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Feminism, Nationalism, Separatism? The case of Alice Stopford Green

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In the introduction to her translation of Julia Kristeva's 'Women's Time', Alice Jardine suggests that 'Kristeva writes in a kind of "future perfect"'.¹ This tense, 'for an action which at a given future time will be in the past', takes on a future-based perspective.² Jardine asks rhetorically of Kristeva's 'complex' and challenging work: 'What will have to have happened before she can be read?'³ The same question might be asked of the late-Victorian historian Alice Stopford Green. As an amateur historian, writing outside the academy at a time when a university post was gradually becoming a badge of credibility, and a woman writing at a time when the discipline was becoming masculinized, she was all too aware that her most sympathetic audience might not be a contemporaneous one. Rather than straightforwardly adopting the conventions or tones of the professionalized historian, however, she took a consciously separatist position in several ways, defining her writing as the product of a specifically female, and specifically Irish, bent. She refused to take on the persona of the objective and scientific historian, combining her role as historian with that of committed activist. She also boldly embraced a form from which many Victorian historians shrank, lacking the hindsight to condense their multifarious present into a singular narrative: contemporary history. This was a topic about which it was both impossible, and necessary, to write in a kind of 'future perfect'.

The present essay focuses on two works by Stopford Green: first, her 1915 epilogue to her late husband J. R. Green's *Short History of the English People* (1874); and second, a startlingly anguished periodical article of 1897, 'Woman's Place in the World of Letters'. Her 1897 article in many ways anticipates the concerns with *écriture féminine* voiced seven decades later by Hélène Cixous, and Kristeva's notion of 'Women's Time'. Whether the 'women's time' that Stopford Green envisages is that of cyclical 'repetition' or monumental 'eternity', a golden age waiting in the future, or yet a stream parallel to and ignored by men's, is open to debate.⁴ The 'Epilogue', in its own way, is just as radical: in it, Stopford Green both voices and subverts her husband's English nationalism, and brings his history up to her present, in the midst of a war now seen as a watershed.

Alice Stopford Green complicates our view of women's historiography at the turn of the twentieth century, often overturning our expectations. In 1889, for example, encouraged by her friend Mary Humphry Ward, she signed the 'Appeal against Female Suffrage' with Ward, Louise Creighton and that other figure, one who also eventually became a radical political campaigner, Beatrice Potter. She justified her support for Ward on the grounds that

¹ Alice Jardine, 'Introduction to Julia Kristeva's "Women's Time"', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 7 (1981), 5–12 (p. 5). See Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time', *Signs*, 7 (1981), 13–35.

² *A Practical English Grammar*, ed. by A. J. Thomson and A. V. Martinet (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 194.

³ Jardine, 'Introduction', p. 5.

⁴ Kristeva, 'Women's Time', p. 16.

women could not – or would not – compete with men within patriarchal institutions: instead, they needed to find ‘alternative circuits of influence’.⁵ Although she later changed her mind about female emancipation, she always ‘sought the company of men’, even to the expense of women. Asked once which of her fellow Dublin women she liked, she eventually selected one on the grounds that ‘she never speaks when her husband is in the room.’⁶ In 1898, Potter (by now Webb) ascribed the dissatisfaction she saw in Stopford Green to her yearning for love, for which ‘only religion can take its place. And Alice Green has no religion, no conviction, not even a cause she believes in.’⁷ Soon, however, Stopford Green found a cause she believed in. From the turn of the century, she became increasingly invested in the movement for Irish independence. This was a highly activist investment: not only did she support the cause financially and through her writings, but she was a major player in the Howth gunrunning of 1914, and sheltered nationalist fighters in her house in Dublin. After 1922, she became one of the first Irish Free State Senators. Her historiography evinces characteristics often labelled as feminine: prioritizing the particular over the general, and differentiating rather than universalizing, she focuses on the silenced and marginalized voices of women and the Irish ‘nation’. Her approach to this writing, however, challenges readings of the literary and historiographical field that see women being ‘edged out’ of the mainstream.⁸ Stopford Green’s attitude, and self-positioning, is anything but passive. Some valuable research has been done tracing Stopford Green’s impressive and little-recognized career. R. B. McDowell’s biography provides the essential basis for all recent work.⁹ A detailed delineation of the lives and experiences of nineteenth-century women historians, including her, has been provided by Rosemary Mitchell, and Sandra Holton and Nadia Smith have built on this foundation to focus on Stopford Green’s own career.¹⁰ She has received valuable discussion in broader contexts in work by Billie Melman and Joan Thirsk, and in connection with her friend and Irish nationalist Roger Casement, in work by Angus Mitchell.¹¹ These existing inquiries, however, have all been conducted in a historiographical mode, and no attempts have been made to grant her writing close textual analysis. ‘Woman’s Place in the World of Letters’ has had brief mention in several studies in historiography, but

⁵ Angus Mitchell, ‘Alice Stopford Green and the Origins of the African Society’, *History Ireland*, 14 (2006) <<http://www.historyireland.com/20th-century-contemporary-history/alice-stopford-green-and-the-origins-of-the-african-society/>> [accessed 2 June 2014].

⁶ Qtd. León Ó Broin, *Protestant Nationalists in Revolutionary Ireland: The Stopford Connection* (Goldenbridge, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1985), p. 210.

⁷ *The Diary of Beatrice Webb*, ed. by Norman Mackenzie and Jeanne Mackenzie, 4 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), II, 128.

⁸ Gaye Tuchman and Nina E. Fortin, *Edging Women Out: Victorian Novelists, Publishers and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 1989). See also Joan Thirsk, ‘The History Women’, in *Chattel, Servant or Citizen: Women’s Status in Church, State and Society*, ed. by Mary O’Dowd and Sabine Wichert (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, The Queen’s University of Belfast, 1995), pp. 1–11.

⁹ Robert Brendan McDowell, *Alice Stopford Green: A Passionate Historian* (Dublin: Allen Figgis, 1967).

¹⁰ Rosemary Ann Mitchell, ‘“The Busy Daughters of Clio”: Women Writers of History from 1820 to 1880’, *Women’s History Review*, 7 (1998), 107–34; Sandra Holton, ‘Gender Difference, National Identity and Professing History: The Case of Alice Stopford Green’, *History Workshop Journal*, 53 (2002), 118–27; Nadia Smith, *A ‘Manly Study’?: Irish Women Historians, 1868–1949* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

¹¹ Billie Melman, ‘Gender, History and Memory: The Invention of Women’s Past in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries’, *History and Memory*, 5 (1993), 5–41; Thirsk; Angus Mitchell.

has received no sustained critical attention.¹² By building particularly on Holton's dual focus on feminism and nationalism, but, unlike Holton, examining selected writings of Stopford Green's more closely, I demonstrate how both her feminist and nationalist commitments were subject to the same pattern: both were avowedly separatist, but were nonetheless modified by the pull of universalising and unifying impulses. The opening section of this article, therefore, will demonstrate the prevalence of the discourse that associated both 'woman' and 'the Irish' with particularity and multiplicity, and will show how the establishment of history as a professional discipline affected the relative status (and gendering) of particular and general towards the end of the nineteenth century, when Stopford Green was beginning to write for publication. The second half will consider how this interplay of particular and general plays out in – and is critiqued by – Stopford Green's writings themselves.

Femininity, nationality and the particular

The idea that our concepts of history are gendered is not a new one. Christina Crosby argues that in the nineteenth century, men were associated with universality and linearity – History – while women were, in the process, demoted to the realm of cyclical, circular time. For Crosby, “‘Women’ are the unhistorical other of history”.¹³ This idea of the ‘unhistorical’ woman, moreover, is conceived in the terms that form the conceptual crux of this article. In Crosby's reading, woman is atemporal and essentialized, and thus, on one level, singular. The character of this essentialization, however, is one of multiplicity, in the form of domesticity, superficiality and particularity. In a recent monograph, Brigid Lowe has in a sense turned Crosby's thesis on its head, using the framework of derogatory mid-Victorian commentary on women's writing to suggest that ‘there *is* such a thing as a feminine imaginative perspective’, but to reclaim this as a positive.¹⁴ She proposes that some realist novelists embraced a concern with ‘feminine’ circumstantial detail and multiplicity as a deliberate strategy. As Claire Colebrook concludes, in an analysis of the changing relationship between the ‘nature-culture binary’ and the ‘male-female’ binary, ‘Woman may appear as the natural, biological and embodied origin of being, or she can be associated with surface, display, artifice and fashion.’¹⁵ As we will see, Stopford Green draws upon the former in her evocations of the Irish nation, but draws on, and rails against, both orientations of this binary in her analysis of the challenge facing women writers.

So what is the relationship between ‘woman’ and ‘the nation’? The practice of personifying a nation in feminine form is a ‘familiar’ one, ‘ingrained in European tradition’, and Ireland is

¹² It receives brief mentions in Miriam Elizabeth Burstein, *Narrating Women's History in Britain, 1770–1902* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 15; Devoney Looser, *British Women Writers and the Writing of History, 1670–1820* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), p. 29; Maureen O'Connor, *The Female and the Species: The Animal in Irish Women's Writing* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 133; Ian Hesketh, *The Science of History in Victorian Britain: Making the Past Speak* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011), p. 128. Holton grants it two paragraphs, but shrinks from textual analysis, explaining that ‘It is the least lucid of Green's writings and perhaps I should have been warned by the advice of Joan Thirsk that it “deserves careful reading”.’ (p. 123)

¹³ Christina Crosby, *The Ends of History: Victorians and ‘the Woman Question’* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 1.

¹⁴ Brigid Lowe, *Victorian Fiction and the Insights of Sympathy: An Alternative to the Hermeneutics of Suspicion* (London: Anthem Press, 2007), pp. 64–5. My italics.

¹⁵ Claire Colebrook, *Gender* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), p. 44.

no exception.¹⁶ As diverse scholars have highlighted, the ‘archaic temporality’ of ‘women’s time’ has also been transferred to characterize the Irish chronotype.¹⁷ The Irish have persistently been associated with short-sighted particularity, and thus with femininity. As Matthew Arnold famously claimed in his 1865–66 lecture series *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (whose purpose was to argue for the value of this literature, but which nonetheless devoted much time to a critique of ‘the Celtic nature’), their characteristics ‘have something feminine in them’.¹⁸ After invoking the stigma of effeminacy by talking solely of *men*, and talking always in the singular as if there is nothing to distinguish one Irishman from another, he concludes that ‘the Celt is thus peculiarly disposed to feel the spell of the feminine idiosyncrasy; he has an affinity to it; he is not far from its secret.’¹⁹ He calls forth the first orientation of the ‘nature-culture / female-male’ binary in order to suggest that ‘[the Celt’s] sensibility gives him a peculiarly near and intimate feeling of nature and the life of nature’.²⁰ Recent interventions by L. Perry Curtis and Michael de Nie have highlighted the late-nineteenth-century *splitting* of this feminine-natural myth of the Irish.²¹ As Maureen O’Connor describes it, alongside the ‘helpless and frail “Hibernia”’ British cartoons also depicted ‘a brutal, apelike, *male* figure of Irish rebellion or anarchy, from whom Hibernia seeks protection in the arms of John Bull or Britannia’.²² In retaliation against this vein of association, Irish nationalists themselves evoked a female Ireland: the peaceful Mother Nature whom they sought to protect, and whose reputation they seek to salvage. For the marginalized groups to whom Stopford Green was most committed, the singular definitions of ‘woman’ and ‘Ireland’ could offer, as I show here, a goal of self-sufficiency and self-determination.

Anxieties about ‘the particular’ are not confined to the Victorian period. Naomi Schor’s work on aesthetics is illuminating in tracing the association of feminine and particular across a broader timeframe. She suggests that ‘the censure of the particular is one of the enabling gestures of neo-classicism’, and is inextricably associated with the feminine.²³ She sees ‘the detail’ as ‘participat[ing] in a larger semantic network, bounded on the one side by the ornamental, with its traditional connotations of effeminacy and decadence, and on the other, by the everyday, whose ‘prosiness’ is rooted in the domestic sphere of social life presided over by women’.²⁴ The key words here for my study are ‘ornamental’ and ‘everyday’. Schor’s association of ‘the detail’ with the former’s superficiality and the latter’s

¹⁶ Kirsten Stirling, *Bella Caledonia: Woman, Nation, Text* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2008), p. 11.

¹⁷ Ina Ferris, ‘Writing on the Border: The National Tale’, in *Romanticism, History, and the Possibilities of Genre: Re-forming Literature, 1789-1837*, ed. by Tilotama Rajan and Julia M. Wright (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 93. See also David Lloyd, *Ireland after History* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1999); Luke Gibbons, ‘Romantic Ireland: 1750-1845’, in *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature*, ed. by James Chandler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹⁸ Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature and Other Essays*, ed. by Ernest Rhys (London: Dent, 1976), p. 86.

¹⁹ Arnold, *Celtic Literature*, p. 86.

²⁰ Arnold, *Celtic Literature*, p. 86.

²¹ L. Perry Curtis Jr, *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997); Michael de Nie, *The Eternal Paddy: Irish Identity and the British Press, 1798–1882* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).

²² O’Connor, *Female of the Species*, p. 86.

²³ Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 3.

²⁴ Schor, *Reading in Detail*, p. 4.

domesticity draws out parallels between Victorian ideas of the feminine and anxieties about writing inevitably short-sighted contemporary history. Both these disparaged categories come together in Stopford Green's writings.

The academic and professional discipline of 'History' established in Britain from the 1860s onwards was conceived in terms of exclusivity. When a long-held dream came to fruition in 1886 with the foundation of the *English Historical Review*, it was explicitly designed to address not 'the person called the "general reader"', but 'professional students of history'.²⁵ T. W. Heyck and Reba Soffer have located a decisive shift in disciplinary ideals in the final quarter of the century, and Thomas F. Gieryn has affirmed the centrality of the late-Victorian decades to an equivalent process in the history of science.²⁶ Gieryn's evocative term, 'boundary-work', by which he characterizes the process of establishing a secure and exclusive disciplinary space for science by labelling undesirable elements 'unscientific', has been usefully applied by Ian Hesketh to the concurrent process of defining the 'scientific' historical discipline.²⁷ I would like to widen this concept to apply to the gradual exclusion from academic 'History' of modes of knowledge conceived of as 'feminine', of which, as we will see, Stopford Green takes an expansive view.

As Joan Thirsk has traced in relation to historiography, and Gaye Tuchman and Nina Fortin has explored in relation to novel writing, women had been prominent and even numerically predominant in the genre's early blossoming. As both analyses show, however, as new fields like these become 'institutionalized, formalized, and organized', they 'always fall under the control of men',²⁸ who 'edge . . . out'²⁹ their female counterparts. The true power of boundary-work lies, according to Bonnie Smith, in its ability to render itself invisible: even those who are effectively excluded from its realm can believe in its 'universal reach and constituency'.³⁰ Stopford Green epitomizes this problem: she rails against the male monopoly on 'the world of letters', and the privileging of transcendent and universalising (imperialist) narratives, but sometimes reverts to those same universalising categories herself.

'Woman's Place in the World of Letters'

In 'Woman's Place in the World of Letters', we find a startling hostility to history that seems to belie Smith's generalizing evocation. When Stopford Green published this article in the *Nineteenth Century* in 1897, she had not yet written the histories of Ireland for which she would later be famous. Although she had already published *Town Life in the Fifteenth*

²⁵ [James Bryce], 'Prefatory Note', *English Historical Review*, 1 (1886), 1–6 (p. 5).

²⁶ T. W. Heyck, *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), p. 15; Reba N. Soffer, *Discipline and Power: The University, History, and the Making of an English Elite, 1870–1930* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994); Thomas F. Gieryn, 'Boundary-Work and the Demarcation of Science from Non-Science: Strains and Interests in Professional Ideologies of Scientists', *American Sociological Review*, 46 (1983), 781–95 (p. 781). Gieryn uses John Tyndall (1820–1893) as his opening case study (p. 784).

²⁷ Ian Hesketh, 'Diagnosing Froude's Disease: Boundary Work and the Discipline of History in Late-Victorian Britain', *History and Theory*, 47 (2008), 373–95.

²⁸ Thirsk, 'The History Women', p. 2.

²⁹ Tuchman and Fortin, *Edging Women Out*, p. 46.

³⁰ Bonnie G. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 132.

Century (1894), she was best known as the widow of J. R. Green. It is written from a perspective bordering, both chronologically and personally, on the professional historical establishment.³¹ As Elaine Showalter's important 1993 anthology has helped to remind us, fin-de-siècle New Woman writing is often resolutely separatist.³² In Oliver Schreiner's 1887 fable of the struggle to reach a female utopia, 'Three Dreams in a Desert', which appeared in the liberal *Fortnightly Review*, the narrator looks at the prostrate body of 'woman', and sees 'in her eyes the terrible patience of the centuries'.³³ Ten years later, Stopford Green releases a similar cry of agony and lament for centuries of female oppression, depicting a world in which women's modes of thought are not only deemed invalid, but are utterly alien to the structures, goals and values of the workings of human (male) civilisation.

It begins in light-hearted mode, with a metaphor drawn from 'Sleeping Beauty'. 'Round the cradle of every new study cluster hypotheses like the old fairy godmothers ... And nowhere have the gossips been more bustling than round the still young discussion of woman's place in the world of letters' (p. 964). The tone soon shifts, however, taking on a note of lamentation and suppressed anger. Stopford Green considers women's future place in the 'world of letters', that strikingly non-disciplinary phrase harking back to an earlier part of the century, and declares that it is difficult to predict.³⁴

For even in her literary venture woman remains essentially mysterious. It is as though some inherent diffidence, some over-mastering self-distrust, had made her fear to venture out into the open unprotected and bare to attack. She covers her advance with a whole complicated machinery of arrow-proof hides and wooden shelters. (p. 965)

This discourse of 'attack' and 'arrow-proof hides' to some extent matches that which Lytton Strachey used coyly in the preface to *Eminent Victorians* (1918), where he suggests that the only way to approach writing about his recent past is through surreptitious military means, 'attack[ing] his subject in unexpected places; he will fall upon the flank, or the rear'.³⁵ Unlike Strachey, however, her metaphorical manoeuvre in the world of letters is a defensive rather than an aggressive one.

Stopford Green suggests that this 'complicated machinery' of conventional defences – paratexts and self-exculpations – does not always suffice. If not,

[S]he seeks safety in what is known in Nature as protective mimicry – one recalls the touching forms of beautiful creatures that, dwelling in the arid desert, have shrouded themselves in the dull hue of the soil, or in arctic cold have taken on a snowy whiteness; of live breathing things that have made themselves after the likeness of a dead twig, and harmless beings who in their alarm have donned the gay air of

³¹ Alice Stopford Green, 'Woman's Place in the World of Letters', *The Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review*, 41 (1897), 964–74. Subsequent references will be given within the text.

³² *Daughters of Decadence: Women Writers of the Fin-de-Siècle*, ed. by Elaine Showalter (London: Virago, 1993).

³³ Olive Schreiner, 'Three Dreams in a Desert', *Fortnightly Review*, 42 (1887), 198–203 (pp. 198–89). Also in *Daughters of Decadence*, ed. Showalter, pp. 308–16, p. 308–09.

³⁴ As Linda H. Peterson has noted, however, 'woman of letters' itself was a 1860s coinage. *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 4.

³⁵ Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, ed. by John Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 5.

predatory insects and poisonous reptiles. Over wide seas, where it is hard to say if she fears man or Nature most, woman sails under any colour but her own[.] (p. 965)

In contrast to Kristeva, who declares, following Lacan, “‘There is no such thing as Woman’” ... she does *not* exist with a capital “W”, Stopford Green acquiesces with the essentialization of woman, talking of half the human population in the singular – as ‘she’ and ‘woman’.³⁶ She undermines conventional essentializations, however, by declaring that in current circumstances, woman’s true nature is almost never seen. Her disguises are both perpetual and multiple. Unlike Schreiner’s ‘woman’, who ‘threw from her gladly the mantle of Ancient-received-opinions she wore’, Stopford Green’s is condemned to hide behind convention.³⁷ In this passage, woman is at once allied with the prey species of the animal world, and placed in an even more vulnerable position: her most dangerous predator is her own mate. Men refuse to identify woman as their fellow, but view her as Other, an object of predation.

Men see women as Other, Stopford Green suggests, because women *are* other. There is, she argues, a profound divergence between the ‘established order’ of Western civilisation and the female nature.

What if these things should be but signs that woman is herself no better than a stranger in the visible established order of this world – a strayed wanderer from some different sphere – a witness, a herald it may be, of another system lying on the ultimate marge and confines of Space and Time. (p. 969)

While woman is envisaged as a visitor from another planet, men are comfortable in this world. ‘In the world without he can distinguish a harmony, an intellectual order which responds to and justifies his reason.’ (p. 969) The world is set up for man, and by man. What Stopford Green locates as woman’s chief ‘ceaseless passion’ is one that ‘has never reigned here as Law, the Force of redeeming Love.’ (p. 970) Unfortunately, for her – and, presumably, for man – ‘[t]he torch of Love cannot be handed on like the torch of Reason; it is quenched with every lover. If the object of Reason stands changeless as the heavens, the object of Love is as fleeting as the summer cloud’ (p. 970). Woman’s chief gift cannot be bequeathed for posterity, cannot be passed down in material form, but only lives as long as those who nurture it. The form of transmission through generations that Stopford Green envisages, therefore, is one utterly at odds with the Whig historical scheme of continuity and unbroken heritage. Women’s gifts do not fit in this framework, and are thus both devalued and dehistoricized.

‘Of all pilgrims and sojourners in the world’, Stopford Green declares, ‘woman remains in fact the most perplexed and the most alien. From the known order of things she has everything to fear, nothing to hope. ... her disillusionment as to the Past [is] complete’ (p. 971). She does not, however, disassociate women from *all* senses of history. The one benefit of their current position is the liberation it bequeaths to women disenchanted equally by the past and the present, allowing them to adopt a single-minded focus on the time to come.

³⁶ Kristeva, ‘Women’s Time’, p. 30.

³⁷ Schreiner, ‘Three Dreams in a Desert’, p. 201. Also in *Daughters of Decadence* ed. Showalter, p. 313.

‘[H]er eyes are turned only to the Future. There she images ceaselessly another Life to be revealed which shall utterly efface old codes and systems’ (p. 971). Is this a rallying cry? It can only become one, the article suggests, if woman first finds a voice and a language in which to express her alienation. Stopford Green suggests that ‘there is nothing of the reckless enthusiast or spendthrift about [the female writer]. With a sober, straightforward, practical air she makes her entry into the literary world . . . in her bearing a gravity as though something more than mere literature were at stake’ (p. 965). Implicit in this ‘as though’ is the suggestion that something more is at stake: an entire world of female identity and assertion of a legitimate place in society is bound up in its literary expression, in a way that prefigures twentieth-century calls by Cixous and Kristeva for an *écriture féminine*.³⁸ In the current situation, however, women are utterly alienated both from history and from the present conception of what history might entail.

The pervasive extent of the discourse that views women, in Crosby’s terms, as ‘the unhistorical “Other” of history’, is perhaps nowhere clearer than in Stopford Green’s fierce analysis of this discourse. Although she rails against the alienation it causes, in the process she actually endorses its central tenets. She associates ‘man’ with ‘laws’ – of behaviour, of existence and of history (p. 969). These laws require a mode of historical thinking in perpetual movement away from the particular towards the general, and thus one unsuited to women’s ‘gifts’. She does not claim a fundamental unity or common ground for the sexes; rather, she suggests, in a separatist mould, that woman can only find true expression in a world utterly transformed: a ‘future perfect’.

Irish nationalism

At the opening to his study on British fantasies of imperial knowledge, Thomas Richards characterizes ‘an empire’ as ‘by definition and default a nation in overreach’, and this illuminates the now-unusual combination of sentiments held by Stopford Green.³⁹ Her nationalism is particular rather than all-encompassing, fuelled by a belief in self-determination rather than nascent imperialism. Her response to the idea of English, and especially British nationhood, therefore, is neither disinterested nor unproblematic. As Holton has emphasized, throughout the latter part of her life, Irish history and the ‘Irish question’ dominated her work. She published an openly Celtic-nationalist history, *The Making of Ireland and its Undoing, 1200–1600*, in 1908.⁴⁰ The previous year, her determination to support Sir Anthony MacDonnell, Under-Secretary for Ireland, in his Irish Council Bill to establish a representative Irish body to manage several departments of the country’s government, extended even to arranging a meeting for him with Richard Burdon Haldane, the Secretary of War. Seven years later, in the spring of 1914, she was the leading

³⁸ See Hélène Cixous, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ [1975] in *The Portable Cixous* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

³⁹ Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London: Verso, 1993), p. 1.

⁴⁰ Alice Stopford Green, *The Making of Ireland and Its Undoing, 1200–1600* (London: Macmillan, 1908).

contributor to a fund of £1,500 established for the purpose of arming a group of Irish National volunteers, who even met secretly at her house in Dublin.⁴¹

This nationalist commitment received most substantial, and scholarly, delineation in her two works of medieval Irish history, *The Making of Ireland and Its Undoing* (1908) and *The Old Irish World* (1912). In both works, she stressed the concerted distortion imposed by English versions of Ireland's history. The Preface to the first of these works describes the fates of many Irish and Anglo-Irish historical figures as a 'second death': that of being 'buried by the false hands of strangers in the deep pit of contempt, reproach, and forgetfulness – an unmerited grave of silence and of shame.'⁴² As in 'Woman's Place', she evokes the sense of erasure attendant on being denied a voice, and thus a 'place', in history. She explains: 'Thus the history of the Irish people has been left unrecorded, as though it had never been'.⁴³ This is echoed in a striking passage in *The Old Irish World*, where she observes just how much the English administrators of Ireland 'did not know or care to know'.⁴⁴ Stopford Green's sophisticated sense of historical knowledge is far from binary. It places a high value on the importance of utterance, of giving silenced people a voice. And it stresses the powerful influence of the stories we *want* to hear on the stories we tell.

Stopford Green's work has at times been criticized for being influenced too much by the stories she wanted to hear. Particularly in her histories of pre-conquest Ireland, she was accused of fabricating more of a sense of national identity – evoking myths equivalent to the British use of King Arthur – to claim a fallacious, or at least 'anachronistic', unity for Ireland.⁴⁵ One of the things Stopford Green was understandably keen to find in her researches into the Irish past was evidence of gender equality. As Miriam Burstein has delineated particularly well, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historians and moralists often used women's status (and moral stature) as a marker of national progress in order to 'diagnose . . . the state of society as a whole.'⁴⁶ And Stopford Green does this with zeal. She invokes this trope at the opening of 'A Great Irish Lady', the third chapter of *The Old Irish World*, where she states: 'We are often told that the civilization of a people is marked by the place of its women: a rule by which the Irish stand high'.⁴⁷ Her vision of pre-medieval Ireland evokes an idyllic land of consensus and flexibility in relationships reminiscent of William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890). As she delineates in her *History of the Irish State to 1014* (1925), husband and wife could 'separate by mutual consent, with equal endowment at parting, exempt and free, without malice', and 'succession through a female ancestor was lawful . . . perhaps a remnant of matriarchal custom'.⁴⁸ Perhaps the clearest statement of her faith in the superior position of women in Ireland before its English

⁴¹ See McDowell, *A Passionate Historian*, p. 55.

⁴² Stopford Green, *Making of Ireland*, p. x.

⁴³ Stopford Green, *Making of Ireland*, p. ix.

⁴⁴ Alice Stopford Green, *The Old Irish World* (Dublin: Gill and Son, 1912), p. 116.

⁴⁵ Nadia Smith, *A 'Manly Study'?*, p. 57. See also Ó Broin, *Protestant Nationalists*, p. 23.

⁴⁶ Burstein, *Narrating Women's History*, p. 102.

⁴⁷ Stopford Green, *The Old Irish World*, p. 100.

⁴⁸ Alice Stopford Green, *History of the Irish State to 1014* (London: Macmillan, 1925), p. 206.

conquest comes in *The Making of Ireland and Its Undoing* (1908), where she declares: ‘The Irish women had evidently a position of great independence and influence.’⁴⁹

Both these concerns come together in the epilogue she wrote in 1915 to her late husband’s *Short History of the English People*. This 1874 one-volume national history was lauded (and vilified) in its day as a democratic manifesto, and J. R. Green certainly wrote it with radical intentions. He deliberately broke with the convention of structuring his text by regnal dates, defending his approach with the declaration: ‘I won’t divide by Kings, a system whereby History is made Tory unawares and infants are made to hate history’.⁵⁰ By doing so, he effectively proclaimed that monarchs are not always the most important contributors to historical change, and suggested that agency lay more widely with ‘the people’. In practice, however, despite its title, both practical and aesthetic constraints meant that monarchs and ministers populated his *Short History*. Having undertaken a simple quantitative comparison (counting the number of pages devoted to politico-military versus socio-economic history), Gertrude Himmelfarb concluded that Green’s practice was less radical than his intentions.⁵¹

The book was also emphatically an English history, and one that focuses on the ‘English People’ rather than its lands or laws.⁵² This point is strikingly evident from the opening pages, which are set not in the beloved green hills of the English landscape, but in the marshes of modern Denmark.

For the fatherland of the English race we must look far away from England itself. In the fifth century after the birth of Christ, the one country which we know to have borne the name of Angeln or the Engleland lay in the district which we now call Sleswick, a district in the heart of the peninsula which parts the Baltic from the northern seas.⁵³

This opening places the germ of English heritage in racial origins. Unsurprisingly, Stopford Green’s epilogue presents a conflicted attitude to the ‘English People’ her husband had so eulogized, and a rather critical view of the benefits of English imperialism.

In her epilogue, Stopford Green expresses (as was common in other proto-social historians of the late nineteenth century, such as the onetime Governor of the Isle of Man, Spencer Walpole) a worshipful vision of ‘the nation’.⁵⁴ She presents the reforms of the Victorian period as crucially different from previous such periods of reform, resulting not from the impositions of a monarch but ‘the work of the nation itself’.⁵⁵ This synecdoche, in which the nation possesses intrinsic characteristics, embodying and embodied in its individuals, was one way to bring ordinary and unhistoric ‘English People’ into her *History*.

⁴⁹ Stopford Green, *Making of Ireland*, p. 83.

⁵⁰ J. R. Green to Edward Freeman, 30 December 1872, *The Letters of John Richard Green*, ed. Leslie Stephen (London: Macmillan, 1904), p. 340. Qtd. in Anthony Brundage, *The People’s Historian: John Richard Green and the Writing of History in Victorian England* (London: Greenwood Press, 1994), p. 105.

⁵¹ Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The New History and the Old: Critical Essays and Reappraisals* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 152.

⁵² On Victorian historians’ tendency to write histories of England rather than ‘Britain’, see David Cannadine, ‘British History as a “New Subject”’, in *Uniting the Kingdom?: The Making of British History*, ed. by Alexander Grant and Keith Stringer (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 12–28.

⁵³ J. R. Green, *A Short History of the English People*, ed. by Alice Stopford Green (London: Macmillan, 1916), p. 1.

⁵⁴ Spencer Walpole, *A History of England from the Conclusion of the Great War in 1815*, 6 vols. [1878–86] (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1890).

⁵⁵ Alice Stopford Green, ‘Epilogue’, in Green, *Short History*, pp. 837–1008 (p. 897).

It also offered a way to deal with one of the central challenges of contemporary history writing: how to make sense of – and represent – the disparate mass of still-living individuals who are its subject.

However, this unified and singular notion of the ‘nation’ does not always fit comfortably with her Irish nationalist activism. She concludes her text with two epigraphs from her late husband that act as badges of authorisation for her historical interpretation:

‘The sympathies of peoples with peoples, the sense of a common humanity between nations, the aspirations of nationalities after freedom and independence, are real political forces.’ *Feb. 1877*⁵⁶

‘The great force which has transformed Europe, which has been the secret of its history ever since 1815, is a political “sentiment” – that of Nationality.’ *April 1880*⁵⁷

These epigraphs endorse both of the founding principles of her epilogue, presenting a doctrine of nationalism at once passionate and qualified. She is at pains to argue, in her appendix to her husband’s influential work, that nationalism need not be synonymous with chauvinism: that faith in common humanity across nations is as vital as that within nations. These sentiments, of course, strike a particular chord in the context of the war in which, in 1915, her world was currently immersed. They also remind us that nationalism is not a singular or a binary position. Stopford Green was an Irish nationalist, but not a republican. This is no matter of subtle shades of opinion: in 1922–23, her pro-Free State stance, supporting the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, put her on the opposite side from many of her former friends in the resulting Irish Civil War.⁵⁸

Stopford Green’s hostility towards a nationalism that transgresses its borders – and thus transforms into imperialism – is evident in the tone of her epilogue to the *Short History*. In his proto-social history of 1878–86, *The History of England from the Conclusion of the Great War in 1815*, liberal civil servant Spencer Walpole had placed great significance on the impact of population growth. With a triumphalist confidence, he declared: ‘This prodigious increase in the number of the English-speaking people is not merely the chief fact in the history of the nineteenth century, it is the most important circumstance in the history of the world . . . The British have swept over the largest portion of the world, and they have brought light instead of darkness in their wake’.⁵⁹ Stopford Green evokes this same rhetoric in the opening to her epilogue, but in a tone decidedly tongue-in-cheek. In her opening depiction of the aftermath of Waterloo, she writes that

Once more, as after the Armada, a lofty pride stirred the nation. ‘England,’ it was said, ‘seems destined by Providence to lead the moral condition of the world. Year after year we are sending forth thousands and hundreds of thousands of our citizens to people the vast solitudes and islands of another hemisphere; the Anglo-Saxon race will shortly overspread half the habitable globe. What a mighty and what a rapid addition to

⁵⁶ *The Letters of John Richard Green*, ed. by Leslie Stephen (London: Macmillan, 1901), p. 447.

⁵⁷ *Letters of John Richard Green*, p. 480.

⁵⁸ See Ó Broin, pp. 189–90.

⁵⁹ Walpole, VI, 381.

the happiness of mankind, if these thousands should carry with them, and plant in those distant regions, our freedom, our laws, our morality, and our religion!’⁶⁰

The key phrase in this passage is that unobtrusive little aside, ‘it was said’, a phrase often used in the late nineteenth century to preface traditional but unevidenced historical anecdotes. This is decidedly not Stopford Green’s own call to imperialism, but a wry illustration of the early nineteenth century’s naïve ideals. She at once recognizes and offers up to the reader the power of these kind of messianic imperialist narratives, and undermines them.

It is through surreptitiously double-edged rhetoric, therefore, that Green’s widow uses her late husband’s influential and popular textbook as the conduit of revisionist and even radical ideas. This technique – restating views she implicitly seeks to critique – risks being misinterpreted as straightforwardly triumphalist. The other inevitable by-product of ironic semantics is that the process of quoting nonetheless gives voice to – and at some level reaffirms in the public consciousness – the very sentiments it seeks to decry. This sweeping statement of patriotic pride is a much more attractive and accessible opening to her epilogue than a wry comment about the shortcomings of post-Waterloo England would have been. In the oblique mode of these kind of embodied sentiments lies the strength and the constraints of her critique.

So what is the relationship between ‘woman’ and ‘the nation’? Although Alice Stopford Green evokes both vast and universalising terms, her concern with the marginalisation of ‘women’ and ‘the Irish’ prioritizes particularism and separatism. In *Town Life of the Fifteenth Century* (1894), she explains her choice of topic by the fact that the period ‘has long remained but little known’, seen as a period of ‘backsliding’ between the High Medieval thirteenth century and the Tudor sixteenth.⁶¹ It has been marginalized, neglected and denigrated, acquiring what she views as an ‘evil reputation’.⁶² Having found her subject in need of rescue, therefore, she sets herself the challenge to revive and revalorize it. And she does so by casting it as analogous to her and her readers’ nineteenth century: ‘We must judge this period in fact as a time of transition in many ways extraordinarily like our own’.⁶³ It saw the rise of a new class, resulting from ‘a great industrial revolution’, and new careers open to talent, leading also to a new intensity of ‘reproach ... attached to incompetence and poverty’.⁶⁴ Her analysis should, she proposes, ‘make us more tolerant of the unpicturesque and Philistine element whether then or now’.⁶⁵ Thus she defends fifteenth-century town life as unjustly dismissed and depreciated (just as she was to argue for medieval Ireland), but also as strikingly self-sufficient. She claims: ‘The town of those earlier days in fact governed itself after the fashion of a little principality. Within the bounds which the mayor and citizens defined with perpetual insistence in their formal perambulation year after

⁶⁰ Stopford Green, ‘Epilogue’, p. 837.

⁶¹ Alice Stopford Green, *Town Life of the Fifteenth Century*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1894), I, 35.

⁶² Stopford Green, *Town Life*, I, p. 35.

⁶³ Stopford Green, *Town Life*, I, 39.

⁶⁴ Stopford Green, *Town Life*, I, 39.

⁶⁵ Stopford Green, *Town Life*, I, 39–40.

year it carried on its *isolated self-dependent life*.⁶⁶ Her choice of this topic, therefore, can also be located in its conscious and successful separatism. This is a self-determining ‘principality’, but one governed by civic rather than hereditary or authoritarian rule – and one in which women could often play a significant part. This was also her vision for Ireland.

The rationale behind *Town Life* epitomizes Stopford Green’s historiographical approach. It also demonstrates her ideal conception of the relationship between women and nation. ‘Nation’ for Stopford Green is not the universalist category it sometimes seems to be for historians of England. She is perpetually aware that any ‘nation’ is one among many; any discussion of Irish nationalism also goes on in the shadow of English nationalism. For her, nationalisms were multiple and particular, and had to co-exist alongside one another. Stopford Green’s works went on to be influential in Ireland. Their reception history demonstrates the extent to which the appeal of historiography is symbiotically dependent on its contemporary applicability. Her *Irish Nationality* (1911) – her equivalent in some ways to Green’s *Short History of the English People*, in being a social-minded national history from its earliest origins to the present, targeted at a popular audience – had a quiet reception on its initial publication, but then was produced in second, third and fourth impressions between 1919 and 1922. As Nadia Smith points out, ‘it appears to have been most popular during the War of Independence, rather than right after its publication a decade earlier.’⁶⁷ After the Irish Free State was established in 1922, and Stopford Green became a member of the new Senate, what Smith characterizes as a ‘conservative ... ending which offered closure’ was added to subsequent reprints of the text.⁶⁸ This later edition contained determinedly conclusive statements. It proclaimed that ‘[t]he long tradition of foreign rule has been broken . . . The story of national life has been resumed . . . [and under the new representative government] is free to develop as it may.’⁶⁹ In such passages, Stopford Green suggested that Irish colonial history had reached its end.

As these passages demonstrate, the weakness of contemporary history writing is the risk that it will soon be superseded. Especially on a volatile issue such as Irish independence, the topicality of *Irish Nationality* is also its limitation. A subject may be worth writing about because it is relevant to the demands of the moment, but these same demands also render it speedily outdated. In this regard, Stopford Green showed more concern with activism—namely, having an impact on the present position of marginalized groups—than intellectual prestige or academic longevity. Such alienation from the Whig emphasis on unbroken, lasting legacy is evident in all her work. As she wrote vividly: ‘the torch of Love cannot be handed on like the torch of Reason; it is quenched with every lover . . . as fleeting as the summer cloud’. The challenge for us is to work out how to assimilate that bold embrace of ephemerality into our own academic (and still often Whig-inflected) narratives of historiographical development.

⁶⁶ Stopford Green, *Town Life*, I, 1–2. My italics.

⁶⁷ Nadia Smith, *A ‘Manly Study’?*, p. 50.

⁶⁸ Nadia Smith, *A ‘Manly Study’?* p. 50.

⁶⁹ Alice Stopford Green, *Irish Nationality* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1929), p. 251.

Conclusion

Tuchman and Fortin have influentially demonstrated how women were gradually ‘edged out’ of the field of novel writing over the course of the Victorian and Edwardian periods. In Stopford Green’s writings about both gender and nationality, however, she suggests a desire for separatism, an affirmative insistence on not entering the masculine or imperialist establishment, which rather challenges and complicates their thesis. In Melman’s analysis of the radical social and economic historiography of the early twentieth century, ‘the emphasis was on *difference* in human experience, rather than on unity and homogeneity’.⁷⁰ This emphasis is to some extent apparent in Stopford Green’s historiography, which drew out hitherto unheard and dissonant voices. But she does not fit straightforwardly into this category. Melman suggests that ‘although the new history elevated women to a historical community, sharing a common material experience, it did not treat them as a monolith, nor as a collective bound by a sense of an essentially and naturally feminine identity’.⁷¹ ‘Woman’s Place’, however, does exactly that. It is not ‘Women’s Place’ Stopford Green is concerned with, but ‘Woman’s’ – and she repeatedly invokes ‘her’ as her referent. Her nationalism was notably particularist and relativist, but her feminism – in word, if not in deed – espoused an essentialist and even separatist path.

Melman’s conceptualisation of ‘integrative’ and ‘relativist’ early twentieth-century historical schools does not quite work for Stopford Green. The latter, according to Melman, ‘emphasized the specificity of gendered experience in history and . . . rejected the nationalist framework altogether’.⁷² Alice Stopford Green falls awkwardly between these two stools: perhaps this is one reason why she’s been largely forgotten or ignored. Nowadays, we are uncomfortable with any confluence of feminism and nationalism. In Stopford Green’s own words, perhaps we ‘[do] not know or care to know’ – and perhaps we should.

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⁷⁰ Melman, ‘Gender, History and Memory’, p. 22.

⁷¹ Melman, ‘Gender, History and Memory’, p. 26.

⁷² Melman, ‘Gender, History and Memory’, p. 34.

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