, in the impetuosity of my Irish feelings, to fling a stone, and raise a cromlech on the spot, where impressions of such happy augury for the happiness of mankind were awakened! (*Fr* 15)

<sup>134</sup> Alain de Lille, *De Planctu Naturae*, Prose IX, p. 28.

As she makes her observations of France, her words also describe the societal constraints that she witnesses in Ireland. She sees France making decisions based upon its recent collection of past experiences. The more positive experiences collected by an individual or a specific community, in this case, the country of France or Ireland, the more likely he, she or it will make decisions of calculated risk to increase the potential of a successful pattern.

Thus, these writers' texts define many concepts of society, representing justice, religion, and social welfare, transporting twenty-first century readers to enlightenment imparted from virtue and wisdom of centuries old philosophical expression. De Lille incorporates the theory of iconic realism in the midst of a lush, medieval garden to illustrate the possibilities associated with recognition of the frailties within the authority of any society and dares to question his own authority in the form of medieval Catholicism. Likewise, philosophical thought, influencing Owenson's writing from Descartes spiralling to Comte, characterizes her rhetorical choices, as she utilizes the components of the semiotic theory of iconic realism to create within the minds of her readers a revolutionary design. Through her national tales, narrative poetry, and in her travelogue, *France*, she presents the possibility of influencing nineteenth century consciousness. Literary influences, representing a time span of seven centuries, such as De Lille's and Owenson's, emanate from enlightened consciousness which transcend the limitations of time. Knowledge gained from sharing this new awareness provides innovative thought to permeate communities with intellectual capabilities that eventually affect positive change.



