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SYDNEY OWENSON,
LADY MORGAN
THE WILD IRISH GIRL



The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale

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"I long to study the purely national, purely natural character of an Irishwoman." When Horatio, the son of an English lord, is banished to his father's Irish estate as punishment for his dissipated ways, he goes off in search of adventure. On the wild west coast of Connaught he finds remnants of a romantic Gaelic past--a dilapidated castle, a Catholic priest, a deposed king and the king's lovely daughter Glorvina. In this setting and among these characters Horatio learns the history, culture, and language of a country he had once scorned, but he must do so in disguise, for his own English ancestors are responsible for the ruin of the Gaelic family he comes to love.

Written after the Act of Union, *The Wild Irish Girl*. (1806) is a passionately nationalistic novel and a founding text in the discourse of Irish nationalism. This unique paperback edition includes the 'Introductory Letters' to the novel as well as Owenson's footnotes, rich in detail on the Irish language, history, and legend.

The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale Details

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Perry Whitford says

Lady Morgan's love letter to early 19th century Ireland, or rather a series of love letters scantily dressed up as an epistolary novel.

Henry Mortimer is our eyes and ears to the overlooked charms of Erin, a prejudiced young Englishman who falls in love with the place and the wild Irish girl of the title, Lady Glorvina, when he is forced to spend some time at his father's estate in Connaught.

He receives a a fresher course in Irish history from the decayed Prince of Inismore and his beautiful young daughter; of its mythical Milesian roots, of Finn McCool, Ossian; of Irish dress, music, language, poetry, hospitality.

Henry is completely captivated by Glorvina, *'this sylphid elegance of spheral beauty was united to all the symmetrical contour which constitutes the luxury of human loveliness.'* In modern parlance, she was a stunner.

More importantly, she is also the very personification of Ireland, made clear when Henry Mortimer writes of her *'superior and original character, which is at once both natural and national.'*

So what is the Irish character? I think Lady Morgan best sums it up when Glorvina compares it to Irish music: *"our national character admits of no medium in sentiment; it either sinks our spirit to despondency, by its heartbreaking pathos, or elevates it to wildness by its exhilarating animation."*

For sure the period romance elements of the novel can be a little distracting for a modern reader, all blushing cheeks and lips kissing dewy flowers, but what little plot there is never really gets in the way Lady Morgan's real purpose, to melt the stony hearts of exploitative England towards their wild but hospitable sister country.

I'm of Irish descent on the side of both my parents, so this was a fascinating and enriching read for me.

Leanne (Booksandbabble) says

3.5

Izzy Lorjuste says

I'm stopping at 91%. Which is just about done, anyway. I don't care enough for the conclusion. I didn't care much for the book at all, and if I hadn't been reading it for my friend's bookclub, I would have given up much earlier.

The romance is the only thing that made me give it two stars instead of just one, and even then, I wasn't excited about it. The book just goes on and on without really going anywhere a lot of the time.

Andy says

Dated and silly. Owenson writes similarly to Jane Austen except for the fact that she lets two men converse without a man in the room. Owenson chose to use the diary format popular at the time, which only served to frustrate me as I had to sift through secondary accounts instead of actually seeing what happened. Owenson's wordiness made this read a struggle.

Eliza says

3,5/ 5 stars. Enjoyable, but sometimes tedious due to the mixing of antiquarian focus and novel focus. To be studied still.

Lizy says

So, this book was the Lit of the Irish book for July. Through letters, it tells the story of a rather arrogant Englishman who's sent into temporary exile to Ireland. He falls in love with an Irishwoman, Glorvina, and learns all sorts of Irish history and customs.

I have mixed feelings about the book. On the one hand I'm biased toward defending it because I was the one to nominate this book. I'm also probably a little more suited to appreciate it because I've been conditioned to read the driest of classics--this is actually better than some of the books I had to read for my English degree. But the book isn't that great. It's dry, there are needlessly long passages about things I find irrelevant, and the letter format takes some getting used to.

This novel is quintessentially Victorian, basically. It describes society to the detail, it has these gloriously gothic passages, there's plenty of melodrama, a death, everything. If you're into that kind of thing, go for it and give it a read, but I feel like the average Jane or Joe would find this book impossible and annoying.

And the ending. I have to give it away, do if you don't want spoilers stop reading the review here. But ohhhh my goood his dad and him after the same woman! I did not expect that. So juicy. Definitely made up for the monotony of the rest of the book. I didn't expect something so intense as those last few chapters but hot damn that interrupted wedding and the prince's death. So good.

Trisha says

The Short and Sweet of It

Horatio has been a bad boy, and as his punishment, he is sent to his father's estate in Ireland. While there, he infiltrates the residence of the local Irish royalty his family displaced. He quickly becomes enamored of the family and their

A Bit of a Ramble

This story's subtitle is "A National Tale" and I think that subtitle is more relevant than the title itself. Much of this book is focused on A Look at the Legend of Ireland: History, Culture, and Politics. The "wild Irish girl" in question, Glorvina, is certainly a focal point as she is the vehicle through which much of the Irish culture is filtered for our English protagonist, Horatio. While the romance between Horatio and Glorvina remains at the forefront of Horatio's letters, it is the reversal of Horatio's biased opinions of the Irish and the breakdown of Irish stereotypes that really takes center stage (and comprises the majority of the text).

I think if I was in the right mood while reading this, I could have learned a crapton about Ireland, especially if I had done further research on some of the information. I really am interested to know if the history presented is in fact true. Unfortunately, I do not currently have the time to delve into a project of this sort, so I took the lessons learned at face value and maintained my focus on the story rather than the national history.

And the "story" - the romance - is certainly worthy of attention. Horatio and Glorvina have a slow, understated courtship which is sweet in its subtlety (a type of romance not popular in contemporary lit). Their love is practically unsaid, a connection of minds and personality. To add a twist to the tale, the reader receives the plot through letters Horatio is writing to one of his friends back in England. I find epistolary novels interesting in that they have such a unique point of view - so focused on the thoughts of the protagonist.

Something I didn't like: I would like to start by saying that I adore footnotes. I like annotated copies of works. I actually enjoy reading books about books. And yet, I was annoyed with the footnotes in this book, and pretty much skimmed them (okay, I may even have just completely skipped a few). I couldn't fully explain why these footnotes are so different from those I adore. I guess, in part, I didn't understand why some of the footnotes were footnotes. So much of the text is taken up with discussing Irish history and culture that the separate footnotes for certain historical/cultural tidbits confused me. And I wasn't too impressed with the tone of the footnotes; they weren't that interestingly written (and many footnotes I have really enjoyed are brimming with personality). I guess I need a unique separation and a real voice for my footnotes.

The Wild Irish Girl was a wee bit entertaining and a wee bit informative but didn't wow me on either count. I will say, though, that I really mean it when I say if you get the chance, you should read it.

Rebecca says

Apparently influential upon Irish nationalism. The author was even placed under surveillance by the British Government. Tis about the son of an English Lord who falls for a dispossessed Irish Princess. The playful 'n' intellectual heroine is the novel's only endurable aspect.

Didn't get me embracing my heritage... except for potatoes.

licks potato lasciviously

Ronny says

The actual plot is very small. The rest are scenes and dialogues fitting a National Geographic show about

Ireland. The description of nature and the sublime scenery in the novel resemble very much the gifted hand of Ann Radcliffe. Furthermore, as much as Owenson clearly attempts to advocate via her work the notion of English-Irish unification (following the Act of Union in 1800), and as much as the Irish characters are all presented as eloquent, generous, and passionate about their history, in the end it is mainly about how the English lords are MORE kind and benevolent.

Spoilers Horatio and his father both attempt to reconcile the O'Melvilles feud with their family by assuming a false identity - the former that of a wandering artist, and the latter that of a rebel. In their disguise, they both show that the real prejudice resides in the Irish, or rather yet, the representatives of old Irish tradition (The Prince of Inismore); they are forced to lie and deceive him and his family because he is unwilling to receive them as they are, solely because they are the descendents of the general who killed his ancestor in battle. Moreover, the ending presents the English as the saviours of the Irish - the Lord M- rushes to the aid of the prince not only by paying his debts and releasing him from his prison-cell, but also by consenting for his son to marry the prince's daughter (and by thus giving her a legal claim to the hereditary property that once belonged to her family).

Kathleen F says

OK, in fairness this novel is pretty mediocre and rather strange--given its grandiose and very romantic depiction of early 19th Century Ireland. ESPECIALLY when you consider that Lady Morgan/Sydney Owenson was a contemporary of Jane Austen.

But it's critical in that the first Irish novels were written by women (Maria Edgeworth was the original "mother" of the Irish regional novel.)

So for its sheer camp factor and its important vision into Irish literary history, I give it 4 stars. :)

Keith Boynton says

From its labored prose to its bludgeoning didacticism to its insufferable narrator and the glacial progress of its so-called plot, this is as comprehensively tedious and artless a novel as I ever hope to come across. A book to be enthusiastically avoided.

Jason Smith says

A didactic Irish nationalist novel written primarily with an English audience in mind. The conversations are largely expository evaluations of Irish history, made in an attempt to subvert prevailing attitudes towards the Gaelic race. Owenson's authorial hand is heavy as the novel is riddled with an absurd amount of footnotes that rip you out of the narrative to load more facts (some quite dubious) on the reader.

The most damning element of the book, written at the turn of the nineteenth century following the union of Ireland and England, is the foolish Romantic notion that peace and unity can be found through the mixing of these disparate civilizations; the English sophisticates can bring societal advances and structure to the good, honest people of Ireland without addressing the massive economic and structural disparities. See: Famine.

I qualify all of this with a recommendation to read this if you are interested in the history and attitudes surrounding the Union and Irish history (or at least Irish antiquarianism) in general. Maria Edgeworth, Enlightened Protestant Ascendent provided a response/contrast to Owenson's Catholic Irish Nationalist/Unionist perspective with her novel *Ennui*.

Meg Merriet says

This one's been added to my list of favorites. The allegory is phenomenal! Critics are still arguing about the author's intention with it. In addition to being a spellbinding historical text that reads like a twisted gothic fairytale, *Wild Irish Girl* confronts its readers with a subversive commentary on England's cannibalization of the Irish national identity. To love this book, you have to look past the sexist ideologies of its narrator and appreciate the text as a historical artifact, as well as remember that it was written by a woman who is in many ways mocking the stifling lens of her narrator.

Maria says

Gez, I want to say it was boring... but it was just such a SOAP OPERA (but for the time it was probably pretty scandalous. So to save you the time, I will just tell you this is how it goes- boy goes to Ireland- boy suffers from ennui (extreme boredom)- boy meets red head- boy goes on for pages about her beauty- boy finds out red head is engaged-boy returns to England and papa isn't home- boy discovers where and when red-head is getting hitched- boy stops wedding only to find red-head is marrying dad- dad drops dead-boy marries red-head.

(I left this one in Ireland)

Jack says

Not to spoil this for anyone, but...she's not that wild, really.
