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**INNOVATION, GENRE, AND AUTHENTICITY IN THE NINETEENTH-
CENTURY IRISH NOVEL**

by

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A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,
Marquette University,
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

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ABSTRACT
INNOVATION, GENRE, AND AUTHENTICITY IN THE NINETEENTH-
CENTURY IRISH NOVEL

David A. Kenney II, B.A., M.A.
Marquette University, 2022

Attempts to reintegrate nineteenth-century novels into the narrative of Irish literary history have been greatly hampered by their long neglect and persistent critical narratives that regard the literary output of this era as either an ingenuous or inartistic failure to establish an authentic literary tradition. Through four case studies, this dissertation explores how national romance and picaresque novels of the mid to late nineteenth-century made significant contributions to the development of the novel form within the Irish literary tradition through stylistic dexterity and cultural subtlety that has long gone unrecognized. To illustrate this, I first analyze Sheridan Le Fanu's *The Fortunes of Torlogh O'Brien: A Tale of the Wars of King James* (1847) and Rosa Mulholland's *Marcella Grace* (1886), two national romances with significant departures from the colonial and gendered allegorical frameworks typically associated with the genre. In the second section, I explore Charles Lever's *Charles O'Malley the Irish Dragoon* (1842) and William Makepeace Thackeray's *The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon, Esq.* (1844) as novels that demonstrate the picaresque genre's potential to meaningfully engage with Ireland's history of colonial representation through subtle forms of carnivalesque inversion and satire. To accentuate innovations within these novels that reflect earnest engagement with Irish polemics, I contextualize my inquiry through considerations of trends in genre development and comparisons with contemporaneous works of British fiction. Both these genres are highly reflective of Ireland's perplexing and volatile social, political, and cultural position in the nineteenth-century. The national romance form allowed Irish artists to create literary heuristics for understanding causes and possible solutions to enduring socio-economic problems through allegory. By contrast, the picaresque reflects a frustration over failed attempts to encapsulate or solve such problems and a longing to establish more liberating modes of expression through variety, diversion, and digression. Though these genres appear in many national literatures, a study of the way Irish authors refashioned conventional plot structures to better interact with the complexities of the Irish socio-political situation reveals how nineteenth-century novels framed questions of national identity for subsequent generations.

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David A. Kenney II, B.A., M.A.

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INTRODUCTION

Great innovation in literature often springs from an intense dissatisfaction with or even contempt for established literary models. If Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605) is acknowledged as the first European novel, then this novelistic tradition emerged as a form of parody of the dominant chivalric poetic tradition. Many literary movements coalesced as an assault on the aesthetic and stylistic enterprises of their predecessors. Romanticism sought to undermine the sterility of the Enlightenment, which then inspired the backswing of Realism. Modernism rebelled against Victorianism, only to be repudiated by postmodernism. Forces of creation and reaction operate throughout literary history, forming perennial cycle of incitement and inspiration. However, the fervor that compels authors to venture out into new literary territory not only often leads to extravagant defenses of their own craft but also overzealous denunciations on the quality of the art they define their own against. The literary historian, critic, and discerning reader must therefore contextualize authorial opinions carefully. And so, when the Romantic poet William Wordsworth tells us that "all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling,"¹ we should, perhaps, interpret this as an insight into the author's own art rather than an objective argument against the meticulously crafted verse of earlier or subsequent poets.

Despite the inter-generational rivalry between authors, in the British literary tradition, Virginia Woolf did not cancel out Jane Austen. Joseph Conrad did not make Emily Brontë obsolete for the reading public, and E.M. Forster did not revoke the

¹ Wordsworth, William. "Preface to Lyrical Ballads." *English Literary Criticism: Romantic and Victorian*. Daniel G. Hoffman and Samuel Hynes (Eds.) Meredith Publishing Company. 1963. 13-40. (16)

relevance of Charles Dickens for critics. However, such a process of negation has become the reality in the Irish tradition, where the enmity of early twentieth-century Irish authors, who accentuated discontinuity within the tradition and questioned the cultural relevancy of early texts, has largely canceled in the minds of the reading public and scholars alike the literary and cultural relevance of early Irish novelists.

The aesthetic attitudes of authors like James Joyce, William Butler Yeats, and Samuel Beckett (because of both their own genius and their world-wide recognition) have cast long shadows both before and behind their careers. In his introduction to the *Cambridge Companion to Irish Modernism*, Joe Cleary argues that a critical focus on these three authors, in particular, has “ultimately contributed to an attenuated conception of the history and achievements of Irish modernism more broadly.”²

And the influence of the giants of Irish literature has been even more consequential to the legacy of anterior authors. Rüdiger Imhof begins his short but impassioned 1993 plea for the republication of the forgotten works of the nineteenth-century with observations about the oddity of literary history in the Irish tradition:

There can scarcely be anything more lost than the Irish novel in the nineteenth century. [...] It is surely a strange state of affairs to find not just one novel lost, but a considerable portion of Ireland's literary heritage gone.³

Since the time of Imhof's essay, there has been significant scholarly efforts to reintegrate the literature of the nineteenth-century into the critical and public discourse through the

² Cleary, Joe. “Introduction.” *The Cambridge Companion to Irish Modernism*. Joe Cleary (Ed.) Cambridge University Press. 1-18. (1)

³ Imhof, Rüdiger. “The Nineteenth-Century Irish Novel and the Necessity of Putting It Back on the Map.” *The Linen Hall Review*. 10.2. (Autumn 1993.) 6-7. (6)

publication of anthologies, surveys, and critical companions.⁴ However, this struggle has been greatly hampered by the long neglect of the works and the persistent critical narratives that regards the literary output of the nineteenth-century as either an ingenuous or inartistic failure to establish an authentic literary tradition. Declan Kiberd begins his highly influential *Inventing Ireland* (1995) by designating late nineteenth-century Irish émigrés Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw as the beginning of a distinct Irish literary tradition, referring to them as artists who “used England as a laboratory [...] to redefine what it meant to be Irish.” Starting here, Kiberd overleaps the majority of the nineteenth-century as a time when, as he puts it, “artists tended to exploit far more of Ireland than they expressed.”⁵ What is lost by the neglect of the authors of nineteenth-century Ireland, however, is not only an appreciation for their *sui generis* aesthetic accomplishments but also a nuanced awareness of the various avenues of engagement authors have developed in the struggle for appropriate cultural representation in the formative years of the Irish novel.

Over the twentieth-century, a cultural amnesia has developed over the nuances of the literary world of the Irish nineteenth-century, contributed to not only by the outstanding achievements and passionate opinions of twentieth-century authors but also

⁴ Although the vast majority of Irish novels of the nineteenth-century have gone unpublished for more than half a century, Peter Van De Kamp and A. Norman Jeffares’ three volume *Irish Literature of the Nineteenth Century* series (published by Irish Academic Press in the 1990s) has offered readers an excellent sample of essays, poetry, and novel excerpts from this time period. A number of substantial critical surveys have also recently offered literary histories and critical commentary of works across the century – James Cahalan’s *Great Hatred, Little Room: The Irish Historical Novel* (1983), Barry Sloan’s *The Pioneers of Anglo-Irish Fiction 1800-1850* (1986), Norman Vance’s *Irish Literature Since 1800* (2002), Derek Hand’s *A History of the Irish Novel* (2011), James Murphy’s *Irish Novelists and the Victorian Age* (2011), and George O’Brien’s *The Irish Novel 1800-1910* (2015) – as well as several anthologies of critical essays such as *The Irish Novel in the Nineteenth Century: Facts and Fictions*, Jacqueline Belanger (Ed.) (2005) and *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel*, John Wilson Foster (Ed.) (2006)

⁵ Kiberd, Declan. *Inventing Ireland*. Harvard University Press. 1995. (51) & (136)

from the monumental events of the century itself. Just as a tendency to focus on the big names of Irish literature can lead to a simplified narrative of literary history, so too can the singular events of the nineteenth-century naturally swallow up subtleties. Beginning with the Act of Union (1800) which disbanded the Irish parliament, this was a century of great hope and great disillusionment. This century saw the parliamentary reform campaigns of the two legendary constitutional nationalists, Daniel O'Connell and Charles Stewart Parnell, who brought about an unprecedented sense of political collective identity amongst the impoverished and disenfranchised Irish people. Throughout the century, civil unrest and agrarian agitation constantly vied against the legacy of stiffening legislation from the previous century. Perhaps most importantly, it was a century rent through center by the Great Irish Famine, whose legacy on all subsequent intellectual, social, linguistic, cultural, and political developments in Ireland is difficult to exaggerate. The nineteenth-century has come to be associated with herculean efforts and insufficient gains, with forlorn hopes and rising resentment, and overall with hunger, poverty, and misrule. In such a century, it is little wonder that the story of Irish novel has been neglected, especially when simplified narratives have been offered to explain away its relevance. However, in this blind spot, I will argue, lies a crucial chapter in the story of Ireland's struggle for cultural and aesthetic articulation.

Building on foundational work done over past decades to remap the forgotten literary landscape of nineteenth-century Ireland, my project will focus on four exemplary texts that demonstrate distinctive manipulations of genre. I have situated my discussion around genre to invite a reconsideration of the authenticity and technical sophistication of these works. A traditional approach to nineteenth-century novels has long been to regard

them as cultural artifacts that happen to be literature rather than as literature with cultural and historical significance. An examination of genre presents a means of redirecting this conversation towards the permutations of literary form that display sincere engagement with subject matter. First and foremost, I seek to present a candid and extensive engagement with these texts as substantive pieces of literature. The legacy of early twentieth-century cultural critiques of these novels has been that for nearly one hundred years, critics and readers alike have been prompted to approach them as being historically germane but aesthetically immaterial. And so, criticism on the modern Irish novel has been built atop a seriously deficient set of assumptions about the literary development of the nineteenth-century. Adding points of contention into a newly awoken debate on this century, I will challenge narratives about the homogeneity and cultural inconsequence of this literature, spending extra time exploring places where simplified binaries based on political affiliation have discouraged serious critical engagement and encouraged partisan evaluative criteria.

The works I have chosen are written in two very popular genres of nineteenth-century Irish writing: the national romance and the picaresque.⁶ I have chosen these two genres because of both their popularity in the nineteenth-century and because they present opposing sides of a narrative tradition: the national romance seeking to

⁶ Miranda Burgess begins her essay on the Irish national romance by identifying the genre as the earliest form of Irish novel and also “widely considered among the best and most significant of nineteenth-century Irish novels.” See Burgess, Miranda. “The National Tale and Allied Genres, 1770s-1840s.” *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel*. John Wilson Foster (Ed.) Cambridge University Press. 2007. 39-59. (39). And although the picaresque was not as wide widespread, it was the genre employed by one of the most popular, if not the most popular, Irish author of the century Charles Lever in his most famous works. See Shanahan, Jim. “The ‘Losing Side Ever’: Charles Lever, Walter Scott, and the Irish National Tale.” *Romantic Ireland: From Tone to Gonne; Fresh Perspectives on Nineteenth-century Ireland*. Paddy Lyons, Willy Maley and John Miller (Eds.) Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2013. 298-309. (298)

encapsulate a socio-political situation through allegorical plots and the picaresque exploring modes of escape from the constraints of apologue through variety, diversion, and digression.

Both genres are highly reflective of Ireland's perplexing and volatile social, political, and cultural position in the nineteenth-century. The national romance illustrates the longing to create literary heuristics for understanding causes and possible solutions to enduring socio-economic problems. By contrast, the picaresque is reflective of frustration over failed attempts to encapsulate or solve such problems and a longing to establish more liberating modes of expression. In my first section on the national romance, I will examine Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *The Fortunes of Torlogh O'Brien: A Tale of the Wars of King James* (1847) and Rosa Mulholland's *Marcella Grace* (1886) as works with significant departures from the colonial and gendered allegorical frameworks typically associated with the genre. In the second section, I will pair two works that illustrate distinct ways the picaresque tradition was manipulated to express aspects of the Irish identity. Charles Lever's *Charles O'Malley the Irish Dragoon* (1842) is a novel that capitalizes on carnivalesque inversions and plot digressions to disrupt conventional modes of understanding identity through narrative, and William Makepeace Thackeray's *The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon, Esq.* (1844) demonstrates the picaresque potential to engage with Ireland's history of colonial representation through sophisticated forms of satire, where stereotypes are employed in a manner that ultimately challenges their validity. Where appropriate, I have included in my discussions comparisons to contemporaneous works of English and Irish fiction that open up a wider discussion of competing stylistic and representational trends.

Through these four case studies, I will engage the questions that emerge when we depart from the conventionalized assumptions of Irish literary history. This project will contribute to the emerging dialogue over the dynamism of the mid to late nineteenth-century Irish literary world, a period often considered a time of literary drought between the earliest trailblazers of the Irish novel and the Celtic Revival. While the 1840s have been dismissed as a period of decline in the quality Irish writing,⁷ this same decade saw the emergence of a substantial Irish reading public. James Cahalan points to the 1840s as decade where a rise in Irish publishing houses led to a closer consideration of the identity of the “Irish” author and possibilities of writing for an Irish audience.⁸ Alongside recent critical attention to the nineteenth-century novel has also come long-needed studies into the Irish print culture that emerged of the second half of the century, unveiling a time period of vibrant and varied polemics from the conservative *Dublin University Magazine* to the more radical *The Nation*.⁹ However, even the designations of conservative and radical here can be misleading when interpreted anachronistically. In the introduction their anthology of nineteenth-century Irish literature, Peter Van de Kamp and A. Norman Jeffares explore the odd communion that existed between these two politically opposed publications that involved sharing contributors and even articles.¹⁰ The oddity of the

⁷ See Imolf. (6-7)

⁸ See Calahan, James. *Great Hatred, Little Room: The Irish Historical Novel*. Syracuse University Press. 1983.: “With Irish publishers behind them, writers such as these [James Duffy and Sheridan le Fanu] could begin to be more secure about the Irishness of their work; but at the same time, they seemed seriously in doubt about just what this “Irishness” entailed.” (68) Also see De Kamp, Peter Van & Jeffares, Norman A. “Introduction.” *Irish Literature: The Nineteenth Century*, Volume 2. Peter Van De Kamp & A. Norman Jeffares (Eds.) Irish Academic Press. 2007. 1-40. (16-18), where they address the effect of the national system of education and the rise of the Irish printing industry.

⁹ According to Van De Kamp and Jeffares, “more magazines were published between 1830 and 1850 than in the whole of the eighteenth century. And they covered a wide spectrum of the expanding market.” (17)

¹⁰ Van de Kamp and Jeffares refer to the relationship as “marked by mutual respect, if not admiration,” (19) and go even further to claim that both publications had “their hands on the same culturally ideological plough.” (20)

relationship points to what makes this time period inconvenient to the simplified narrative of Irish literary history. Though leaning in different directions politically, both publications attempted to cultivate forms of cultural nationalism and competed for the growing Irish readership.¹¹ In their studies of *The Dublin University Magazine*, Wayne Hall and Elizabeth Tilley both argue that simplified categorizations used by modern critics have hindered our understanding of the complexity and variety of this publication over its forty four year existence.¹² As one would expect in a time of confusion over developing conceptions of social, political, and cultural identity (and the complex relationship between them), it is an era of high passions but many grey areas, a time of ambiguity and experimenting. Taking a full and accurate assessment of the novels I will be analyzing requires not only acknowledging contradictions and eccentricities of the works but also engaging with the intricate polemics with which they were engaged, many of which (such as contentions over demarcations of identity and accurate representation) have survived even into the twenty first-century.

The approach of my analysis has been developed to confront a set of assumptions over the ideological and intellectual stagnancy of this literature. Lines of demarcation are often drawn across the tradition distracts readers from complex struggle towards cultural

¹¹ "Postscript." *The Dublin University Magazine*. M'Glashan, James (Ed.) 17:100. 528-532.: In the postscript to its hundredth issue in 1941, *The Dublin University Magazine* boasts not only of being the longest running, widely circulated, and impartial Irish publication, but also one that is "actually written for the most part by authors resident in Ireland, and seeking, as the principle basis for support, an Irish circulation!" (528)

¹² Elizabeth Tilley addresses the problems of critical assumptions over the static ideological by exploring the variety of essays and literature over nearly half a century. See Tilley, Elizabeth. "Charting Culture in the Dublin University Magazine." *Ireland in the Nineteenth Century Regional Identity*. Leon Litvack and Glenn Hooper (Eds.) Four Court Press. 2000. 58-65. (58-59). And Wayne Hall, though admitting a fairly consistent if sometimes self-contradictory political outlook through essays, explores the "much wider and more generous vision of 'Irishness'" explored through the literary output. Hall, Wayne. *Dialogues in the Margin: A Study of the Dublin University Magazine*. The Catholic University of America Press. 1999. (14)

expression in which the authors were engaged. These categorizations have proved enduring in the tradition both because of the clean version of Irish literary history they offer and because of the long list of impressive proponents. Scholars of Irish literature often point to Yeats and the authors associated with the Celtic Revival as the progenitors of animosity against the nineteenth century Irish novel. As John Foster Wilson puts it,

The Revival thought of itself as returning to the past to achieve a beginning, so its exponents and promoters paid little attention to the Irish Victorian novel which continued through the 1890s and into the Edwardian decade and beyond. In our own day, literary historians of the period have maintained this inattention.¹³

The mid twentieth-century Irish novelist and critic Thomas Flanagan describes the attitude of Yeats and his contemporaries towards this literature as being “bred of a bastard art, neither Irish nor English, and present[ing] a view of Irish life which was false alike in moral and in political terms.”¹⁴ In the decades following Irish independence, the artists developing their own literary and cultural programs became even more hostile towards the literature of the previous century.¹⁵ In the 1930s and 40s, influential “Irish Ireland” nationalist author Daniel Corkery, who Emmet Larkin calls “the high priest of

¹³ Foster, John Wilson. “The Irish Renaissance, 1890-1940: Prose in English.” *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature*, Vol. 2. Margaret Kelleher and Philip O’Leary (Eds.) Cambridge University Press. 2006. 113-180. (113)

¹⁴ Flanagan, Thomas. *The Irish Novelists: 1800-1850*. Columbia University Press. 1959. (viii)

¹⁵ O’Brien, George. *The Irish Novel 1800-1910*. Cork University Press. 2015. (xi): “Beginning on the mid-1920s, and partly in reaction to Yeats, the criteria for national literature, and national cultural well-being generally, became more ideologically combative. This *Kulturkampf* held that the nineteenth-century novel was basically worthless, a repository of unacceptable depictions of Irish people and representations of Irish realities made in bad faith.”

Also see Kelleher, Margaret. “Wanted an Irish Novelist’ the critical decline of the nineteenth-century novel”. *The Irish Novel in the Nineteenth Century: Facts and Fictions*. Jacqueline Belanger (Ed.) Four Courts Press Ltd. 2005. 187-201. (196)

cultural nationalism after the Easter Rising,”¹⁶ further equated the literature of the previous century as English rather than Irish.¹⁷ In his zeal to de-Anglicize the Irish educational system and literary life, he further developed distinctions between “Irish” and “Anglo-Irish” literature, questioning the legitimacy of even the most famous Celtic Revivalists of the previous generation such as Yeats, Lady Gregory, and John Millington Synge. For Corkery, the literary history of Ireland could be cleanly divided between a native Irish tradition and a usurper tradition that attempted to imitate but remained English. Lawrence J. McCaffrey has argued that Corkery’s influence on post-independent Ireland was greater than either Yeats or Synge’s because of his influence on Seán O’Faoláin and Frank O’Connor,¹⁸ who, though more cosmopolitan and critical of nationalism than their mentor, still wed “aesthetic theories to a wider critique of Irish society,” as Derek Hand observes.¹⁹ Corkery, O’Faoláin, and O’Connor were all authors of genius who captured, particularly in their short stories, the aspirations and agonies of the transformational period they lived in, where Ireland struggled to define itself as an independent nation and autonomous culture. As cultural critics, they engaged with many of the most perplexing ambiguities and paradoxes of the Irish literary tradition. And yet, as many insights as these critics offered into the ongoing struggles of Irish cultural and literary life, it should not be forgotten that they were artists striving towards their own aesthetic visions that attempted to redefine Irish identity in the developing state.

¹⁶ Larkin, Emmet. “A Reconsideration: Daniel Corkery and his Ideas on Cultural Nationalism.” *Éire-Ireland: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Irish Studies*. 8:1. 1973; 42-51. (42)

¹⁷ See R.F. Foster. *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making it Up in Ireland*. Oxford University Press. 2002. (100-101) & (108)

¹⁸ McCaffrey, Lawrence J. “Daniel Corkery and Irish Cultural Nationalism.” *Éire-Ireland: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Irish Studies*. 8:1. 1973; 35-41. (36).

¹⁹ Hand, Derek. *A History of the Irish Novel*. Cambridge University Press. 2011. (3)

Flanagan's *The Irish Novelists 1800-1850* (1959) is, perhaps, the first significant survey attempting to widen the discussion of literature of this century with insightful engagement with the unique challenges of the novelistic form.²⁰ Of course, Ireland produced world-famous, novelists like James Joyce and Flann O'Brien during the first half of the twentieth-century, but the literary arm of the Celtic Revival was primarily a movement of drama and poetry²¹ and was followed by prominent short story authors like O'Connor and O'Faoláin who questioned the novel itself as an authentic mode of expressing the transitional struggle of the Irish condition.²² Corkery's cultural criticism of Anglo-Irish literature went beyond a critique of the identities of individual authors to the very literary forms they propagated. He wrote, "The Ascendancy it was that had fixed the moulds of Anglo-Irish literature, if Anglo-Irish it be, those moulds that do not willingly receive the facts of Irish life."²³ As a historical novelist himself, Flanagan's aim was, in part, to repair the reputation of the novel as a legitimate venue of expressing Irish national character and culture, and he devotes chapters to each of the five most influential

²⁰ Flanagan writes, "The history of the Irish novel is one of continuous attempts to represent the Irish experience within the conventions which are not innately congenial to it." (334) His work is particularly attentive to the unique struggle faces by Irish authors to engage with the novel form. For example, he writes that while English novelists engaged with "social choice and personal morality," Irish authors were forced to subordinate these "to questions of race, creed, and nationality – questions which tend of their nature to limit the range of power in fiction." (35)

²¹ John Cronin's study of the Irish novel from 1900-1940 begins by proposing it as common knowledge that the Irish Literary Revival produced notable poets and dramatists but few significant novelists." Cronin, John. *The Anglo-Irish Novel. Vol. 2, 1900-1940*. Barnes & Noble Books. 1990. (11). R.F. Foster also points out a rift in the commonly accepted qualifications to be considered "Irish" artist between those who engaged directly with cultural/national issues and modernist novelists like James Joyce. He writes, "The condition of being 'an Irish writer' is at the centre of the Irish Literary Revival, and intimately connected with the politics of the day Thus for many years Joyce was put in a rather different critical box to Yeats and Synge, until the recent shift in interpretation of his politics, or inferred politics. In the general sweep of Modernism, self-conscious national identity tends to go out the window." Foster, R.F. *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making It Up in Ireland*. The Penguin Press. 2001. (95-96)

²² See Hand. (3). Flanagan concedes this point, writing that "The history of the Irish novel is one of continuous attempts to represent the Irish experience within the conventions which are not innately congenial to it." (334). However, the history and criticism he offers, as a whole, celebrates this struggle.

²³ Corkery, Daniel. *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature*. Russell & Russell, Inc. 1931. (ix)

nineteenth-century authors: Maria Edgeworth, Lady Morgan (Sydney Owenson), John Banim, Gerald Griffin, and William Carleton. Nearly thirty years later, Barry Sloan would return to this time period to focus primarily on this same set of authors in his much more scholarly and meticulous survey *The Pioneers of Anglo-Irish Fiction 1800-1850* (1986). In recent decades, there has been a concerted effort to reclaim this obscure era of Irish literary history. George O'Brien has broadened the scope of Sloan's appeal by devoting a chapter a piece to thirty different novels in his 2015 *The Irish Novel 1800-1910*. In addition, scholars such as James Murphy, Emir Nolan, Margaret Kelleher, and Norman Vance have all made great strides in reintroducing Irish nineteenth-century literature into the critical narrative of Ireland's literary history.

Alongside accusations of the nineteenth-century novel being genetically inauthentic, another enduring impediment to this literature's reintegration into the narrative of Irish history has been the accusation of pandering: that the large overseas audiences encouraged a fawning, insipid literary production. This belief has further pushed these novels to liminal, sub-Irish categorization. Critics like Melissa Fagan²⁴ and J. Th. Leerson have argued that the regionalist tropes of many nineteenth-century Irish texts indicate an attempt to "seduce" an apathetic foreign audience. Leerson also argues that the reliance on foreign readerships often caused unique disassociation between writer and subject, as authors needed to remove themselves from the Irish condition in order to adopt a mediating role.²⁵ In my analysis, I will not be attempting to ignore the validity of these avenues of investigation. Indeed, a need to explain Ireland to overseas audiences did result

²⁴ See Fegan, Melissa. "Isn't It Your Own Country?: The Stranger in Nineteenth Century Irish Literature." *The Yearbook of English Studies*. 34. 2004.

²⁵ Leerson, J.Th. "On the Treatment of Irishness in Romantic Anglo-Irish Fiction." *Irish University Review*. 20:2. 1990. 251-263. (259-260) & (262)

in many painfully prevalent conventions all throughout the century, such as lengthy descriptions of Irish customs and extensive footnotes. One can think here of the comically long-winded glossary at the end of Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (1800). However, while engaging with the legitimate insights of the critical tradition, my approach has been developed to counteract the a too broad a critical brush painted across the century. The works I have chosen, for examples, are all ones that take noticeable strides away from the travel-guide tropes prominent in the first half of the century, indicating a greater focus on Irish audiences.

The critics Kelleher and Murphy have been particularly astute in pointing out the idiosyncrasies that have evolved in the Irish critical tradition, ones that often have strong demands of "authentic" representation.²⁶ Kelleher observes four criteria that have become standard modes of interpretation for the Irish nineteenth-century novel:

1. The success of the novel is equated to the accuracy of its depiction of Irish life.
2. Sociological and historical characters are judged as unartistic.
3. English influence is seen as "Anglicanization of Irish genius."
4. The conviction that authors created market-driven characters for foreign audiences.²⁷

A common theme of these criteria is authenticity. Over the past century, this emphasis on how accurately or sincerely the authors portrayed their subject matter has led to valuable insights about the writing culture of the time. Yet, while historians and critics often admit

²⁶ See Murphy, James. *Irish Novelists & the Victorian Age*. Oxford University Press. 2011. (12) where Murphy contrasts Irish and Scottish mandates on being considered authentic and (8) where he contrasts the interpretations of stereotypes employed by Charles Dickens and Irish author Charles Lever.

²⁷ Kelleher, Margaret. "Wanted an Irish Novelist' the critical decline of the nineteenth-century novel. *The Irish Novel in the Nineteenth Century: Facts and Fictions*. Jacqueline Belanger (Ed.) Four Courts Press Ltd. 2005. 187-201. (193-195)

to the frustrating complexity of the socio-political situation of nineteenth-century Ireland, the accurate portrayal of that situation remains a common standard for critical evaluation. The state of affairs lamented by Imhof nearly thirty years ago is still a palpable reality, and as Margaret Kelleher observes in the *Cambridge History of Irish Literature*, we currently have a literary understanding of this period “with little detailed study of the development of the genre over the century or of its complex influences.”²⁸

In the nineteenth-century, national romance and picaresque novels created a durable aesthetic tradition preoccupied with the complex polemic over Irish national identity. Though these genres appear in many national literatures, a study of the way Irish authors refashioned these plot structures to better interact with the complexities of the Irish socio-political situation reveals how nineteenth-century novels framed questions of national identity for subsequent generations (despite the radical cultural, literary, and political revolutions of the early twentieth century.) My project will approach evolution of genre as a consequential and neglected aspect of literary history, mapping what shifts in conventions and paradigms reveal about the Irish condition shaped the evolution of the novel. In *Inventing Ireland*, Declan Kiberd stresses the synergistic relation between Britain and Ireland in the formation of national identity, and to capitalize on this relationship I have chosen, where appropriate, British novels as a point of contrast to emphasize the distinctiveness of the Irish development of national identity. Bringing into the conversation contemporaneous, influential novels and relevant points of contrast. In addition, evaluating how English critics engage with identity formation when evaluating

²⁸ Kelleher, Margaret. “Prose writing and drama in English, 1830–1890: from Catholic emancipation to the fall of Parnell.” *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature* Kelleher, M. and O’Leary, P. (eds.). Cambridge University Press. 2006. 449–499. (450)

their own literature will not only provide a relevant counterpoint to my own discussion but will also provide critical models for identifying underdeveloped aspects in the tradition of critical engagement with the Irish nineteenth century novel.

SECTION 1: THE NATIONAL ROMANCE

Ireland's position within the British Empire in the formative years of the Anglo-Irish novel has had an underappreciated effect on the modes of expression and tropologies that influenced and were then refashioned by later Irish authors. Although Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (1800) usually takes the title of first Irish novel, Lady Morgan's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) became the prototype for one of the most compelling and popular modes of fictionalizing problems in Irish society, the national tale or national romance. The plots of these novels revolve around a highly symbolic courtship and marriage between a man and woman. This is, of course, not an Irish innovation; the marriage plot is the defining characteristic of British novels during this time-period as well. However, it should not be surprising that what comes to dominate the Irish tradition (especially early on) is an overemphasis on highly allegorical plots that resolve with unions between English and Irish, colonizer and colonized, ruler and ruled. In English novels, the marriage plot usually celebrates the preservation and continuation of a society through the union of people that were all indisputably "English." However, in the Irish novel, there cannot be the same assumption of social cohesion or purpose. As George Boyce puts it, the Irish did not enjoy "the institutional framework of the Anglo-Saxon kind from which national consciousness could emerge."²⁹ Since national identity was a contested issue, part of the Irish novelist's project includes defining the term "Irish" itself. And where the English could portray an English society in which Irishness existed as an external point of contrast, Irish authors had to incorporate the British institutions and intellectual concepts

²⁹ Boyce, D. George. *Nationalism in Ireland*. Routledge. 1995. (28)

that saturated Irish society into the portrayals of their own identity. Especially when writing to an English audience, a gendered, hierarchical union between a male England and a female Ireland was a particularly apropos model for any author who wished to elicit sympathy and understanding as well as emphasize the issues of colonial responsibility. Anthony Trollope articulates directly what is implied by these many marriage plots in *Phineas Finn: The Irish Member* (1867), as the liberal politician Joshua Monk speaks of the need for reform in Ireland:

But if it was incumbent on England to force upon Ireland the maintenance of the Union for her own sake, and for England's sake, because England could not afford independence established so close against her own ribs, - it was at any rate necessary to England's character that the bride thus bound in a compulsory wedlock should be endowed with all the best privileges that a wife can enjoy. Let her at least not be a kept mistress. Let it be bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh...³⁰

One point that made this tradition subsequently unpopular with cultural naturalists is the presentation of the union with England as a foregone conclusion. For many authors, the question is not whether or not England and Ireland should be united but how that end can be achieved most congenially. The closeness of ribs in Trollope's passage not only calls up an image of the proximity of hearts but also in its allusion to Adam and Eve, whose union was divinely ordained. By utilizing a marriage plot in these terms, authors confirmed the colonial relationship between Ireland and England and at the same time reinforced the gender dynamics of the Empire.

³⁰ Trollope, Anthony. *Phineas Finn: The Irish Member*. Jacques Berthoud (Ed.) Oxford University Press. 2008. (180)

The marriage trope was recognized by authors as an effective vehicle for influencing social change as it prompts the reader to recognize possible avenues of progress and reconciliation. Early in the century, John and Michael Banim adapted romance plots of this kind in their historical novels: *The Boyne Water, A Tale* (1826) and *Croppy: A Tale of 1798* (1828). Since these novels address pivotal points in Irish history, they allowed the authors to address root causes for their own contemporary problems. Georg Lukács argues that in this time-period, the historical novel became a vehicle to help people “comprehend their own existence as something historically conditioned” and “see in history something which deeply affected their daily lives.”³¹ When considering this, it is important to note the simultaneous rise in an Irish readership that is gradually occurring over the course of the century. The dynamics of colonizer male/colonized female was established at a time when authors, like Edgeworth, Morgan, and the Banims, were aware of their over-reliance on English audiences for both marketing and political reasons.

In the first chapter, I will examine a novel that complicates the implications of the colonial marriage plot by casting an exiled rebel as the male and an heiress from the landed gentry as the female. Sheridan Le Fanu’s historical novel *The Fortunes of Colonel Torlogh O’Brien* has been all but forgotten, though as late as 1915 it was praised in *Studies* magazine as being “held by many to rank among the three or four best Irish historical novels.”³² This is a novel that addresses a defining moment in Irish history, one still yearly commemorated in the North as the great victory of the Protestant British over the Catholic

³¹ Lukács, Georg. *The Historical Novel*. Hanna and Stanley Mitchell (trns.) Merlin Press. London. 1962. (24)

³² Brown, Stephen J. “Irish Historical Fiction.” *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review of Letters Philosophy and Science*. IV.15. 1915.

Irish. While arguing for the inclusion of nineteenth-century Irish works into the canon of Irish literature, James Murphy points out that one of the main hurdles when approaching the literature of this area has to do with relatability: the ageless internal struggles of characters seemingly overwhelmed by the external conflicts that no longer exist between tenants and peasants.³³ However, Le Fanu utilizes the numinous contrasts between good and evil in the gothic style to create a more universal appeal to the political struggles within the novel. I will consider this work alongside an English novel published in the same year that addresses a similar foundation myth of British history, Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Harold, the Last of the Saxon Kings*, contrasting the treatment of natural identity formation through the amalgamation of different races to form a united culture.

Ironically, Ireland's intimacy with atrocity and horror made it a problematic setting for both Gothic and historical fiction although it is easy to understand why Irish stories of a past haunted present and hubris hunted down by nemesis might cut a bit too close to the bone for many for audiences. Though Gothic stories failed to appeal to nationalist literary movements, Gothic undertones were a distinctive features of many Irish novels. Kilfeather goes so far as to propose that the term "Irish gothic" should be viewed less as a separate genre or subgenre of fiction, and more as a pervasive feature found in many types of nineteenth-century Irish fiction, particularly the national tale.³⁴

My second chapter will consider how Mulholland incorporates a female character into a heroic role and how that conflicts with the typical gendered hierarchy and symbology that would remain standard into the twentieth century. *Marcella Grace* is another novel that complicates a standard colonial marriage by placing the female in the most dynamic

³³ Murphy. (49)

³⁴ Kilfeather. (86)

role of the courtship. The female personification of Ireland (which is what many females in national romances come to represent) is typically a person who confers power and legitimacy but cannot herself rule. C.L. Innes argues that in both Irish histories and literature the males are national subjects while the women are merely the “site of contestation.”³⁵ This is a practice in Irish representation also pointed out by Daphne Watson, who writes,

England’s past and present relationship with Ireland has been consistent with a subconscious defining of Ireland as a ‘feminine ‘Other’ subject to an imperious male. Irish writers refer to Ireland as female – O’Brien’s ‘Mother Ireland’, Yeats’s ‘Cathleen Ni Houlihan’, Shaun Herron’s ‘old sow’ – and England’s behavior in the past has been abjection in Lacanian terms of the essential Otherness of Ireland³⁶

In *Marcella Grace*, I examine how far Mulholland breaks with this tradition and how much the burdens of symbolic expectations restrain her heroine character’s development. This will allow for a discussion of how integral to the function of an Irish national romance is a male subject and a female object, a symbolic but powerless female personification of Ireland, and a feminine Other to be contrasted with masculine imperium. Yeats called Rosa Mulholland the ‘novelist of contemporary Catholic Ireland,’ and she was the only living author he featured in his 1891 *Representative Irish Tales*,³⁷ although, as Murphy put it, the “Victorian respectability of her work did not endear her to him [Yeats] in the longer run.”³⁸ Unlike many national romances, the heroine in *Marcella Grace* is a surprisingly

³⁵ Innes, C.L. *Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society, 1800-1935*. The University of Georgia Press. 1993. (3)

³⁶ Watson, Daphne B. “The Cross of St. George: The Burden of Contemporary Irish Literature.” *Literature and Imperialism*. Robert Giddings (Ed.) St. Martin’s Press. 1991. 25-43

³⁷ Kelleher. (196)

³⁸ Murphy. (52)

autonomous female figure whose education by experience on how best to fulfill her role as landlord to the good of the entire society is one of the central themes of the text.

These two works have been chosen as ones that demonstrate how the national romance evolved over the century in ways undermined the colonial and gender hierarchies and the works brought into these discussions for comparison are ones that illustrate points of significant departure from both Irish and English representational structures.

CHAPTER 1: HISTORY AS NEMESIS IN LE FANU'S *THE FORTUNES OF TORLOGH O'BRIEN*

With Charles Maturin before him and Bram Stoker after, Sheridan Le Fanu is a member of a class of Irish Gothic authors whose works have never rested easily in the canon of Irish national literature. Each began his career writing Irish themed novels only to later bury their native island in the subtexts, veiled allegories, and frame narratives of their mature novels. *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), *Uncle Silas* (1864), and *Dracula* (1897) have all enjoyed continuous public and critical attention as classics of British and Gothic literature, but more recently, critics have started digging in earnest to unearth the hidden Irish character of Stoker's best seller. Though justified by the author's biography and early novelistic attention to Ireland, these attempts illustrate the difficulty of deciphering national identity with only the murmurs of allegory, as this approach has allowed critics to see in the bloodthirsty Count a personification of both the malignant aristocracy and the vengeful peasantry of Ireland, as well as the embodiments of national personalities as uncomplimentary as Oscar Wilde and C.S. Parnell³⁹. The inspiration for these more recent interpretations is undoubtedly the powerful attempt to reclaim *Uncle Silas* as an Irish novel by the novelist Elizabeth Bowen in her 1947 introduction to Le Fanu's masterpiece, where she sees in the "hermetic solitude, and the autocracy of the great country house, the demonic power of the family myth, fatalism, feudalism and the 'ascendancy' outlook" an "Irish story transported to an English setting."⁴⁰ However, it is

³⁹ Frazier, Adrian. "Irish Modernisms, 1880-1930." *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel*. John Wilson Foster (Ed.) Cambridge University Press. 2006. 113-132. (122)

⁴⁰ Bowen, Elizabeth. "Introduction." *Reflections in a Glass Darkly: Essays on J. Sheridan Le Fanu*. Gary William Crawford, Jim Rockhill, and Brian J. Showers (Eds.) Hippocampus Press. 2011. (334)

worth asking the question: why did Irish classics of this time period need English settings? Why did all three of these Gothic authors, whose careers span across the nineteenth-century and into the twentieth, only achieved the enduring readership and scholarly attention when they brought their Irish stories abroad?

In this chapter, I will examine one of Le Fanu's most neglected novels, an Irish story overtly attentive to Irish problems, a novel that when noticed by critics is often either held up as one of the finest works of its genre or dismissed as one of the most derivative. To this latter claim, I begin the discussion of this work by regarding its place within the genre of historical and national romance writing in Ireland, addressing first the enduring paradigms established by Sir Walter Scott to rationalize Scotland's incorporation into the British Empire and then addressing how Le Fanu's disrupts key aspects of this formula to undermine its colonial overtones.

This chapter focuses on a detailed analysis of the formal and thematic distinctions between these two authors, particularly on Le Fanu's rejection of heuristics of historical progress and racial hierarchies. Notably, I will call on the work of Siobhán Kilfeather and Julian Moynahan to explore how Le Fanu exploits the tension between the Gothic and historical Irish novelistic traditions to create a work crafted in its unique tone, structure, and emphasis to give its readers a distinctively Irish engagement with history and national allegory. In the final section of the chapter, I will explore how Le Fanu not only subverts the progressive representation of Scott's proto-Victorian historical model but also the pernicious racialization of that framework made by his English contemporaries, exemplified by Edward Bulwer Lytton. Ending with this comparison, I will argue that

the neglect of Le Fanu's early work is not a result of its low quality or lack of insight into its subject matter.

Like much of the literature of nineteenth-century Ireland that sincerely grappled with the complexity of the Irish situation, the cultural significance and literary merit of Le Fanu's early novels go often underrated or unnoticed, despite their innovation and acumen. There is no better place to begin a reassessment of Le Fanu's Irish, historical, national romance novel, *The Fortunes of Torlogh O'Brien: A Tale of the Wars of King James*,⁴¹ than where the discussions of many Irish national romance and nearly all Irish historical novels start: with Sir Walter Scott. Although Maria Edgeworth and Sydney Owenson deserve recognition as pioneers of a uniquely Irish tradition of novel writing, Scott exerted a great influence on the tone and structure adopted by Irish novelists throughout the century.⁴² Recognized as the father of the English historical novel, Scott is remembered not only as a pioneer of genre but also a maestro of the allegorical plot. His great admirer Georg Lukács sees this genius in the blending of history and domesticity: "Scott endeavours to portray the struggles and antagonisms of history by means of characters who, in their psychology and destiny, always represent social trends and historical forces." Scott used as his personification of progressive attitudes, a protagonist "always a more or less mediocre, average English gentleman," moderate in both virtue and intelligence who flirts with but is never fully seduced by a "great cause."⁴³ Scott's

⁴¹ Le Fanu, Joseph Sheridan. *The Fortunes of Colonel Torlogh O'Brien: A Tale of the Wars of King James*. George Routledge and Sons. n.d. [Hereafter referred to as *Torlogh*]

⁴² See Burgess, Miranda. "the National Tale and Allied Genres, 1770s-1840s." *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel*. Cambridge University Press. 39-59. (39-41); Sloan, Barry. *The Pioneers of Anglo-Irish Fiction 1800-1850*. Barnes and Noble Books. 1986. (83-84); and Cahalan, James M. *Great Hunger, Little Room: The Irish Historical Novel*. Syracuse University Press. 1983. (xii-15)

⁴³ Lukács, Georg. *The Historical Novel*. Hanna and Stanley Mitchell (trns.) Merlin Press. London. 1962. (33) (35)

first novel, *Waverly*, already exhibits his successful formula. The title character, after a brief dalliance with the Jacobite cause, personified by the beautiful and passionate rebel Flora Mac-Ivor, comes back to his senses with the “inexpressible repugnance at the idea of being accessory to the plague of civil war” after receiving a letter from the more moderate, temperate Rose Bradwardine, whom he is destined to marry. Following this narrative, the reader, along with Waverly, have become impassioned by and then apprehensive about the Jacobite cause and its romantic Celtic supporters, ultimately concluding with the protagonist that:

Whatever were the original rights of the Stuarts, calm reflection told him that, omitting the question how far James the Second could forfeit those of his posterity, he had, according to the united voice of the whole nation, justly forfeited his own. Since that period four monarchs had reigned in peace and glory over Britain, sustaining and exalting the character of the nation abroad and its liberties at home. Reason asked, was it worth while to disturb a government so long settled and established, and to plunge a kingdom into all the miseries of civil war, for the purpose of replacing upon the throne the descendants of a monarch by whom it had been willfully forfeited?⁴⁴

Luckily, the Stuarts abandoned their throne, so a possible conflict between legitimacy and stability becomes confused. The progress, economic growth, and social stability at the time of the novel’s publication become the validation for the novel’s formulation of history. Stability provided peace, and peace allows for reflection, and reflection can reconcile history to the present. The novel itself is a product of the reflection that peace

⁴⁴ Scott, Sir Walter. *Waverly*. Penguin Group. 1994. [1814] (223-224)

has provided. *Waverly* presents its readers with not only a forward-looking, coherent presentation of history but also, as Lukács observed, an intermingling of the domestic and the geo-political through history's transformation into a narrative. *Waverly*'s romantic and political decisions are coterminous in the rejection of the romantic past, represented by Flora and her unruly highlanders, and preference for the sensible, stable future of Rose and her lowlanders and English allies. The reader is meant to admire with a nostalgic respect the former while sitting comfortably in a world now controlled by the latter. From the beginning and throughout the nineteenth-century, Scott's fictionalizations of history remained a high-water mark in terms of artistic quality and gratifying resolutions,⁴⁵ offering British readers a "contemporary, synchronic and enveloping" way to conceptualize the past,⁴⁶ one always "informed throughout by a spirit of enlightenment, and a philosophy of progress which insists that the old world must make way for the new."⁴⁷

However, an overemphasis on Scott's influence has led to an underdeveloped appreciation for the struggles and success of many nineteenth-century Irish authors to create a distinctive national literature characterized not by calm reflection but by struggle with a reoccurring cycle of historical, political, economic, and social questions. Through all the changes of the nineteenth century, the perception and reality that Scotland's history was a legible success story and Ireland's was an ongoing, tragic mystery was a constant, only changing in degrees. From Scott's *Rob Roy* to Robert Louis Stevenson's *Alan Breck*, Scottish rebels were welcome guests in Victorian drawing rooms because

⁴⁵ Simmons, James C. *The Novelist as Historian*. Mouton & Co. 1973. (7)

⁴⁶ Sanders, Andrew. *The Victorian Novel 1840-1880*. St. Martin's Press New York. 1979. (31)

⁴⁷ Gibbons, Luke. "'Some Hysterical Hatred': History, Hysteria, and the Literary Revival." *Irish University Review*. 27:1. 1997. 7-23. (8)

their historical moment was perceived to be over, an interpretation that viewed Scottish nationalism as successful integrated into the British Empire.

The Irish rebel, on the other hand, was a figure hated in England and contentious in Ireland, with both O'Connell's and Parnell's constitutional nationalist movements splitting even Catholic nationalist sentiments towards armed rebellion. The traditional critical approach to the nineteenth-century Irish novel has been to emphasize the failure to successfully adapt Scott's model, not only in allegorical plot resolutions but also the "delineation[s] of national and local character, manners, and customs."⁴⁸ In a mid-twentieth century history of the English novel, Walter Allen sums up nicely the critical stance that has long held sway: "The Irish novelists of the time, who had found their exemplars in Maria Edgeworth and Scott, are much less interesting. Their natural talents were smaller and their interpretation of life crude."⁴⁹ This is a sentiment taken up more recently by Joseph Spense, who adds a root cause for the lack of quality: "The chief reason for the failure of Scott's Irish imitators is that none of them possessed their master's literary skill, but it is also the case that even those with some ability or imagination failed to understand his purpose, or, at least, failed to adapt it to the Irish situation."⁵⁰

However, though literary critics often sigh over the failure to adapt, they sometimes point to the very reason why adaptation to the Irish situation is a questionable criteria for evaluation, as Baker does by noting "When Scott wrote, the feuds and civil

⁴⁸ Baker, Ernest. *The History of the English Novel: The Age of Dickens and Thackeray*. H.F. & G Witherby Ltd. 1936. (12)

⁴⁹ Allen, Walter. *The English Novel: A Short Critical History*. Phoenix House Ltd. 1954. (125)

⁵⁰ Spense, Joseph. "Allegories for a Protestant Nation: Irish Tory Historical Fiction, 1820-18." *Religion & Literature*. 28:2/3. 1996. 59-78. (59)

disturbances which formed much of the historical groundwork of his drama were a thing of the past. Not so in Ireland.” It is this later observance, often noted but rarely incorporated into evaluations of literary merit, that should be at the heart of discussions of the development of an Irish national literature. If Scott’s harmony, straight-forward purpose, and productive allegories are held as the criteria for quality, then Irish authors would have to gain that quality at the cost of authenticity. If Scott’s sense of purpose comes from his admiration of what has been won and nostalgia for what has been lost, then Irish authors had little to speak of in the former category and only divisive material in the latter. Any Irish author who hoped to influence Irish readers or present a sincere treatment of Irish history needed to drastically modify all the settled, reflective aspects of Scott’s model that brought him such acclaim and commercial success.

Scott’s influence on the basic structural framework of the early Irish novel is undoubtedly significant, and his general emphasis on rural life and the overarching goals of “[h]ealing wounds and neutralizing old animosities”⁵¹ continue to be prominent features of Irish literature. And yet, while Scott could realistically celebrate Scottish history with satisfying, allegorical resolutions, Irish authors who sought resolution in history had to engage in speculation, speculation proposed to a divided populous, made in the midst of political, economic and social volatility, and burdened by popular Victorian theories of racial determinism. As striking as the broad similarities might be between Scott’s works and Irish novels of this century, recent critics such as Luke Gibbons, Emer Nolan and George O’Brien, have begun to explore in more detail the problems Irish authors faced in adapting Scott’s progressive view of history in a country where “history

⁵¹ Vance, Norman. *Irish Literature Since 1800*. Pearson Education Limited. 2002. (46)

did not lend itself very readily to plots about enlightened reconciliation, or gradual but steady progress”⁵² and “the task of securing, stabilizing, and delimiting norms [was] constantly in jeopardy.”⁵³ Ireland was not only a problem, but an ongoing fiasco for Victorian politicians and historians, a direct challenge to the forward-looking spirit of the age. The first volume of Macaulay’s 1848 *History of England* begins with praise of the settled state of Scotland, which “after ages of enmity, was at length united to England, not merely by legal bonds, but by indissoluble ties of interest and affection,” and a lament over Ireland, which remained “a member of the empire, but a withered and distorted member, adding no strength to the body politic.”⁵⁴ The literary traditions of Ireland and Scotland are united by threads of Celtic romanticism, allegorical devices, and nationalist objectives that recommend comparison. However, Irish authors who sought to step away from trends of British literature and into a uniquely Irish literary tradition, were forced to engage with a less congenial set of societal polemics. Even on the eve of Irish Independence, history seemed a force working against the Irish and for the Scots, despite the ostensible similarities in their experience and racial dispositions. Over seventy years after Macaulay, Cyril Robinson demonstrates the stability of historical understanding when describing the legacy of Jacobite rebellions in Ireland and Scotland. He can recall

⁵² Nolan, Emer. “Banim and the Historical Novel.” *The Irish Novel in the Nineteenth Century: Facts and Fictions*. Jacqueline Belanger (Ed.) Four Courts Press Ltd. 2005. (80)

⁵³ O’Brien, George. *The Irish Novel: 1800-1910*. Cork University Press. 2015. (xii)

⁵⁴ Macaulay, Thomas Babington. *The History of England from the Accession of James II*. John W. Lovell Company. Vol. 1. 1905. 13-14. See also later recognition of Ireland’s place in English history - Robinson, Cyril E. *The History of England: William III to Waterloo, 1689-1915*. Methuen & Co. Ltd. v.3. 1921. Hathi Trust Digital Library. “We valued Ireland less indeed than our other overseas possessions, because there was less advantage to be sucked from her. On the other hand, we interfered with her industries for more, because there was far more danger of their competing with our own. Hence we made no pretense whatever to frame our legislation for the island’s benefit; and the sufferings inflicted by this selfish policy on both settlers and inhabitants alike were regarded on this side of the Irish Channel with absolute indifference.” (210-211)

the aftermath of Culloden as not the end but the beginning of the flowering of Scottish national identity: “The genius of the Scots has preserved until this day his separate racial character and sturdy independence; but it has also made him (as alone it could) a devoted and valuable servant of the common weal.”⁵⁵ But the earlier Irish Jacobite rebellion still after two hundred years remains an open wound: “For a full century Ireland lay thus, gagged, indigent, and bleeding, until a fresh insurrection in 1798 provoked the abolition of the Irish Parliament, and a new variety of political repression.”⁵⁶ And so, when Sheridan Le Fanu in the 1840s turns to this latter rebellion in an bid to create a socially relevant historical novel, he chooses an event that did not bring resolution to a historical problem but one that was the catalyst for current problems. What Le Fanu produces is a novel disappointing when we look for the resolution and linearity of *Waverly*. Scott takes us on a straight path through a chaotic past to a settled present. Le Fanu wanders through a chaotic past looking for ways out of a chaotic present, creating as his central thematic conflict the difficulty of obtaining order and the danger of falling into chaos in a constantly changing society, a conflict woven into the very structure of the novel.

Torloagh O'Brien was published in 1847, the most infamous year of the Famine, a time when allegories of progress seemed not only inappropriate but grossly ironic. And, it is a novel that was faulted from its release for its turbulent structure and emphasis on violence. A contemporary reviewer put it,

There is genius of no common order flung forth carelessly upon its pages; but, notwithstanding all this, there is a want about it which a little consideration and

⁵⁵ Robinson, Cyril E. *The History of England: William III to Waterloo, 1689-1915*. Menthuen & Co. Ltd. v.3. 1921. Hathi Trust Digital Library. (49)

⁵⁶ Robinson. (8)

forethought would easily have supplied. A novel ought to be something more than a rapidly-shifting succession of scenes, however powerful and beautiful.⁵⁷

Even Le Fanu's biographer Nelson Brown has little nice to say of this novel, whose "chief fault is one of construction: there is no real climax and the story has no shape."⁵⁸ I will argue, however, that it is precisely in the disorder of the novel, its fractiousness and subversion of normal modes of representation and plot structure, that we find the most significant contributions to an Irish literary tradition can be found. Though *Torlogh* is a novel clearly bookended by Scott with a familiar allegorical framework, internally it is a work that calls into question the legitimacy of many of Scott's central themes. It is a novel with no clear demarcation between the romantic old and progressive new to help readers appreciate historical progression. In it, grotesque side-stories of torture and murder supplant the main narrative for long stretches. Early on, we are introduced to a character who looks to be the English moderate hero, Percy Neville, who quickly disappears almost entirely from the plot only to return in the final chapters for a perfunctory marriage to a bucolic Irish girl. The reader's sense of progression as well as convention are disrupted in ways that cause a reevaluation of relation between major and minor plot points. And though this may demonstrate a misapprehension of the preferences of the reading public, it certainly does not signal a disingenuous interaction with the subject matter. Writing in a sharply divided society where little could be put forth without violent rebuttal from the vying factions of the Irish and reflecting at a moment of historical uncertainty, Le Fanu creates a novel that seeks to create a unifying

⁵⁷ Waller, John F. (ed.) "Novels and Novelists of the Day." *Dublin University Magazine*. 30:177. 1847. 255-278. (278)

⁵⁸ Browne, Nelson. *Sheridan Le Fanu*. Arthur Baker, Ltd. 1951. (36)

sense of revulsion at the excesses of Irish society rather than through the celebration of an unambiguous sense of cultural or historical heritage.

Despite having a conventional allegorical framework, the unruly plot of *Torlogh* deemphasizes the traditional preoccupations of the national tale: the racial characteristics of the allegorical romance couple and the antagonism between modern and traditional societies. True, this is a story of resolution and reconciliation. A much more hopeful novel than the earlier *The Cock and Anchor* (1845), *Torlogh* tells the story of its title character's return to Ireland after his family's dispossession and exile to mainland Europe to fight for King James II against William of Orange. Ultimately on the losing side in this conflict, Torlogh regains his family's ancestral castle of Glindarraha through his marriage with the supplanting family's heiress, Grace Willoughby, reestablishing his family into the Irish ruling class.

Both the Willoughbys and the O'Brien are united by a similar honor system, which disdains above all duplicity and treachery. Unlike the clash between highland clans and English regiments of Scott's novels, the compromise this novel proposes has no inherently effete political structure that must be overcome to facilitate a stable society. Instead, Le Fanu emphasizes the threat to vulnerable communities in a constantly fluctuating society caught in a long running revenge cycle. Glindarraha Castle itself was confiscated by the Willoughbys over a hundred years before the start of the novel, then the O'Briens returned and killed Grace's great-grandfather, then Cromwell came drove the O'Briens out of the country, then over the course of the novel King James confiscates the castle from Sir Hugh Willoughby and then King William restores it again, and then we end with voluntary incorporation of the O'Briens back to their ancestral seat through

marriage, breaking the pattern of violent usurpation. During the shifts in power that occur during the novel, Le Fanu, while giving voice to the concerns of the Protestant minority during the reclamation under Patriot Parliament of King James, does still deemphasize questions of race and religion both by showing these to be a superficial impediment in the union between Torlogh and Grace and by showing neither the Catholic nor Protestant superiority to be one based on natural laws.

In this novel, Le Fanu is subverting an understanding of history common in his time. As Thomas Bartlett observes, because of the confiscation of Protestant land during King James' brief reign, the "Catholic question and the land question were henceforth inextricably bound up together, and it was axiomatic that to yield on the first meant endangering the second."⁵⁹ Le Fanu's portrayal of events stresses the fickleness of supremacy, not the natural progression of superior religions or races. The Irish defeat at the Boyne is shown as a fluke rather than an inevitability, as a retreating Irish soldier remarks, "Had my Lord Tyrconnell, and our colonel, and Sarsfield been duly seconded, by — we would have won the country this day; as it was, *they* have left more men upon the field than we."⁶⁰ Le Fanu's biographer Ivan Meleda notes a dark irony of historical whimsy operating throughout the novel, pointing to a scene where the French general St. Ruth, after telling his Irish comrades that all the battle plans for the Boyne are in his head, has his head blown off by a cannon ball.⁶¹ The relegation of historical progression to chance rather than destiny destabilizes notions of a Protestant ascendancy prescribed by natural law. The romance plot reflects this historical outlook, as neither of the two

⁵⁹ Bartlett, Thomas. *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation: The Catholic Question 1690-1830*. Barnes and Noble Books. 1992. (14)

⁶⁰ *Torlogh*. 284

⁶¹ Meleda, Ivan. *Sheridan Le Fanu*. Twayne Publishers. 1987. (33)

legitimate contestants for Glendarragh Castle, the O'Briens and the Willoughbys, are portrayed as the superior claimant, their virtue making them both worthy and the title to the property only shifting on the whims of foreign monarchs. Convoluted Victorian theories of a progressive history, the resolution of the novel occurs despite not because of the larger historical events that occur.

Heightening the unease with historical development, the novel also subverts all questions of resolution and harmony through themes of alienation. In his analysis of early nineteenth-century Irish literature, Barry Sloan singles out Le Fanu as distinct among Anglo-Irish novelists for his "eccentric originality and his preoccupation with abnormal and grotesque relationships,"⁶² and the first of these grotesque relationships that the reader is aware of in *Torlogh* is not between any of the characters but between a distant, romantic narrator and a gruesome, pressing reality. As the novel opens, this narrator "lifts the curtain from before the magic mirror" to reveal a room of conspirators, none of whom are named but who all have great "influence upon the events and persons of our Irish story."⁶³ James Walton sees in this scene a means of "bring[ing] home to the reader, from a temporal distance, the abject materiality that underlies all doctrinal and temporal differences," where the artifice of narrative is overshadowed by a Nature that "obliterate[s] marks of identity and humanity itself."⁶⁴ From the first scene, the reader is aware of an unsettling distance, both between narrator and subject and between mutable and immutable touchstones of identity.

⁶² Sloan, Barry. *The Pioneers of Anglo-Irish Fiction 1800-1850*. Barnes and Noble Books. 1986. (48) & (202)

⁶³ *Torlogh* (1)

⁶⁴ Walton, James. *Vision and Vacancy: The Fiction of J.S. Le Fanu*. University College Dublin Press. 2007. (85-86)

As the novel progresses, this distance between the theatricality of the narrator and the scenes he interrupts causes the reader to question the validity of the allegorical framework itself. Torlogh and Grace first encounter each other in the woods outside the castle of Glindarra, the site of contention between the two feuding families. Grace has been warned of the coming of “Torlogh Duv” who has “swore himself, on the altar, before the blessed and holy Pope, as I’m tould, in furrin parts, never to rest antil he had revenge on them that took the lands and the blood of his family.”⁶⁵ The Willoughbys of Glindarra are particularly troubled at this time by rumors of marauding soldiers from the continent arriving to fight for King James. Lured into the forest by one of these soldiers named Hogan, Grace is accosted. Breaking up a jarring scene of attempted rape, where Hogan tells her to not resist as “it’s often I shot a better woman than yourself,” the narrator interposes with dramatic calls for help:

Oh! for a messenger of mercy to peal this summons in his ears, and ring the alarm through all the chambers of his heart. Oh! beautiful Grace Willoughby, art thou then, indeed, defenceless. Not so; for at the very moment when the hand of the brawny villain had grasped the tiny wrist of the beautiful lady, a deliverer appeared.⁶⁶

Hogan’s blunt threat carries with it a more realistic import than does the narrator’s verbose theatrics. Cloaked in convention, the theatrical mediation only serves to heighten the grotesqueness of the events that have been interrupted through contrast. The deliverer of this scene is, of course, Torlogh, who, though an old comrade in arms of Hogan, disarms and dismisses his comrade, saying “for old acquaintance sake, I tell you, that if I

⁶⁵ *Torlogh*. (18)

⁶⁶ *Torlogh*. (26)

see you attempt to load again, or even so much as stop to look back upon me, I will send a leaden messenger after you, straight enough to find you even through a key hole.”⁶⁷

Danger is never finalized in this novel. History is capricious. Though the narrator guides events, the authority his voice represents is undermined throughout by the memorable savagery of the events he intrudes on, in a society otherwise governed by random acts of violence and retribution.

The narrator’s operatic inflection, so at odds with the grisly scenes he arbitrates, complicates any sense of settled resolution that the plot ostensibly proposes. Siobhán Kilfeather notes a similar contrast between the narrator and reality as a prominent trope of Gothic fiction, used to create a sense of dread, as a narrator, unwilling to accept the reality of the uncanny or supernatural, struggles to reject pressing sensory evidence.⁶⁸ By accentuating hideous details and distancing the narrator from the reality he relates, the novel forefronts both the urgent necessity for progress and the difficulty of the prerequisite reconciliation.

The grotesque scenes of the novel, which disrupt the linear movement of the plot, force the reader to include the shocking sublimity of a common human inequity when considering the more temporal disputes within Irish society. Throughout the novel, the reader witnesses scenes of horror that are not directly related to the feuds within society but rather a savage license allowed during times of political instability, as roving bands of armed men threaten both protagonists and antagonists alike. The most vivid instance of this is when, (after Le Fanu has hurried through scenes more prescient to the central plot)

⁶⁷ Torlogh. (29)

⁶⁸ Kilfeather, Siobhán. “The Gothic Novel.” *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel*. John Wilson Foster (Ed.) Cambridge University Press. 2006. 78-96. (82)

we read an extended torture scene of minor villain Garvey, whose arms are pulled from their sockets after repeated subjections to the strappado before a soldier takes up his musket and “with two blows mercifully shattered the unconscious head to pieces, and this secured the mangled wretch against the possibility of further torment.”⁶⁹ Scenes like this disrupt a sense of proportion within the novel. Villains are murdered in such appalling ways that the ugliness of the event become more memorable than the justice the events facilitate. The justice that comes for Garvey, though, is the consequence of his villainous actions within the confines of the novel. Even less attractive is the prospect of justice in a historical context. We see this in the contest between the Willoughbys and O’Briens, where justice demands vengeance, each side provided with legitimate cause for retaliation. In the convoluted Ireland Le Fanu presents, everyone has a just grievance; everyone has an understandable cause to seek revenge either personally or historically. But when we see this retribution enacted in the novel, even to characters who deserve it, satisfaction is undercut by imagery.

Along with retribution, Le Fanu places duplicity at the heart of an ongoing struggle for societal stability in Ireland, and he is not alone in this prognosis. William Carleton’s portrayal of an Irish society wracked by violent petty feuds in *The Black Prophet*, another Gothic historical novel published the year before *Torlogh*, clearly identifies those who exploit vulnerable segments of the population as chief exasperators of an already untenable situation of the country.⁷⁰ The chief villain of Le Fanu’s novel is

⁶⁹ *Torlogh*. (281)

⁷⁰ Carleton, William. *The Black Prophet: A Tale of Irish Famine*. D.J. Sadlier & Co. n.d. [1846] What follows is the beginning of Carleton’s introduction to Denis Skinadre the money lender who seeks : “There is to be found in Ireland, and, we presume, in all other countries, a class of hardened wretches, who look forward to a period of dearth as to one of great gain an advantage, and who contrive, by exercising the most heartless and diabolical principles, to make the sickness, famine, and general desolation which scourge

Miles Garrett, an aristocrat who for political reasons converts back and forth from Protestantism to Catholicism several times in the novel, each time hoping to confiscate land from his former co-religionists. Garrett's perfidy is excessive in proportion to the protagonists' constancy. As a foil to this, the consistency of Torlogh and Sir Hugh's moral fortitude facilitate the plot's comedic resolution. Characters like Torlogh, Grace and her father Sir Hugh, and the young priest O'Gara are highly virtuous and through them Le Fanu develops themes of reconciliation and understanding. These characters are in their virtue, like Miles Garrett in his vice, static, but their stasis is the commonality that provides a basis for respect across partisan lines. They endure the conflict of the novel by holding on to their code of honor, and the harmony achieved between these characters comes through an appreciation of similar disdain for vice previously obscured by class and religious prejudices. Virtuous characters coalesce by recognizing common virtue and villains are destroyed by other villains through failures to recognize common villainy.⁷¹ What complicates the effect of these, at times simplified, extremes is the imposition of moral ambiguity in a cast of minor characters. Accusations that the plot is unfocused undoubtedly come from the fact the Gothic imagery and tropes are employed to accentuate these subplots, most noticeably in the story of Jerimiah Tisdal.

Tisdal is the vassal of Sir Hugh, a bigoted puritan who condemns the Catholic population for an immorality that he himself exemplifies. He enjoys his high status in Irish society afforded by his Protestantism, but this status becomes threatened by the unexpected appearance of an old war-buddy, Richard Deveril. With a name two letters

their fellow-creatures, so many sources of successful extortion and rapacity, and consequently of gain to themselves." (86)

⁷¹ Garvey is tortured and murdered because of betrayal by Garrett.

removed from devil, this character from the first is described as appearing as “an apparition of a human form,”⁷² and he proceeds to blackmail Tisdal, threatening to expose the puritan’s former life of murder and profligacy. Tisdal then contrives to have Deveril murdered, leaving his former comrade in his house, which he knows will shortly be attacked by an advancing Irish army. After the carnage, Tisdal returns to a sight that most critics who summarize the novel dwell on as evidence of Le Fanu’s obsession with the macabre: a charred skeleton sticking out from the bars of a window.

Tisdal distractedly snatched up a long charred joist, which lay among the smouldering rubbish, and, stretching across the smoking embers and ashes, he, with the end of it, pushed the ghastly figure. The effect was horrible; for though the pressure was but slight, the grinning head separated from the body, and rolled, amid a cloud of dust, towards Tisdal's feet, while the body dropped back into the ashes and rubbish within the walls, leaving but the blackened arm still clinging and sticking to the bars. If the frightful apparition had spontaneously sprung from its position, and leaped at the throat of its betrayer, Tisdal could hardly have felt a pang of terror wilder than the paroxysm which froze him, as he saw the head of his victim thus rolling and plunging through the ashes, toward his feet.⁷³

The corpse shown here, which prompts feelings of otherworldly retribution, is not in fact Deveril but Tisdal’s servant Praise-God Bligh. When Deveril returns to renew his persecutions, Tisdal believes him to be a ghost, and throughout the rest of the novel the persecuting presence of this character continues to haunt Tisdal, causing him to bear false witness against his lord and friend, Sir Hugh, in a conspiracy to have the honorable

⁷² *Torlogh*. (49)

⁷³ *Torlogh*. (115)

knight executed for treason. Here should be recognized what Julian Moynahan observes as a reoccurring theme of much of Le Fanu's fiction, the haunting of the living by the living.⁷⁴ After this betrayal Tisdal recognizes in Deveril the presence of demonic forces, saying "I do believe you are the fiend himself, in shape of man, come again to tempt and undo me."⁷⁵

The underside of Victorian progressivism, according to Victor Sage, is the nightmare of the Gothic, where the dead past is constantly resurrecting itself to destroy the present, and "Nowhere is this tension more acute than the Irish gothic writer, Sheridan Le Fanu."⁷⁶ Throughout *Torlogh*, not only does the broader plot contain subtler elements of this haunting device, such as in the repeated reappearance of the O'Brien's to reclaim their home, but it is literally employed in the story of Tisdal to accentuate not only the danger of moral timidity but also the psychological complexity of confronting the past in the Irish context. For Tisdal to admit his past would mean losing his superior status in the community, a status built on his religious affectations. In seeking to maintain that position by unscrupulous means, he falls back into degeneracy of his past. He is a character consumed by his own history, his affection made pathetic and his airs of superiority made ironic. Though a Protestant himself, Le Fanu is not only particularly harsh when criticizing the degeneracy of the aristocracy in Miles Garrett, but also the bigotry of a lower caste of Protestant yeomen in Jeremy Tisdal. Associated with the

⁷⁴ Moynahan, Julian. "The Politics of Anglo-Irish Gothic: Maturin, Le Fanu and 'The Return of the Repressed'". *Studies in Anglo-Irish Literature*. Heinz Kosok (Ed.) 1983. 43-53. (50). Moynahan describes these figures as "'creatures commanding fell physical force and an intense mental desire to do mischief, and not merely by the insubstantial dead'".

⁷⁵ *Torlogh* (293)

⁷⁶ Sage, Victor. "Resurrecting the Regency: Horror and Eighteenth-Century Comedy in Le Fanu's Fiction." *Victorian Gothic: Literary and Cultural Manifestations in the Nineteenth Century*. Palgrave. 2000. 12-30. (15)

incursions of Cromwell by his puritanism – in contrast to the Willoughbys who were upheld rather than established by the New Model Army – Tisdal can be viewed as a personification of an arresting Protestant guilt, one in which the interaction with the past produces the same quandary of Macbeth who sees before and behind the same journey through blood. And with this historical burden on characters, those of moral complacency not only fail to reform but sink further into degeneracy and complacency. Many of the most distinctive themes of the Irish Gothic - alienation, degeneracy, and paranoia - that make the genre so distinctive⁷⁷ are shown to be the birthright of not only the corrupt aristocracy, but also the various social strata of Irish Protestants trust an atrocity-haunted past in order to maintain their position in society.

Biography looms large in most assessments of Le Fanu's early Irish novels. His Unionist conservatism and capitulation in 1863 to his English publisher to abandon both Irish themed and historical novels⁷⁸ negatively influencing interpretations of both the quality and cultural relevance of his early works. Brown speculates that "Naturally, the Le Fanus belonged to the ascendancy class, and unconsciously, we may suppose, adopted towards the "depressed" classes an attitude of superiority and patronage assumed to be indisputable."⁷⁹ Though we can note a hesitancy here to identify the exact extent of his

⁷⁷ See Cleary, Joe. "The Nineteenth-Century Irish Novel: Notes and Speculations on Literary History." *The Irish Novel in the Nineteenth Century: Facts and Fictions*. Jacqueline Belanger (Ed.) Four Court Press. 2005. 202-221 (216) and Moynahan (46)

⁷⁸ Howes, Marjorie. "Misalliance and Anglo-Irish Tradition in Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature*. 47:2. 1992. 164-186. (168) It should be noted, however, that during this time he was also the owner of the *Dublin University Magazine*, and during his tenure the political commentary declined [Howes, Marjorie. "Misalliance and Anglo-Irish Tradition in Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature*. 47:2. 1992. 164-186. (60-61)]

⁷⁹ Browne, Nelson. *Sheridan Le Fanu*. Arthur Baker, Ltd. 1951. (18)

family's hauteur, Sheridan Le Fanu's Tory political affiliations and isolated upbringing⁸⁰ certainly skewed his perception of Irish Catholics.

There is in this novel, however, a clear attempt to present an evenhanded adaptation of history. Even King James, as Brown Points out, is "treated with a leniency that must have surprised Le Fanu's readers."⁸¹ And it is not only in the great personages like Patrick Sarsfield that we see this positive representation; the folk hero Ned Ryan or "Ned of the Hills", who symbolizes Irish lawless opposition to Protestants rule, in the end exhibits noble personal attributes that unite him with the greater protagonists, helping his enemy Sir High when it is the just course of action.⁸² And yet, Le Fanu is singled out in Cahalan's study of Irish historical fiction, *Great Hunger, Little Room*, as the only non-"nationalist" author addressed in that work, a claim largely based on the novelist's subsequent abandonment of the Irish historical genre: "He [Le Fanu] moves from history to Gothicism rather than Gothicism to history, as Scott did. He retreats from history rather than pursue it, and his retreat demonstrates the power of history in Ireland." Cahalan even goes so far as to draw a connection between Le Fanu himself and the "imbecile" hero of the *Waverly* novels whose brief romantic dalliance with nationalism is ultimately rejected; but, while Scott helps his characters find a middle way between nationalism and modernity, Le Fanu, the man, fails to find an appropriate way to reconcile history and identity, becoming ultimately a "waverer and finally a confused

⁸⁰ Not only was Le Fanu and his siblings isolated from their community by their fathers position as Dean in Abington Co. Limerick, but the family was harassed and on one occasion pelted with stones during the Tithe Wars. McCormack (23) (82-82)

⁸¹ Browne (35)

⁸² See *Torlogh* (302)

escapist.”⁸³ This interpretation runs parallel with biographer W.J. McCormack assessment that *Torlogh* is a somewhat insincere and awkward flirtation with political compromise between the author’s high Toryism and the Young Irelander nationalism of his friend Charles Gavan Duffy, who McCormack suspects of heavily editing the novel,⁸⁴ a speculation that has been more recently dismissed as unsubstantiated speculation by Joseph Spense.⁸⁵ Though seeming to clarify, biographical criticism often distracts from the difficulties of writing a national novel in Ireland, of not only depicting but appealing to a country so embroiled in civil unrest. George Boyce puts “the creation of a comprehensive Irish nation embracing all creeds and classes of Irishmen” as the “most consistent goal of attempts to define Irish nationalism and their greatest failure in accomplishing.”⁸⁶ Le Fanu’s novel is an attempt at this goal. To say that it failed where Scott’s succeeded in bringing a unified sense of history to his country is to ignore the disparity in the two tasks. With strong incriminations of both the moral and legal legitimacy of his own class, he proposes a compromise that appeals for a recognition of virtue and nobility across sectarian lines.

While tempting to interpret Le Fanu’s later retreat from Irish history as an indication of his early insincerity, this simplification underestimates the role reception and genre have played in the critical legacy of this work. Leober, Stouthamer-Leober, and Leerson list both Gothic and historical fiction as genres largely excluded from the

⁸³ Cahalan (19) and (70). See also Sullivan, Kevin. “Sheridan le Fanu: The Purcell Papers, 1838-1840.” *Irish University Review*. 2:1. 1972. 5-19 (18), where Sullivan argues that it was Le Fanu’s failure to become the Irish Scott that caused him to almost abandon literature altogether.

⁸⁴ McCormack, W.J. *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*. Clarendon Press. 1980. (95) (100-103)

⁸⁵ Spense (72) Spense argues that the little evidence we have about collusion between Duffy and Le Fanu, could be explained by a tendency to embellish by writers of *The Nation*, concluding that without this assumption, *Torlogh* would seem a much more sincere and magnanimous attempt at compromise.

⁸⁶ Boyce (10-11)

nineteenth-century's Irish cultural movements to establish a national literature, movements whose efforts culminated in the Irish Literary Revival.⁸⁷ And yet, throughout the nineteenth-century the Gothic mode of representation, with its romantic blend of morbidity and foreboding, was deemed a pertinent style to express the Irish experience by many artists. Kilfeather goes so far as to propose that the term "Irish gothic" should be viewed less as a separate genre or subgenre of fiction, and more as a pervasive feature found of many types of nineteenth-century Irish fiction, particularly the national tale.⁸⁸ What makes the Gothic a troublesome venue for political nationalism is its uncertainty. It is a genre more vivid in its diagnoses than prescriptions, with the cultivation of fear, mystery, and the sublime all prompting caution rather than advance.

While discussing the conflicted and sometimes contradictory character of Le Fanu and his writings, Victor Sage points out that the rendition of history he presents is a type of cultural memory where "the nightmares of the past are explicitly, but subtly, revived, often revealing the bankrupt heritage of an aristocracy that has lost its capacity to resist its own history."⁸⁹ And in *Torlough*, the sense of uncertainty is accentuated by the way Le Fanu asks the reader to encounter history as a mystery.

This is established in the very first scene of the novel, where we are shown a room of conspirators, none of whom are named. Withholding identity is a jarring device that reoccurs throughout novel, as the reader often enters a scene of unknown actors only

⁸⁷ Leober, Rolf; Stouthamer-Loeber, Magda; and Leerson, Joep. "Early Calls for an Irish National Literature, 1820-1877." *Writing Irishness in Nineteenth-Century British Culture*. Neil McCaw (Ed.) Ashgate Publishing Company. 2004. 12-33. (20)

⁸⁸ Kilfeather. (86)

⁸⁹ Sage, Victor. "Resurrecting the Regency: Horror and Eighteenth-Century Comedy in Le Fanu's Fiction." *Victorian Gothic: Literary and Cultural Manifestations in the Nineteenth Century*. Palgrave. 2000. 12-30. (29)

to be later told the identity of the either familiar or newly introduced agents of the scene. The delayed introductions Le Fanu uses disorient the reader, adding to the overall sense of uncertainty created by the larger Gothic themes. To appreciate the dynamism of this mode of representing Irish history, we can again turn to Carleton's *The Black Prophet*, this time to emphasize a stylistically distinctive aspect of Le Fanu's work that demonstrates a defiance of conventional techniques of fictionalizing Irish people and history. Though both novels involve conspiracy, duplicity, and murder, Carleton begins many of his chapters with small sermons explaining the troubles in Ireland. Chapter XIII begins with a description of how landlords and middlemen operate in Ireland, and Chapter XXVIII opens with a condemnation of Irish politicians and their neglect of the poor.⁹⁰ While these passages signal the author's authority in assessing of the Irish situation, they also reveal an uncertainty as to intended audience. Carleton in these passages provides passionate pleas for the suffering Irish, but the exoticism adopted indicates the ever-present pull of foreign considerations on Irish artists, which caused the extravagant explication and annotation so emblematic of Irish literature of this era. This focus on exposition is conspicuously absent from Le Fanu's work, and its neglect compliments the internal and external agendas of the novel. The presence of a narrator who withholds information and suspends exposition contributes to the sense of unease with which the story approaches history. The characters move around and make decisions in an uncertain world under a distant narrator who defers from establishing himself as a supreme interpreter of events. Le Fanu's turn away from this convention of Irish literature can also be interpreted as a greater concern for appealing to an Irish audience,

⁹⁰ Carleton. (210) & (465)

for whom lengthy explanations were superfluous. The lack of side-notes focuses the reader on the narrative of the novel. This signals an attempt to not introduce the audience to Irish history or culture but ask them to reinterpret its significance.

Cahalan points to the period of 1845-1849 as a period when Irish authors were “unsure of their readership, their own political allegiances, and, for that matter, the course of history.”⁹¹ This was also a time when English readers, either from fatigue of Celtic romanticism or revulsion at the problems in the country, began to tire of Irish themed literature.⁹² *Torlogh*’s commercial failure is blamed for the otherwise prolific author’s hiatus from novel writing for fourteen years⁹³ and yet it is a novel that by the beginning of the twentieth-century, soon after its republication (both times by a Dublin publishing house)⁹⁴ was praised by Stephen J. Brown in *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review of Letters Philosophy and Science* as commonly held to be one of the finest Irish historical novels ever written.⁹⁵ Indeed, what is most striking about the current reputation of this novel is the extremes of critical opinion. In the main unnoticed or dismissed, it is also still occasionally hailed by critics like Joseph Spense, who sees in it “the influence of Dickens in its characterization, of G.P.R. James in its style and of John Banim in its approach”⁹⁶ or by biographers like Ivan Melada who argues that Le Fanu’s ironic and violent

⁹¹ Cahalan. (68)

⁹² A year after *Torlogh* was published, Anthony Trollope was advised to discontinue his Irish novels, after *The Kellys and the O’Kellys* (1848), because of a drop in English demand. See Murphy, James. *Canonicity: The Literature of Nineteenth-Century Ireland*. New Hibernia Review. 7.2. (Summer 2003) 45-54. (51)

⁹³ Byrne, Patrick F. “Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu: A Centenary Memoir.” *Dublin Historical Record*. 26:3. 1973. 80-92. (87). and Sullivan, Kevin. “Sheridan le Fanu: The Purcell Papers, 1838-1840.” *Irish University Review*. 2:1. 1972. 5-19. (18).

⁹⁴ Browne. (34). Republished in 1904 by J. Duffy and Co.

⁹⁵ Brown, Stephen J. “Irish Historical Fiction.” *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review of Letters Philosophy and Science*. IV.15. 1915. (447-448) (448)

⁹⁶ Spense. (71)

treatment of history anticipates Zola and Tolstoy.⁹⁷ Though not a great commercial success, it did receive praise at its publication for both its entertainment value and its unique presentation of history. The *Dublin Review* praised it as an exuberant novel and for “not letting the history overwhelm the characterization or plot.”⁹⁸ *The Athenaeum* commended its insightful treatment of history, holding it up as a counter to “English distortions” influenced by public policy.⁹⁹ And in a short review, *The New Monthly Magazine* called it a “story overflowing with that succession of fun, incident, and pathos, which has almost identified itself with the literature of Ireland.”¹⁰⁰ Positive reception of a novel carries with it not only an economic boon but a validation of relevance, both cultural and artistic, something particularly important to an author seeking to be a national writer. Important to consider alongside the influence of the English market are the difficulties and turbulent pressures of writing about Ireland and to Irish audiences in a country where increasingly through the century the “notion of artistic achievement became more politicized and the political notion of ‘Irishness’ grew into an important criterion for the literary merit of a given author,”¹⁰¹ something Maria Edgeworth in the 1830s deemed intolerable because “realities are too strong, party passions are too violent.”¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Melada. (31)

⁹⁸ “XI. — The Fortunes of Colonel Torlogh O’Brien. A Tale of the War of King James.” *The Dublin Review*. Vol. 22 Issue 43. March 1847. 270.

⁹⁹ “The Fortunes of Colonel Torlogh O’Brien. A Tale of the War of King James.” *The Athenaeum*; London Issue 1013. Mar 27, 1847. 327-329.

¹⁰⁰ “The Fortunes of Colonel Torlogh O’Brien.” *New Monthly Magazine*. Vol. 79, Iss. 316, Apr 1847 531.

¹⁰¹ Loeber et al. (19)

¹⁰² Edgeworth, Maria. *The Life and Letters of Maria Edgeworth*. Augustus J.C. Hare (Ed.) Vol. II. Houghton, Mifflin and Company. 1895. (550)

Critics have seen in the shift in emphasis from tragedy of Le Fanu's first novel, *The Cock and Anchor*, to comedic resolution of *Torlogh*, a rising to crescendo of the young author's nationalistic sentiments.¹⁰³ Both novels, however, maintain a similar focus on the reenfranchisement of Catholic Ireland through their central allegorical romances. Like *Torlogh*, *The Cock and Anchor* features the romance between a landless, Jacobite Catholic male and a Protestant female heiress. Although this formula was at the time¹⁰⁴ and still today, overlooked as a somewhat perfunctory romance equation,¹⁰⁵ interchangeable with of plots with reversed roles, J.T. Leerson points to an unaccommodated adaptation of Scott's blueprint as an dominant trope for Irish literature of the mid nineteenth-century:

It is almost *de rigueur* for an Anglo-Irish novel from this period to have, for its hero, narrator or focalizer, a cosmopolitan, non-Irish (usually English) character, whose progress westward, towards an acquaintance with Ireland, provides the main basis for plot and incident.¹⁰⁶

The allegorical implications of Le Fanu's deviation from this convention, centering his plot on a Catholic masculine being accepted into a feminized ascendancy class, preferences the internal reconciliations needed within Irish society over the imperial

¹⁰³ Magill, Frank N. (Ed.) "Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu." *Critical Survey of Long Fiction: English Language Series*. Vol. 4. Salem Press. 1983. Magill writes "The social cancer that blighted the love of Mary and Edmund is, however, allowed a possible cure in *The Fortunes of Colonel Torlogh O'Brien*. As the deaths of the lovers in the first novel showed Ireland as a sterile wasteland, so the union of the Willoughbys and the O'Briens in the second promises restoring rain, but when after the long hiatus Le Fanu returned to novel-writing, he chose to let the promise go unfulfilled." (1624)

¹⁰⁴ See *The Literary Gazette : A Weekly Journal of Literature, Science, and the Fine Arts*; Issue 1574. Mar 20, 1847. 231. "One of the class of Irish stories,[...] in which hair-breadth escapes illustrate the noble character of the hero (of course a true Milesian), [...] finally lead to a consummation devoutly to be wished, - a happy union between the Hibernian and the Saxon, and no Repeal desired on either side."

¹⁰⁵ Cahalan (106)

¹⁰⁶ Leerson, J.Th. "On the Treatment of Irishness in Romantic Anglo-Irish Fiction." *Irish University Review*. 20:2. 1990. 251-263. (259)

implications of plots centered on a masculine colonizer and a feminized native. The latter was a plot dynamic, inaugurated by Scott, was adapted to an Irish setting early in the century with Lady Morgan's popular *Wild Irish Girl* (1806). By the beginning of the twentieth-century the dynamic of a cultural-violator/personal-wooer relationship had been recognized for its ironic potential, and authors from Bernard Shaw to Brien Friel have utilized the equation to explore the perverse relationship between Ireland and England. However, the structure of both of Le Fanu's novels remove the geo-political aspect by excluding foreign, English characters from the central romance plot. Even in *Torlogh*, a novel that deals with an English military incursion, English born characters play only tangential role in the central romance.

The inclusion of English characters in a national romance plot was a particularly alluring prospect to Irish authors writing in the national romance genre as it created relevance to a wider British audience. English characters could also be used to accentuate cultural dissonance. Declan Kiberd begins his *Inventing Ireland* with a discussion of the how England and Ireland used each other as a foil when formulating their own identities,¹⁰⁷ and F.S.L. Lyons proposes an even deeper confusion within Irish society as he argues as the antagonistic factions within Ireland were "defined not so much by their relations with each other, critical as those were, but by their relations with the English culture under whose shadow they existed and to which they had always to respond."¹⁰⁸ Le Fanu's novels, on the other hand, use English counterweights sparingly, with a cast of mainly Irish exile or Irish born characters who live in a world agitated by English interference but possessing its own internal cohesion. The consistent allegorical structure

¹⁰⁷ Kiberd, Declan. *Inventing Ireland*. Harvard University Press. 1995. (9)

¹⁰⁸ Lyons, F.S.L. *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland, 1890-1939*. Clarendon Press. 1979. (7)

can be viewed not only as an indicator of the author's intent to speak directly to an Irish audience but also, as will later be explored in a discussion of racial determinism, his rejection of an Irish identity that only exists as an English antipode.

The domestic focus of these novels also accentuates the ways in which Le Fanu both engages with and defers questions of cultural identity. I use the term domestic here to indicate a concern with internal Ireland itself rather than in reference to everyday life, as indeed we find in Le Fanu's works very little of the investigation or explanation of rural life and customs so prominent in other Irish novels. In *Torlogh*, the turmoil created by the contest between James and William has thrown Irish society into an extraordinary state, one that serves to accentuate the extremes of national character. Le Fanu uses this chaos to draw attention to the danger of excesses rather than what is enduring in the mundane, and in doing so distracts the reader from cultural distinctions within normal society. Both novels do depict a society with clear and rigid social distinctions, but each stratum is made distinct by a set of vices accentuated by disorder: the Catholic population by a disregard of the law and the Protestant aristocracy by a neglect of responsibility. However, it is the Catholic masculine suitor of the romance and other dispossessed Catholic characters who are shown to possess the greater claim on historical legitimacy. In *Torlogh*, the O'Briens are the original owners of the castle, and the claimant's nobility makes him a legitimate claimant both in pedigree and character. In *The Cock and Anchor*, the character Captain O'Hanlon, a dispossessed Jacobite, is given a lengthy speech on the injustice of for which we can find no parallel eloquence from the Protestant characters.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ It should be noted that Le Fanu also displays a dark side of Irish nationalism that conflicts with O'Hanlon's virtue through the character of a priest, the head of a secret society, willing to commit murder to protect the cause. See *The Cock and Anchor* chapters XLIII - XLV

Is it a common thing, think you, that all the gentlemen, all the chivalry of a whole country—the natural leaders and protectors of the people—should be stripped of their birthright, ay, even of the poor privilege of seeing in this their native country, strangers possessing the inheritances which are in *all* right their own; cast abroad upon the world; soldiers of fortune, selling their blood for a bare subsistence; many of them dying of want; and all because for honour and conscience sake they refused to break the oath which bound them to a ruined prince? Is it a slight thing, think you, to visit with pains and penalties such as these, men guilty of no crimes beyond those of fidelity and honour?"¹¹⁰

One can here think back to Waverley's reflection on legitimacy and stability as the two standards of historical justification and progress. Lacking historical legitimacy, the Protestant gentry of Le Fanu's novels cannot claim validity through stability, as their class's characteristic flaws of self-indulgence and duplicity are the primary cause for its absence. Noble Irish Protestants, like the Willoughbys, can seek legitimacy through personal virtue, which cannot be fully realized without recognition of the legitimate claims of Catholic Ireland. In this, just as Le Fanu directs us away from the global to the national, he also presents the problems in Ireland (and of the Protestant class in particular) as one of personal rather than political. In neither of these two novels does religion or cultural peculiarities provide an impediment to the central romance, which instead is impeded by an avaricious, self-serving aristocracy and an impoverished people given over to lawlessness.

¹¹⁰ *The Cock and Anchor*. (8)

Both Le Fanu's early novels show the decline into depravity of both upper and lower classes as the greatest threat to progress in Irish society. In *The Cock and Anchor*, Sir Richard Ashwood, the Irish lord who successfully frustrates the central romance, is a man for whom "generosity, compassion, and natural affection were not only unknown, but incredible,"¹¹¹ and the slums of Dublin are a place where reigns "a certain course and revolting disregard and defiance of etiquettes and conventional decencies of social life."¹¹² Though the lower classes are often painted with a broad brush, Le Fanu's sharpest critiques are cut into the ruling class, where a comic irony lies in the interplay of legitimacy and degeneracy. This is a theme he does not abandon in his later, English-set novels. Parallels could be drawn between Ashwood and Silas Ruthyn, through their decadence and perpetuation of vice through their children. One of the recurring ironies of *Uncle Silas* is the title character's dissatisfaction with his uncultivated children who he himself has neglected. However, unlike *Uncle Silas*, which have a claustrophobic focus on an isolated household, Le Fanu is more ambitious in his earlier Irish novels, portraying not only a dynasty but a whole society in a state of neglect and instability, where characters like Miles Garrett, himself a symbol of instability by his religious and political defections, threaten to ascend to dominance and initiate a new cycle of revenge and reprisal.

Despite the larger scope of the Irish novels, there is still an intensely personal focus in the way Le Fanu depicts societal problems. In the fracturing society he depicts, disinherited characters, like Torlogh, who strive to maintain virtue must do so always "tempted by dark spectres of murder, pealing dire menace in his ear, and beckoning the

¹¹¹ *The Cock and Anchor*. (75)

¹¹² *The Cock and Anchor*. (144)

last of the ancient race to vengeance.”¹¹³ And while these characters resist ancestral calls to perpetuate discord, Protestant characters resist the bigoted war cries of their own enfranchised comrades. In his brief appearance, Percy Neville, still bleeding from the wound that will remove him from the plot of the novel,¹¹⁴ upon hearing his fellow Protestant berating the native Irish who inflicted the wound, replies,

call them cowards and savages if you will, but as far as I may pronounce from my poor personal experiences, their flesh wounds smart as much as those of the politest and most valorous people upon earth; and thus much too I will aver, that in this skirmish they have borne themselves as prettily as any men need do.¹¹⁵

Both Torlogh and Percy are characters provided with ample reason to seek revenge, and yet resisting the omnipresent babble of racial invective is what defines their heroism within the story. When Torlogh seeks vengeance on the Willoughby family, he does so legitimized by history: his family’s property has been stolen and his ancestors have been murdered. When Percy recognizes the valor of the Irish, he does so against even the narrator’s description of the “wild Irish” as they attack Glendarragh Castle, a description that calls to mind Conrad’s portrayal of Africans in *Heart of Darkness*, more the confused personifications of a land in turmoil than human beings.

And now with terrific hubbub and thundering war-whoop the dark and savage multitude[...] came rushing madly like a dark wave rolling and peeling up the shingles on the shore, toward the castle gate ; [...] a sea of wild haggard heads swaying and rolling this way and that, and flowing like conflicting tides, so that

¹¹³ *Torlogh*. (109)

¹¹⁴ Soon after this scene, all the principle characters move along with the setting to Dublin, while Percy is left to convalesce at Glindarragh, recovering just in time to ride off to fight for King William.

¹¹⁵ *Torlogh*. (91)

those who from the castle walls beheld the giddy spectacle, felt their very brains to swim and sicken as they looked.¹¹⁶

The sense of lower-caste degeneracy is also accentuated in more intimate scenes of the Dublin slums, most memorably when a disreputable Dublin innkeeper, Peter Coyle, after being attacked with a knife, dispatches his wife by holding a door closed on her throat, “watching the gradual blackening and quivering of her frightful face, with an expression half vindictive and half horrified.”¹¹⁷

Again, as in the story of Tisdal, the reader encounters a scene of murder remarkable for its vivid grotesqueness. Both scenes accentuate the violation of relationships central to the Irish national romance: between husband and wife and between master and vassal, as it is Tisdal’s servant whose skeleton is found clinging to the window of the house his master abandoned to seek safety. The portrayal of Catholic Ireland in scenes the wild Irish outside Glindarragh or of Dublin innkeepers murdering his wife might seem to detract from greater themes in the novel of overcoming old hatreds and racial prejudice, possibly illustrating the author’s own prejudice. However, recognizing the totality of the cultural criticism can bring us closer to the novel’s full proposal of Irish history as a heuristic for Irish readers. More than the wider political intrigues, Le Fanu is concerned with exploring a community where the basic relationships that hold society together have become perverse at all levels: husbands kill their wives, peasants rebel against their landlords, masters betray their servants, landlords betray their tenants, and king (or kings) disrupt the rule of law. And the remedy developed through the heroic characters of the novel is for individuals to willfully

¹¹⁶ *Torlogh*. (92)

¹¹⁷ *Torlogh*. (256)

abandon justified grievance. This approach that focuses on personal clemency might be criticized for how it side-steps overt confrontation with larger political and colonial questions of England's interference in Ireland. And yet, the personal malleability that Le Fanu's humanizing representation assumes stands against emerging colonial modes of depicting and explaining the perennial nature of Irish conflicts as evidence of a racial disposition.

In tracing the colonial overtones of British literature, Patrick Bratlinger observes that at the start of the nineteenth-century, Scott could use the term 'race' synonymous with 'nation', "without the invidious biological significance", and yet by the 1860s race was understood as "virtually a collective synonym for 'character,' understood as an immutable set of traits."¹¹⁸ This semantic shift was well on its way in Le Fanu's time, and his rejection of a racialized approach to fictionalizing Irish history demonstrates a recognition of inadequacies of such an approach to either explain or improve the conflicts within Irish society.

Over the course of the nineteenth-century, racial theories became increasingly attractive modes of supporting a nationalist spirit and expiating national guilt for English historical authors. After visiting Ireland in 1860, novelist Charles Kingsley wrote of the Irish, "I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw ... I don't believe they are our fault...But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much."¹¹⁹ Though relying on popular scientific theories of his day, this racial diagnostic contains more of the panic of a Jekyll or Frankenstein than the observations of

¹¹⁸ Bratlinger, Patrick. *Victorian Literature and Postcolonial Studies*. Edinburgh University Press. 2009. (16) & (41)

¹¹⁹ quoted in: Curtis, L.P. JR. *Anglo-Saxons and Celts: A Study of Anti-Irish Prejudice in Victorian England*. Conference on British Studies. 1968. (84)

a Darwin. In the later half of the century, Kingsley was a major proponent of a widely popular system of belief that L.P. Curtis terms Anglo-Saxonism: an unsystematic ideology of racial determinism that reached its height in the 1860s through 90s, holding that the mixture of Germanic attributes that constituted the English race, in particular a unique genius for political administration and unswerving devotion to personal liberty, had helped their civilization produce the most advanced system of government administration, one they were entitled to impose dominion over less developed nations.¹²⁰ It is a theory that was, as Curtis proposes, specifically developed to explain “one of the longest secular trends in English cultural history,”¹²¹ anti-Irish sentiment. Though this theory gained momentum in the second half of the century, its infiltration into historical fiction can be seen at the end of the 1840s. Edward Bulwer Lytton’s *Harold the Last of the Saxon Kings* was published the same year as *Torlogh*, and is identified by Billie Melman as “the prototype of the ‘Saxon’ novel”. Although both *Torlogh* and *Harold* share Scott’s nationalistic objective of reconciling the national divisions of their day,¹²² they are strikingly distinctive in the ways they propose their societies interpret the significance of national history, a contrast accentuated by the differences in the presentation of race and progress.

Harold is a novel that asks its readers to understand modern English identity by examining the constituent racial dispositions of the Saxon-Danes and Normans that conflicted at and merged after the Battle of Hastings. Though the skill and guile of

¹²⁰ Curtis, L.P. JR. *Anglo-Saxons and Celts: A Study of Anti-Irish Prejudice in Victorian England*. Conference on British Studies. 1968. (7-12)

¹²¹ Curtis. (27) and (33)

¹²² Melman, Billie. “Claiming the Nation’s Past: The Invention of an Anglo-Saxon Tradition.” *Journal of Contemporary History*. 26:3/4. 1991. 575-595. (577 & 580)

William and his Normans are set against the honor and valiance of Harold and his Saxons, they are, through common Teutonic ancestry, both portrayed as possessing a common set of Germanic virtues that elevate them above the fractious, Celtic Welsh.

They [The Danes] had the same prodigious energy, the same passion for freedom, individual and civil, the same splendid errors in the thirst for fame and the “point of honour;” and above all, as a main cause of civilization, they were wonderfully pliant and malleable in their admixtures with the peoples they overran. This is their true distinction from the stubborn Celt, who refuses to mingle, and disdains to improve.¹²³

Two decades before Matthew Arnold would conclude that “For ages and ages the world has been constantly slipping, ever more and more, out of the Celt’s grasp,”¹²⁴ Lytton portrays the rebellious Welsh prince Gryffyth as the personification of the decadent, clannish Celtic worldview that has doomed his race to become a mere footnote to the more significant struggles between the versatile and progressive Germanic peoples.¹²⁵ Michael de Nie quite rightly argues that race should be considered as one of a triumvirate of prejudicial burdens on the Irish people alongside economic status and religion, each of which had prominence at different times and in different sectors.¹²⁶ Still, the strange pseudo-scientific allure of this Anglo-Saxonist outlook – its ability to articulate older

¹²³ Lytton, Edward Bulwer. *Harold, the Last of the Saxon Kings*. Charles Scribner’s Sons. 1903. Vol 1. (20). Hereafter referred to as *Harold* v1.

¹²⁴ Arnold, Matthew. *On the Study of Celtic Literature and on Translating Homer*. The Macmillan Company. 1904. [1865] (81)

¹²⁵ *Harold* v1. (318-319). “But, intensely national, his mind had turned from all other literature, to the legends, and songs, and chronicles of his land; and if he is the best scholar who best understands his own tongue and its treasures, Gryffyth was the most erudite prince of his age.”

¹²⁶ See de Nie, Michael. *The Eternal Paddy: Irish Identity and the British Press, 1798-1882*. The University of Wisconsin Press. 2004. 5-27 where he addresses each of these in turn.

religious prejudices in modern, enlightened terms, maintain a stable sense of immutable superiority in a time of rapid cultural change and expansion, and account for the seeming contradictions of a freedom loving nation that subjugates other nations – gave it a powerful allure that would increasingly over the century make English nationalism, in Brantlinger’s words, “often indistinguishable from racial chauvinism.”¹²⁷ Lytton’s novel’s celebration of the Saxons and Normans races is predicated on their ability to change and adapt, particularly though the melding with other races, as long as those races are Germanic.

What makes Lytton’s coeval fictionalization of history relevant to Le Fanu’s *Torlogh* is the marked difference in the way these two authors defined the parameters of a nationalistic polemic when reinterpreting history. For Le Fanu, racial identity most often emerges in calls to vengeance. We have seen this already in the spectral race memory of Torlogh and his Catholic kinsmen and the fanaticism of a Protestant minority with dubious historical claims to ascendancy. History is shown as a cycle of vengeance, and it is only in ignoring its retributive commands that characters can attain a personal heroism that allows for harmony. In contrast, through the Saxon-Danes of *Harold*, particularly through the emblematic King Harold himself, Lytton explores the attributes of truth, honor, and nationalism that are the most admirable qualities of a uniquely English character, ones that, though overlaid by Norman ingenuity and bureaucracy, still remain an admirable driving force in the modern English disposition.

The union between Norman and Saxon succeeds because their common Germanic love of truth, but the simpler Saxon character remains the core of virtue. Within the

¹²⁷ Brantlinger. (2-3)

novel, King Harold is justified in his suspicions of foreign peoples and religions as the narrator overtly warns against the corrupting power of Latinate duplicity on the honest German mindset.¹²⁸ Natural dispositions pull Saxon characters towards virtue, and Harold's native integrity is corrupted only by entering the wider geopolitical world of the Normans, as "for the first time an ambition apart from that of service to his country" influences his decisions, "corrupt[ing] the genuine simplicity of his earlier nature", when "expediciencies began to dim to his conscience the healthful loveliness of Truth."¹²⁹

Themes of native purity and foreign corruption are also developed through the central romance of the novel, as Harold, though briefly tempted to marrying outside his own race for political expedience, ultimately choses his Saxon love Edith, who overtly identified as the personification of Truth by the narrator.¹³⁰ Although Curtis points to both Scott and Lytton (as well as Kingsley) as the most prominent literary sustainers of the "racial and ethnic distinctions" that "pervaded the discussion of the English governing classes about their relation to the Irish, the Scots, and the Welsh,"¹³¹ Lytton represents a distinctive turn in evolution of racial representation in British historical fiction.

Despite the clear distinction Scot portrays between the Scots and English, critics like Andrew Sanders are still able to see his "most original and important innovation" as the "perception that environment shapes the human consciousness."¹³² The heightened

¹²⁸ Lytton, Edward Bulwer. *Harold, the Last of the Saxon Kings*. Charles Scribner's Sons. 1903. Vol 2. (75) Hereafter referred to as *Harold* v2. "The great historian of Italy has said, that whenever the simple and truthful German came amongst the plotting and artful Italians and experienced their duplicity and craft, he straightway became more false and subtle than the Italians themselves." This also explains why the French influence on the Normans makes them less admirable than the Saxon.

¹²⁹ *Harold* v1. (256)

¹³⁰ *Harold* v2. (146)

¹³¹ Curtis. (21). "These racial and ethnic distinctions sustained the 'sword and buckler' historical novels of Sir Walter Scott, Lord Lytton, Charles Kingsley and their imitators, just as they pervaded the discussion of the English governing classes about their relations with the Irish, the Scots, and the Welsh."

¹³² Sanders, Andrew. *The Victorian Novel 1840-1880*. St. Martin's Press New York. 1979. (8)

racial determinism of the Saxonist novel that Lytton inaugurates is a vehicle better suited to not only explaining but also justifying colonialist endeavors. The galvanic conceptions of national identity he offers asks his community to see commonality across ephemeral partisan disputes in an innate heredity that can be utilized when properly recognized. The engagement with race here demonstrates what Bratlinger observes as the circular reasoning when “race is treated as historical causation” that was used to justify imperial actions abroad.¹³³ Not only was this an increasingly popular mode of presenting history amongst British audiences as the century progressed, but it also would have been particularly alluring to Irish Protestants, so unsure of their own cultural legitimacy or political relevance to their society.

It is all the more significant, therefore, that Le Fanu veers away from the engagement with the racial and ethnic framework popular to English audiences and complimentary to his class, even while interacting with historical events that seems to lend itself to such demarcations. Instead, he innovates on an Irish tradition of historical writing inaugurated by John Banim. Speaking of the beginnings of the Irish historical novel in the 1820s, Sloan points out that given their demoralizing subject matter, the failings of Irish authors who attempted to engage with Irish history “are perhaps less important than the fact that they attempted it at all,” and Banim’s *The Boyne Water* (1826) established Irish historical fiction as “capable of providing imaginative insight into current beliefs and events rather than being simply a catalogue of abuses perpetrated by the English against the Irish.”¹³⁴ In this earlier depiction of the contest between the forces of James and William, Emir Nolan notes a de-emphasis of historical determinism

¹³³ Brantlinger. (44)

¹³⁴ Sloan. (63) & (85)

similar to what I have already discussed in *Torlogh*.¹³⁵ And Le Fanu even includes a short flourish of deference to his Irish predecessor when he forgoes a lengthy description of the Battle, saying “we are not presumptuous enough to traverse the ground already explored by him [John Banim].”¹³⁶ A much lengthier novel, *The Boyne Water* contains a more complicated double romance plot, where a brother and sister from the Protestant Evelyn family fall in love with their compliments in the Catholic McDonnell family, with the struggle to reconcile the racial and political affiliations between the mismatched couples provide a driving force in the narrative.¹³⁷

Unlike Le Fanu, Banim published his Irish novels through English publishers, and it is a testament to the pressures of representation inherent in that venue that although the novel presents what would today be considered a sympathetic and moderate depiction of both the political and domestic sides of the conflict, it was still called in *The Times* on its release “a compendium of mad Popery.”¹³⁸ Twenty years later, when Le Fanu came to reinterpret the same historical events, we can see how he contributes to the “imaginative insights into current beliefs” of an Irish literary tradition increasingly reliant and aware of Irish audiences and resistant to the divergent path of the English tradition. By condensing the allegorical framework into one romance that affirms the reestablishment of Catholicism, decentralizing questions of political and cultural impediments in that romance, and destabilizing notions of racial and historical

¹³⁵ Nolan. (85). “There is nothing in Banim to support Scott’s view that the defeat of the Jacobitism was inevitable, or that it was in any case destroyed as much by its own inner weakness and anachronisms as by any external force: indeed, throughout *The Boyne Water*, Banim depicts ‘the war of the two kings’ as a rather close-run thing.”

¹³⁶ *Torlogh*. (281)

¹³⁷ O’Brien. (33); Sloan (81)

¹³⁸ qtd. in Sloan. (76)

progression, *Torlogh* privileges cultural relevance over historical reality. In Banim's novel, the Catholic masculine/Protestant feminine romance of Edmund McDonnell and Esther Evelyn ends with a tragedy symbolically appropriate to the aftermath of King William's victory. In Le Fanu, the description of the successful union that crowns Grace and Torlogh's reconciliation is covered with the same flowery blandishments as their first meeting, as the narrator cries, "Oh! joyous meeting; oh! ecstasy unutterable; too wildly happy for tears – too deep for laughter; yet trembling and gushing with the mysterious confluence of both; what raptures of affection in every look; what boundless tenderness in the hushed tones of every word!,"¹³⁹ adding an appropriate tone of the fantastic to the conclusion that is already fantasized history.

At the expense of historical accuracy, Le Fanu attempts to diminish the role of rigid demarcation of Irish identity, by depicting reconciliation as a personal struggle between people divided by their own unique set of vices rather than their virtues. Indeed, *Torlogh* presents its readers with a radical rewriting of Irish history, one that seems to extract a simple moral of religious and political reconciliation from events that are still pointed to as the most divisive in Irish history. Melada sees in the happy resolution of the novel an attempt to gloss over of "the divisions in Irish political life."¹⁴⁰ And there is truth in this, as, unlike in Banim, there is very little cultural conflict between Grace and Torlogh, who fall in love quickly and struggle throughout the novel with the prejudice of others and the legal impediments to their union rather than with each other. But we should consider the conclusion and romance of the plot within the confines of the novel itself, recalling Browne's criticism that this is a story with no real climax or resolution.

¹³⁹ *Torlogh*. (339)

¹⁴⁰ Melada. (31)

With the fragmented structure and competing voices within the novel distracting from the central allegorical union, critics have sensed that the resolution that does play out as the proper culmination of the plot's action as in other novels, causing the reader to look to the more vivid and memorable aspects of the story to find meaning. McCormack suggests that the merit of Le Fanu's fiction "does not so much lie in method or theme as in its explorations of form and pattern."¹⁴¹ In national romance novels that seek to promote understanding and union, the most common character pairings come between two antagonistic characters, divided by national sentiment, who ultimately reconcile across partisan lines. This occurs at the end of *Waverly* between Colonel Talbot and Scottish noble Bradwardine, and also in *Torlogh* between Torlogh himself and Sir Hugh and also in comical early side story on between and English servant Goslin, and his Irish counterpart Dwyer.¹⁴² More prominent in Le Fanu's novel are the antagonisms such as Sir Hugh and Miles Garrett, Torlogh and Hogan, Tisdal and Deveril, which are cognate conflicts, each character set athwart a darker version of themselves and their class. Garrett is the avarice and duplicity that has enabled families like the Willoughbys to come into possession of the land, and Hogan is the violence and lawlessness that has allowed the O'Briens to survive in exile.

In many of Le Fanu's supernatural stories we encounter a similar device of the intimate nemesis. Stories like "Green Tea", "The Familiar" and "Carmilla," diabolical kinships cause characters to question and sometimes reject justice in a cosmic sense, leading characters to ask: "Oh, my God! When the justice of Heaven permits the Evil one to carry out a scheme of vengeance [...] then, indeed, the torments and terrors of hell are

¹⁴¹ McCormack. (242). In this quote he is speaking to *Uncle Silas* in particular.

¹⁴² See *Torlogh*. Chapters III & XIII

anticipated on earth.”¹⁴³ But in his early novels, the reaction is against historical justice rather than providence. Except for a brief moment of introspection,¹⁴⁴ the reader knows Garrett only as “traitor to your friends, apostate from your God, consummate miscreant, monster and destroyer.”¹⁴⁵ And Torlogh is led to despair by the “enormities and violence” of the vengeance of hungry Irish troops led by his compatriot Hogan.¹⁴⁶ Placing a greater emphasis on the struggles of individual conscious, this aspect of the text also makes the characters seem more ahistorically symbolic. The resolutions that do come at the end – Sir Hugh’s exoneration from false charges of disloyalty, Torlogh’s reclamation of his ancestral home, and Tisdal’s forgiveness – are not facilitated by the victory of William over James as a historical precondition but rather by the elimination of villainous doppelgangers, Garrett, Hogan, and Deveril. Racial identity in Le Fanu is not the fount of virtue but a dark mirror, confronting each character with a nemesis that must be confronted and overcome to facilitate progress. We can contrast this with the significant relationships in *Harold* which emphasize either the commonality within racial groups or highlight the antagonism of opposing racial dispositions. Le Fanu presents significantly paired cast who are not racially predetermined, defining their personal identity against characters of a racialized Other. Rather, he stresses the commonality of noble human traits set against a diversity of historically conditioned vices.

In many ways, Le Fanu’s subversion of the racial categories of Arnold’s forerunner Lytton seems out of touch with the currents of Irish nationalism that would receive such brilliant expression on the Irish Literary Revival, but his emphasis on the

¹⁴³ Le Fanu, J. Sheridan. “The Familiar”. In *a Glass Darkly*. Wordsworth Editions Limited. 1995. (62)

¹⁴⁴ *Torlogh*. (246)

¹⁴⁵ *Torlogh*. (39)

¹⁴⁶ *Torlogh*. (107)

dehumanizing aspects of sectarian conflict in Ireland, would have echoes in post-independence Ireland. The 1840s were a time of competing cultural nationalist movements, each hoping to capture the public imagination in a bid to define the parameters of an evolving conception of Irish national identity: on one side radical offshoots of O’Connell’s “Ireland for the Irish” political stance emphasized autonomy and national self-awareness¹⁴⁷ and on the other side of the spectrum a reactionary conservative movements that began in the 1830s sought to create a broader sense of Irish identity but also delegitimize claims to political solidarity.¹⁴⁸ The egalitarian nature of this later approach to national identity, which certainly influenced Le Fanu’s projects in some respects, could be regarded today as more laudable if the system it sought to maintain was less reprehensible. Beyond the historical burden of centuries of misrule and maltreatment, nationalistic Irish Protestant authors also inherited their caste’s long history of publicly degrading the Catholic population with “ridicule laced with fear.”¹⁴⁹ The “insecurity and class snobbery” implicit to varying degrees of their texts was the cause of more rigid definitions of “Irish” that “denied full spiritual communion with the Irish nation to the colonizing, landed Anglo-Irishman with his apparently English accent, manner, and loyalties and his Protestant faith.”¹⁵⁰

Yeats would attempt to bridge this gap between Protestant and Catholic Ireland by, as Gregory Castle observes, using “the same logic that allowed Arnold to admit the Celtic sensibility into the English national character: the peasant has a natural connection

¹⁴⁷ Boyce. (162)

¹⁴⁸ Hutchinson, John. *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism, The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State*. Allen & Unwin. 1987. (79-80). Also see Spense (60)

¹⁴⁹ See Frazier. (115-116)

¹⁵⁰ Brown, Terence. *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922 to the Present*. Cornell University Press. 1985. (83)

to an ancient religion that offers the Anglo-Irish Revivalist a way to join the Catholic Irish in a 'Unity of Being' that transcends cultural differences."¹⁵¹ But this too would have its own counter-revolution by post-Civil War authors, more "disposed to emphasize the violence and the horror of the struggle than the national and cultural-nationalist ideals that had been at stake."¹⁵² We can think here of the dehumanizing side of abstract nationalism explored in Frank O'Connor's "Guest of the Nation" (1931) or the tragic-comic presentation nationalistic affectation in O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* (1922). It is this later mode of societal criticism that Le Fanu engages in with his national romances, an approach perhaps more suited for times of stability and reflection but no less legitimate in their interaction with the excesses and contradictions of Irish cultural history.

When taking the final measure of a novel like *Torlogh*, one notices that its adherence to and abuse of the novelistic traditions in which it operates make the novel worthy of literary appreciation and cultural recognition. Encountering the familiar broad-strokes of the novel, we can conclude with Elizabeth Bowen that Le Fanu was not a great innovator of plots but a sophisticated manipulator of convention.¹⁵³ But however much authors like Bowen might use this observation as a springboard to explore the intricacies of his most famous works like *Uncle Silas*, the continued obscurity of his national romance novels, and *Torlogh* most of all, might also lead us to conclude with his

¹⁵¹ Castle, Gregory. *Modernism and the Celtic Revival*. Cambridge University Press. 2001. (52-53)

¹⁵² Vance, Norman. "Region, Realism and Reaction, 1922-1972." *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel*. John Wilson Foster (Ed.) Cambridge University Press. 2006. 153-170. (165)

¹⁵³ Bowen, Elizabeth. "Introduction to *Uncle Silas*." *Reflections in a Glass Darkly: Essays on J. Sheridan Le Fanu*. Gary William Crawford, Jim Rockhill, and Brian J. Showers (Eds.) Hippocampus Press. 2011. 333-345. (334) & (345)

biographer Brown that “all that can be said with any confidence is that he is a writer with a limited appeal and range.”¹⁵⁴ However, this obscurity of his early works has more to do with their historical moment than the work’s own inner complexity. *Torlogh* approaches history and nationalism with the same caution and criticism that would be emblematic of Irish literature a century later. It removes the divisive depictions of racialized identity that were embedded in the tradition of national romance writing, replacing a narrative of cultural, historical, and racial progression towards optimization with one that stresses the necessity of compromise and compassion in cyclical revolutions of dominance and retribution. The burden of Irish history subtly woven into the struggle of each character is proposed to us not as a question of caste or creed but one of personal character.

Hauntings and the diabolical pairings implicitly confirm a form of divine governance aimed at individual development, which can be contrasted with the irony that undercuts the caprice of historical power struggles. In 1996, Joseph Spence introduced his short discussion of this novel calling it a work “described as one of the best Irish historical novels of any era,”¹⁵⁵ echoing Stephen Brown’s 1915 sentiments in *Studies*. And though it is perhaps the least popular of all Le Fanu’s novels today, it still stands, for those who read it, as a significant contribution to the historical imaginary of Irish literary tradition and a rich and engaging text that demonstrates innovations created specifically to give a unique expression to find an appropriate mode of representation to emerging conceptions of Irish national identity.

¹⁵⁴ Brown. (8)

¹⁵⁵ Spence. (71)

CHAPTER 2: DISRUPTION OF GENEDERED ALLEGORY IN MULHOLLAND'S *MARCELLA GRACE*

Eight months before the signing of Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921, the *New York Times* ran an obituary captioned “English Novelist Dead”¹⁵⁶ to announce the passing of an author whom Yeats had described as “the novelist of contemporary Catholic Ireland.”¹⁵⁷ Adding to the irony of this unfortunate heading was the fact that Rosa Mulholland had spent her career advocating for Irish writers to maintain the integrity of Irish literature, calling for them to resist the monetary temptation to cast their literary talents into “the universal river of English fiction” and hide their shamrocks in a “field of universal clover.”¹⁵⁸ In the Jesuit magazine *America*, Rosa Mulholland received a more detailed and laudatory eulogy, and yet even here Father Reville, perhaps unwittingly, indicates aspects of Mulholland’s work have muddled her legacy in the Irish literary canon, describing that she “uncompromisingly looked into the heart of her countrymen. Nationalist and Catholic, she is not the advocate of any party or political creed. Her books are not theses. They are plain unvarnished records of love, loyalty and idealism.”¹⁵⁹

Mulholland’s mixture of nationalism and loyalism, her preference for human compassion over political doctrine, and the seeming lack of concrete directives within her novels have all made her works distasteful to subsequent literary and nationalist factions

¹⁵⁶ “ENGLISH NOVELIST DEAD.: Lady Gilbert Was Known to Literary World as Rosa Mulholland” *New York Times* (1857-1922); Apr 27, 1921; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times. (14)

¹⁵⁷ Yeats, W.B. “Rosa Mulholland”. *Representative Irish Tales*. W.B. Yeats (Ed). Humanities Press. 1979. 321. (321)

¹⁵⁸ Mulholland, Rosa. “Wanted an Irish Novelist.” *Irish Monthly*. 19:217. 1891. 368-373. (369)

¹⁵⁹ Reville, John C., S.J. “Rosa Mulholland, Interpreter of Ireland.” *America*. America Press Inc. May 14, 1921. (88)

of twentieth-century Ireland. Long discounted, Mulholland has recently found advocates in scholars like Susan Cahill, Tina O'Toole, George O'Brien, and, most prolifically, James H. Murphy, who have all recognized in her works a significant contribution to the development of gender representation in the Irish novelistic tradition. In this chapter, I will argue that, when considered within the tradition of the Irish national romance novel, Mulholland's 1886 *Marcella Grace* can be appreciated as a work more progressive in its presentation of both feminine and national identity formation than even its advocates have heretofore explored. By considering this novel as a late, popular, but now largely forgotten example of the nineteenth-century national romance genre, this chapter will demonstrate how sustained and detailed engagement with novels such as *Marcella Grace*, which are often mentioned only in passing, can disrupt narratives that claim artifice and irrelevance of the genre as a whole to the canon of Irish literature. *Marcella Grace* not only places added emphasis on the role of women within a symbolic reconciliation romance allegory, but goes even further by creating a central plot driven by the conflict between competing sides of a dual-natured heroine rather than the idiosyncrasies of the male and female counterparts. Beginning with an examination of the structure of the novel, this chapter will explore how Mulholland's female representation of a divided Ireland in the character of Marcella Grace allows for a critique of Irish society concordant with the novel's overarching themes of integrity, compromise, and deference, a balance difficult to achieve in the highly politicized and polarized culture of late nineteenth-century Ireland.

Mulholland's short novel can be divided into four episodes, with the initial episode serving mainly to establish the title character's internal struggle to reconcile

conflicting aspects of her identity. Along with the main character, the plot of the novel matures, moving from an initial series of events embellished with fairy tale motifs as Marcella is raised to influence (the fifth chapter is even called “An Irish Cinderella”) to events in the latter half of the novel that closely parallel true circumstances, speeches, and even names. Mulholland was even compelled to change character names between editions, as Murphy explores in his introduction to the 2001 edition of the novel,¹⁶⁰ due to how closely this novel followed the details of an actual murder trial. In this progression, the audience is taken from conspicuously fictive rags-to-riches plot devices to a more critical engagement with the institutions, people, and events of Irish society.

However, unlike many classic Victorian novels where authors deploy the contrivance of incidental social elevation to facilitate the resolution of conflict, Marcella’s fortuitous inheritance of land only initiates the novel’s conflict. The last two episodes, which take up the second half of the novel, deal with Marcella’s struggles during the trial and false imprisonment of her romantic interest, Bryan Kilmorey. In these two precursory episodes to this, we read of Marcella’s inheritance of an estate and endeavor to become a compassionate landlord. Even in these early chapters, the twists of fate that move the action forward are less important than Marcella’s decisions when navigating those happenstances. The daughter of a poor poplin weaver in the squalid Liberties of Dublin, Marcella is introduced as an intelligent, industrious young woman frustrated not by her poverty but by her inability to make independent decisions.

¹⁶⁰ Murphy, James H. “Introduction”. *Marcella Grace*. James H. Murphy (Ed.) Maunsel & Company. 2001. (4-5). Murphy points out that Marcella’s romantic interest in the novel’s original serial release shared the name, Bryan Kilmartin, of the accused in the trial the story parallels and was changed to Kilmorey for its book release in 1886. I will be using for reference the 1886 Harper and Brothers edition in which the name appears as Kilmorey.

Marcella's mother had been a bankrupted aristocrat who married below her station, and her father justifies denying his daughter apprenticeship in the family trade because of her noble birth, leaving Marcella to clean their meager home and gaze on the family loom "as at an enemy whom she was powerless to grapple, while she thought of her terrible helplessness as a woman."¹⁶¹ When her father proposes that she should marry "some well-to-do man of his own, or not much better than his own" station, she justifies her defiance with a hauteur that seems absurd when assumed by the father:

It was not that she disliked or despised the poor people around her, but they were not of her class, and she was not of theirs. She could help them, sympathize with them, pity them, respect them as occasion required, but she could not take a husband of their kind.¹⁶²

Here we see an example of what George O'Brien describes as the "high-minded, Catholic and in certain crucial respects High Victorian outlook" of many of Mulholland's novels,¹⁶³ as Marcella's patrician outlook conflicts with (and some argue detracts from) the sympathy she gains from her compassion and tenacity.

However, from the beginning, the discrepancies in Marcella's thoughts and actions alert the reader to a dynamism in this character that pushes her beyond the traditional limiting dictates of female allegories in the national romance. Far from the static exemplar of idealized national attributes awaiting a more charismatic male counterpart, Marcella is a conflict within herself, both condescending and humble, deferential and rebellious, industrious and decadent. And yet, what we are meant to

¹⁶¹ Mulholland, Rosa. *Marcella Grace*. Harper & Brothers, Publishers. 1886. (3). Reprinted by SN Books. Hereafter referred to as *Marcella Grace*.

¹⁶² *Marcella Grace*. (7)

¹⁶³ O'Brien, George. *The Irish Novel: 1800-1910*. Cork University Press. 2015. (134)

recognize in Marcella is not an escape from national allegory but rather the consolidation of two sides of a conflict into one person, a person struggling to harmonize the dueling tendencies of her own nature.

Although Marcella ascends to prominence through happenstance, the preliminary episodes emphasize the control she exerts over her own destiny and identity. In the first few chapters she not only opposes her father's attempts to marry her off, but also harbors a fugitive from the police (later revealed to be Bryan Kilmorey) without telling her father. After these incidents, Marcella is discovered by her long-lost, affluent aunt and becomes the object of a custody battle between father and aunt, each wanting to retain the girl for self-centered reasons. Wanting an heir, but not wanting any vestiges of Marcella's life of destitution to follow the girl into her new position, Mrs. O'Kelly offers the father a fifty-pound annuity to break all ties with his daughter. In this bargaining, any sympathy we have for Mr. Grace's position disappears when he quickly transforms from father to negotiator: "All the dignity and sentiment vanished from his face, mingled cunning and triumph twinkled in his eyes, and his very attitude was expressive of the acuteness of his perception that something had turned up in his favor." And later he further displays his willingness to risk his daughter's future by insisting that she continue to hold to his demands: "I'm not goin' to give up my child, an' be lonely in my latter days, not to please no fine madam of a Connaught gentry-woman, you can tell her."¹⁶⁴ Caught in this competition between parental figures representing the nobility's façade of respectability and the poor's hunger for security, Marcella refuses to abandon her father, asking only

¹⁶⁴ *Marcella Grace*. (29) & (31)

that Mrs. O'Kelly help her find work to support her father¹⁶⁵ in a show of self-sacrifice and fealty that will ultimately earn her the love of both parties.

As addressed in the previous chapter, the traditional schema of the national romance culminates in the union through marriage of a male and female that symbolize rival factions in society. But Marcella Grace is the product of such a union. She is both aristocrat and peasant, through experience intimate with the suffering of the former but through presumptions linked with the high-born biases of the latter. She is an aristocrat who wants to work and a pauper who rejects security for family. Inconsistencies that could easily be presented as caprice or duplicity are revealed in Marcella as a vying set of sympathies, apprehensions, and loyalties that the character constantly attempts to reconcile as she later deliberates on the best way to manage her inherited estate, decides whether to give evidence when her fiancé is wrongly accused of murder, and deals with hostile factions in society after his imprisonment. The initial incidents establish the central conflict in the novel as an internal one within Marcella rather than one between her and her love interest. From the start of their romance, there is very little difference in the sympathies of Marcella and Bryan Kilmorey, who is himself a moderate-liberal member of the aristocracy. The two are not representative of opposing poles in Irish society. They are both moderates whose associations with political extremism obstruct their union. In this pair, Marcella is the more conservative of the two and the clear focus of the narrative's attention, with Bryan serving mainly as her worthy compliment. Not only do Marcella's moral negotiations guide the action of the plot, but Bryan is even

¹⁶⁵ *Marcella Grace*. (34). It should also be noted that the concession Marcella asks of her aunt is in defiance of her father's wishes for his daughter to remain unemployed and dependent on his or a husband's employment.

physically absent for most of the work, either away on his own business or, in the later half, in prison. Marcella's centrality to the plot's action and subsequent significance to the allegory of Mulholland's national romance is done in defiance to the model posed by earlier and even subsequent novels as to the feminine position in the symbology of the Irish nation.

Le Fanu's national romances place a consistent emphasis on reincorporating a Catholic, masculine element in the ruling classes of Ireland through his symbolic courtships between Jacobite outlaws and Protestant heiresses. Although modern scholars have interpreted the vivid portrayals of female characters in his later stories like "Carmilla" and novels like *Uncle Silas* as revealing the author's personal anxiety over the power of female sexuality and a larger Anglo-Irish fear of assimilation,¹⁶⁶ these stories nonetheless offer readers a portrait of female energy that stands in contrast to the often "emotionally paralyzed" masculine characters of these works.¹⁶⁷ However, in the national romances, Le Fanu allows his female protagonists to slip into customary modes of representation dictated by their traditional allegoric function as passive symbols of stability. Both Grace Willoughby in *Torlough* and Mary Ashwoode in *The Cock and Anchor* are not entirely lifeless, but they are certainly limited characters, both memorable chiefly for their static long-suffering, each defined by conflicting obligations between their male guardians and suitors. Of the two, Grace alone reaches the resolution of marriage, but only because of the reconciliation between her guardian and her suitor

¹⁶⁶ Howes, Marjorie. "Misalliance and Anglo-Irish Tradition in Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature*. 47:2. 1992. 164-186. (165), (180-181), & (185)

¹⁶⁷ McCormack, W.J. *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*. Clarendon Press. 1980. (233); Also see acknowledgements of the complexity of Le Fanu's female characters in Hall, Wayne. *Dialogues in the Margin: A Study of the Dublin University Magazine*. The Catholic University of America Press. 1999. (86)

rather than her decision between them. The way Grace and Mary function within the symbolism of the national romance allegory provides evidence of what C.L. Innes proposes as the two dominant ways we encounter female characters in Irish fiction, as either “muses or mates”: “Locked into confrontation with Britain and contestation over the motherland, Irish literature and Irish history have created males as national subjects, women as the site of contestation.”¹⁶⁸ Going beyond literary representation, Innes points to historical figures like Sarah Curran, Maud Gonne, and Kitty O’Shea who are often reduced in cultural memory to this convenient muse/mate paradigm. Recent historical scholarship further confirmation of these biases through attempts by Ann Fogarty and Margaret Ward to rescue the reputation of Lady Gregory¹⁶⁹ and Anna Parnell¹⁷⁰ from narratives of mere satellite-fame. And so, writ large, the problems of female under-representation, misrepresentation, and limited-representation go well beyond Irish national romance tradition, but Innes points out a mode of simplified portrayal to which the national romance genre is particularly susceptible as typified in Le Fanu’s work.

Nineteenth-century authors of national romance works were not only attempting to encapsulate the identity of large groups of people into proxy characters but also speculating on how the peculiarities of these groups could be modified in order to overcome harmful stasis within society. Since many national romances revisited

¹⁶⁸ Innes, C.L. *Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society, 1800-1935*. The University of Georgia Press. 1993. (3).

¹⁶⁹ See Fogarty, Ann. “‘Woman of the House’: Gender and Nationalism in the Writings of Augusta Gregory.” *Border Crossings: Irish Women Writers and National Identities*. Kathryn Kirkpatrick (Ed.) The University of Alabama Press. 2000. 100-122. Fogarty stresses the role of social and political prejudice played in the diminished reputation of Gregory, stressing the role George Moore, Oliver St. John Gogarty, Maud Gonne, and Sean O’Casey in Gregory’s subsequent reception.

¹⁷⁰ See Ward, Margaret. “Gendering the Union: Imperial Feminism and the Ladies’ Land League.” *Women’s History Review*. 10:1. 2001.

historical, political, and military events, events where women had no institutionalized role, characters like Grace Willoughby and Mary Ashwoode easily slipped into idealized roles representing fidelity, stability, and domesticity, virtues that could be united to the political and military masculine through marriage once the conflicts of the plot are resolved.

An examination of the narrative of limited representation must be interwoven here with a consideration of canonization and reception into the public imaginary that has played a part in the obstruction of Mulholland's novel. Though a popular novelist, Mulholland was reckoned even during her lifetime in *The National Review* as a writer noteworthy for her sympathetic representation of Irish people but even in this respect greatly overshadowed by the Banims and Carleton.¹⁷¹ A public interchange in the early 1990s between prominent female poets to illustrate a still present frustration and confusion over the interplay of representation and canonization in the Irish tradition, where the innovation of authors like Mulholland had failed to be recognized as part of the progression of national identity formation through literature. Describing her own feelings of alienation as a young artist from the "stresses which a national literature can impose on a poet", Evan Boland, in her 1990 article "Outside History," argued that the Irish poetic tradition of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries were not only dominated by male practitioners but by masculine motifs that simplified both the ideas of the Irish nation and feminine identity by conflating the two through allegory.¹⁷² However,

¹⁷¹ See Prothero, R.E. "Irish Novelists and Irish Peasants." *The National Review*. Vol 12, Iss 71. Jan 1889. 598-611. (601) & (609). Prothero commends the Banims and Carleton for their realism in presenting the Irish people "in their essential nature", as "an illiterate, ignorant, superstitious, yet droll, warm-hearted, impulsive, even poetic people."

¹⁷² Boland, Eavan. "Outside History." *The American Poetry Review*. Vol. 19, No. 2. 1990. 32-38. (33) & (32)

Boland's summation of a stifling Irish poetical tradition, lacking adequate representation of or artistic avenues for women, was soon challenged by American poet Anne Stevenson, who chided Boland for ignoring not only the number but the variety of Irish women poets over the centuries and dramatizing the pressures of being an artist within an established literary tradition.¹⁷³ Stevenson's article was in turn riposted by Irish poet Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill in "What Foremothers?". Shifting the focus to the Irish language tradition, Ní Dhomhnaill defended Boland's assessment, arguing that the problem was not a lack of female poets but rather that "the literary canon was drawn up without them," using both historical and personal evidence to emphasize the continuing problem within a tradition where, as she puts it, "the two concepts of 'woman' and 'poet' seem incapable of being entertained simultaneously by the tiny little minds of the literati of this island."¹⁷⁴

It is only within the last few decades that Mulholland's significant contribution to female representation in nationalist discourse has begun to be explored by critics. Susan Cahill has examined the depiction of young women in Mulholland's later works *Giannetta* (1889) and *A Girl's Ideal* (1905), persuasively arguing that these works "insist on the girl's role in the most significant political and feminist debates of the late nineteenth century" and unite nationalist ideals with a "philanthropic feminine consciousness."¹⁷⁵ And both Siobhán Kilfeather and Tina O'Toole have recognized Mulholland's contribution to feminist discourse in Ireland as a significant contributor to

¹⁷³ Stevenson, Anne. "Inside and Outside History." *PN Review* 18:3. 1992. 34-38. See "Outside Histrionics." *PN Review*. Vol. 9 Iss. 5. 1994. 40. In which Stevenson goes farther defending the healthy modes of female representation in the Irish tradition.

¹⁷⁴ Ní Dhomhnaill, Nuala. "What Foremothers?" *The Poetry Ireland Review*. No. 36. 1992. 18-31. (31)

¹⁷⁵ Cahill, Susan. "Making Space for the Irish Girl: Rosa Mulholland and Irish Girls in Fiction at the Turn of the Century." *Colonial Girlhood in Literature, Culture and History, 1840-1950*. Kristine Moruzi and Michelle J. Smith (Eds.) Palgrave Macmillan. 2014. 167-179. (168)

literature of the New Woman, the later critic praising *Marcella Grace* in particular for championing leadership roles for women.¹⁷⁶ Yet, the presence of conservative circumspection alongside bold representation in Mulholland's writings still causes many critics to give a heavily qualified acknowledgement of the novel's affirmative presentation of a feminized Ireland.

Throughout the novel, the challenges of Marcella mirror those of the greater society around her. The opening incidents of the novel show a young woman struggling to maintain her personal integrity while warring members of an older generation, whose actions conflict with professed affection and altruism, vie over her sympathies. This struggle is presented as a mirror of the situation of the Irish people, caught between the Scylla and Charybdis of a callous establishment and a chaotic revolutionary culture. The narrator comments, "With the landlord on one side, irritating and crushing them, and on the other secret societies pressing them to put themselves in the hands of a power that declared itself able and willing to right them."¹⁷⁷ Mulholland's middle-path approach has been interpreted by Murphy as reflecting the sentiments of a number of upper-middle class, Catholic authors in the closing decades of the nineteenth-century, who were concerned primarily with "the stability, or rather the potentially deleterious instability as they saw it, of class and national identity in Ireland."¹⁷⁸ Though presenting different threats, the landlords of the novel and the reactionary nationalist groups both contribute

¹⁷⁶ See Kilfeather, Siobhán. "Irish Feminism." *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*. Joe Cleary and Claire Connolly (Eds.) Cambridge University Press. 2005. 96-116. (101).; and O'Toole, Tina. *The Irish New Woman*. Palgrave Macmillan. 2013. (83)

¹⁷⁷ *Marcella Grace*. (74)

¹⁷⁸ Murphy, James H. "'Things Which Seem to You Unfeminine': Gender and Nationalism in the Fiction of Some Upper Middle Class Catholic Women Novelists, 1880-1910." *Border Crossings: Irish Women Writers and National Identities*. Kathryn Kirkpatrick (Ed.) The University of Alabama Press. 2000. 58-79. (58)

to the breakdown of healthy relationships in society. However, beyond the apprehensions of emerging affluent Catholics, Mulholland's framework also reflects a broader uncertainty that existed in the wake of the changes in Irish society in the late 1880s.

The agrarian agitation that began to coordinate during the Famine through the Tenant League, famously seeking fixity of tenure, fair rent, and free sale,¹⁷⁹ had culminated in what T.W. Moody describes as the “greatest mass movement in modern Ireland”, the organized series of demonstrations, embargoes, boycotts, ostracisms, and relief efforts known as the Land War of 1879-82 that “convinced British statesmen of both parties that the landlord system as it existed in Ireland was no longer defensible.”¹⁸⁰ Secret societies of agrarian agitation had sprung up sporadically in times of distress since the 1760s, offering, as Thomas O'Neill puts it, “intermittent protection to the tenants but [...] no formulated economic or political aim beyond that.”¹⁸¹ Prior to the increased restraint by the leaders of the Land League in the early 1880s, the tactics of these agrarian secret societies offered a mixed blessing to the struggling poor. L.P. Curtis notes that in the twenty years leading up to the Land War, of the 113 agrarian murders, the majority of “victims were in fact tenant farmers who had either paid their rent secretly, or aided a boycotted person, or – a much graver offense – taken an evicted holding”, with only six landlords assassinated.¹⁸² With the greater restraint and legitimacy that agrarian agitation gained during the Land War, constitutionally minded Irish and English feared the

¹⁷⁹ Hoppen, K. Theodore. *Ireland Since 1800: Conflict and Conformity*. Longman Group UK Limited. 1989. (111-112)

¹⁸⁰ Moody, T.W. “Fenianism, Home Rule and the Land War 1850-1891” *The Course of Irish History*. T.W. Moody and F.X. Martin (Eds.) Robert Rinehart Publishers. Fourth Edition. 2001. 228-244. (238) & (240)

¹⁸¹ O'Neill, Thomas P. “The Irish Land Question, 1830-1850.” *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*. Vol. 44, No. 175. 325-366. (326)

¹⁸² Curtis, L.P. Jr. “Landlord Responses to the Irish Land War, 1879-1887”. *EÍRE – IRELAND*. 38:3/4. 2003. 138-188. (156-157)

movement not for the reforms it might accomplish in parliament, but for the spirit of uncertain ends over violent means that it seemed to propagate throughout society. These fears constitute a primary concern for one of Mulholland's influential contemporary female authors who has also received some recent critical recognition for her progressive representation of female characters: Emily Lawless.

Praised by British prime minister Gladstone as depicting the "living reality" of "the estrangement of the people of Ireland from the law,"¹⁸³ Lawless's 1886 popular novel *Hurrish* is chiefly concerned with exploring the disruption that land agitation caused between the population and the law and, more importantly, the discord between members of the Irish peasant class community. A beautifully written novel, it is relevant to this discussion for its use of traditional Irish themes and tropes to present a response to prevalent nationalist rhetoric. Norman Vance holds up Lawless as a significant counterbalance to the political rhetoric that infected literature and scholarship of the 1880s, and refers to *Hurrish* specifically as an "answer to nationalist novels of landlord and tenant such as Charles Kickham's enormously popular *Knocknagow, or the Homes of Tipperary*."¹⁸⁴

In the novel, *Hurrish*, a physically robust but gentle member of the peasantry, possessing a "genuine Celtic temperament poetic, excitable, emotionable, unreasoning,"¹⁸⁵ attempts to live a simple, peaceful life while being constantly heckled and goaded by his mother, portrayed as an Irish Madame Guillotine, one of "those historic beldames who, from time to time, have revelled in perfect carnivals of horrors,"

¹⁸³ qtd. in Vance, Norman. *Irish Literature Since 1800*. Pearson Education Limited. 2002. (40)

¹⁸⁴ Vance, Norman. *Irish Literature Since 1800*. Pearson Education Limited. 2002. (96)

¹⁸⁵ Lawless, Emily. *Hurrish: A Study*. Leipzig Bernhard Tauchnitz. 1888. (30)

and whose only praise for her son comes when she mistakenly believes the murder Hurrish committed accidentally was politically motivated:

'Twas! 'twas! 'twas himsel' dun it! himsef alone an' no other! Glory be to God and the saints this day! Me shame's wiped out! Hurrish, darlint, yer old mither's shame's wiped out! 'Tis crying for joy she is this minute! Oh, me darlint son! me boy! An' I that thought he was too chicken-hearted for to kill a man! I wronged you, Hurrish, darlint! Core of my soul! where is he, that I may bliss him? Where is he at all, that I may get at him an' bliss him for this day's work? Hurrish! Hurrish, alannah!¹⁸⁶

The mother is represented as a perverse muse, a blood-thirsty Cathleen Ni Houlihan, the nationalist spirit of malevolence who superimposes discord on innocent actions in society. Although Cahalan quite rightly points out that *Hurrish* has all too often eclipsed Lawless's later, more sympathetic work *Grania* (1892),¹⁸⁷ whose focus on exploring the psychology of sisters Grace and Honour O'Malley overshadows the romance in a manner comparable with *Marcella Grace*, the earlier, more political novel nonetheless stands as a vivid testament to conservative fears over the spirit animating popular movements of land reform in Ireland.

In Lawless's *Hurrish*, the impetus behind land agitation is a desire for blood and vengeance, which threatens to undo any movement towards progress, not only poisoning the relation between Hurrish, his mother, and neighbors but also the semi-sacred relation between the peasant and the land itself.

¹⁸⁶ Lawless. (49) & (144)

¹⁸⁷ Cahalan, James M. "Forging a Tradition: Emily Lawless and the Irish Literary Canon." *Forging in the Smithy: National Identity and Representation in Anglo-Irish Literary History*. Joep Leerson, A.H. van der Weel, and Bart Westerweel (Eds.) Editions Rodopi B.V. 38-57. (40-41)

All over Ireland this marked severance is growing up between the younger, educated or half-educated peasant or peasant's son, whose aspirations are all Americanised, progressive, modern, and the earlier, ruder type of peasant-farmer, whose union with the actual piece of soil he cultivates or does not cultivate amounts to a partnership; a vital union, like that of the grass and potatoes.¹⁸⁸

Considering the conservatism of Mulholland and her mediating approach to progress, it is important to consider the way she diagnoses the Irish problem in contrast to a work such as *Hurriish*. While both Mulholland and Lawless paint secret societies as inciters of discord, Mulholland shows them to be not a manifestation of a corrupted society so much as the equal but opposite product of a corrupt landlord, both existing on the fringes of society and operating with disregard for the public good.

In *Marcella Grace*, Mulholland's chief concern is not land reformers but the more politically minded groups whose tactics and rhetoric threaten to overwhelm conservative forms of Irish patriotism. Though critical of landlords, Mulholland places extra emphasis in the second half of the novel on the internecine strife and lack of cohesion that would continue to plague nationalist identity formation into the twentieth century. The Land War brought agrarian retributive societies together with secret societies of political nationalists, broadly referred to during the latter half of the century as the Fenians. Moody attributes to these organizations a similar lack of a grand plan, writing "The crucial fact about the Fenian movement is that its thinking was simply nationalistic; it had no specific social programme for the Irish republic of its dreams."¹⁸⁹ During the Land

¹⁸⁸ Lawless. (67)

¹⁸⁹ Moody. (231)

War, the Fenians were willing to, as Theodore Hoppen puts it, “water down their adherence to revolution and join the land agitation which grew out of agricultural depression in the late 1870s” resulting in “an interlude during which agrarianism, constitutionalism, Catholicism, and modified republicanism were able to coalesce and thus briefly overcome the normal particularism of Irish politics as a whole.”¹⁹⁰ But the widely divergent and often ambiguous aims of these factions made sustained cooperation exceedingly difficult. The famous contention over “the story of the very famous split” between Mr. Casey and Dante in Joyce’s *Portrait of an Artist*, a scene of communal and familial disintegration over politics and religion, dramatizes an antagonism that had long existed between the Catholic Church and radical nationalists, one only exacerbated by the events surrounding Parnell’s fall. Fenians often equated the Catholic clergy with the British establishment,¹⁹¹ and the clergy often denounced the Fenians for their secrecy and violent methods.¹⁹² Like the landlords, the Fenians are criticized in Mulholland’s novel; in their pursuit of championing Irish society, they adopted tactics that ultimately serve to undermine it. As the lawful protectors of the people, the landlords have failed through neglect. As the unlawful protectors of the people, the Fenians have failed through violence. For Mulholland, violent nationalism delegitimizes itself through its inhumane actions. When Marcella is raised to a position where she can confront these problems, rather than revolutionizing the system, her actions are aimed at bringing into alignment the causes and functions of the disruptive factions on the extreme ends of Irish society.

¹⁹⁰ Hoppen. (114-115)

¹⁹¹ Huttman, John P. “Fenians and Farmers: The Merger of the Home-Rule and Owner-Occupancy Movements in Ireland, 1850-1915.” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*. 3:4. 1971. 182-197. (183)

¹⁹² Moody. (231)

In the second crisis of the novel, Marcella acquires her estate and, aided by the parish priest Father Daly, develops her own mode of administration. In this section, the political perspective of the novel develops as Marcella rejects the inadequate role-models around her and forges a new path to repair landlord-tenant relations. Prefacing his work on the first half of the nineteenth-century, Sloan points to three reoccurring themes that dominate the novelistic discourse of the entire century: “landownership, the relationship between landlords and their tenants, and how the fates of both parties depend upon the way the land was managed.”¹⁹³ He goes further to speculate that this fixation of Irish nineteenth-century authors on landlord/tenant relations is a contributing factor to their rapid decline in popularity, the conflict between the two parties being not only archaic but, in hindsight, insoluble with a lack of moral economy preventing any meaningful exchange between the two parties.

Sealed off from each other socially, neither [landlords nor tenants] had that sort of internal ideological or moral purchase on the other, the resolution of which might allow today's readers still to find an echo of their own struggles. The reader is, thus, not able to consume nineteenth-century Irish literature so that it confirms a belief in a universal human experience.¹⁹⁴

It is this breakdown in moral economy, and in these corrupted modes of communication, recognition, and respect between different caste's in Irish society that Mulholland focuses her readers' attention on as the greatest crisis in Irish society. For some critics, Mulholland's engagement with politics serves only to detract from the more prescient

¹⁹³ Sloan, Barry. *The Pioneers of Anglo-Irish Fiction 1800-1850*. Barnes and Noble Books. 1986. (3)

¹⁹⁴ Murphy, James. “Canonicity: The Literature of Nineteenth-Century Ireland.” *New Hibernia Review*. 7.2. Summer 2003. 45-54. (49)

explorations of gender dynamics and identity formation. John Wilson Foster for example, urges to “send packing Mulholland’s largely spiritual and band-aid solutions to Ireland’s socio-economic problems” and focus instead on “the courage and self-sacrifice of the women who are her heroines.”¹⁹⁵ But although many nineteenth-century attempts to revive rather than raze the social structure in Ireland can easily be viewed today as a forlorn hope, the self-sacrifice and courage of the women in Mulholland’s national romance novel is intertwined with the socio-political commentary the author is proposing. Indeed, all questions of gender are inextricably linked with questions of political, national, and economic power. It is in the lessons and sacrifices of Marcella that reveal the allegorical meaning and not a serendipitous rise to fortune. And in the final section of the novel, it becomes more and more difficult for Marcella to maintain her integrity when her blended identity and moderation make her the target of both sides of the conflict.

One of main aspects of *Marcella Grace* that bars it from a nationalist canon is its advocacy of the landlord system. Then as now, nineteenth-century Irish landlords were a caste proverbially linked to neglect and decadence. As Patrick Brantlinger observes, the majority of Victorian England subscribed to the narrative of a benevolent Empire, which attributed the catastrophe of Ireland solely to the “mismanagement and absenteeism by Anglo-Irish landlords, the fecklessness of the Irish peasantry, and Catholicism.”¹⁹⁶ In post-Famine Ireland, though land-reform, nationalist, and religious minded groups often butted heads, they did find a common enemy in the landlords. The landlord denied

¹⁹⁵ Foster, John Wilson. *Irish Novels, 1890-1940: New Bearings in Culture and Fiction*. Oxford University Press. 2008. (125).

¹⁹⁶ Brantlinger, Patrick. *Victorian Literature and Postcolonial Studies*. Edinburgh University Press. 2009. (19-20)

farmers a natural connection with the land, denied their own claims to Irish identity by relying on an alien power for legitimacy and protection, and denied God by ignoring His commandment against theft. Anne Kane has explored this complex network of discourse narratives created by agrarian reformers, political nationalists, and religious institutions in the late nineteenth-century and shows how these accusations were formulated to influence the actions as well as to cultivate the symbolic power of Irish farmers whose “everyday practices [...] were guided by deference to authority (landlords, church, and state), communalism, and to some extent, fatalism” but who could not become the symbolic heroes of a new nationalist, cultural narrative until they “changed their deferential and submissive attitude and behavior towards landlords.”¹⁹⁷

As successful as this rhetoric had become by the end of the century, the idea that the landlord system was inherently flawed rather than simply mismanaged was by no means universal. *The All Ireland Review*, condemning a Landlord Convention in 1901, after accusing the landlords of willful betrayal of not only their nation but the legitimacy of their own class, ends by proclaiming “This paper [...] is sorry to wage war upon a body of men who at least live and desire to live in Ireland, but in your own interests and those of the whole class, is determined to do its best to put an end to you, and to get your places filled by better men.”¹⁹⁸ Despite the success of land agitation movements since the 1840s, most of which professed an intent total abolishment of the entire landlord system,¹⁹⁹ there is nonetheless even in nationalist camps an outlook that emphasized

¹⁹⁷ Kane, Anne. *Constructing Irish National Identity: Discourse and Ritual During the Land War, 1879-1882*. Palgrave Macmillan. 2011. (228) & (112)

¹⁹⁸ “To the Landlord’s Convention.” *All Ireland Review*. Vol. 2, No. 13. 1901. (91).

¹⁹⁹ Curtis, L.P. Jr. “Landlord Responses to the Irish Land War, 1879-1887. *EÍRE – IRELAND*. 38:3/4. 2003. 138-188. (149)

reinstatement over revolution, the idea that perhaps “better men” could do a better job. And it was not until fifteen years after this letter that an unlikely event in 1916 announced the death sentence to Parliamentary nationalism in Ireland. While not regretting the revolutionary fervor that prompted Ireland down its road to independence, one can still appreciate an author like Mulholland who attempts to stand against what she viewed as dangerously abstracted political rhetoric on both sides of a political divide, condemning both nationalists and unionists for divisive tactics. Yet today, it is perhaps the most difficult aspect of Mulholland’s nationalism to understand or affirm her affinity towards the landlord system.

Despite a failure to stand as either a sufficient moral or managerial force in nineteenth-century Ireland, landlords none-the-less often appear in literature as part of a pseudo-messianic myth of rejuvenation through the novels of the century that predicted a potential societal harmony being achieved with the return of a reinvigorated ruling class. The ultimate act of dereliction habitually committed by Irish landlords was absenteeism, and the remedy offered by many novelists throughout the century was to simply make the landlords return and accept responsibility of their estates. This focus is obvious from the very title of Maria Edgeworth’s 1812 *The Absentee*.

In Edgeworth’s novel, Irish unrest is presented as almost exclusively the result of neglect, and the young Lord Colambre ultimately persuades his parents to return to their estate in Ireland, using arguments of both a psychological and ethical necessity of doing so, saying to his mother:

'restore my father to himself! Should such feelings be wasted?—No; give them again to expand in benevolent, in kind, useful actions; give him again to his

tenantry, his duties, his country, his home; return to that home yourself, dear mother! leave all the nonsense of high life—scorn the impertinence of these dictators of fashion, by whom, in return for all the pains we take to imitate, to court them—in return for the sacrifice of health, fortune, peace of mind, they bestow sarcasm, contempt, ridicule, and mimicry!”²⁰⁰

There is a simplicity in the solution of converting landlords, of course, but it is a simplicity that springs from the elementary nature of the problem rather than the dullness of those who proposed it. William Carleton’s 1846 novel *The Black Prophet* also identifies the problem with the landlord system as the physical absence of a caste who would otherwise be compelled by natural, paternal sympathies to good management, as opposed to the middleman who “very naturally endeavors to sweep from off the property he holds, whilst he holds it, by every means possible, as much as it can yield, knowing that his tenure of it is but temporary and precarious.”²⁰¹ Even in the rebel author Charles Kickham’s 1879 bestseller *Knocknagow*, while certainly not advocating landlordism, hints throughout that the true villains in the Irish drama are the agents rather than the absent landlord.²⁰² The long tradition of anticipating or attempting to prompt the return of the landlord runs deep throughout the literature of the nineteenth-century, if not always offered as a total solution then at least thrown out as a step towards stabilization. What differentiates Mulholland’s treatment of landlordism is her lack of nostalgia and her

²⁰⁰ Edgeworth, Maria. *Castle Rackrent and The Absentee*. J.M. Dent & Sons Limited. 1960. (280-281)

²⁰¹ Carleton, William. *The Black Prophet: A Tale of Irish Famine*. D.J. Sadlier & Co. (n.d.) [1846] (210-211)

²⁰² See Kickham, Charles. *Knocknagow or the Homes of Tipperary*. Anna Livia Press. 1988. (169): “He [Mr. Somerfield, the agent] pretends 'tis the landlords refuse to give leases; but 'tis ell known 'tis himself puts 'em up to it. [...] The father was a good sort of an old fellow, nothing troubling him but hunting. But the son is a rogue. He's after turning more people out than any man in the county, and giving the land to Scotch and English tenants at a lower rent, and leases.” (169). And elsewhere it is suggested that the landlord’s physical presence would do a great deal to ameliorate the suffering of the people. (118-119)

confidence that an inversion of the system would work better than the current state. Hers is a story of a pauper who assumes the role of landlord and brings stability through a basic compassion that blue-blooded landlords seem incapable of either conceiving of or performing. There is no assumption that a landlord who is physically present on the land or connected with the people will govern well or benevolently.

When Marcella Grace's father and aunt die almost simultaneously at the end of the first section, she becomes momentarily free from her first identity crisis. She then inherits Crane Castle and Distresna estate, adopts the name of O'Kelly, and creates a story of continental education to explain her sudden appearance in high society. Advised by Father Daly to not take up residence right away, she stays with the Kilmoreys, Bryan and his mother, visiting her future tenants incognito to establish a bond with them before revealing herself. Bryan tells Marcella of the neighboring O'Flahertys of Mount Ramshackle, a family of rackrenters ruled over by Julia O'Flaherty, to whom the "freemasonry of human sympathy is hardly known." Marcella also learns of the contrasting methods of the Kilmoreys, who take a hands-off approach to land management, born of a strong sense of guilt over the past wrongs of their class and enacted against "a sinister element which blows like a contrary wind against the prow of all well-meaning efforts."²⁰³ Bryan tells her about his fear of despotism, leading him to approach land management with the philosophy to "put it out of my own power to be a persecutor of my fellow-men, even with the most plausible reasoning on my side", and when Marcella asks Bryan if he thinks she should follow his example, he replies, "I advise you to do nothing till you shall see further for yourself,"²⁰⁴ which is what she does,

²⁰³ *Marcella Grace*. (60)

²⁰⁴ *Marcella Grace*. (64-65)

creating a plan that is not only compassionate but practical, as she becomes “acquainted with all the ills to which these suffering creatures had been subjected” and realizes that with proper management “her rent-roll might show an increase rather than a falling off in wealth.”²⁰⁵

For Marcella, relinquishing her newly acquired position of power in the community in the manner of the Kilmoreys seems a dereliction of duty.

She was aware, too, that her exceptional experience of the tribulations of the poor ought to give her (when educated, as she now hoped to be), a particular advantage in the efforts she might make to raise the condition of those over whom she had been so strangely and wonderfully placed.²⁰⁶

And so, aided by Father Daly and a young, doting peasant named Mike, Marcella begins visiting the cottages of her future tenants. Doing so, her heart becomes stirred as she “remembered that she was a child of the people” who now possessed “[t]he power to alleviate their wants and miseries.”²⁰⁷ Eventually, she reveals herself to her tenants and hosts a celebratory gathering at Crane Castle, which goes on “as merrily as though under the patronage of a queen” and where “Marcella danced with her tenants and helped them with her own hands to the good cheer she had prepared for them”. The simplicity with which Mulholland resolves landlord-tenant relations at Distrensa estate is indicative of the author’s views on its complexity. A compassionate landlord, Marcella gains the respect of the people. Her hybridity, which unites her to both classes of people, also allows a critical perspective on each, enabling her to recognize a simple solution to a

²⁰⁵ *Marcella Grace*. (73)

²⁰⁶ *Marcella Grace*. (68)

²⁰⁷ *Marcella Grace*. (74)

simple problem. Her affinity for the people compels her to reject the self-centered approach of the O'Flahertys, and her lack of guilt over past wrongs allows her to overcome the indecision of the Kilmoreys. The novel does not detail a plan but simply points out a truth: greater compassion between castes creates greater stability in society.

But Mulholland's greater concern, and the one which will take up the rest of the novel, is not the reformation of the landlords but the product of their misrule, the dissident element that will exist beyond any reform. Even at the celebration, the young peasant Mike warns Marcella of a faction in the hayloft doing nothing but "chattin' under their breath and [giving] dark looks for anybody else that goes near them."²⁰⁸ Here, not half way through the novel, Marcella has overcome two major hurdles: establishing her moral integrity by risking wealth for the sake of her father and establishing her leadership potential through a compassionate and prudent approach to her new role in society. Still operating under the assumed name of O'Kelly, Marcella has gained general good will, but still faces the shadowy subversives at the edges of society and from her new peers of the establishment who condemn her for associating with the "queer half-Fenian Kilmoreys." Marcella's attempt to maintain her social position and personal integrity in the face of direct attacks from these two groups constitutes the remainder of the novel, which, more than the previous episodes are significant for their development of Marcella's character as a symbolic representation of Ireland. This is Mulholland's true commentary on the Irish socio-political questions of her day.

O'Brien sees the most noteworthy aspect of *Marcella Grace* in its "attempt to be contemporary,"²⁰⁹ and the novel, when noticed, is often held up as a memorable example

²⁰⁸ *Marcella Grace*. (77)

²⁰⁹ O'Brien. (135)

of a Land War novel, a genre that often adopts the allegorical framework of the national romance, popular in the 1880s and '90s as agrarian and political agitation galvanized the Irish population and pushed Irish concerns back to the fore of British politics. Murphy contends that *Marcella Grace* is “the most significant example of a novel which makes a bold attempt to tackle the complexities of the land question and to make out a case for a Catholic gentry solution”²¹⁰ if not the most original. Major plot points can be found in earlier works by other authors, such as the peasant girl turned landlord of Fannie M. Gallagher’s *Thy Name is Truth* (1883) and the heroine’s moral quandary of providing evidence against a lover of Richard Ashe King’s *The Wearing of the Green* (1884).²¹¹ The “gentry solution” that Murphy refers to is an assessment of the novel’s political agenda he shares with O’Toole,²¹² that Mulholland is envisioning a “world in which Catholic landlords, sympathetic to the people, are in charge.”²¹³ However, Murphy has repeatedly insisted that Mulholland does not present an unqualified advancement of this position, as she includes in the novel examples of several bad Catholic landlords, “be they absentee like Mrs. O’Kelly, over repressive like the O’Flahertys, or over liberal like the Kilmartins [Kilmoreys].”²¹⁴ Although it is easy to see the Catholic criteria as the most revolutionary of the two, Mulholland’s prioritizes the necessity of human compassion over questions of religion.

²¹⁰ Murphy, James H. “Rosa Mulholland, W.P. Ryan and Irish Catholic Fiction at the time of the Anglo-Irish Revival.” *Forging in the Smithy: National Identity and Representation in Anglo-Irish Literary History*. Joep Leerson, A.H. van der Weel, and Bart Westerweel (Eds.) Editions Rodopi B.V. 1995. 219-228. (221)

²¹¹ See Murphy, James H. *Irish Novelists and the Victorian Age*. Oxford University Press. 2011. (174-176)

²¹² See O’Toole. *The Irish New Woman*. (82)

²¹³ Murphy. “Introduction.” (15)

²¹⁴ Murphy. “Introduction.” (11)

John Huttman attributes land reforms that began during the Famine to a gradual shift in land ownership that occurred in the latter half of the nineteenth-century. The Encumbered Estates Act of 1848-1849 followed by the Landed Estates Act of 1858 both encouraged landlords to sell their estates, and by 1862 one half of the estates, totaling 1/6 of the land of Ireland, had shifted to new proprietors, most of whom were from a dynamic middle class of Irish businessmen who were less knowledgeable of the land and more likely to consolidate or convert their lands for grazing.²¹⁵ Mulholland seems to take Catholic enfranchisement for granted. In *Marcella Grace*, not only are nearly all the landlords already Catholic, Mrs. O'Kelly, Julia O'Flaherty, Mrs. Kilmorey (Bryan's mother), but they are almost exclusively women, with the exception of the heir to the Kilmorey estate Bryan, being only mentioned anecdotally.

Mulholland then presents us with a world that is not in transition from Protestant to Catholic or male to female hierarchy, but one where Catholic women are already the most visible members of the ruling class, and their task is not to establish themselves but to find ways to govern well. In the novel, Marcella navigates between the tyrannical O'Flaherty's and the progressive Kilmoreys, rejecting both older obsolete methods of oppressive rule as well as newer over-liberal rule, confessing that "in her heart she leaned on the side of landlordism" and wanting to "try her own powers at doing good before throwing the reins out of her hands."²¹⁶ But how can a defense of landlordism, a system proven to be disastrous time and time again in Irish history, be considered either complex or progressive? The answer to this can be seen in the dexterity of Mulholland's work in

²¹⁵ Huttman, John P. "Fenians and Farmers: The Merger of the Home-Rule and Owner-Occupancy Movements in Ireland, 1850-1915." *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*. 3:4. 1971. 182-197. (184)

²¹⁶ *Marcella Grace*. (64)

avoiding the standard mode of framing the “Irish problem.” By posing the question within the framework that emphasizes a common humanity and personal integrity, she resists the temptation to fictionalize the problem with the same eristic framework that by the 1880s had become the habitual mode of discussing Ireland, causing even moderate authors to sink into partisan diatribe. The perfect example of the polarizing framework Mulholland avoids can be found in the novel written in direct response to *Marcella Grace*, which is not a liberal or revolutionary nationalist denunciation of Mulholland’s defense of landlords but a unionist satire of her humanistic portrayal of the Irish people.

I have already touched on the apprehensions that existed in the wake of the Land War over trends in Irish society as expressed by Lawless in *Hurriah*, but to understand the extreme political opinions that existed in Ireland it is necessary to briefly examine a novel written as a direct rebuff to the political conjectures of Mulholland.²¹⁷ Published anonymously in 1891, the *Priest and People: A No Rent Romance* portrays Ireland as a “land of poetry, beauty, and misfortune – misfortune coming not from without, but from the very hearts of the people themselves,” a people who long for the day when they will “have the land, and no paying for it neither.”²¹⁸ Incensed at the growing political enfranchisement of Catholic, nationalist Ireland, the author depicts people whose lives are dominated by concerns over economic improvement, but whose nationalistic sentiments paradoxically cause them to refuse any monetary gain that might legitimize the “Saxon” presence in Ireland; not only do they withhold rent they can easily afford but they go so far as to throw away money earned from landlords because “one’s counthry is

²¹⁷ Murphy, James H. “Rosa Mulholland, W.P. Ryan and Irish Catholic Fiction at the time of the Anglo-Irish Revival.” (223)

²¹⁸ Anonymous. *Priests and the People: A No Rent Romance*. Eden, Remington & Co Publishers. 1981. Vol. 1. Reprinted by British Library, Historical Prints Editions. 2018. (40) & (17)

the first claim at all.”²¹⁹ Constant references to Irish people’s innate desire for indolence are accentuated by repeated proclamations of their naïve and economically catastrophic political goals, which are presented to the reader as the greatest threat to the stability of Irish society: “We’ll hunt ivery mane divil of them into the sea, red boys and all. And we’ll have the land again and pay no rint whativer.”²²⁰ The novel presents a land where priests and rabble-rousers lead a counter-insurgency to frustrate attempts by the ruling class towards economic progress. Catholic priests live in fear of the British Parliament not for its tyranny but for its magnanimity, which threatens to establish “another element in the hearts of the people” that would undermine clerical dominance over what they see as a “nation of children.”²²¹ Along with nationalist agitators, priests encourage Irish peasants to live in the fable of their own oppression, so deluded that they are unable to admit their own affluence while lamenting their lot: “divil a home she’s got but the home that the League boys built her, and divil a penny she to live on but the money she saved by not paying the rint.”²²² Through its bombastic irony, the novel comically demonstrates the anxiety of extreme Unionists over the enfranchisement of people who, in their eyes, have been justly and prudently barred from political expression over the centuries. It is a novel that reveals Mulholland’s position on landlord reform as not a conservative antithesis to radical nationalism, but part of a broader spectrum of opinion in a struggle to identify and promote an interpretation of the root causes of Ireland’s problems. Before dismissing the assessment of *Priest and People* as sentiments of a lone radical, it is worth

²¹⁹ *Priests and the People*. (67)

²²⁰ *Priests and the People*. (9)

²²¹ *Priests and the People*. (56-57)

²²² *Priest and the People*. (19)

noting that the novel shares many accusations against the Irish popular movements found in Trollope's Irish novels, right through to his final work, *The Landleaguers* (1882).

Although Trollope, like Lawless,²²³ attributes much Irish unrest to foreign rather than domestic influences, stemming from the “grand Home-Rule, anti-Protestant, hate-the-English, stars-and-stripes” societies in America, he still portrays Ireland as a country where the organizers and rhetoricians of land agitation are agents working against progress, breaking down the healthy relationships in society that had been steadily progressing and seeking to awake the old religious hatreds that had stagnated the country for centuries. Like in *Priest and People*, these nationalist leaders are shown to be either sources of revulsion or comedy. Influenced by American radicalism, a new breed of firebrand priests, who think “more of the political, and less of the religious state of his country,” seek to undue a century worth of harmonizing secularization, believing “that no rent ought to be paid by any Irish tenant to any landlord—no rent, at least, to a Protestant landlord.”²²⁴

Trollope accentuates the detrimental effects of land agitation when describing the new state of things as an almost Biblical cataclysm, where ungrateful people rise up against their benevolent landlords, disrupting all natural communion that had been painstakingly built up over the generations and replacing it with a new, terrible regime built on violence and intimidation:

²²³ Lawless. (67): “All over Ireland this marked severance is growing up between the younger, educated or half-educated peasant or peasant's son, whose aspirations are all Americanised, progressive, modern, and the earlier, ruder type of peasant-farmer, whose union with the actual piece of soil he cultivates or does not cultivate amounts to a partnership; a vital union, like that of the grass and potatoes.”

²²⁴ Trollope, Anthony. *The Landleaguers*. The Trollope Society. 1995. (19) & (21)

A new and terrible aristocracy was growing up among them,—the aristocracy of hidden firearms. There was but little said among them, even by the husband to the wife, or by the father to the son; because the husband feared his wife, and the father his own child. [...] In the dull, dim minds of these poor people there arose, gradually indeed but quickly, a conviction that the new aristocracy might be worse even than the old; and that law, as administered by Government, might be less tyrannical than the law of those who had no law to govern them.²²⁵

Again, the Irish nationalist movement is presented as marred by deep ironies, led by politics-over-God priests and egalitarian-preaching despots. Mulholland is, in one respect, connected to both Trollope and the nameless author of *Priest and People* through similar fears over the power vacuum created in the dismantling the landlord system. All three are particularly concerned with the dehumanizing and duplicitous dimension of nationalist rhetoric. There is a scene in *Priest and People* where two peasants, Larry and Dan, returning from a Land League rally, stop to help their landlord's daughter Eileen recover her wayward horse. In gratitude for their help, she pays them. Following this act of mutual courtesy and respect, Larry ends their meeting by saying, "Blessings on ye, thin, Miss," only to whisper under his breath "Curses on them", as she rides away.²²⁶ This exchange, though most likely intended to augment themes of inherent Irish duplicity that run through the novel, offers a satire on political abstractions, illustrating a situation, paradoxical from without, where compassion can be shown to the individual and hatred can be levied on the group. Similar scenes can be found throughout *The Landleaguers*, where members of the beneficent, landed Jones family are sabotaged, ostracized and even

²²⁵ Trollope. (339)

²²⁶ *Priests and the People*. (48)

murdered by the peasantry with whom they had shared a happy relationship just one year before. In their mutual concern with a breakdown in affection between members of Irish society, *Marcella Grace* has an ironic connection with the very novel that lampoons it, although the connection ends with this shared apprehension over change, indicative of their position on the conservative end of the political spectrum, however broad.

However, where *Priest and People* becomes a parody of itself by bemoaning unhealthy divisions within society while supporting those divisions through incendiary rhetoric and lampooning bigotry while participating in it, there is deft harmony between purpose and execution in *Marcella Grace* as both the novel and heroine attempt to forge a middle road between the two perpetually antagonistic castes in Ireland. When the heroine speculates ““And yet, does it not seem a pity to let the old relations of land- lord and tenant quite die out? [...] It seems to me such a good relation if every one did his duty,””²²⁷ it is easy to conflate this with the call to maintain the status-quo found in other conservative works. But there is a great difference between the way the authors justified these outlooks. Unlike *Priest and People* or *The Landleagues*, Mulholland’s novel does not focus our attention on abstract antagonisms between political or racial dispositions. Instead, there is an intense focus on the personal decisions of Marcella, the embodiment of two traditions; she must resist the allure of being either too austere and too romantic in both her public and private decisions. The middle way Mulholland proposes is not only a political one but one of temperament as well. The deceptive simplicity of the novel comes as Marcella addresses identity formation as an act of character-building decisions rather than a journey of expedients to obtain a desired end. Marcella often reduces

²²⁷ *Marcella Grace*. (64)

political questions to moral ones of truth vs. distortion, responsibility vs. neglect, and altruism vs. misanthropy. Like Dickens, who encouraged her in the late 1860s, publishing her stories in *All Year Round*,²²⁸ Mulholland places special emphasis on exploring a flawed moral economy rather than speculating on an ideal that is either political or economic. She presents us with an Ireland that is allegorically whole in the character of Marcella Grace. The censure and criticism in the novel is not leveled against one particular racial or status group in society but at the divisiveness that threatens the integrity of the whole. This becomes most apparent in Marcella's decision over whether or not to give evidence against Bryan Kilmorey.

The great crisis of the novel does not occur as a conflict between Marcella and her tenants or from some difference in politics between her and her lover. The great dilemma comes when Marcella must choose whether or not to adopt the same tactics as her adversaries in order to achieve her desired ends. After Marcella established herself as a landlord and earned the good will of all but a few obdurate people around her, she is suddenly called upon to give evidence in court against Bryan regarding the night they first met when she hid him from the police. That night, Mister Gerald Ffont had been assassinated by members of a "debased branch of Fenianism whose vengeance he [Bryan] had provoked by seceding from its rank," who now had secured a pardon for their crime "by turning Queen's evidence" against their former member.²²⁹

The Fenians of the novel operate with a duplicity that directly contradicts both Marcella's morality and her sense of nationalism. She becomes physically ill when watching one man give testimony against Bryan, as his words and actions "roused in

²²⁸ O'Brien, George. *The Irish Novel: 1800-1910*. Cork University Press. 2015. (134).

²²⁹ *Marcella Grace*. (134) & (128)

Marcella a sense of amazed loathing which almost suffocated her, and her fascinated gaze remained riveted to his evil countenance so long that it became imprinted on her brain with a vividness not likely to be effaced while she lived.”²³⁰ However, these unreliable witnesses put Marcella in a moral quandary. She alone carries a credible testimony against Bryan. The narrator describes her initial determination to “save him at any cost” as “woman-like,” and when asked how she knows that Bryan is innocent, she replies, “How do I know the sun shines? How do I know that God is good? Why do you ask me so tormenting a question?”²³¹ Marcella has solved other problems with a level-headed and judicious approach, but here we see a crack in her character that could be called either obstinacy or determination.

Though ultimately a correct conviction, her unquestioning defense of her lover at times seems at odds with her other virtues. While some could read this as a commentary on the inconsistency of the moral or mental quality of Marcella’s feminine nature, Mulholland seems to be guiding the reader to understand this as a conflict between ends and means that runs through other aspects of the story. Marcella has shown herself to possess both a dominant and indomitable nature, her life defined by independently coming to and carrying out her own designs. And Bryan’s mother comments on this, saying that she possesses “That great strength in woman [...] not always desirable, not always lovable in the eyes of men.”²³² Up until this point, the heroine has had a fairly straightforward road to righteousness. She chooses to stand by her father over an affluent aunt and then chooses to be a compassionate, practical landlord rather than a neglectful or

²³⁰ *Marcella Grace*. (129)

²³¹ *Marcella Grace*. (87)

²³² *Marcella Grace*. (108)

insolvent one. So, Marcella has already established herself as both morally good and prudent, her decisions benefit both herself and her community. Here, however, the public and private good of her actions diverge and she must make a choice. If she, like the Fenians, gives false testimony, she violates her own personal values and the values she hopes to proliferate in society. If she stays true to her moral code, she acts with the persecutors of her fiancé and potentially contributes to a miscarriage of justice. But even beyond the threat of becoming disingenuous, the allegorical implications of her decision force her to choose sides and either support or subvert the justice of the State.

Like other authors touched upon in this chapter, Mulholland uses dramatic irony to help us recognize the untenable moral or political position of the antagonists in her story. For Mulholland, however, this irony is not the province of one side of the political spectrum or a certain racial disposition, but rather the result of those who have adopted actions that are injurious to the ends they profess. In *Marcella Grace*, the Fenians and the Crown are connected in this irony as they ally to prosecute Bryan Kilmorey. The prosecution for the Crown exonerates known murderers in order to catch a possible murderer, and the word *possible* can be stressed here because, of course, the purchased testimony comes from subversives intent on sabotaging the prerogatives of the state. The Fenians betray a former member for committing the unforgivable sin of betrayal, becoming complicit with the forces of the Crown in the processes. Marcella initially views her own decision as both the Crown and Fenians do, where the ends overwhelm any consideration of the means: “They should not hang Bryan on words coming from her lips, not though [...] Sin: was it sin? Sin to refuse to murder Bryan Kilmorey with her

own hand that had once been so proud of having saved him?”²³³ And Mulholland accentuates the difficulty and pain of such a decision by lingering on Marcella’s misinterpreted actions and inner turmoil while trying to conceal her knowledge from the people around her. Thinking in this way, she adopts the reasoning of the ironic antagonists of the story. Both the Crown and the Fenians are so intent they have made themselves incapable of the introspection needed to realize that the complicity of a nemesis throws serious doubt over the desirability of any endeavor. How can Bryan be both the enemy of the Crown and the revolutionaries? But Marcella recognizes the paradox of adopting damnable means to gain salvation. “Would not God cut her off for all eternity? Would not Bryan himself learn to hate her for her crime? And yet to hang Bryan with her own hand, to lift up her voice and give the signal for the murder of her love!”²³⁴.

She is ultimately dissuaded from her intention to commit perjury by Bryan in a scene that has caused critics to sharply delineate the limits of the feminine nature of Irish national identity that Mulholland is proposing and one worth quoting from at length:

Give me your hands, sweetest love, and let me hold them fast while I say the rest of what I have to say to you. It is hard to say, and hard to hear, but it must be said. In this I am stronger than you, as I ought to be; for I am the man, and I must be the master. "Your will must be my will if you love me at all, and so — Marcella, you must not commit perjury! [...] We must not endure sin. You and I, who are one in heart and mind, will not commit crime to prove our innocence. [...] Unless death takes one of us, our lives can never pass away from each other. Even in

²³³ *Marcella Grace*. (115)

²³⁴ *Marcella Grace*. (117)

eternity I do not feel that we can be separated. All the more reason that I will not endure this sin. [...] We are both too keenly alive to the beauty and harmony of life regulated by the moral law to be able to smile in each other's faces, while conscious of having gained our happiness by so hideous a lapse from it. You are sick now with sorrow; your brain is overwrought; you are a little mad with your passion for self-sacrifice; quite blinded by your thrice-blessed tenderness and sweet concern for me.²³⁵

Murphy argues that Mulholland, though confident in the abilities of women, still portrays the power that women hold in this novel as “a sign of a destabilized situation in need of remedial attention.” For Murphy, Bryan's role as moral guide in this scene demonstrates Marcella's “morally inferior and in need of a man's guidance,” and Marcella's eventual marriage signals to the reader that the energy and authority of our heroine must be curtailed in order for society to return to normalcy:

The last reference to her in the novel is in the phrase “Kilmartin [Kilmorey] and his wife.” For Marcella, once married, the exercise of power is only ever an interim arrangement in the hope of Bryan's return. Indeed, for much of the time her grief at being separated from him and anxiety that she will no longer be sufficiently attractive to him when he returns diverts her from the beneficial exercise of power.²³⁶

Elsewhere, he describes Marcella's ultimate marriage as a necessary curtailing of the feminine “idealism, energy, and ability” that has proved itself successful in the “male sphere of public affairs” and so must be cut short. And finally, Murphy concludes that

²³⁵ *Marcella Grace*. (120-121)

²³⁶ Murphy, James. “Introduction.” (12) & (14)

“Marcella ends the novel as she began it, subservient and demure.”²³⁷ And O’Toole likewise looks to the marriage at the conclusion of the novel as a confirmation of a “dependent feminine role” in the national allegory of the novel.²³⁸

Bryan’s proclamation that he is the stronger of the two and as the man “must be the master” certainly raises the questions that the above interpretation seems to answer. However, I will end this chapter by contending that this interpretation underestimates the larger context of how and when this speech is given, and in doing so attempts to bring *Marcella Grace*’s themes and message in closer alignment with the standard national romance tropes than the novel as a whole warrants. In many ways, we end the novel as we began, but not with, as Murphy contends, a subservient or demure character. In our brief glance into the subsistence living of the Grace household in the first chapters, we see Marcella defy her father’s injunction of marriage, rebel against his denial of education, conceal a possible criminal without her father’s knowledge, and refuse to barter for her future with Mrs. O’Kelly. As a landlord, Marcella dismisses her fiancé’s model of management to adopt Father Daly’s offered advice of gradual integration amongst her tenants. Time and again, she proves herself to be a woman who able to weigh ends and means in a manner others in her society are incapable of. Unlike them, she is not distracted by the standard divisions of gender, rank, or race, taking advice when prudent and rejecting it regardless of the rank or position of the offerer. And this emphasis would suggest a reading of her scene with Bryan in the prison cell as one that establishes Bryan’s worthiness of her rather than her submission to him.

²³⁷ Murphy, James H. “‘Things Which Seem to You Unfeminine’: Gender and Nationalism in the Fiction of Some Upper Middle Class Catholic Women Novelists, 1880-1910.” (67)

²³⁸ O’Toole, Tina. *The Irish New Woman*. (83)

Despite Marcella's high estimation of him, Bryan has done little in the novel to earn the reader's respect or confidence. He gives a few speeches to Marcella about his worldly experiences and education but fails to enact any meaningful improvement on his family's estate. His clumsy vacillations in politics have earned him the enmity and contempt of both the establishment and the radicals. But Marcella's love for him has caused her to abandon the foresight and self-possession that has marked all of her other decisions thus far, and Bryan's insight in the above scene, and perhaps his only real insight of the novel, is the recognition that Marcella's strong love has put her at risk of losing her identity. Indeed, during the trial, when Marcella sits at the dock to give a truthful testimony, it is a scene of unveiling where she legitimizes her own identity. She reveals herself as Marcella Grace of the Dublin slums who once gave shelter to an outlaw to an audience that knows her as the aristocrat Ms. O'Kelly, the heiress of Distresna estate. Her full identity becomes publically known, and Bryan's significance to the plot has been to guide her past the conflict that he created. His words only confirm a contradiction that Marcella had already recognized, that through dissemblance she risked her identity, literally making her deny her peasant name Grace, the link with that lower-class identity that Marcella attributed to her ability to be an effective landlord.

By accepting Marcella's function as a placeholder and believing the conclusion of the novel affirms Bryan's stabilizing dominance over Marcella, the majority of themes established by the plot's action become convoluted. Accepting that Bryan has indeed become the new despot of the relationship at the end throws doubt over any interpretation that suggests Mulholland's ultimate message involves the establishment of an invigorated, sympathetic, Catholic gentry. Bryan is a delinquent landlord, whose lack of

confidence in his own ability arrests his action.²³⁹ Marcella, on the other hand, is a character defined by action. If Bryan is to become a landlord beneficial to society, he will only do so by following the model established by Marcella.

While it could be argued that she was an interim agent in a time of disruption, the lack of nostalgia in the novel for a previous time of better landlord-tenant relations seems to champion Marcella as a trailblazer rather than a substitute. There is no time of previous stability alluded to in the novel. She is the catalyst that is driving the society towards a more prosperous future. While Bryan shies away, she is the one attempting to improve a perpetually broken society in an effective manner. If we are meant to understand that Bryan is now going to dictate all of Marcella's actions, the ending would be semi-tragic precisely because Marcella would no longer possess the dynamism and independence of decision that have facilitated all the social improvements in the plot. And too, the action of the last quarter of the novel, after Bryan's imprisonment, stresses Marcella's continued independence and growth as well. Marcella, again governing alone, begins to be harassed by Fenians, who murdered her peasant companion Mike. One member of the society comes under her power when he is found sick and incapacitated. Instead of turning him over to the police, Marcella ends the novel with an act of charity similar to her action at

²³⁹ *Marcella Grace*. "For my own part I have gradually withdrawn from it till I find myself now as little of a landlord as possible on the acres my forefathers owned; and for this I may thank my forefathers themselves, who, as some irreverent wag said the other day, sold my birthright for a mess of pottage, and, figuratively speaking, gave their souls for a fox-hunt." (60). And as previously referred to "As for myself I thought the matter out and put it thus: many men have probably had as generous thoughts in the beginning of their career as those that come to me. How do I know that later in life I shall not have become so attached to some form of selfishness or other, which will show me things in a different light from that in which I see them now? I will put it out of my own power to be a persecutor of my fellow-men, even with the most plausible reasoning on my side. I confess that a hereditary liking for the position of landlord has stood in my way, and, even now, if I can possibly save the mastership of the remnant of my property, I feel that I will do it. But not unless I can by this means effect as much improvement as by the other. I will have no slaves living under my rule." (64)

the beginning: shielding an outlaw from the law because of her compassion. She does this because of sympathy and a slim hope that some good will might be established that could aid Bryan (again the mixture of compassion and prudence that has guided her in other trials). Though hesitant, suffering from “an intolerable doubt that she had been wrong from the first in this affair; that she ought to have declared her knowledge of his identity while he lay too ill to struggle,”²⁴⁰ she shields the sick man and thereby ultimately gains a confession that exonerates Bryan. In this last episode, Marcella demonstrates that she has learned the lesson Bryan preached in the prison cell. In an equally difficult decision, she has chosen the path of authenticity over aims, resisting the temptation to seek retribution, this time with no prompting by a male advisor. Bryan again appears for the last few pages of the novel, but this reunion emerges as a positive event primarily because it stands as an affirmation of justice through compassion and also because he is the object of Marcella’s desires. Given all we have seen of Marcella’s abilities, Bryan’s return is not presented as a prerequisite for stable, responsible governance beyond the promise of continuity through children that their marriage promises.

Marcella’s central role in this national allegory is important for reasons that extend into a wider consideration of canonization and representation in the national romance genre of nineteenth-century Ireland. By participating in this genre, Mulholland entered into a tradition of long established conventions of plot, character and closure. This is a genre where the colonial model of colonizer/male and colonized/female and the gendered model of active masculine and passive feminine proved particularly alluring to

²⁴⁰ *Marcella Grace*. (177)

the many authors who helped establish these as standard tropes. However, the rapid decline in the popularity of nineteenth-century Irish literature, as opposed to the still vibrant interest in English Victorian literature, certainly comes in part from a failure to give adequate recognition to those Irish authors who produced innovative works within the tradition.

Marcella Grace is a novel that places a dynamic female at the heart of a national allegory. Marcella does not represent one side of a national conflict or one side of domestic vs. public life; she is both the Irish peasantry and aristocracy; she is both the innovative landlord and defender of the hearth. In this, she stands out in the novel as a lone representation of Ireland that defies the classic model of a docile Hibernia. She looks to the male characters like Father Daly, Mike, and Bryan for guidance rather than directives. This novel inverts the muse/mate paradigm proposed by Innes. When Marcella doubts herself and Bryan warns her against jeopardizing her integrity, he is the one acting as muse to the more active and versatile character of the novel. The male in the novel is the one pursued and liberated by the actions of the female. And Mulholland is not alone in reworking gender dynamics in the late nineteenth-century national allegory. Lawless's *Grania* is another novel, mentioned earlier in passing, that although a much less optimistic work similarly consolidates an allegorical representation Ireland into female characters, the sisters Grace and Honour O'Malley, the former an indomitable, restless spirit and the latter a representation of piety and fidelity. Lawless's novel goes even further in removing men from a positive symbolic position, denying them even the function of muses, relegating them to mere threats, the inconstancy and dissolution of suitors posing the greatest hazard to the sisters' security and happiness. In resisting the

urge to try and fit novels like *Marcella Grace* into the long-cherished interpretations of the national romance's limitations, they move closer to a place at the table in the broader discussion of the evolution of Irish literature and its contributions to identity formation that occurred in the nineteenth-century.

Beyond its significance as an innovative work of allegory, it is also important to recognize *Marcella Grace* for its deceptively simple subtlety in treating the larger national issues of its time. Certainly, some aversion to Mulholland's work comes from her conservative outlook on land reform, a somewhat starchy tone, and avoidance of political minutia of the Irish problem, but in avoiding this last, she also escapes from being dredged down into the hopeless polemics and partisan diatribe that overwhelms so many Irish works of this century, making them unintelligible to modern readers. By making Marcella an agent who works with, against, and within both sides of a political divide, Mulholland manages a level of compassion in the treatment of both sides that reflects a moral of compassion and humanity. Without the presence of racial rhetoric, the Fenians are not the diabolic but wayward, advocating a detrimental form of nationalism that can be transformed by encountering a humanity equal to the inhumanity that drove them to the fringes of society. This point is stressed when Marcella nurses the Fenian back to health, when he "fears that some fatal supernatural change had been wrought in him by the gentleness of this woman, a change ruinous to his own interests and to the interests of the society to which he belonged."²⁴¹ Here, of course, there is wordplay as Marcella acts as an agent of grace, but her own revulsion at seeing this Fenian give evidence against her fiancé is transformed into a sympathy that facilitates his conversion.

²⁴¹ *Marcella Grace*. (177-178)

Reduced to a political slogan or taken as a cure-all for late nineteenth-century socio-economic problems, the novel will certainly read as a simplification. However, the real problem that Mulholland targets in the parameters of her short novel is a lack of communication and sympathy that stood in the way of effective engagement with the complexity of the Irish problems. In this, she identified a fundamental, root problem in Irish society, a problem that Sloan identifies in literature of this era: an alienating fixation, distancing these novels from modern readers. This novel reduces political intrigues to questions to humanity and integrity, but as Marcella finds her way towards obtaining stability in her own life and community, the allegorical framework of the national romance then prompts the reader to expand out from Marcella's to larger questions of sincerity and purpose as Ireland struggles for self-assertion and identity formation. There is a truth in Father Reville's comment at beginning of this chapter, that Mulholland's is indeed an apolitical work in one crucial regard: though her conservative insistence on preserving a continuum and fear of instability are set within the Irish structure, the questions of identity formation addressed in this novel are not reliant on a specific economic or political structure to be relevant. She points us to the inconsistencies and ironies that exist on both sides of the disastrously divided political spectrum while maintaining an introspective awareness, totally absent from the retort novel *Priest and People*, that the alienating rhetoric that characterized many people's understanding of the Irish problem was in itself an impetus towards instability in Irish society. It has been the fate of *Marcella Grace* to be a novel mocked in its own time for its nationalism and dismissed in ours for its seeming unionism, but it stands out as a work that complicates

generalized assessments of the limitations and lifelessness of the nineteenth-century national romance genre as a venue for exploring issues of gender and identity formation.

SECTION 2: THE IRISH PICARESQUE

The one thing that all critics who engage with the picaresque tradition agree on is that the exact parameters of the genre are difficult to define. On the one hand, in common parlance, as Ulrich Wicks notes, the designation of picaresque is “applied whenever something “episodic” tied together with an “antihero” needs a name.”²⁴² On the other hand, scholarly discourse attempts to create precise parameters of a that accurately categorize a multifarious corpus of novels that exhibit attributes associated with the genre, a struggle Howard Mancing likens to “Menelaos struggling with Proteus.”²⁴³ However, Richard Bjornson’s study of the picaresque across European literature offers a definition that reflects the prevailing consensus:

In broad general terms, it [the term picaresque] is usually employed to describe episodic, open-ended narratives in which lower-class protagonists sustain themselves by means of their cleverness and adaptability during an extended journey through space, time, and various predominantly corrupt social mileux.²⁴⁴

Despite some agreement over the character types and plotting methods, contentions between critics, in the main, center around which of these two criteria should be the defining attribute. For example, critics like Mancing emphasize the “protean form,” focusing on the “generic self-consciousness” of narration style and independent characteristics or the pícaros and ultimately dismissing genre limitations based on plot:

²⁴² Wicks, Ulrich. “The Nature of Picaresque Narrative: A Modal Approach.” *PMLA*. 89:2. 1974. 240-249.(240)

²⁴³ Mancing, Howard. “The Protean Picaresque.” *The Picaresque: Tradition and Displacement*. Giancarlo Maiorino (Ed.). University of Minnesota Press. 1996. 273-291. (274)

²⁴⁴ Bjornson, Richard. *The Picaresque Hero in European Fiction*. The University of Wisconsin Press. 1977. (4)

“its structure may be completely open [...] It may be constructed in a tight, logical, and casual way, or it may be loose, arbitrary, and episodic.”²⁴⁵ Other scholars point to the diversity of picaresque protagonists to define the genre based on story structure.

The Spanish picaresque tradition had a great influence on eighteenth-century British novelists like Daniel Defoe and Henry Fielding, but in the main, popular English novelists of the nineteenth-century followed the more cohesive narrative patterns and more congenial character types of the romantic tradition. Emerging as a form of satire on chivalric romance in the sixteenth century Spain, the chaotic structures, sordid subject matter, and shady casts of picaresque novels often explore the less genteel and sordid realities of life. And yet, because of their emphasis on action and lawlessness, they also had great potential for expressing the vitality of the human spirit and serendipity of reality. Utilizing Robert Schole’s theory of fictional modes, Wicks places picaresque on a spectrum between satire and comedy opposite tragedy and romance, arguing that the genre “presents a protagonist enduring a world that is chaotic beyond ordinary human tolerance, but it is a world closer to our own (or to history) than the worlds of satire or romance.”²⁴⁶ However much scholars might argue over what emphasis should be applied to definitions, peculiarities of character types and plots have proved the most useful features to use when engaging with the distinctiveness of the genre.

This second section will explore two authors who adapted picaresque plotting and character types into Irish theme novels: Charles Lever and William Makepeace Thackeray. The works of both of these authors have been commonly referred to as

²⁴⁵ Mancing. (284) & (288)

²⁴⁶ Wicks, Ulrich. “The Nature of Picaresque Narrative: A Modal Approach.” *PMLA*. 89:2. 1974. 240-249. (241)

picaresques, but most often as a pejorative by critics accusing the works of being ephemeral, unrefined, and juvenile. Lever's *Charles O'Malley the Irish Dragoon* (1841) and Thackeray's *The Luck of Barry Lyndon* (1844) also deserve consideration together as they adopt strikingly different elements of the picaresque tradition into their novels, exhibiting diverse ways this genre can be utilized to explore and express the Irish condition.

Of all the authors in this dissertation, the reputation of Charles Lever has undergone the greatest reversal, and today the modifier most commonly used to describe him is "raconteur." In V.S. Pritchett's *The Living Novel* (1946), Lever appears as the "supreme raconteur, surpassed or (should one say?) by-passed on his own ground by Wilkie Collins: yet he has, within his limits, an individual accent and a flawless virtuosity."²⁴⁷ This emphasis on Lever as master story-teller is even more pronounced in commentary by those who knew him, like Anthony Trollope who wrote of Lever that "surely never did a sense of vitality come so constantly from a man's pen, nor from man's voice, as from his!" before concluding that Lever's "novels will not live long."²⁴⁸ The connection between the persona of Charles Lever, the gregarious crowd-pleaser, often blends into interpretation of his novels, emerging as an emphasis on their frivolity and aimless action. This can be seen in the use of bodily metaphors from the *The Catholic World* in 1877:

Mr. Lever's teeth were all his own, and very brilliant, and whether from habit or accident, he flashed them upon us in company with his wonderful eyes - a battery at once both powerful and irresistible. [...] Like all good raconteurs, he addressed

²⁴⁷ Pritchett, V.S. *The Living Novel*. Chatto & Windus. 1946. (95)

²⁴⁸ Trollope, Anthony. *An Autobiography*. University of California Press. 1947. (210)

himself deferentially to his auditor in the beginning, and as soon as the fish was hooked, the attention enthralled, he would speak as if thinking aloud.²⁴⁹

Even modern advocates of Lever, like Tony Bareham, often emphasize Lever's later, less popular, more serious works written after he left Ireland, distancing these novels from the earlier lively picaresques, which he argues are "splendid stuff of their kind. But the kind is limited and ephemeral."²⁵⁰

The protagonists, or pícaros, of Charles Lever's early novels are typically young Irish men with a congenital love of adventure and martial heroism. The violent heroic ideals that these characters embody can rarely find a healthy outlet in normal society, so often they leave Ireland to fight in continental wars where their bellicose disposition can serve the state. In going off on campaign, these young men enter an essentially homosocial world of travel and adventure where women are met only in passing and serve chiefly as objects of conflict between male characters. However, this construction also contains an attempt to refute a popular negative conception of Irish identity. Joseph Valente points out that in order to justify colonization, the British relied on theories of the gendered racial predisposition of the Irish people, which vacillated between descriptions of female incompetence and masculine brutality.²⁵¹ Lever's picaresque attempts to transmute the savage, brutal masculine into a noble and productive heroic. Although Charles Lever exhibits a world that seems to envision Ireland's harmonious role within

²⁴⁹ "Charles Lever at Home". *The Catholic World, A monthly Magazine of General Literature and Science*. 26:152. 1877. 203. (203)

²⁵⁰ Bareham, Tony. "Introduction: 'The Famous Irish Lever'". Charles Lever: Tony Bareham (Ed.). *New Evaluations*. Colin Smythe. 1991. 1-17. (8) Bareham also notes that "Lever's early books, admittedly, are almost pure picaresque, and whole episodes could be swapped or cut without detriment to any sense of the overall design." (10)

²⁵¹ Valente, Joseph. "The Myth of Sovereignty: Gender in the Literature of Irish Nationalism. *ELH*. 61.1. 1994. 189-210. (192)

the Empire through an ennobling participation in the colonial project, his exuberant handling of picaresque devices can also be read as a resistance the common parabolic ways interacting with history and identity prompted by the national romance. Unlike bildungsroman novels that emphasize the protagonist's development towards a higher state of maturation or understanding, novels of the picaresque tradition are about a desperate and often futile struggle, where emphasis focuses on the collection of experiences and skills needed to survive. Lacking the set points of resolution – adulthood for the bildungsroman and the marriage of the national romance – picaresque narratives require different strategies for drawing ultimate meaning that include a consideration of the overarching disruption of linear narrative progression.

In more ways than one, Thackeray's *The Luck of Barry Lyndon* is the odd-novel-out in this study, but one that compliments the discussions of innovation and representation begun in the analysis of Charles Lever. While all three other works of this dissertation hold at least embattled claims to be in the canon of Irish literature, this novel, written by an Englishman and oblivious to many of the typical political and cultural concerns of most Irish literature, seems on the surface to present its audience with cliché-ridden, contemptuous stereotypic representation. In her *The Irishman in the English Novel of the Nineteenth Century* (1935), Sr. Mary Edith Kelley contends that the fictional Irishman did not appear in English novels “until the time of Thackeray, and then as a rogue.” And though not meant to be complimentary, her description of the premise of *Barry Lyndon* is quite accurate: “Thackeray presents the Irish adventurer, card-sharper, and bully as a thoroughpaced scoundrel, whose swagger and braggadocio make him a

person completely lacking in appeal.”²⁵² Thomas Flanagan describes the novel as “a literary joke in which he [Thackeray] expresses his contempt for the glorification of the criminal,” with no consideration of why “the imagination of the Irish peasant reacted so strongly to the story of the cutthroat and ruffian.”²⁵³ Daniel Corkery also hold up Barry Lyndon as an example of how the noble tradition of the outlaw in Irish fiction is degraded by English authors in his *Hidden Ireland* (1924).²⁵⁴ I will be arguing that both Corkery and Flanagan got this point exactly backwards; it is not Irish but English taste in literary literature that the novel directly mocks. To explore this fully, I explore how Thackeray parodies the British tradition of rogue fiction, which had a long history of criminalizing Irish identity. Modern scholarship has acknowledged some of the subtleties of this novel – George O’Brien includes it as one of the thirty Irish novels in his survey – but I will further explore the novel’s complex manipulation of both rogue fiction and picaresque tropes and character types.

In this work, Thackeray enters into the discourse over Irish representation as no other Victorian novelist, with the possible exception of Anthony Trollope, attempted. What I will contend is that an underestimation of the extent of his satire has led to a misunderstanding of the objects of this novel’s parody. Thackeray takes a character type common in both picaresque and rogue fiction – the reckless, lawless, adventurer – and through him mocks the conventions of genre by diverting the traditional emphases of

²⁵² Kelley, Sister Mary Edith. *The Irishman in the English Novel of the Nineteenth Century*. Haskell House Publishers Ltd. 1935. (22)

²⁵³ Flanagan. (181)

²⁵⁴ Corkery, Daniel. *Hidden Ireland: A History of Gaelic Munster in the Eighteenth Century*. Wipf and Stock Publishers. 1967. (16): “To fill out the vision of that land, so dark, so scorned, yet so secretly romantic to those who know it, one would need to have as well a full account of the Irish adventurers of that century, of such men as Mory Óg O’Sullivan and Art O’Leary – to take two of many figures so different, so very different both from “Barry Lyndon” – the “Irishman” of fiction and Barrington’s “Irishmen” of history.”

such narratives. Both traditional rogue fictions and picaresques present narrative through pseudo-autobiography, but Thackeray takes the potential for dramatic irony of this convention to a new level by situating the narrator's self-deception as the constant vehicle for humor. However, by also exhibiting the extreme brutality of this narrator, he intentionally pollutes the comfortable amusement of his audience as Lyndon utilizes his self-delusion to justify reprehensible action. And one conception that Lyndon consistently manipulates to his advantage is a sense of national identity. In the fourth chapter, I will refer to Thackeray's irony as reckless both because of its various targets and because of its lack of affirmation. This is undoubtedly why the representation in the novel has been labeled scornful of the Irish it contains little flattery of anything. However, in this satire can also be detected a sincere investment in and sentiment towards even the objects of mockery. One clear target of Thackeray's parody is the fiction of his friend Charles Lever, which further situates the novel as one engaging with an Irish literary discourse over representation.

CHAPTER 3: STRATEGIC DIGRESSIONS IN LEVER'S *CHARLES O'MALLEY THE IRISH DRAGOON*

Turning from the straightforward plotting and sustained allegory of the Irish national romance, the next two chapters will engage with another widely popular but subsequently marginalized genre of nineteenth-century Irish novels: the picaresque. Originating in sixteenth-century Spain and influential to early English novelists like Defoe, Fielding and Sterne, picaresque novels on the surface seem less part of an “authentic” Irish literary tradition (even broadly defined), and thus more open to suspicion over their ability to serve as an appropriate vehicle for expressing the Irish condition or identity. The Irish picaresque novel explored in this chapter is a comical work, which further differentiates it in tone from the often tragic and somber national romance. Though often loosely defined, the term “picaresque” is generally used to label works of episodic plot structure and first-person narration, often from a disreputable, ignoble, or low-born character, a “pícaro.” At best, the genre is viewed by critics as a liberating vehicle that allows for great variety and dramatic irony; at worst, it is identified as a chaotic hodgepodge lacking the fundamental causal relationships that sustain a true novel. Ultimately, the genre presents a mode of plot progression and character development that invites a greater span of interpretations than novels with uninterrupted narrative and sedentary, symbolic characters.

This chapter will examine one of the most famous and maligned example of this novel type from nineteenth-century Ireland: Charles Lever's second novel *Charles O'Malley the Irish Dragoon* (1841). Lever's early novels are generally referred to as works of picaresque fiction, a categorization in his case often employed to emphasize the

novels lack in narrative cohesion, rather than to preface a genre-specific approach to critical interpretation. Introducing an anthology of Lever criticism, Tony Bareham writes, “Lever’s early books, admittedly, are almost pure picaresque, and whole episodes could be swapped or cut without detriment to any sense of the overall design.”²⁵⁵ Here, picaresque is used to denote structural disunity and arbitrary narrative formula. Even amongst Lever’s advocates, like Bareham and Jim Shanahan, there is a tendency to use the categorization of picaresque to indicate the ephemeral nature some of his works.

While Lever’s comic picaresques have had their own influence on Irish writing, his darker, more mature, less ‘popular’ material has not received the same attention, and this has been to the detriment of our understanding of the dynamic of the Irish novel in the nineteenth century.²⁵⁶

Even here, where Shanahan indicates the significance of Lever’s early work, he still uses the picaresque to contrast the mature. This comes from a lament he shares with many Lever scholars that of the author’s thirty-some novels, it is only his first two – and those two the most “picaresque” – that are remembered, and when remembered disparaged. However, Shanahan also acknowledges elsewhere that the early novels break free “from the simple Ireland- England binary found in the national tale and create something completely different, a sort of ‘supra-national’ tale.”²⁵⁷ Although Lever’s early works are often dismissed as immature and insignificant to emphasize the unacknowledged accomplishments of his later career, their form and characterization still present a

²⁵⁵ Bareham, Tony. “Introduction: ‘The Famous Irish Lever’”. *Charles Lever: New Evaluations*. Tony Bareham (Ed.). Colin Smythe. 1991. 1-17. (10)

²⁵⁶ Shanahan, Jim. “The ‘Losing Side Ever’: Charles Lever, Walter Scott, and the Irish National Tale.” *Romantic Ireland: From Tone to Gonne; Fresh Perspectives on Nineteenth-century Ireland*. Paddy Lyons, Willy Maley and John Miller (Eds.) Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2013. 298-309. (299)

²⁵⁷ Shanahan. (298)

significant and dynamic attempt to present an alternative to the standard ways of presenting Irish identity.

I will argue in this chapter that early, hostile evaluations of *Charles O'Malley* by influential authors and critics have stunted the breadth of interpretation invited by its picaresque mode of expression. Though recent scholars have offered defenses of (or at least a passing nod to) the more serious, latter novels of Charles Lever, his biographer Stephen Haddelsey has pointed out that these critics tend to dismiss the novelists early works as the folly of “an ignoble novitiate and to rapidly pass over them, rather than to examine them in any detail or, indeed, to identify their merits.”²⁵⁸ So ensconced has this disavowal grown that *Charles O'Malley's* early, complimentary assessments read today as absurd, like the 1877 review from *The Catholic World* that proclaims that “*Charles O'Malley* stands unrivalled, and will hold its own when hundreds of so-called Irish romances shall have returned to the dust out of which they should never have emerged, even into a spasmodic vitality.”²⁵⁹ Anticipating Shanahan, this review, though with questionable prophesy, points to an important distinction, categorizing Lever's fiction in contrast to the traditional Irish national romance, and this chapter will consider it thus. Separating Lever's critics into two camps, I will address the most enduring aesthetic and cultural critiques of the novel to examine why it elicited such boisterous condemnation and then reassess the validity these claims. Haddelsey subtitled his biography of Lever “The Lost Victorian” and early on poses the question:

²⁵⁸ Haddelsey, Stephen. *Charles Lever: The Lost Victorian*. Colin Smythe Limited. 2000. (39)

²⁵⁹ “Charles Lever at Home.” *The Catholic World, A monthly Magazine of General Literature and Science*. 26:152. 1877. 203. (203)

How was it that the only nineteenth century Irish novelist to vie with Dickens in popularity and earning power, whose name – during his early career – was a household word, could become within fifty years of his death almost completely unknown?²⁶⁰

The best way to engage with this question is to appreciate that from the beginning of his writing career, Lever was critically attacked on two fronts, by contingents whose combined maneuvers have cut this author off from both the critical interest or communal sympathy that could sustain his legacy. The critical approach suggested in famous aesthetic and cultural disparagements from Edgar Allan Poe, William Carleton, and W.B. Yeats have all had a great influence in establishing orthodox predispositions for approaching Lever's works as artistically bankrupt and culturally degrading.

Charles O'Malley the Irish Dragoon, is, as the title suggests, a story of war and soldiering that loosely follows the careers of the title character and his companion, Mickey Free, an Irish peasant and dependent from the O'Malley estate. The first episode sets the tone for the rest of the novel, a humorous story of imposture, death, and rebirth. Godfrey O'Malley MP, uncle to Charles and "the handsomest man in Ireland,"²⁶¹ sits in Dublin with his two closest advisors, scheming. Parliament will dissolve soon. When that happens, Godfrey will become open to his creditors, who are waiting to track him down and put him in debtor's prison. To avoid this, Godfrey enters a notice of his own death in the Dublin newspapers and has his accomplices drive him in a coffin across

²⁶⁰ Haddelsey. (18)

²⁶¹ Lever, Charles. *Charles O'Malley the Irish Dragoon*. William Curry, Jun and Company. 1841.(4) Vol. 1. Hereafter referred to as *O'Malley V1*.

Ireland back to Galway, where he arises before the mourning crowd to fabricate a more endearing reason for the ruse and announce his bid for reelection atop his own hearse:

There was nothing else for it, boys; the Dublin people insisted on me being their member, and besieged the clubhouse. I refused – they threatened – I grew obstinate – they furious. ‘I’ll die first,’ said I ‘Galway or nothing!’ [...] And you see I kept my word, boys – I did die; I died that evening at a quarter past eight. There, read it for yourselves; there’s the paper; was waked and carried out, and here I am after all, ready to die in earnest for you – but never desert you.²⁶²

This episode is typical of many in the novel with its playful tone and adjuvant relation to the main plot, and the reader’s brief view of Godfrey along with his unscrupulous legal advisor Sir Harry Boyle and trigger-happy bodyguard Bill Consadine, give a hint of what Roger McHugh calls the “phantasmagoric procession of landed gentry, bailiffs, proctors, dragoons, generals, hard-drinking squires, and hard-riding Galway horsewomen [along with the] occasional droll servant or drunken Major”²⁶³ who wander in and out of the plot and whose stories, songs, and exploits consistently interrupt (or one could argue augment) the central story of Charles O’Malley’s military career. Putting aside these subplots and diversions, even an outline of the events directly concerning the title character runs long. Lorna Reynolds, in her “A Tale of Love and War: *Charles O’Malley*”, uses the first fourteen pages of her article to offer an admirably succinct summary of just Charles’ movements and doings in the novel,²⁶⁴ demonstrating the

²⁶² *O’Malley* V1. (9-10)

²⁶³ McHugh, Roger J. “Charles Lever”. *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*. 27:106. 1938. 247-260. (253-254)

²⁶⁴ See Reynolds, Lorna. “A Tale of Love and War: *Charles O’Malley*.” *Charles Lever: New Evaluations*. Tony Bareham (Ed.). Colin Smythe. 1991. 32-48. (32-45)

difficult task facing any critic engaging with a work that has so much diversity of themes, incidents, and characters.

One of the major problems with interacting with such a large picaresque novel (not to mention one that has been so long neglected) is the abundance of events, intricacies, and side-stories. In the absence of typical benchmarks of plot progression, reoccurring themes replace the continuum of events, and one of the most noticeable components of the novel is its preoccupation with performance and farce. After winning a duel in Galway, Charles must flee to Dublin, where he has several raucous adventures with fellow students at Trinity College, most notably Frank Webber, a character Julian Moynahan finds noteworthy for his reckless disruption of academic and social life, as he keeps “the college and half of Dublin in an uproar with elaborate, mostly destructive practical jokes” many of which involve disguising himself to prey on the faculty and fellow students.²⁶⁵ N.M.B. Christie interprets these hijinks as seemingly gratuitous but sharing a common theme: the “humiliation of pompous authority.”²⁶⁶ Pranks on presumption reoccur throughout the novel, personified most conspicuously by the characters Frank Webber and Mickey Free, the latter being more prominent as he follows Charles when he leaves Trinity and Weber behind to fight with Wellington’s army in the Peninsular War against Napoleon.

While on campaign, Charles, Mickey, and their companions fight, drink, flirt, duel, ride, sing, and tell stories across Portugal and Spain. Charles is reckless and mercurial, given to youthful alternations between ecstasy and gloom, while Mickey is

²⁶⁵ Moynahan, Julian. *Anglo-Irish: The Literary Imagination in a Hyphenated Culture*. Princeton University Press. 1995. (89)

²⁶⁶ Christie, N.M.B. “Lever’s Charles O’Malley: A Book to Recommend to a Friend?” *Études Irlandaises*. 4. 1979. 33-55. (47)

loyal and artful, seemingly as at home in Lisbon as he is in Galway. Although the progression of events is perplexing, these two characters provide the cohesion of themes that make the novel approachable to both readers and critics. As the ostensible narrator relating the exploits of his youth, the older Charles vacillates between pride in his childish exploits and ruminations on death and aging, adding a consistent contrast between old and young visions of the world. Where Charles, through inexperience and imprudence, often becomes the object of deception, the more temperamentally stable Mickey enacts deception upon the pretentious characters the two encounter. In an early incident, while at a waystation traveling with Charles across Ireland, Mickey becomes upset with an emissary of the Orange Order, Billy Crow, for his harangues against the Catholic population. And so, Mickey tricks Billy into thinking that some traveling priests are actually high-ranking Orangemen in disguise. Misinterpreting the priests' aversion to join him in a toast to the downfall of the pope, Billy pronounces his invectives louder and louder until finally he draws the attention of the villagers, who drag him out into the street and beat him.²⁶⁷ The antics of characters like Mickey Free are particularly troublesome to interpret in the Irish tradition.

Although Mickey's actions here show him to be an enactor of retribution against bigotry in Irish society (and in this instance specifically mocking bigotry against the Irish Catholic peasant class) he also, as a trickster and Puck-like character, can easily be categorized as manifestation of the stage-Irishman, a degrading stock-character who functions only as a source of ridicule, reinforcing comfortable stereotypes for foreign audiences. Indeed, Mickey and Charles seem to adhere to what Declan Kiberd identifies

²⁶⁷ See *O'Malley* V1. (68-71)

as “two major Irish stereotypes on the English national stage [...] on the one hand, the threatening, vainglorious soldier, and, on the other, the feckless but cheerily reassuring servant.”²⁶⁸ Along with the denotation of character traits, however, the designation of stage-Irish also carries with it a connotation of character function. The traditional stage-Irish characters of the seventeenth and eighteenth-century were stock figures that affirmed rather than challenged prejudices against the Irish people. The function of these characters was comforting; the audience could be assured of a comical uniformity in a comical Irish population. I will end this chapter with a discussion of Lever’s utilization of stock-characters and the extent to which they present readers with a satire on the Irish people, but, before this, it is necessary to come to an adequate estimation of the overall form of the novel’s unique mode of expression.

Shanahan calls Lever “a martyr to the nineteenth-century demands for volume and the vagaries of serial publication,”²⁶⁹ and it cannot be denied that, as with Dickens, Trollope, and many other English authors of the time, the sales-driven aspects of this mode of release influenced the style, substance, and arrangement of Lever’s work greatly. Not only were situations and even endings of some of Lever’s novels influenced by public demand,²⁷⁰ but the unpopularity of one of his more experimental works (*A Days Ride* (1860), also infamously caused Dickens to release *Great Expectations*

²⁶⁸ Kiberd, Declan. *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*. Harvard University Press. 1995. (12)

²⁶⁹ Shanahan, Jim. “Reviving Pleasant Memories: Charles Lever and the Crisis of Union.” *New Voices in Irish Criticism* 4. Fionnuala Dillane and Ronan Kelly (Eds.) Four Courts Press. 2003. (202)

²⁷⁰ Hall, Wayne. *Dialogues in the Margin: A Study of the Dublin University Magazine*. The Catholic University of America Press. 1999. (88) Writing while the novel was during its serialization, Lever thought his 1845 novel *The O’Donoghue* set up for a tragic ending but was persuaded by his editor James M’Glashan to abandon this conclusion because “the ladies wouldn’t like it.”

prematurely.²⁷¹ However, unlike many of his English contemporaries who labored under the same publication demands, Lever never managed to escape the stigma of disingenuousness brought on by his compositional mode. Part of this came from his own projected persona, as he emphasized the ease with which he wrote,²⁷² and his humble estimation of his own work.²⁷³ However, the huge popularity of Lever's first two novels *The Confessions of Harry Lorrequer* (1839) and *Charles O'Malley, the Irish Dragoon* drew immediate criticism for their unusual plotting. And from the start, Lever's commercial success was interpreted as an artistic strike against him. The year of *Charles O'Malley's* publication, the *The Athenaeum* hailed "a new style of literature suited to the new customers for whose use it has been called into being. But it is one thing to admit the fact and another to pronounce that it is good."²⁷⁴ The reviewer goes on –

In descending, therefore, from the purer region of literature, to commence with the uneducated and unrefined, it is not surprising that the power of moving – the power of effective composition – should be predominantly diminished; and however great be the talents of the author, however original the bent of his genius,

²⁷¹ Meckier, Jerome. "'Dashing in Now': *Great Expectations* and Charles Lever's *A Day's Ride*." *Dickens Studies Annual: Essays on Victorian Fiction*. Stanley Friedman, Edward Guiliano, and Michael Timko (Eds.) AMS Press. 1998. 227-260. (227) The unpopularity of Lever's novel *A Day's Ride: A Life's Romance* in 1860 caused the circulation of *All Year Round* to decline for the only time in Dickens' lifetime, and the Inimitable was forced to release *Great Expectations* in weekly rather than monthly installments.

²⁷² See Shanahan, Jim. "The 'Losing Side Ever': Charles Lever, Walter Scott, and the Irish National Tale." (308)

²⁷³ See Mchugh, Roger J. "Charles Lever". *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*. 27:106. 1938. 247-260. "Lever had no illusions about his own literary limitations, and ranked Carleton and Maria Edgeworth far above himself. If his work has not always the close observation of the first or the power and convincing peasant-portraiture of the second, it has many things which they lack; humorous incident easily told, polished repartee, genial conversation." (260)

²⁷⁴ "'Charles O'Malley, the Irish Dragoon'. *The Athenaeum* (February 27, 1841), 166." *A Victorian Art of Fiction, Essays on the Novel in British Periodicals 1830-1850*. John Charles Olmstead (Ed.) Garland Publishing, Inc. 1979. 363-365. (365)

his highest triumph is usually bound by a single hit. The very element of success, excessive stimulation, is an element rapidly exhausted.

A year later, across the Atlantic, Edgar Allan Poe would offer a very similar assessment in a review written in an elevated tone meant to stand as intellectual counterpoint to the boorishness of popular literature represented by Lever's novel. Poe notes the "disgusting vulgarism of thought which pervades and contaminates this whole production, [...] from which a delicate or lofty mind will shrink as from a pestilence," describes a plot overflowing with "more absurdities than we have patience to enumerate," laments the "exceedingly rough, clumsy, and inartistical" construction, and ends with the pronouncement that -

The American, at least, who shall peruse the concluding pages of the book now under review, and not turn in disgust from the base sycophancy which infects them, is unworthy of his country and his name.²⁷⁵

It is little wonder that a brooding Macbeth like Poe would harangue so viciously against an Aerial like Lever. And, to modern readers, Poe's derisive candor here accentuates the irony of his own legacy within the American canon with traditionalists like Harold Bloom only reluctantly acknowledge the macabre story-teller primarily because of his popularity, regarding him as "an inescapable writer, but not a good one."²⁷⁶ The author of "The Importance of the Single Effect in a Prose Tale," Poe is repulsed by picaresque plotting. He is also a critic who identifies melancholy as "the most legitimate of all

²⁷⁵ Poe, Edgar Allan. "Review 1". *Graham's Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine*. 20:3. 1842. 186.

²⁷⁶ Bloom, Harold. "Introduction". *Bloom's Major Short Story Writers: Edgar Allan Poe*. Harold Bloom (Ed.) Chelsea House Publishers. 1999.

poetical tones,”²⁷⁷ and so naturally equates the ebullient tone of Lever with artistic bankruptcy. However, Poe’s review is part of a broader assessment of aesthetics that has had a long legacy, associating popularity with pandering and joviality with artificiality.

The assumptions that form each critic’s approach to the popularity and humor of Lever dictates whether the author appears as an innovator or a sycophant. This initial assumption either precludes or encourages meaningful interaction with the most distinctive aspects of Lever’s plotting and style. Poe’s assessment can be likened to the critical standpoint that Bakhtin stands against, in which “the essential truth about the world and about man cannot be told in the language of laughter” and “the place of laughter in literature belongs only to the low genres.”²⁷⁸ Indeed, Bakhtin’s study of Rabelais recommends itself as a counterweight to Poe’s aesthetical view as both critics begin with the same observation: the author’s popularity.²⁷⁹ However, where Poe, along with many Lever critics after him, take popularity as an indicator of vulgarity, Bakhtin begins by interpreting the instant success of *Pantagruel* as a cue to its merit.²⁸⁰ What is wholly missing from Poe’s appraisal is the guarded but glowing praise of Lever’s artistry that almost always accompanies even harsh judgements. *The Athenaeum* review even concedes that “the author of the work before us is pre-eminent for this mirth-moving power, for his acute sense of the ridiculous, for the breadth of his humor, and for his

²⁷⁷ Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Philosophy of Composition”. *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe*. R. Brimley Johnson (Ed). 191-202. (195)

²⁷⁸ Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Helene Iswolsky (Trs.) M.I.T. Press. 1968. (67)

²⁷⁹ Poe, Edgar Allan. “Review 1”. Poe begins his review – “*The first point* to be observed in the consideration of “Charles O’Malley” is the great *popularity* of the work. We believe that in this respect it has surpassed even the inimitable compositions of Mr. Dickens. At all events it has met with a most extensive sale; and, although the graver journals have avoided its discussion, the ephemeral press has been nearly if not quite unanimous in its praise. To be sure, the commendation, although unqualified, cannot be said to have abounded in specification, or to have been, in any regard, of a satisfactory character to one seeking precise ideas on the topic of the book’s particular merit.” (186)

²⁸⁰ Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. (61)

power of dramatic writing.”²⁸¹ George M. Towle thirty years later would offer an almost identical assessment, beginning with a very sharp delimitation between the noble didactic novels of Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, and Eliot and the works of Lever, only praising the latter for his readability:

Who has not read and reread, with constantly-recurring mirth, following with breathless and painless excitement, the erratic course of the dashing characters, convulsed by their mishaps, infected by their jollity, envious of their triumphs – who has not thus enjoyed the tremendous adventures of Charles O’Malley?

Also like the 1841 reviewed in *The Athenaeum*, Towle identifies Lever as the pioneer of “a new vein in fiction”: “No one has previously occupied a field in which there was so much that was rarely and racily humorous, and which only actual Irish experience could cultivate.”²⁸²

Bakhtin’s conception of the carnivalesque provides a particularly useful approach to understanding the brief recognitions of genius that critics often allude to but rarely explore. Although Lever’s novel does not contain the same “grotesque” bodily and scatological motifs in which Bakhtin finds the “contradictory and double-faced fullness of life”²⁸³ in Rabelais’ world view, *Charles O’Malley* does embrace a preoccupation with the revelry and mummery that Bakhtin places at the heart of the carnival’s power to disrupt the normal orders within society. Bakhtin explores the “feast of fools” that facilitates “suspension of the entire official system with all its prohibitions and hierarchic

²⁸¹ “Charles O’Malley the Irish Dragoon.” *A Victorian Art of Fiction: Essays on the Novel in British Periodicals, 1830-1850*. John Charles Olmsted (Ed.) Garland Publishing, Inc. 1979. 365. (365)

²⁸² Towle, George M. “Charles Lever”. *Appletons’ Journal of Literature, Science and Art*. 4:92. 788. Towle’s praise of Lever is prefaced by an explanation that stresses that “Teaching by fiction is surely one of the noblest use of g

²⁸³ Bakhtin. (62)

barriers,”²⁸⁴ in a way similar to how critics have noticed Lever’s military setting removing his characters from the social and class divisions that existed in Ireland. Julian Moynahan describes Lever’s military setting as a place where the soldiers

meet as equals, as brother officers in the service. This service is a freemasonry, if not a democracy. For as long as it continues, the Irish-English difference, and even class differences, scarcely matters.²⁸⁵

Shanahan argues that by utilizing this atmosphere, Lever created “a sort of never-never land where his characters could remain as ‘Irish’ as they had ever been [before the Union].”²⁸⁶ Although the carnival mode comes at the cost of a focus on the harsh realities of Irish life and the complexities of Ireland’s socio-political position, it makes no pretense of depicting every-day reality, emphasizing instead the absurdities, inversions, and variety brought about by an extraordinary circumstance. What McHugh observes in *Harry Lorrequer* is true of *Charles O’Malley*, both novels are parades of “anecdotes, escapades, practical jokes, hair breadth escapes, duels, dances, mistakes of identity, and drinking bouts.”²⁸⁷ Bakhtin’s approach assumes there is meaning in the seeming ephemerality of such a procession of lively incidents; games, role-play, performance and even public beatings (here can be recalled the incident of Mickey and Billy Crow²⁸⁸) become inter-connected events that draw “the players out of the bounds of everyday life,

²⁸⁴ Bakhtin. (89). Also see (246): “carnavalesque revelry is marked by absolute familiarity. differences between superiors and inferiors disappear for a short time, and all draw close to each other.”

²⁸⁵ Moynahan, Julian. *Anglo-Irish: The Literary Imagination in a Hyphenated Culture*. Princeton University Press. 1995. (93)

²⁸⁶ See Shanahan, Jim. “Reviving Pleasant Memories: Charles Lever and the Crisis of Union.” *New Voices in Irish Criticism 4*. Fionnuala Dillane and Ronan Kelly (Eds.) Four Courts Press. 2003. 202-211. (208)

²⁸⁷ McHugh. (249)

²⁸⁸ See Bakhtin. The punching-up of Frank Webber and Mickey Free, who both inflict violence on people above their social station, can be read as part of Bakhtin’s inversion of the fool and king, where the fool is venerated and the king assaulted, creating a situation in the narrative where “thrashing and abuse are not a personal chastisement but are symbolic actions directed at something on a higher level.” (197)

liberated them from the usual laws and regulations, and replaces established conventions by other lighter conventionalities.”²⁸⁹ The liberated form and setting of the novel make it stand in contrast with the national romance. Lever’s replacement of life within society with that of the wandering military campaign and his emphasis on revelry both facilitate the tumultuous spirit of the “marketplace” to be established, allowing an inversion of social roles, a rejection of despair as the defining philosophy of the world, and a celebration of the natural processes of life.

Humor and farce are not simply prominent features of *Charles O’Malley*; they are sustaining elements of the plot, compelling the reader forward as the narrative deviates from a central story. Bakhtin treats laughter as a healing principle, an “essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole, concerning history and man.”²⁹⁰ And Lever need not be considered a philosopher for the reader or critic to admit that he is tapping into a philosophy of laughter in this way. Indeed, Bakhtin is careful to point out that the presence of these carnivalesque aspects “does not mean, of course, that each detail was invented, carefully thought out, and weighed in the author’s abstract mind.”²⁹¹ Here, it is enough to entertain the prospect that the many attributions of genius that pepper critiques of *Charles O’Malley* have a foundation, grounded in Lever’s utilization of carnivalesque to sustain the picaresque, and his employment of the marketplace atmosphere and carnival to hold together and give meaning to a periphrastic plot.

In the novel, the narrator, the elder O’Malley, defends the many digressions by saying that “one swallow can no more make a summer, than one well-sustained character

²⁸⁹ Bakhtin. (235)

²⁹⁰ Bakhtin. see (30) & (66)

²⁹¹ Bakhtin. (212)

can give life to a masquerade.”²⁹² And indeed, the masquerade provides an apt metaphor not only for the festivity and variety of the novel, but also for the themes of misapprehension and imposture that provide continuity of humor in many seemingly disjointed or insignificant episodes. One example comes when Charles wakes from a sickbed in Lisbon to see a man “whose broad sombrero hat and brown mantel bespoke his nation [...] a perfect picture [...] of the indolent luxury of the South,” posturing before a mirror and repeating, “*Come va, vostra senoria.*” O’Malley speculates a backstory for the stranger: “a grandee of Portugal, invested with rank, honours, and riches; but who, effeminated by the habits and usages of his country, had become a mere idle voluptuary, living a life of easy and inglorious indolence.”²⁹³ Surprised he is then when the figure turns and shouts, “By the rock of Cashel he’s cured!”, revealing the stranger to be O’Malley’s closest companion and countryman, Mickey Free. What begins here as a seeming satire from the author on the decadence of the Portuguese quickly shifts to joke on the protagonist (and by extension, the narrator) on presumptions. O’Malley as the young, impetuous central character often falls prey to dramatic irony because he lacks self-awareness. He criticizes a French officer (who is similar in age and outlook) for being naïve and a fellow officer for being headstrong though he exemplifies both of these traits.²⁹⁴

Particularly in his romantic endeavors, O’Malley’s misapprehension of the people and events around him and even his own motivations create much the tension of the plot. Before his military career begins Charles has already professed his love to Miss Lucy

²⁹² Lever, Charles. *Charles O’Malley the Irish Dragoon*. William Curry, Jun and Company. 1841. Vol. 2. (88) Hereafter referred to as *O’Malley V2*.

²⁹³ *O’Malley V2*. (66-67)

²⁹⁴ See *O’Malley V1*. (271) & (219)

Dashwood, whom he will eventually marry, yet he has two other romantic dalliances, first before he even leaves Ireland in Cork with the sisters Dalrymple and the second more sustained liaisons with Dona Inez da Silviero. The latter ends, appropriately enough, at a masquerade ball, where Dona Inez proclaims her love for the masked O'Malley mistaking him for his friend Captain Power. But even during Charles and Innez's superficial dalliance, O'Malley's inability to understand himself complicates the story's significance. He becomes enraged when he learns of her other suitors, but adds, "not that I was in love with her myself, but yet, I know not how it was, I had fancied her affections unengaged; and without asking myself wherefore, I wished as much."²⁹⁵ While on military campaign, O'Malley receives his training in a hyper-masculine world, surrounded by men obsessed with pursuing women but also greatly fearing sustained association. Many of the side-stories told at the fire-side and mess table are about amorous adventures and misadventures, often ending with an escape from marital entanglements. The memorable character Major Monsoon even warns Charles directly that "the fairer sex [...] are like the guerillas, and they pick you off when you least expect it, and when you think there is nothing to fear."²⁹⁶ These stories comprise many of the anecdotes of the novel, and the amount of pages afforded to such revelry suggests a celebration of wild, perpetual bachelorhood. However, although readers are clearly meant to laugh at Major Monsoon, it would be difficult to make the case that they are meant to imitate him.

For O'Malley, who anticipates his life after wartime, consequences follow antics. When Lucy unexpectedly comes to Lisbon, being the daughter of General Dashwood, she

²⁹⁵ *O'Malley* V1. (217)

²⁹⁶ *O'Malley* V1. (195)

discovers O'Malley and Innez together and runs off. O'Malley experiences a paroxysm of guilt and, foreseeing his post-war future dashed, collapses. The incident is denied the centrality it might hold in a linearly plotted novel by the quickness with which the narratives moves from event to event. After O'Malley's agitation, the picaresque quickly asserts itself again, and O'Malley and Mickey Free (who has also been courting a woman in Lisbon and teaching her Irish) have to leave on a new campaign. The episode ends with Free looking over his shoulder as they leave the city, saying, "I wonder if we treated the young ladies well, anyhow, Mister Charles, for, faix, I've my doubts on it."²⁹⁷ This is the double-edged sword of Lever's picaresque style, where the variety and juxtaposition that allows for the carnival atmosphere also makes the weight of incidents unclear. Given that the seeming moral of the above episode is only stated as a somewhat ambiguous afterthought as the protagonists move on to their next venture, it is easy to interpret any meaning as simply tacked on. However, the novel's capricious structure disrupts the standard affectations of linear allegory, ultimately undermining many of the presuppositions imposed by the form of the national romance.

This focus on such interruptions and digressions contributes to a larger disregard for marriage as a symbolic crux of the novel. While exploring fundamental themes of national tales and romances, Miranda Burgess, interacting with the theories of Garry Kelly and Nicola Watson, entertains the marriage ending as the "key motif" of this genre, one that offers readers "an allegory of reconciliation between warring classes and cultures that unifies the nation."²⁹⁸ This central allegory schema prompts the reader to understand

²⁹⁷ *O'Malley* V2. (95)

²⁹⁸ Burgess, Miranda. "The National Tale and Allied Genres, 1770s-1840s." *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel*. Cambridge University Press. 2007. 39-59 (43)

the situations and casts of these novels as dictated by a social/political commentary that culminates in the establishment of a reconciliation through marriage between characters designed as representations of potentially harmonious but currently disjointed facets of the community. The characters who pose an impediment to these portentous unions incarnate disruptive forces identified by the authors as preeminently threatening to domestic and social life. The centrality of the augural marriage to the plot of the national romance justifies extra scrutiny into the exact import of these unions by scholars like Elizabeth Cullingford and C.L. Innes, who both explore, as Cullingford puts it, “the asymmetries of power between men and women”²⁹⁹ inherent in such arrangements, where even novels like *Marcella Grace* that intentionally attempt to diminish the gender disparities must still do so through a symbolic union that legally establishes her husband as head of the household.

Charles O'Malley, both in form and tone, stands in contrast to the primary orientation the national romance proposes through the prophetic marriage. Although driven by amorous passions, O'Malley is given no primary villain or obstacle that must be overcome in order to achieve his ultimate marriage. A wide variety of villains and obstacles present themselves in the text, but their variety confounds allegory. Indeed, if there is one constant threat to the desired union between Charles O'Malley and Lucy Dashwood running throughout the plot, it is Charles O'Malley himself, his youthful ineptitude and lack of introspection pose the greatest threat to domestic concord. And lest the reader anticipate this future marriage as a symbolic cessation of struggle, the mature

²⁹⁹ Cullingford, Elizabeth Butler. *Ireland's Other: Ethnicity and Gender in Irish Literature and Popular Culture*. University of Notre Dame. 2001. (41); Also see Innes, C.L. *Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society, 1800-1935*. The University of Georgia Press. 1993. (15)

O'Malley narrator's flippant and often doleful commentary on events introduces further disparage the youthful ambitions that drive the plot, as when he comments of love that "When we think for a moment over all the toils, all the anxieties, all the fevered excitement of a *grande passion*, it is not a little singular that love should so frequently be elicited by a state of mere idleness."³⁰⁰ In the novel, neither O'Malley's desired marriage nor his probable inheritance of the family estate reflect a larger harmonization of his society. The old O'Malley who unfolds the story, a man now capable of the introspection his younger self as protagonist lacks, sees little of grand narrative in the ambitions that dictate events. Lacking the allegorical mandates that permeate the national romance, Lever's picaresque novel undercuts the idealized mode of representation where characters must conform to design to convey meaning. The novel undercuts gendered and social hierarchies by both sidestepping these issues somewhat with the military setting and, more significantly, by denying these hierarchies an authority they typically enjoy in dictating the plot and character. The characters who wander in and out of the narrative appear as free agents with no predestined role.

Although *Charles O'Malley* is recalled as having seemingly superficial slapdash pace and comic digressions, it does also contain enough focus on its protagonist to invite interpretation of progression. The fragmentation of the picaresque plot does not preclude the themes of development and growth. Appreciating this, J.A. Michie can interpret in another picaresque *Moll Flanders* the "logic of spiritual change within the protagonist. The book has coherence to be found in the gradual unfolding of the inward states of

³⁰⁰ *O'Malley* V1. (135)

Moll's character," below the "surface logic of outward action."³⁰¹ Haddesley points to the continuity of action as well as the heightened comedy as two prime distinctions of quality between *Charles O'Malley* and Lever's first and more popular novel *Harry Lorrequer*,³⁰² and this more structured focus allows Reynolds to discuss the novel as a *bildungsroman*, recognizing a continued focus on the education and maturation of the title character through many of the episodes.³⁰³ The celebration of the vivacity of life found in the masquerade and carnival aspects in *Charles O'Malley* is tempered with a darker side that Moynahan points to when calling this "a much grimmer novel"³⁰⁴ than Lever's first. The presumption of lawlessness and frivolity of plot can lead to a dismissal of these "grimmer" aspects as incongruous departures from an otherwise carefree narrative, and yet a closer consideration of them can lead to an appreciation of how they complete rather than a diminishment of the carnevalesque themes in the novel.

The manner in which the novel portrays romance and love is similar to the way it presents war and youth. The rapidity of events offer both point and counterpoint in quick succession. An ambiguity runs through the novel, created when as readers, we are reminded that this is not the diary of struggle from the young soldier but the recollections of the older, settled veteran, who often punctuates the episodes in which the young character has been the most triumphant with morbid rumination. At first, these vacillations seem to create contradictions, as the narrative's momentum rides along on

³⁰¹ Michie, J.A. "The Unity of *Moll Flanders*." *Knives and Swindlers: Essays on the Picaresque Novel in Europe*. Christine J. Whitbourn (Ed.) Oxford University Press. 1974. 75-92. (76)

³⁰² Haddesley. (47). "There is a definite augmentation of the dramatic incidents which results in the variation of pace and tone far superior to the unrelenting boisterousness of *Harry Lorrequer*."

³⁰³ See Reynolds. (38)

³⁰⁴ Kelleher, Margaret. "Prose Writing and Drama in English, 1830-1890: from Catholic Emancipation to the Fall of Parnell." *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature*. Margaret Kelleher & Philip O'Leary (Eds). Cambridge University Press. Vol. 1. 449-499. (467)

action and ardor only to be halted by reflections that question the validity of those stimulants, as when the narrator interjects,

When first we set out upon our worldly pilgrimage, these are indeed precious moments, when with buoyant heart and spirit high, believing all things, trusting all things, our very youth comes back to us, reflected from every object we meet; and like Narcissus, we are but worshipping our own image in the water. As we go on in life, the cares, the anxieties, and the business of the world engross us more and more, and such moments become fewer and shorter. Many a bright dream has been dissolved, many a fairy vision replaced, by some dark reality.³⁰⁵

And these reversals between ardor and anguish never follow one another more quickly than when Lever writes of war. On the day of his first battle, O'Malley recalls the exploits of his life thus far, but proclaims, "never till now did I know how far higher the excitement reaches, when man to man, sabre to sabre, arm to arm, we ride forward to the battle-field,"³⁰⁶ only to conclude three pages later that "There are few sadder things in life than the day after a battle," while he remembers the "compact ranks and glistening files" while looking

upon the cold and barren heath, whose only memory of the past is the blood-stained turf, a mangled corpse, the broken gun, the shattered wall, the well-trodden earth where columns stood, the cut-up ground where cavalry had charged,— these are the sad relics of all the chivalry of yesterday.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁵ *O'Malley* V1. (161)

³⁰⁶ *O'Malley* V1. (246)

³⁰⁷ *O'Malley* V1. (249)

As mentioned earlier, Lever's setting of the military camp and campaign diminishes the distinctions of social and racial rank, enabling a festive air of conviviality beyond what can be achieved in the strictures of society, but this leveling is also reflected in the way Lever presents the battlefield, where the land stretches out, "one mass of dead and dying, the bearskin of the French grenadier lying side by side with the tartan of the Highlander."³⁰⁸

Julian Smith characterizes the picaresque as a narrative mode that "tends towards excess and proliferation,"³⁰⁹ and in the extremes of Lever's novel reflect a holistic interaction with the spirit of the carnival, where "negation and destruction [...] are included as an essential phase, inseparable from affirmation."³¹⁰ The problem in interpreting this novel stems not from a lack of themes and meanings but from a surplus. The abundance creates an ambiguity through juxtaposition that distances the work from straightforward interpretations of the novel as a simple heroic or romantic tale. A young Bernard Shaw found in Lever's picaresque a heroes' "unsuccessful encounters with the facts of life, a poignant quality that romantic fiction lacked." Shaw also viewed "the tragi-comic irony of the conflict between real life and the romantic imagination" as a feature that connected his own writings closely with Lever and the Irish literary tradition.³¹¹ Recent critics have picked up on Shaw's pronouncements, defending Lever's

³⁰⁸ O'Malley V1. (321)

³⁰⁹ Smith, Paul Julian. "The Rhetoric of Representation in Writers and Critics of Picaresque Narrative: 'Lazarillo de Tormes, Guzmán de Alfarache, El Buscón'". *The Modern Language Review*. 82:1. 1987. 88-101. (88)

³¹⁰ Bakhtin. (62)

³¹¹ qtd. in Weintraub, Stanley. "Bernard Shaw, Charles Lever, and 'Immaturity'". *Bulletin (Shaw Society of America)*. 2:1. 1957. 11-15. (11-12). In this quote Shaw is referring to Lever's 1860-61 novel *A Day's Ride: A Life's Romance*.

anti-Romantic approach³¹² and his place within an Irish comedic tradition (James Cahalan and Rüdiger Imhof have drawn comparisons with Flann O'Brien and J.P. Donleavy).³¹³ To come to an adequate appreciation of *Charles O'Malley* and to understand how critics can so consistently account Charles Lever as an author of dazzling genius who produced drivel, one must appreciate that it is not only the disjointed picaresque narrative form that has caused his hasty dismissal, but also his utilization of farce and humor. Though often tempered with introspection, mirth and absurdity, the defining features of the narrative in *Charles O'Malley* lend itself to hasty assessments where light-hearted appearances conflate with light-minded substance. As Christie points out, though sometimes contrived, "Lever's technique as a writer seems to have been very much better-adapted to handling humorous situations than any other kind,"³¹⁴ and the brilliance of the many comic interludes cause them to eclipse all other features. But, as recent critics have begun to explore, the entertainment-value of *Charles O'Malley's* characterization and structure has more than mere empty puerility. Proper assessment of the humorous aspects of the novel are incomplete, however, without a consideration of the cultural critiques, which call into question not the quality of the humor but its suitability for expressing Irish subjects and situations.

³¹² Shanahan, Jim. "The 'Losing Side Ever': Charles Lever, Walter Scott, and the Irish National Tale." *Romantic Ireland: From Tone to Gonne; Fresh Perspectives on Nineteenth-century Ireland*. Paddy Lyons, Willy Maley and John Miller (Eds.) Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2013. 298-309. (304-305). For Shanahan, Lever's significance can be seen in the ways he innovates on the romantic resolutions and linear plotting of Scott's model, and Lever's *Maurice Tiernay* (1852) "can be read as an anti-romantic novel in that it attacks a retrospective glamorization of historical events." (304)

³¹³ Imhof, Rüdiger. "The Nineteenth-Century Irish Novel and the Necessity of Putting It Back on the Map." *The Linen Hall Review*. 10:2. (Autumn 1993.) 6-7. (7)

³¹⁴ Christie. (43)

More damning to Lever's reputation as an author than even the accusation of artistic deficiency has been the cultural criticism that labeled his work as not only cheap but offensive. According to these critiques, Lever was a contributor to prejudices against the Irish people, and this early interpretation made his extraordinary popularity even more galling. The novelist Benedict Kiely, calling Lever "a man before whom I always walk in awe, as should any mortal who ever tried to write a novel or tell a story," has recently written that the "old falsity that Lever, from a gentleman's saddle, saw the native Irish only as comic figures has long since been dismissed as the nonsense that it was."³¹⁵ However, the interpretation that the humor in Lever's novels constituted a satire on the Irish people has by no means been dispelled. The criticism that Kiely dismisses was famously inaugurated in a review by William Carleton published anonymously in the 1843 edition of *The Nation*. In the article, Carleton interprets Lever's tone and popularity as audacious presumption, describing Lever as an author who "without any scruple, undertakes to represent in his pages the general features of our country, and to stand forth, upon his own authority, as the historian of Irish life and manners."³¹⁶ Early on, Carleton makes a distinction between "the powers of ridicule and mirth," placing Lever's depictions firmly in the former category, and demonstrating the power of ridicule himself by heavily seeding the essay with mock praise of Lever's "genius."³¹⁷ Though Carleton

³¹⁵ Kiely, Benedict. "Forward". Haddelsey, Stephen. *Charles Lever: The Lost Victorian*. Colin Smythe Limited. 2000. (12)

³¹⁶ "The 'Dublin University Magazine' and Mr. Lever". *The Nation*. Oct. 7, 1983. (826) Taken from *Irish Newspaper Archives*. All subsequent quotations from this page.

³¹⁷ "The first great ingredient in Mr. Lever's genius is, indeed, an excellent one for any man who devotes his whole life and soul, as he does, to the unscrupulous acquisition of popularity. The ingredient we mean is coolness; which is a useful quality to an author on the very brink of general damnation and an excellent substitute for all those higher principles of honest pride and conscious genius which prevent a public writer from stooping to the mean shifts and unbecoming practices which degrade literature, and make him scorn either to cater for his own reputation at the expense of modesty, or pander to his vanity at that of truth."

throws in jabs about the low literary merit of Lever's work, the real focus of the vitriol throughout is over what he sees as inauthentic representation. He calls Lever "a perfect master in the monstrous, grotesque, and unnatural," and writes, "Invention we must grant him; for instead of taking any portion of nature from the common stock, he invents it all for himself." Although critics have pointed to professional jealousy as playing a part in Carleton's animosity,³¹⁸ the importance of his review lay in its suppositions about the inherent obligations of Irish authors. That Carleton can interpret "invention" as a defect in a fictional work seems odd only without the recognition that for an author who undertakes to fictionalize Irish people, society, and situations, there is an inherent responsibility of accurate or at least appropriate representation. Without this responsibility, Carleton's accusations of presumption and neglect would be cursory, but misrepresentation has proved to be a serious accusation that has profoundly influenced Lever's legacy.

Relying on assumptions of superficiality similar to those in aesthetic criticisms, subsequent cultural critiques of Lever's fiction have emphasized a pertinent negative, a missing depiction or sympathy with Irish people and society, omitted for, at worst, monetary gain and, at best, simple indifference. In his introduction to *Representative Tales* (1891), Yeats softened Carleton's earlier pronouncements by lessening the charges from deliberate misrepresentation to careless limited-representation. However, Yeats maintains the ultimate conclusion that there is something illegitimate in the works of

³¹⁸ See Jeffares, A. Norman. "Reading Lever." Bareham, Tony. "Introduction: 'The Famous Irish Lever'". *Charles Lever: New Evaluations*. Tony Bareham (Ed.). Colin Smythe. 1991. 18-31. (25-26) & Buckley, Mary. "Attitudes to Nationality in Four Nineteenth-Century Novelists, III, Charles Lever." *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*. 80. 1974. 129-136. (131)

Charles Lever. He describes Lever as “the most popular in England of all Irish writers,” but an author

who has never won a place beside Carleton and Banim, or even Griffin, in the hearts of the Irish people. His books, so full of gaiety and animal laughter, are true merely to the life of the party of ascendancy, and to that of their dependents. It will be a long time before the world tires altogether of his gay, witty, reckless personages, though it is gradually learning that they are not the typical Irish men and women.”³¹⁹

For both Yeats and Carleton, the limited perspective along with popularity abroad are evidence of apocryphal aspect in Lever’s mode of depiction, and indifference and omission would come to be the most persistent accusations leveled against him. In *The History of the English Novel* (1936), Ernest Baker condemns *Charles O’Malley* as being “worse than second-rate in his cheerful indifference to Irish neglect squalor and his oblivion to much that was still more tragic.”³²⁰ Later, the novelist Thomas Flanagan would defend Lever against extreme criticism in the first half of the twentieth-century in his work on Anglo-Irish fiction but nonetheless maintains an ultimate pronouncement of negligence through indifference:

³¹⁹ Yeats, William Butler. “Charles Lever.” *Representative Tales*. W.B. Yeats (Ed). Humanities Press. 1979. 286-287. (287). See also “Charles James Lever”. *Irish Literature*. Justin McCarthy (Ed.) Debower Elliott Company. 1904. v. 5 of 10. 1948-1952 In Justin McCarthy’s ten volume *Irish Literature*, for which both Yeats and Lady Gregory served as editors, Lever’s biographical sketch labels him an author who “has done much to perpetuate current error as to Irish character - not that the life which he depicts is unreal, but far from universal or general”. (1951)

³²⁰ Baker, Ernest A. *The History of the English Novel: The Age of Dickens and Thackeray*. H.F.&G. Witherby Ltd. 1936. (53). Also see (49): “He (Lever) was not a man to look below the surface, even had he not been pledged to the task of entertaining readers obsessed with the notion that the Irishman was a comical animal.”

It is not true, though many nationalist critics have made the claim, that Lever was engaged in the task of deliberately travestying his countrymen. His novels, nonetheless, are travesties, because they are not written out of any deep concern with the subject – but this is true of all poor novels.³²¹

In more recent surveys of nineteenth-century Irish novelists, Lever still appears as an author who failed to fully embrace the responsibilities of an Irish author. Sloan characterizes Lever's early novels as merely "a series of adventures that provoked laughter, confirmed foreign prejudices about the quaintness of the Irish peasantry, and challenged little or nothing of the complacency of mid-Victorian England in its policies towards Ireland."³²² Derek Hand writes of Lever's early novels, that they are "usually read alongside [Samuel] Lover's as perpetuating a horrendous libel on the Irish character," with works like *Charles O'Malley* offering only "light entertainment within the conventions of the picaresque mode." But Hand also uses Lever's abuse at the hands of early reviewers like Carleton as evidence that "in Ireland, literature can never be read wholly in aesthetic terms, and that political relevance is more central to assessing worth."³²³

The public antagonism between Lever and Carleton followed by Yeats' pronouncements led to a perception in both public and critical discourse, one which Robert Meredith explores as a simplified binary where "Carleton is the voice of Catholic, rural, peasant Ireland and Lever is the voice of Protestant, urban, Ascendancy Ireland."³²⁴

³²¹ Flanagan, Thomas. *The Irish Novelists, 1800-1850*. Columbia University Press. 1959. (46)

³²² Sloan, Barry. *The Pioneers of Anglo-Irish Fiction 1800-1850*. Barnes and Noble Books. 1986. (192-193)

³²³ Derek Hand. *A History of the Irish Novel*. Cambridge University Press. 2011. (88)

³²⁴ Meredith, Robert L. "William Carleton and Charles Lever". *Carleton Newsletter*. 3:2. 1972. 11-14. (11). Meredith does not argue that the binary is totally false, but rather that an accusation against Lever's authenticity are exaggerated by viewing the authors as two extremes on a spectrum. He writes, "It

Lever was accused of being a major promoter of the stage-Irishman, a character designation used to imply not only negative representation but one adopted to elicit ridicule from foreign audiences. Ironically, Wayne E. Hall places Lever alongside Carleton as the two famous stage-Irish progenitors whose characters served as models for Sommerville and Ross.³²⁵ Hall's ability to conflate the two authors' modes of representation points to a latitude in the criteria for this classification, one that famously allowed for the violent reactions against Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*. Definitions of stage-Irish most often emphasize a set of stock character-types or attributes that reinforce negative stereotypes about the Irish. Elizabeth Cullingford stresses that these types "took both positive and negative forms: virginal colleens and violent Paddies; quick-witted servants and loud-mouthed soldiers; warm-hearted but impecunious noblemen and calculating fortune hunters."³²⁶ However, in throwing accusations of promoting stage-Irishry, I argue, in Lever's case, critics have often presumed authorial intent as established by Carleton and Yeats, without considering the context of the traits as utilized by the author. Ernest Baker accuses Lever of being a key figure in "establish[ing] the stage Irishman, half fool, half mountebank, a myth not utterly destroyed till a century later." He also accuses Carleton of owning "his share in the evolution of the stage Irishman, through his congenital love of capering and clowning."³²⁷ However, refuting Baker's death certificate of the stage Irishman, more recent

requires a little of the wisdom of Solomon to see that they were both right – both were depicting a "real" and a "true" Ireland – and that Lever's depiction of a particular class of Irishman in certain situations was no less true to the actual facts than was Carleton's depiction of another class in other situations." (14)

³²⁵ Hall, Wayne E. *Shadowy Heroes: Irish Literature of the 1890s*. Syracuse University Press. 1980. (72).

³²⁶ Cullingford, Elizabeth Butler. *Ireland's Other: Ethnicity and Gender in Irish Literature and Popular Culture*. University of Notre Dame. 2001. (14)

³²⁷ Baker, Ernest. *The History of the English Novel: The Age of Dickens and Thackeray*. H.F. & G Witherby Ltd. 1936. (17). (35)

scholars like John Hargaden have maintained that “the phenomenon known as ‘the stage Irishman’ is alive and well and finds consistent employment in modern Irish drama,” having turned to a mode of introspection by post-independence dramatists like Sean O’Casey and Brian Friel.³²⁸ By assuming that stage-Irish representation is a question of authorial intent, rather than a set of character criteria, Baker’s and Hargaden’s seemingly contradictory contentions suddenly reconcile. Stage-Irish attributes did not die with independence, but what did perish is the assumption that those attributes were being deployed in an uncritical and pandering way. And this is why Carleton’s original accusations against Lever have had such an enduring legacy. For, by denouncing Lever as an author whose only concern is monetary gain from foreign audiences, Carleton was able to pronounce libel on modes of representation he himself would later be accused of utilizing.

My purpose in stressing ambiguity in definitions of stage-Irish here is not meant to belittle the reality of this tradition nor depreciate the effects it has had on Irish politics, art, and culture. Nineteenth-century Irish authors who sought to create a unique national literature were struggling against a long tradition of denigration of the Irish population through popular art in both England and Ireland. Evidence that this tradition was alive and well at the end of the nineteenth-century can be found in the previous chapter’s discussion of *The Priest and the People*, a novel with the unmistakable aim of laying the blame for Ireland’s economic troubles squarely at the feet of a feckless and deceitful Irish peasantry. Beyond even the complicated psychological effects of such a heritage of public ridicule, intentionally abusive representation also played a profound role in

³²⁸ Hargaden, John. “The Stage Irishman in Modern Irish Drama.” *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*. 79:313. 1990. 45-54. (45) & (48)

influencing British political relations with Ireland. L.P. Curtis argues that “Celtic vices constitutes one of the more persistent themes in Victorian novels, poems, plays, autobiographies, periodicals, and cartoons” with the commonly acknowledged offenses used with a dizzying logic to both justify and explain the failure of English rule in Ireland.³²⁹ And F.S. Lyons points to the latter half of the nineteenth-century, during Lever’s writing career, as a time where “an indelible image of Irish savagery had been stamped on the minds of the English reading public.”³³⁰ Thus, Lever is writing in a time of heightened and justified sensitivity over representation. The similarities in accusations against Lever and Carleton, however, illustrate the strongly held and widely variant conceptions of what constitutes negative representation. While reconsidering the cultural and literary merit of Charles Lever’s early work, it is important to take into account the highly-politicized nature of cultural critique during his time - however justified- and the strong influence on the decline in Lever’s popularity, a downturn Andrew Blake has linked to the author’s autobiographical entry in *Dictionary of National Biography* at the close of the nineteenth-century, “in which he [Lever] is accused (not for the first time) of the patronizing and inaccurate portrayals of Irish life and character.”³³¹

Inconsistencies in the cultural assessment of Lever’s work reflect the same hasty consideration of the picaresque genre that caused aesthetic dismissals; while easy to articulate what *Charles O’Malley* is not, – it is not a linear plotted allegory of Ireland with depictions of peasant life and direct didactic interaction with Ireland’s problems – it

³²⁹ Curtis, L.P. JR. *Anglo-Saxons and Celts: A Study of Anti-Irish Prejudice in Victorian England*. Conference on British Studies. 1968. (33) & (49)

³³⁰ Lyons, F.S. *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland, 1890-1939*. Clarendon Press. 1979. (15)

³³¹ Blake, Andrew. “Writing from the Outside In: Charles Lever.” *Writing Irishness in the Nineteenth-Century Culture*. Neil McCaw (Ed.) Ashgate Publishing Co. 2003. 116-128. (116)

is more difficult to come to an adequate estimation of what it actually is. Even those instrumental in designating his novels as disingenuous still recognize them as significant works. Norman Jeffares points out that although Yeats used an 1889 article in *The Leisure Hour* to chastise Lever as an author unfaithful to the Irish people, he nonetheless in the same year included the “best” novels of Lever “in a list of books Young Ireland Libraries should include,” and four years later he ranked *Charles O’Malley* “11th out of 13 in the *Novels and Romances* section of his list of 30 books necessary to the understanding Ireland.”³³² As in aesthetic criticism, mitigations of complete denouncement often come when tempered with consideration of Lever’s unique mode of presentation. Although Hugh Walker refers to Lever and Lover as “caricaturists rather than artists,” he does make the distinction that “whereas the caricature of Irish nature in Lever is relieved and varied by the rapid rush of events, in Lover it is the staple, and the reader becomes unpleasantly conscious of its essential falsity and hollowness.”³³³ Because of the diverse parade of characters and lack of linear plot that focuses on a small cast of symbolic characters, it is more difficult to interpret characters in *Charles O’Malley* as unambiguously representative.

The masquerading, festive, elaborate world of the picaresque in which Lever presents his material invites a different type of interpretation than that best employed to explore the national romances, where character idiosyncrasies are carefully planned in symbolic representations of social and political commentary. As in its commentary on love, war, and gender, the novel’s pacing and fluctuation make straightforward

³³² Jeffares, A. Norman. “Reading Lever.” Bareham, Tony. “Introduction: ‘The Famous Irish Lever’”. *Charles Lever: New Evaluations*. Tony Bareham (Ed.). Colin Smythe. 1991. 18-31. (26)

³³³ Walker, Hugh. *The Literature of the Victorian Era*. Cambridge University Press. 1921. (636)

interpretation of characters always suspect. This ambiguity even plays out in Mickey Free, “Charley’s bat man, male nurse, and philosophizing sidekick,”³³⁴ as Moynahan puts it, a character who would most strongly suggest a stage-Irish reading. Free is even introduced to the reader in a manner that suggests validity to David Kraus’ estimation of Lever’s characters as “Irish clowns with predictable if highly amusing routines and stage-Irish rhetoric.”³³⁵ He first appears as:

The best hurler in the barony, no mean performer on the violin, could dance the national bolero of “Tatter Jack Walsh” in a way that charmed more than one soft heart beneath a red woolsey bodice, and had, withal, the peculiar free-and-easy devil-may-care kind of off-hand Irish way that never deserted him in the midst of his wiliest and most subtle moments, giving to a very deep and cunning fellow all the apparent frankness and openness of a country lad.³³⁶

However, although Lever begins with a description that suggests a template representation, the utilization of the character throughout the novel presents a more nuanced reading than mere satire on a marginalized Other. Far from the distance and parody implied by a term like stage-Irish, Christie finds Free memorable as a vehicle expressing the author’s own “attitude to Ireland, especially his attitude towards superstition and bigotry,”³³⁷ and Haddelsey insists that part of the authenticity power in Lever’s writing comes from his avoidance of ill-informed representation:

Where Lever does deal in any detail with a peasant character, such as Mickey Free in *Charles O’Malley*, the portrait is not intended to epitomize the whole of

³³⁴ Moynahan. (94)

³³⁵ Krause, David. *The Profane Book of Irish Comedy*. Cornell University Press. 1982. (175)

³³⁶ *O’Malley* V1. (58)

³³⁷ Christie. (49)

the peasant class but rather a body of shrewd, cunning, and humorous individuals within that class. The realism of his writing is due to his primarily concerning himself, throughout his career, with the sections of society – both Irish and international – with which he was most intimately familiar.³³⁸

This view is supported by the wide variety of characters present throughout the novel and harmonizes with McHugh's conclusions that, "if the British public took for granted that Ireland was full of Harry Lorrequers and Mickey Frees, it was more their fault than Lever's. And enough has been said of his Irish novels to show that they must have removed a great deal more misapprehensions than he fostered."³³⁹ There certainly can be found in *Charles O'Malley* jokes at the expense of Mickey's regionalism, as when he misinterprets a message that a regiment of Cossacks is approaching to mean that they are soldiers from Claire Island.³⁴⁰ There is even a chapter called "Mike's Mistake" in which he accidentally sends a report on missing and wounded back to his family in Ireland and his personal correspondence to the adjunct-general.³⁴¹ And yet, even during the scene when Free's blunder is revealed, he cannot be interpreted as a simple bungler, for when Charles looks up from the letter informing him of the mishap, he sees Mickey giving directions and singing, as his fellow soldiers "were busily cleaning his horses and accoutrements for him," a sight which prompts a fellow officer to comment, "Faith, O'Malley, that fellow knows the world."³⁴² The very incident which might suggest to readers that Mickey is a simpleton is interrupted with a scene where he is an adept

³³⁸ Haddelsey. (41)

³³⁹ McHugh. (260)

³⁴⁰ See *O'Malley* V2. (73)

³⁴¹ See *O'Malley* V2. (148-152)

³⁴² *O'Malley* V2. (151)

manipulator of the situations around him. As a character consistently used as a vehicle to mock presumptions and prejudices, there is something ironic in labeling Mickey Free a stage-Irishman. The ambiguity through juxtaposition in the above scene is typical of what the reader experiences throughout the novel. And interpretations that an interesting character like Mickey Free can be reduced to a static and unambiguous portrayal of all Irish people seems one that the variety and contrast of Lever's picaresque style rejects.

Though it can be said that Lever employs characteristics associated with stage-Irish representation, the utilization of characters like Mickey Free throughout the novel suggest a parody of such representation rather than an adherence to it. Evidence that Lever's approach interrupts rather than validates expectations can also be found in his other novels. In his much more somber, straight-forward novel *The Fortunes of Glencore* (1857), the character Billy Traynor or "Billy the Bags," who plays a similar role as Free as companion to the protagonist, appears in the story with a bluster and bravado that seems to set him up as a standard Irish type, offering entertainment to the audience through his naïve affectation of learning and skill. After claiming to be a doctor, he is taken to the ailing lord Glencore, and when asked for his qualifications he responds:

'Tis the same with physic and poetry—you take to it, or you don't take to it!

There's chaps, ay, and far from stupid ones either, that couldn't compose you ten hexameters if ye'd put them on a hot griddle for it; and there's others that would talk rhyme rather than rayson! And so with the *ars medicatrix*—everybody hasn't an eye for a hectic, or an ear for a cough—*non contigit cuique adire Corintheum*.

'Tisn't every one can toss pancakes, as Horace says.³⁴³

³⁴³ Lever, Charles. *The Fortunes of Glencore*. Little, Brown, and Company. The Novels of Charles Lever Vol. 16. 1894. (15)

The smattering of antique phrases and comical reasoning here evoke the same type of stage-Irish tropes played on in Brian Friel in *Translations*. However, not only does Billy, over the course of the novel, prove to be more than a simple braggart and mock-intellectual (the above scene ends with him proving to be a competent physician), he is also a character who has a very sincere love for knowledge and study, being happiest when quartered in a library, where “the calm repose, the perfect stillness of the spot, the boundless stores that lay about him; the growing sense of power, as day by day his intellect expanded; new vistas opened themselves before him, and new and unproved sources of pleasure sprang up in his nature.”³⁴⁴ Also, like Mickey Free, Billy Traynor can often be read as a projection of the author’s own attitudes towards pomposity and presumption. In *The Fortunes of Glencore*, Traynor is utilized to voice frustration at shallow, altruistic rhetoric over Ireland’s problems that hide the true state of affairs. When the well-meaning officer Harcourt insists that the English do not view the Irish as inferior, Traynor responds:

you 'll go home to a good dinner and a bottle of wine, dry clothes and a bright fire; and no matter how hard my argument pushed you, you'll remember that *I'm* in rags, in a dirty cabin, with potatoes to ate and water to drink, and you 'll say, at all events, 'I 'm better off than he is;' and there's your superiority, neither more or less,—there it is!³⁴⁵

Although the formula found in both *Charles O'Malley* and *The Fortunes of Glencore*, that of aristocratic protagonist and peasant attendant, supports James Murphy typical

³⁴⁴ *The Fortunes of Glencore*. (227)

³⁴⁵ See the conversation in *The Fortunes of Glencore*. (113-116). Also see another conversation between Traynor and Harcourt on (44-45) on Saxon vulgarism.

summary of Lever as “a Tory writer who lamented the use of the law to erode what he saw as a properly ‘feudal’ Ascendancy way of life in which landlords and tenants supposedly lived in mutually interdependent harmony,”³⁴⁶ both Free and Traynor also give voice the author’s own frustration over simplified appraisals of the Irish situation or the Irish people. Although Lever was a conservative author, his novels earned him enemies from both ends of the political spectrum, from nationalists for not being sympathetic enough and from Tories for being too sympathetic towards the Irish people.³⁴⁷ He was an author frustrated by the extremes of the Irish political divide,³⁴⁸ and also one who grew increasingly bitter through his life over English perceptions of the Irish,³⁴⁹ an irony given his infamy of creating those perceptions. Andrew Blake maintains that the enigmatic and often self-contradictory political and national identity expressed in both his novels and political writings has caused the author to be “forgotten partly because he is inconvenient,” concluding that “even at the end of his life Charles James Lever did not quite know who he was, or where he should be going.”³⁵⁰ And although uncertainty over identity and politics might seem a sign of timidity or callowness, it did allow for a liberality in expression that resulted in Lever’s many enemies across the political spectrum. Evidence that *Charles O’Malley* is an attempt on the author’s part, however critics may argue over the efficacy or sincerity of that attempt,

³⁴⁶ Murphy. (119). Also see Shanahan, Jim. “Reviving Pleasant Memories: Charles Lever and the Crisis of Union.” (209): “At the heart of his [Lever’s] Toryism is the notion that the old relationships might be revived, and that the natural aristocratic leaders of the country might reassert themselves.”

³⁴⁷ McHugh. (250). Shanahan also discusses this in “Reviving Pleasant Memories: Charles Lever and the Crisis of Union” (205), noting that Lever’s “own particular brand of good-natured liberal Toryism was not particularly palatable to either potential political allies or his opponents.”

³⁴⁸ See Meredith. (13)

³⁴⁹ See Blake (122) and Buckley (133)

³⁵⁰ Blake. (127)

of the reconciliatory rather than partisan ambition of the work can be found stated directly in the postscript to the first volume where Lever, under the name of Harry Lorrequer, writes:

And, however whigs, tories, and radicals talk,
Like leaves of the shamrock, they all spring from one stalk;
They've their root in the soil, and they wish not to sever,
But adorn the hills of this country forever.³⁵¹

However, the question remains over the appropriateness of this mode of representing the Irish situation in such a celebratory manner and averring the political questions of the time.

The Fortunes of Glencore more overtly expresses Lever's political frustration in a way *Charles O'Malley* avoids. In the former, Lever conspicuously addresses many of the political realities of Ireland he is chided for ignoring in his early works, both in the political discourses between characters and in the overarching allegory connected with the deterioration of the house of Glencore. Although this may seem to fit with an accusation of neglect, Buckley also points out that considering Lever's work as a doctor during the cholera epidemic of 1832, "he was one of a few articulate men to whom Irish poverty, disease and dirt were a reality, not just a political weapon or literary device."³⁵² His work as a physician in Kilkee, Carrigaholt, Portrush, Portstewart, and Derry³⁵³ during the outbreak made him witness to the extreme suffering of the Irish people, which found

³⁵¹ *O'Malley* V1. (338)

³⁵² Buckley, Mary. "Attitudes to Nationality in Four Nineteenth-Century Novelists, III, Charles Lever." *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*. 80. 1974. 129-136. (129)

³⁵³ McHugh. (248)

poignant expression, as Meredith argues, in his latter novel *St. Patrick's Eve* (1845).³⁵⁴

But how best to interpret *Charles O'Malley*, a novel that seems to intentionally avert attention away from Irish suffering towards a celebration of Irish exuberance? While important to acknowledge the complacencies in the narrative framework, it is also worth acknowledging what the ambiguity in Lever's picaresque scheme allows for: a less rigid and perhaps more artful interaction with national identity than was exercised in other popular novels. This can best be explored best through a comparison with another best-selling military epic of the time with a similar infamy over imperial function and patronizing representation, Charles Kingsley's *Westward Ho!* (1855).

Westward Ho! offers the swashbuckling tale of Amyas Leigh, who is early on identified as an unambiguous personification of England and its colonial vigor.

And as he [Amyas] stands there with beating heart and kindling eye, the cool breeze whistling through his long fair curls, he is a symbol, though he knows it not, of brave young England longing to wing its way out of its island prison, to discover and to traffic, to colonize and to civilize, until no wind can sweep the earth which does not bear the echoes of an English voice.³⁵⁵

The protagonist is a paragon of positive national virtues but also a "pugnax, bellicosus, gladiator, a fire-eater and swash-buckler, beyond all Christian measure"³⁵⁶ whose youthful virility cannot be contained safely within sedentary society. And so, he ventures forth, first to Ireland to suppress the Desmond Rebellion, where he helps deliver the

³⁵⁴ Meredith. (13)

³⁵⁵ Kingsley, Charles. *Westward Ho! Or the Voyages and Adventures of Sir Amyas Leigh, Knight of Burrough, in the County of Devon – In the Reign of Her Most Glorious Majesty Queen Elizabeth*. Charles Scribner's Sons. 1920. Beautiful Fleet Books, Inc. [n.d.] (8) Hereafter referred to as *Westward Ho!*

³⁵⁶ *Westward Ho!* (18)

“wild Irish” from their Spanish “oppressors,”³⁵⁷ and then to South America. Like Virgil’s Aeneas, Amyas is constantly conflicted between personal goals and national mission. Luckily however, these two objectives never remain irreconcilable, as both Amyas and his nation share the same enemy: Catholic Spain. One of the most glaring ironies of the novel comes as the English characters constantly lament and endeavor to disprove defamation spread by the Spanish characters, and yet the novel as a whole is an exorbitant lambaste of the Spanish people and Catholicism. Indeed, it would be difficult to exaggerate the invectives leveled against the Spanish throughout the novel or the patronizing contempt with which the author treats both the Irish and the South Americans, all meant to reinforce the moral of a novel that, in Brantlinger’s estimation, is an “expression of Kingsley’s belief in the absolute superiority of the Teutonic or, more specifically, the Anglo-Saxon race.”³⁵⁸ When Amyas’ betrothed and his brother are burned alive by the Spanish Inquisition, he returns to England to help repulse the Spanish Armada. Wroth over personal wrongs done to him, he follows a Spanish galleon into a storm and is blinded by lightning. Without his sight, he learns humility and to put the needs of the nation before his personal ambition.

My purpose in bringing this novel into a discussion of *Charles O’Malley* is to emphasize the hallmarks of national representation that Lever conspicuously avoids not only in the narrative but through the whole framework of his novel. Both *Charles*

³⁵⁷ *Westward Ho!* (52). English intervention in Ireland is not only shown as a strategic necessity to the English but a mercy on the Irish who must be saved from Spanish enslavement. Also see (120), where Sir Walter Raleigh laments: “Oh, witless Islanders!” said he, apostrophizing the Irish, “would to Heaven that you were here to listen to me! What other fate awaits you, if this viper, which you are so ready to take into your bosom, should be warmed to life, but to groan like the Indians, slaves to the Spaniard.”

³⁵⁸ Brantlinger, Patrick. *Victorian Literature and Postcolonial Studies*. Edinburgh University Press. 2009. (35)

O'Malley and *Westward Ho!* were extraordinarily popular works of military fiction that have subsequently been discussed as depictions of national identity. However, in *Westward Ho!*, though it can be argued that subtleties exist in how the racial and national identity are developed through the characters, the ultimate pronouncement on these issues is unambiguously explicit. The novel operates under a static and unquestioned understanding of the necessity of England's innate superiority and right to rule over other peoples and focuses only on the questions of how best to do it. The novel is important not only as an example of representation, but also the influence it exerted. Curtis, who identifies Kingsley as one of the main proponents of the Anglo-Saxonist ideology, points to his novels along with those of Scott and Lytton, as ones that "pervaded the discussion of the English governing classes about their relations with the Irish, the Scots, and the Welsh."³⁵⁹

Westward Ho! is a useful novel to contrast with *Charles O'Malley* because it accentuates a drastically different (but very popular and influential) way of treating racial distinctions and national identity through military novels. Situating the action of a novel around military engagements between nations, as both Lever and Kingsley did, invites interpretations over the geo-political commentary in the work. Despite being interpreted from its light-hearted tone as one of the "lighter, unpolitical class of the Irish novel around the middle of the century"³⁶⁰ by Rüdiger Imhof, *Charles O'Malley* has been criticized for its political dimensions. Derek Hand discusses the picaresque genre's use in Ireland as manifesting an imperial function of depoliticizing places as well as projecting a

³⁵⁹ Curtis, L.P. JR. *Anglo-Saxons and Celts: A Study of Anti-Irish Prejudice in Victorian England*. Conference on British Studies. 1968. (21)

³⁶⁰ Imhof, Rüdiger. "The Nineteenth-Century Irish Novel and the Necessity of Putting It Back on the Map." *The Linen Hall Review*. 10.2. (Autumn 1993.) 6-7. (6)

“lack of identity and any real sense of home” through “endless rounds of travel and restless movement.”³⁶¹ The depoliticizing of landscape that Hand refers to is not only a feature of the restlessness of characters and plot, but also a seemingly conscious design by Lever to avoid questions of national justification. Unlike *Westward Ho!*, little attention is paid in *Charles O'Malley* to the rationalization or necessity of military action.

War, in Lever's novel, is more significant as a chaotic arena in which the protagonist can prove himself, a place of contest between individuals rather than a struggle for dominance between governments or races. His precise descriptions of military engagements are often sequestered to their own chapters, in which the narrator adopts a clinical tone, focusing primarily on logistics. So accurate were these descriptions that Penninsular veterans had difficulty believing that the author was not a veteran himself and had never, at that point, set foot in Spain or Portugal.³⁶² Though these chapters are liberal with praise for the bravery of specified regiments, particularly Irish and Scottish ones, they take on the tone and emphasis of a sports commentator who sees no greater meaning in events beyond skillful execution. What these broader-scoped descriptions share with the more personal emphasis of most chapters is a neglect of considerations beyond the moment. This preference by the author is reflected in his protagonists, who when talking with a French soldier he has befriended, is “glad to wander, whenever I could, from the contested point of our national superiority to other topics.”³⁶³ But Lever's attempt at excluding candid treatment of politics from his narrative, of course, brings about a whole different set of political implications.

³⁶¹ Derek Hand.(88)

³⁶² Ward, S.G.P. “Major Monsoon.” *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*. 59:238. 1981. 65-70. (65)

³⁶³ *O'Malley* V1. (271)

While the picaresque mode and emphasis on individual rather than national motives can be interpreted as an attempt to depoliticize the narrative, there must be admitted something inextricably political in attempts of this period to depoliticize the Irish people and landscape. Lever's approach can be linked to the ambitions of the second Irish revival (1830-1848) proposed by John Hutchinson, where Irish Protestant ethnic revivalists, reacting to the political efficacy of Daniel O'Connell's movement, sought to emphasize aspects of Ireland's past (particularly its medieval past) that could be cherished by both Irish Catholic and Protestant communities. This movement, however, in Hutchinson's estimation, was intended to be appreciated by a Protestant elite, who could find in it ties to a distinctive Irish heritage that legitimized their cultural distinction from England.³⁶⁴ However, in Lever's novel the diminishing distinctions between Irish and English brought about by the comradeship amongst the soldiers is only part of a larger egalitarian emphasis, one that becomes more noticeable when contrasted with Kingsley's treatment of national military service. When O'Malley thinks of the ravages of war in Portugal and "the vindictive cruelty of the French soldiery [...]: the ruined château, the burned villages, the desecrated altars, the murdered peasantry" he interprets it as caused by the "revengeful spirit of a beaten and baffled enemy"³⁶⁵ rather than a natural result of either French racial identity or their national cause. Indeed, only a few pages later, after O'Malley accidentally stumbles amongst a group of French soldiers, he winds up sitting at their campfire listening to their stories, thinking warmly of their Emperor, who had "the spirit of individual enterprise" in his country and "by the prestige of his own name,

³⁶⁴ Hutchinson, John. *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism, The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State*. Allen & Unwin. 1987. See (75-76), (88), and (90). Hutcheson also links this movement to *The Dublin University Magazine* in which Lever published and was chief editor from 1842-1845.

³⁶⁵ *O'Malley* V2. (138)

the proud memory of his battles, and the glory of those mighty tournaments at which all Europe were the spectators, he had converted a nation into an army.”³⁶⁶ Even the Spanish guerrillas, who interrupt this scene, their hatred of the French introducing a note of partisan hostility, are after the event immediately admired by O’Malley: “Yes, brigands though they be,” thought I, “there is something fine, something heroic in the spirit of their unrelenting vengeance.”³⁶⁷ While the martial ethos through which O’Malley finds respect in all soldiers he encounters can be scrutinized, it nonetheless adds a wider breath to the commentary on equitable relationships that was established amongst the British soldiers, where a mutual respect for valor replaces any national or racial foundation for personal intimacy or respect.

However, this emphasis on conviviality and understanding comes at a price when considered in the Irish context. Moynahan interprets the lack of political directness of the novel as evidencing a significant avoidance of the key issues inextricable from Irish struggle towards developing a national identity:

Charles is a Roman Catholic, but that affiliation is given no force whatsoever in the plotting. [...] What really counts in this book is that the O’Malleys are not alienated from the British connection. Charley may bridle at what he takes to be English arrogance and putting on airs, yet he is perfectly loyal.³⁶⁸

The absence of direct political discussions in the novel, thus, can be read as a subtle directive to complacency. Like criticisms discussed earlier in this chapter, this points to a pertinent negative within the work. It is true that *Charles O’Malley* is not a novel that

³⁶⁶ *O’Malley* V2. (143)

³⁶⁷ *O’Malley* V2. (147)

³⁶⁸ Moynahan. (94)

overtly promotes Irish assertion of political autonomy through armed rebellion against England. And yet, Lever's depreciation of the importance of national imperative alongside his portrayal of both Irish commanders and common soldiers (Blake points out, Lever's depiction of Irish "military and gentry masculinity are not complicit with the more notorious of these discourses, Matthew Arnold's feminization of the Celts,")³⁶⁹ goes a long way in assuaging interpretation of static acquiescence to the Irish people as a fundamental message of the novel. What causes particular concerns for critics searching for political significance in the plot is the resolution. McHugh says of Lever that his "endings were always a weak point,"³⁷⁰ and the lack of symbolically powerful or auspicious conclusion to events in *Charles O'Malley* has drawn criticism. Sloan writes -

in *Charles O'Malley*, there are passing allusions to the increasing financial crisis in the hero's family leading finally to ruin in an unsuccessful lawsuit, and when O'Malley himself returns to Ireland from the Peninsular War he seeks to improve the estate of his impoverished tenants. His activities are rattled off easily enough, but there are no specific details of the problems of the poor or how these were resolved.³⁷¹

And Moynahan goes even further to anticipate a tragic note, if perhaps an unintended one, that "Charles has almost no chance of rescuing the O'Malley agricultural estate from its intractable problems, which are largely structural, reflecting the unviability of the Irish agrarian system at that period."³⁷² While reasonable to point out the lack of a poignant conclusion to the events in *Charles O'Malley* – one pregnant with geo-political

³⁶⁹ Blake. (120)

³⁷⁰ McHugh. (259)

³⁷¹ Sloan. (194)

³⁷² Moynahan. (93)

implications, characteristic of not only *Westward Ho!* but also the national romances of the previous chapters – where marriages provide a final symbolic crescendo to the plot, promising future prosperity, an overemphasis on this feature in Lever’s picaresque novel can impose critical criteria that the genre and emphasis of the novel conspicuously attempt to dissuade. At the end of *Westward Ho!*, Amyas is blinded not merely for being recklessness in battle, but as a divine judgement on him for letting his personal desire to kill Spaniards outweigh the English need to destroy Spain.³⁷³ This theme of introspection over personal verses national interest permeates the entire novel and culminates when Amyas learns a more humble and pious approach to the national obligation. In contrast, the necessity of British triumph in *Charles O’Malley* assumes little significance beyond it being the side on which Charles O’Malley fights. The national romances and epics propose to their readers a clear way to interpret the present state or anticipate the future of the nation. The end of *Westward Ho!* could not be more explicit, as the narrator affirms the natural and even divine English mission to go forth and “colonize another and a vaster England.”³⁷⁴ The picaresque, on the other hand, avoids these larger certainties and offers readers a less settled vision of the world, one in which the assurance of an assertive resolution would impose an artificiality on the narrative arc. The confidence projected through a symbolically affirmative conclusion would run counter to the action developed

³⁷³ See *Westward Ho!* (406) where, after being blinded admits “I have been a fiend when I thought myself the grandest of men, yea, a very avenging angel out of heaven. But God has shown me my sin, and we have made up our quarrel forever.” But this is by no means a criticism against his actions against the Spanish, as is revealed in his funeral oration of a friend a few pages later where he identifies him as “acquitted himself worthily in his place and calling as a righteous scourge of the Spaniard, and a faithful soldier of the Lord Jesus Christ, is now exalted to his reward.” (410)

³⁷⁴ *Westward Ho!* (413)

in a picaresque, where, as Wicks proposes, the picaresque protagonist encounters a chaotic world truer than that in a romance.³⁷⁵

Acknowledging the motifs of picaresque and the carnival that Lever presents in *Charles O'Malley* does not preclude discussions of what the novel lacks in resolution and linearity, but this discussion should also include an affirmation of what the novel does achieve. Alistair Fowler, in a discussion on “antigenres,” considers the picaresque

particularly antithetic to pastoral romance, whose sensitive hero is fond of contemplating love in retired solitude, and traverses much emotional experience before the final reconciliation. By contrast, the picaresque knows no reconciliation of any depth. The *pícaro* is a tough outsider, who learns only the worldly wisdom needed for social adjustment and satiric observation.³⁷⁶

Two of the more endearing aspects of Lever's novel is his lack of certitude and emphasis on the pregnant moment. The action of the novel is consistently halted by side stories with only loose thematic links. The frameworks of *Westward Ho!*, *Marcella Grace*, *Torlogh O'Brien*, and *Harold: the Last of the Saxon King* all adopt a narrative framework that prompts the reader to seek pronouncements on social and national issues through consistencies of characters and themes. The writers of such narratives assume an obligation to interact with (and possibly attempt to offer solutions for) problems of these kinds, and there is an altruism as well as a danger of hubris adopted in this endeavor, a hubris most evident in the racial and magisterial pronouncements of Kingsley. Just so, the national romance can be justly criticized for over-simplified or underdeveloped

³⁷⁵ Wicks. (241)

³⁷⁶ Fowler, Alistair. *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes*. Harvard University Press. 1982. (175)

assessments of larger geo-political events or circumstances represented through its characters. This is less true of the picaresque, which lacks the overarching continuity of events or fixity of characters that would encourage such commentary. *Charles O'Malley* is a novel of juxtaposition and masquerade. In it, condemnation intermingles with praise, surety reveals itself to be farce, mature ruminations accompany youthful exhilaration, and the prankster in one scene becomes the dupe in the next. In appreciating the whirlwind of representation can be found the novel's cultural significance. It reflects a certain apprehension over national identity that can ring truer than more confident articulations of its time, and it attempts to alleviate the frustration of such a progression through reveling in that confusion.

The harsh personal and professional criticisms Lever received had a great effect on his life and works. His decision to leave Ireland in 1845 was influenced in no small part by his antagonism with William Carleton,³⁷⁷ and he spent the remainder of his writing life abroad on the Continent, prefiguring, as Blake proposes, "voluntary-diasporic Irishness" of Joyce and Beckett.³⁷⁸ Albert Solomon, in *James Joyce Quarterly*, has even gone so far as to argue that *Charles O'Malley* influenced the character types and battle imagery found in the *Ulysses* and "The Dead."³⁷⁹ But although Lever left Ireland, in the over twenty novels he produced abroad, he never stopped writing about Ireland, even after it became an unpopular subject matter in the mid-century. Haddelsey recognizes the irony in the fact that Sheridan Le Fanu, the author who bowed to this public pressure and stopped writing about Ireland, rather than Charles Lever, has enjoyed renewed interest in

³⁷⁷ Meredith. (14)

³⁷⁸ See Blake. (116) and (127)

³⁷⁹ Solomon, Albert J. "Charles Lever: A Source for Joyce." *James Joyce Quarterly*. 29:4. 1992. 791-798. (791)

the twentieth-century.³⁸⁰ Exile brought out in Lever, as George More puts it, “a more sober and more socially alert dimension to his writing” with “a greater willingness than hitherto to regard problemicly the standing of the Big House, the transience of social position and the vicissitudes of public life.”³⁸¹ However, Shanahan has pointed to the “venom of the personal and professional criticism” that caused Lever to leave Ireland as also pushing the author into a more nostalgic regard for Ireland’s past as a place of greater harmony amongst the people.³⁸² However it might attempt to avoid direct interaction with socio-political issues, *Charles O’Malley* does reflect a muted reality of nineteenth-century Irish life, the disproportionate role Ireland played in the nineteenth-century British military.³⁸³ Reading the novel, one gets the impression that the British Army is primarily an Irish institution.

Lever’s choice to move the setting away from Ireland reflects both a sentimental longing for a venue for neutral territory in which to express an Irish identity as well as a desire, especially apparent in his early works, to create an Irish novel for expressing epideictic rather than deliberative rhetoric. As the narrator comments at one point,

It’s only in Ireland, after all, people have fun. Old and young, merry and morose,

the gay and cross-grained, are crammed into a lively country-dance; and ill-

³⁸⁰ Haddelsey. (19)

³⁸¹ O’Brien, George. *The Irish Novel: 1800-1910*. Cork University Press. 2015. (101)

³⁸² Shanahan. “Reviving Peasant Memories”. (205)

³⁸³ See Spiers, E.M. “Army Organization and Society in the Nineteenth Century.” *A Military History of Ireland*. Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffery (Eds.) Cambridge University Press. 1996. 335-357. (335-336). According to E.M. Spiers, Ireland contributed over 90,000 soldiers in the fifteen years before Waterloo, and by 1830 Irish outnumbered English in the British Army, “also contributing far more soldiers than her population warranted to the European armies of the East India Company.” And Irish Catholic soldiers comprised over 40% of the British army by the middle of the century [See “An Irish Military Tradition?”. Bartlett, Thomas & Jeffery Keith. *A Military History of Ireland*. Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffery (Eds.) Cambridge University Press. 1996. 1-25. (12)]

matched, ill-suited, go jigging away together to the blast of a bad band, till their heads, half turned by the noise, the heat, the novelty, and the hubbub, they all get as tipsy as if they were really deep in liquor.³⁸⁴

The novel is, indeed, an attempt to depoliticize the cultural landscape, but this need not be interpreted as an entirely partisan or ignorant attempt. Through its cavalcade of songs, anecdotes, and characters, its jaunty plot and emphasis on fests, feasts, and mummery, *Charles O'Malley* levels much specific praise on Ireland and the Irish while dispersing criticism amongst the multitude of characters. Charles is a brash, naïve young man in a cosmopolitan society of brash, naïve young men. That this approach lacks the concrete projections on Ireland's political future like the national romance does not, as Flannagan concluded, make the novel a travesty through lack of sympathy. The novel shares the goal of the national romance of fostering sympathy, but it does so by contracting this aim to a personal, immediate level through a fixation on incident and variety rather than proposing a grand historical narrative or projecting an idealistic future.

Viewed as an antithesis to the national romance, *Charles O'Malley* stands out as a subversion of standard approaches to history, society, and identity. That it was immediately recognized as a new style of novel stands testament to its flouting of novelistic conventions, and that Yeats would criticize Lever but include *Charles O'Malley* necessary to understand Ireland stands sums up the traditional approach to the novel – a critical reluctance to engage with its innovations as anything more than kitsch tempered with an impulse to acknowledging the novel as more than trivial. Whatever may be said of Lever's avoidance of political polemics, he did construct a novel that

³⁸⁴ O'Malley V2. (6)

poses Irish identity as something that functions beyond its symbolic opposition to other cultures and nations. National identity in the novel expresses itself most clearly through communal activities: meals, stories, songs, banter, travel, and fighting. Woven into the picaresque structure, which preferences the carnival, the spectacle, and the episode over the grand narrative, the novel avoids the presumptions of the national romance by not attempting to encapsulate the whole of national identity but rather celebrating a part. As Meredith puts it when comparing Lever with Carleton,

It requires a little of the wisdom of Solomon to see that they were both right – both were depicting a “real” and a “true” Ireland – and that Lever’s depiction of a particular class of Irishman in certain situations was no less true to the actual facts than was Carleton’s depiction of another class in other situations.³⁸⁵

The genius recognized by even hostile critics center on those aspects that are most picaresque and most carnivalesque: the “mirth-moving power”³⁸⁶ and, as Christie puts it, the “paradoxical (but very Irish) blend of gaiety and cruelty.”³⁸⁷ More than just depicting a separate class of Irish people, Lever drastically resituates the question of Irishness, using the fragmentation of the picaresque to undermine the foundational presumptions of the world-view proposed in the national romance.

³⁸⁵ Meredith, Robert L. “William Carleton and Charles Lever”. *Carleton Newsletter*. 3:2. 1972. 11-14.

³⁸⁶ See footnote 281

³⁸⁷ Christie. (54)

CHAPTER 4: RECKLESS SATIRE IN THACKERAY'S *THE LUCK OF BARRY LYNDON*

The final chapter of this dissertation will consider William Makepeace Thackeray's *The Luck of Barry Lyndon* (1844) as a unique and significant contribution to the development of identity projection in the Irish literary tradition, specifically one that incorporates picaresque character development techniques to frustrate traditional modes of understanding representation.

Contrasting Thackeray's novel with other works from the picaresque and rogue biography, as well as those novels he most closely sought to imitate, I will show that *Barry Lyndon*, although clearly developing on the tropes and patterns of other works, achieves a singular effect through its artful play with previously unexploited narrative dynamics and pugnacious layers of satire. It is a hybrid novel, which makes it of particular interest to a discussion of genre development.

What makes Thackeray's approach of even further interest to a discussion of genre within the Irish tradition is the audacious manner with which he interweaves emulation and lampoon. The cynical mixture of didactics and depravity in this novel has caused confusion over not only the social and ethical commentary of the work but also the direction of its satire. Thackeray utilizes familiar Irish character stock-types from the British literary tradition, stereotypes long used to denigrate Irish identity. And yet, the unrelenting parody and irony of the novel renders all superficial aspects two-faced. Ostensibly taking the reader down a familiar path, *Barry Lyndon* ultimately yields a highly disorienting exploration of the efficacy of literary modes of representation. At the conclusion of this chapter, I will argue that Thackeray's cynical manipulation of genre

and reckless mode of satire has had a significant influence on literary attempts to articulate modern Irish identity. Building up to this discussion, I will first explore Thackeray's unique strategies of manipulating representational tropes and genre conventions.

An English author born in India who largely abandoned Irish subject matter as a mature author in his most celebrated novels *Vanity Fair* (1847) and *Henry Esmond* (1852), Thackeray seems, at first glance, an unlikely candidate to include in a discussion on the development of Irish genres in the nineteenth-century. While visiting Ireland and completing his travelogue *Irish Sketchbook* (1843), he even tried to persuade his then friend Charles Lever to relocate to London where there would be greater commercial opportunities.³⁸⁸ Though clearly fascinated with Irish literary representation and subjects as a young writer, Thackeray's interest with Ireland has been assessed by Neil McCaw as "more transient, and certainly less life-changing, than [Anthony] Trollope's" and influenced by a "contradictory and at times deeply partisan" views on the Irish people.³⁸⁹ G.K. Chesterton earlier noted the author's self-contradicting attitude towards Ireland, writing that Thackeray, despite being an author that "loved liberty, as only a novelist can love it," none the less was not invested in his Irish subject matter enough to "see it in the cause for Irish liberty," making "Irish characters the object of much innocent and rather

³⁸⁸ Buckley, Mary. "Attitudes to Nationality in Four Nineteenth-Century Novelists, III, Charles Lever." *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*. 80. 1974. 129-136. (134). "Thackeray took it upon himself to advise his host to go to London where his opportunities would be so much wider than in Dublin. Lever refused on the grounds that he was Irish in body, soul, and spirit – 'my good name and fame, such as they are, are also Irish, and I think that my duties lie in Ireland, and I expect to make them both pleasant and profitable.'"

³⁸⁹ McCaw, Neil. "Some Mid-Victorian Irishness(es): Trollope, Thackeray, Eliot." *Writing Irishness in Nineteenth-Century British Culture*. Neil McCaw (Ed.) Ashgate Publishing Company. 2004. 129-157. (138)

lumbering satire.”³⁹⁰ However, although the strange contradictions in Thackeray’s literary approach have led to accusations of frivolity in his treatment Irish identity, I will argue that the free-wheeling form of satire deployed throughout *Barry Lyndon* intentionally blurs the distinction between lampooner and lampooned to such an extent that the work cannot be classified as a simple perpetuation of stereotypes. By reincorporating a picaresque sense of play and ambiguity into the genre of British rogue fiction – a popular sub-genre of the picaresque that often unambiguously condemned criminality and mocked foreign identities – Thackeray demonstrates an often underestimated level of critical engagement with his subject matter, producing a novel where the varied aims of mockery ultimately serve to call into question the very forms of caricaturish representation that Thackeray, on the surface, seems to be blithely engaging in.

Barry Lyndon is the most substantial of several mock-heroic, pseudo-autobiographical Irish soldier narratives Thackeray produced early in his career. Although all of these Irish-themed works imitate the character types and narrative style that made Lever famous, they do so in significantly different ways. The last of these Irish satires so directly parodied Lever that it caused a falling-out between the two authors. “Phil Fogarty. A Tale of the Fighting Onety-Oneth” (1847), writes Roger McHugh, “though not a really good parody, is said to have hurt Lever and to have accounted for the less extravagant air of the novels which followed.”³⁹¹ A slapstick burlesque of Irish

³⁹⁰ Chesterton, G.K. “The Method of Allusive Irrelevancy”. *Thackeray: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Alexander Walsh (Ed.) Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1968. 15-19. (19)

³⁹¹ McHugh, Roger J. “Charles Lever”. *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*. 27:106. 1938. 247-260. Also see Ellis, G.U. *Thackeray*. Haskell House Publishers Ltd. 1971. (95). Ellis claims that Lever, in response to *Phil Fogarty*, lampooned Thackeray in his next novel *Roland Cashel*, but in that same work honored Thackeray by changing his style.

soldiers in the Napoleonic Wars, “Phil Fogarty” relates a story of extravagant events and exaggerated brogues. A quote from one of Fogarty’s companions Lanty Clancy typifies the fun poked at the presentation of Irish accents and provincialism, when Clancy says, “O musha, Masther Phil agrah! but this will be the great day intirely, when I send off the news, which I would, barrin’ I can’t write.”³⁹² However tempting it is to view passages such as this as simple insults to national accents and intellect, acknowledging the story as a parody of Lever suggests that the object of derision is not the people themselves but popularizers of absurd caricatures. When Thackeray published this story, Lever had already been accused by William Carleton of “outrageous misrepresentation of Irish life and manners” and “bearing false witness against us [the Irish],”³⁹³ and Lever certainly read Thackeray’s story as a further denouncement of his literary creations. McHugh’s characterization of “Phil Fogarty” as a sub-par parody undoubtedly comes from the gross exaggeration of Lever’s representation of Irish characters. However, beyond the distorted representation, when viewed as a more sophisticated satire of Lever’s attempt to engage with the picaresque tradition can also be appreciated.

Complicated issue of loyalties and identities are raised in “Phil Fogarty” only to be drowned by the absurd wash of baboonery that wells up around them. This propels the satiric cut of the story beyond a simple projection of Carleton’s criticism to a more astute touché on Lever’s whole emphasis on juxtaposition and humor to express Irish identity. The previous chapter explored Charles Lever’s *Charles O’Malley, The Irish Dragoon* as a work of Irish picaresque fiction, one that utilizes episodic plot structures and

³⁹² Thackeray, William Makepeace. “Phil Fogarty. A Tale of the Fighting Onety-Oneth.” *Specimens of the Short Story*. George Henry Nettleton (Ed.) Books for Libraries Press. 1969. 113-133. (121). Hereafter referred to as “Phil Fogarty”.

³⁹³ “The ‘Dublin University Magazine’ and Mr. Lever”. *The Nation*. Oct. 7, 1983. (826)

carnavalesque inversions to disrupt the certainties inherent in the allegorical schema of the predominant national romance genre. Lever's avoidance of socially subversive characters³⁹⁴ is in keeping with his overall Fabian strategy of sidestepping direct confrontation of the more volatile contentions over the delineations of national identity, instead attempting to alleviating the politics of narrative through variety of representation and plot disruption. The satire of "Phil Fogarty" and, indeed, that found in all of Thackeray's Irish stories, evinces great cynicism over the efficacy of such arbitrate literary strategies.

The absurd aspects in "Phil Fogarty" successfully overwhelm all serious issues raised by the characters or suggested by the context of the story. For example, Fogarty, while a prisoner of war in Paris, is tempted to defect to the French side by the beautiful Blanche Sarsfield. Being the descendant of the exiled Jacobite Patrick Sarsfield, Blanche's ancestry connect her with the complicated historical legacy of nationalism and loyalty faced by Irish soldiers, and she eloquently rebuffs Fogarty when he objects to "foreign service."

It is you, Philip, who are in a foreign service. The Irish nation is in exile and in the territories of the its French allies. Irish traitors are not here; they march alone under the accursed flag of the Saxon, whom the great Napoleon would have swept from the face of the earth but for the fatal valor of Irish mercenaries!³⁹⁵

³⁹⁴ although the pranks, blunders, and faux pas of O'Malley and his compatriots violate regulations and etiquette, the novel's characters, and protagonist in particular, demonstrate few of the subversive attributes associated with the traditional picaresque mode. Here can be recalled Julia Moynahan's conclusion that "Charley may brindle at what he takes to be English arrogance and putting on airs, yet he is perfectly loyal." [Moynahan, Julian. *Anglo-Irish: The Literary Imagination in a Hyphenated Culture*. Princeton University Press. 1995. (94)]

³⁹⁵ "Phil Fogarty". (127)

However, Fogarty blithely refuses these appeals, and in the proceeding scene dances a hornpipe with the French statesman Tallyrand as the people of Paris celebrate St. Patrick's Day. The nationalistic conflict proposed in Blanche's appeal should constitute the psychological crux of this story of an Irish soldier captured by the French. But, the protagonist fails to even consider it and the scene itself exists only as an awkward imposition of gravity in an otherwise laughable parade of foolishness. Modern scholars have often linked Lever's dramatic decline in popularity in the early twentieth-century to the light-hearted, enthusiastic treatment of military combat and soldiering³⁹⁶ that Thackeray seems to be deriding here. Thackeray's own biting, mock-heroic mode of satire, on the other hand, is still praised by modern critics such as John Loofbourow for its continued relevance in combating the "persistent human delusions" of "heroic pretense."³⁹⁷

However much "Phil Fogarty" might have nettled Lever, it is Thackeray's earlier and subtler *Barry Lyndon* that presents the most sophisticated interaction with earlier Irish picaresques popularized by Lever. The story of an unscrupulous but compelling Irish mercenary who commits acts of extreme brutality in both his military and domestic life, *Barry Lyndon* stands as Thackeray's darkest challenge to Lever's buoyant depictions of love, war, and identity. Published two years after *Charles O'Malley*, the novel develops corresponding scenes in the initial chapters of the novel that suggest direct satire of the earlier work. Beginning some half century apart,³⁹⁸ both novels are presented

³⁹⁶ See Christie, N.M.B. "Lever's Charles O'Malley: A Book to Recommend to a Friend?" *Études Irlandaises*. 4. 1979. 33-55. (42) and Moynahan, Julian. *Anglo-Irish: The Literary Imagination in a Hyphenated Culture*. Princeton University Press. 1995. (92)

³⁹⁷ Loofbourow, John. *Thackeray Form and Fiction*. Princeton University Press. 2015. (6)

³⁹⁸ Charles O'Malley fights in the Peninsular Campaign of the Napoleonic Wars and Barry Lyndon in the Seven Years War.

as memoirs of minor members of the Irish nobility, and the military careers of each protagonist are set in motion by a similar sequence of events. In both, the young narrator loses his temper at a dinner party and initiates a duel by throwing a glass of wine into his opponents face.³⁹⁹ As a consequence of the duel, O'Malley and Lyndon both must flee to Dublin, where they soon enlist and begin life of soldiering on the continent. The episodes establish the youthful impetuosity of both protagonists, but the divergence in emphasis illustrates the great disparity in ambition between the two authors. Lever treats the events as a sincere though ridiculous instance of juvenile bravado, one that foreshadows many Charles O'Malley's blundering attempts at valor as he matures in the army.

Thackeray develops the event as a foretelling of Lyndon's brutal nature and the violent society that will encourage that tendency. Lyndon's duel develops as a farce. He fights for the unrequited affections of his cousin Nora, and the combat itself is rigged. Nora's family, eager to gain the financial security offered by the rival suitor, Captain Quinn, fake the officer's death on the field of honor and convince Lyndon to flee from the law to get the young hothead out of town. A long but telling passage from the preamble to this duel can serve as a sample of Thackeray's typical mode of mocking heroic aspirations.

'Look at that sword, sir,' says I [Lyndon], pointing to an elegant silver-mounted one, in a white shagreen case, that hung on the mantelpiece, under the picture of my father, ["Roaring"] Harry Barry. 'It was with that sword, sir, that my father pinked Mohawk O'Driscoll, in Dublin, in the year 1740; with that sword, sir, he met Sir Huddleston Fuddleston, the Hampshire baronet, and ran him through

³⁹⁹ See *Barry Lyndon*. (37). & *Charles O'Malley*. (32)

the neck. They met on horseback, with sword and pistol, on Hounslow Heath, as I dare say you have heard tell of, and those are the pistols' (they hung on each side of the picture) 'which the gallant Barry used. He was quite in the wrong, having insulted Lady Fuddlestone, when in liquor, at the Brentford assembly. But, like a gentleman, he scorned to apologise, and Sir Huddlestone received a ball through his hat, before they engaged with the sword. I am Harry Barry's son, sir, and will act as becomes my name and my quality.'

'Give me a kiss, my dear boy,' said Fagan, with tears in his eyes. 'You're after my own soul. As long as Jack Fagan lives you shall never want a friend or a second.'

Poor fellow! he was shot six months afterwards, carrying orders to my Lord George Sackville, at Minden, and I lost thereby a kind friend.⁴⁰⁰

Lyndon brags in this passage to one of his mentors, captain Fagan, who admires the youth for being "the most blood-thirsty [young fellow] I ever saw."⁴⁰¹ The comical names of the victims accentuate the absurd pedigree of the sword, used to defend the honor of a guilty ancestor, too well-bred to admit fault, and Lyndon is taught by both his father's memory and Fagan's affirmation to take pride in a conception of bloody and vindictive valor. The juxtaposition in the above passage is typical of the novel, where tragedy is interwoven into even the most playful episodes. The final grim punctuation of the scene – the promise of lifelong friendship with a portend of imminent death – illustrates the ironic intermingling found throughout. Lever often separates scenes of humor and melancholy, displaying comedy and tragedy as distinct but balanced counterparts of life

⁴⁰⁰ *Barry Lyndon*. (42-43)

⁴⁰¹ *Barry Lyndon*. (40)

and maturation. The comedy of Thackeray's novel becomes an aspect of the tragedy, both from the narrator's inability to recognize his own downward trajectory and his use of levity to distract the reader from his cruelty, vindictiveness, and pride. And although pride and delusion are central to Thackeray's other early Irish stories, the brutality of *Barry Lyndon* creates a distinctive form of social and literary commentary.

A comparison between the types of comedy encountered in *Barry Lyndon* and Thackeray's earliest Irish creation illustrates the divergent aims of irony used in the novel despite the superficial similarities. From 1838 and 1839 – after Lever published his first Irish picaresque novel, *Harry Lorrequer* – Thackeray released a series of stories in *The New Monthly Magazine* that would be later collected as *The Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan*.⁴⁰² The tenor of these stories is comparable to the later “Phil Fogarty;” both are the unbelievable accounts of blustering Irish soldiers. As with all of Thackeray's Irish protagonists, Gahagan fits into a representational trope already well established in his time, the most “prevalent form of ‘stage Irishman’” that emerged by the end of the eighteenth-century, according to David Hayton: the swaggering Irish adventurer whose defining feature is pride.⁴⁰³ This is the type of stage-Irishman encountered in plays like Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *St Patrick's Day, or The Scheming Lieutenant* (1775), where the audacious Lieutenant O'Connor spends the entire play attempting to trick his prospective in-laws to accenting to his marriage to the complicit Laretta Credulous.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰² Clifford, Goldfarb S. “The Mettle of the Brigadier: How the Brigadier Found His Literary Place.” *The Baker Street Journal*. 59:4. 2009. 19-30. (25)

⁴⁰³ Hayton, David. “From Barbarian to Burlesque: English Images of the Irish c. 1660-1750.” *Irish Economic and Social History*. 15. 1988. 5-31. (22), & (19)

⁴⁰⁴ Sheridan, Richard Brinsley. *Plays*. Clayton Hamilton (Ed.) The Macmillan Company. 1928. When Laretta's parents recommend seeking a more stable, respectable match, she responds, “No, give me the bold upright youth, who makes love to-day, and his head shot off to-morrow.” (105) The complicity of the

Significantly, Lauretta's father's main objections to O'Connor are his rank and nationality. When Judge Credulous asks O'Connor to renounce his commission and country, the Lieutenant responds, "if you were not the father of my Lauretta, I would pull your nose for asking the first, and break your bones for desiring the second."⁴⁰⁵

Like O'Connor, Gahagan must overcome his paramour's family's low estimation of his rank and nationality,⁴⁰⁶ establishing a conflict present in both Thackeray and Sheridan's works between the protagonist's high reckoning of his own pedigree and station and the low opinions of these held by the society around him. However, where Sheridan's O'Connor surely exhibits pride and audacity, Thackeray amplifies these attributes in his protagonist to an absurd pitch through the character's ceaseless boasting. Facetious gasconades constantly interrupt Gahagan's narrative lest the reader forget the questionable reliability of their narrator. He introduces himself as someone who "has been in more pitched battles, led more forlorn hopes, had more success than the fairer sex, drunk harder, read more, been a handsomer man than any officer now serving Her Majesty."⁴⁰⁷ He calls himself the greatest swordfighter in the universe, tabulates himself as a thousand men when calculating the strength of a garrison, brags of "fourteen severe wounds and seven musket-balls in [his] body", and prides himself on the two hours he spends every morning curling his "hair in ten thousand little corkscrew ringlets."⁴⁰⁸

paramour, similar in *St. Patrick's Day* and *Major Gahagan*, also demonstrates a stark difference from *Barry Lyndon*, where the protagonist plots against the will of the intended.

⁴⁰⁵ Sheridan. (124). After this threat, Judge Credulous relents, saying, "Here, sir, I give my daughter to you, who are the most impudent dog I ever saw in my life."

⁴⁰⁶ See Thackeray, William Makepeace. *The History of Samuel Titmarsh and The Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan*. Internationale Bibliothek G. M. B. H. 1921. (141) & (149). Hereafter referred to as *Major Gahagan*.

⁴⁰⁷ *Major Gahagan*. (141)

⁴⁰⁸ *Major Gahagan*. (141), (199), (165), & (173)

While arguing that the Gahagan stories constitute a criticism of existing literary models, Rae Greiner notes a ridiculous “hyperrealism” in the narrator’s insistence on precision as well as his repeated professions of honesty.⁴⁰⁹ Thackeray seems particularly fascinated in his first-person Irish narratives with the ironic possibilities of feigned scrupulosity and dubious avowals of integrity. And he uses these comic devices to confront prominent narrative and genre models.

Though both the Lyndon and Gahagan stories present many parallels in their use of popular Irish stock-characters, the differences in these works signal an evolution in Thackeray’s use of such characters as vehicles for satire and irony. Both Gahagan and Lyndon are braggarts who anticipate incredulity in their reader, constantly imposing assurances of their own honesty. As Gahagan says, “I, as is well known, never say a single word which cannot be proved, and hate more than all other vices the absurd sin of egotism.”⁴¹⁰ Lyndon also frequently claims to hate the attributes that most define him, including egotism.⁴¹¹ So similar are some of their declarations that it is easy to mistakenly conflate the two. Lyndon’s sentiments echo those of Gahagan when he says,

Were these Memoirs not characterized by truth, and did I deign to utter a single word for which my own personal experience did not give me the fullest authority,

I might easily make myself the hero of some strange and popular adventures.⁴¹²

However, though similar in delivery, these assertions direct satire differently. Gahagan pleads with his audience to believe him because the actions he relates are unbelievable, as

⁴⁰⁹ See Greiner, Rae. “The Victorian Subject: Thackeray’s Wartime Subjects.” *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Literary Culture*. Oxford Handbooks Online. Oxford University Press. 2015. 1-12. (3-4)

⁴¹⁰ *Major Gahagan*. (162)

⁴¹¹ *Barry Lyndon*. (95)

⁴¹² *Barry Lyndon*. (69)

he carries elephants up hills and cuts his way through innumerable enemies. With a much more believable story to relate, Lyndon, on the other hand, uses professions of honesty and humility mainly to distract the reader from his most un-heroic actions. The above passage, for example, comes as a prelude to Lyndon's bludgeoning to death on the battlefield of a "poor little ensign, so young, slender, and small, that a blow from my pigtail would have despatched him."⁴¹³ In the stories of Gahagan and Fogarty, embellishment is used to effectively overwhelm and obscure any truth in the narrative. The two characters offer stories where the fabrication is so complete that the text offers no alternative series of event. When Gahagan claims to have with one cannonball blown off the trunks of 134 elephants,⁴¹⁴ the audience is not aware of any alternative scenario that would explain this event. In Lyndon's narrative, by contrast, the embellishments are attempts at subterfuge rather than pure fabrication. The events of *Barry Lyndon* are believable. What strikes the reader as preposterous is the absurd way Lyndon proposes those events to be interpreted.

Part of the humor of the novel is the narrator's constant attempts to legitimize his actions. He calls himself a "knight of the dice box" when cheating at cards, exalting the practice by saying that "none but men of courage and genius could live and prosper in a society where every one was bold and clever."⁴¹⁵ When he imprisons his wife, he answers accusations that he is an "Irish Bluebeard" by calling himself "only a severe and careful guardian over a silly, bad-tempered, and weak-minded lady."⁴¹⁶ Lyndon's perverse connotations, of treachery with boldness and spousal abuse with martial responsibility,

⁴¹³ *Barry Lyndon*. (70)

⁴¹⁴ *Major Gahagan*. (209)

⁴¹⁵ *Barry Lyndon*. (117), (134), & (136)

⁴¹⁶ *Barry Lyndon*. (244)

absurd as they are, all too often leave Victorian conceptions of virtue, honor, and propriety recognizably intact while stretching them to defend reprehensible actions. The distinction in the utilization of irony is significant as, unlike his other creations or the early works of Lever, Thackeray used the novel to explore the psychological potential of a well-established character type. As will be seen through a consideration of *Barry Lyndon* as a picaresque novel, Thackeray often presents scenarios and character types familiar to his audience only to interrupt expectations by exploring the neglected potential of such conventions.

Utilizing comparisons in an examination of *Barry Lyndon* is a common critical approach, one often used to dismiss the novel as highly derivative, a work that attempts to lash together literary exemplars into what David Parker calls “an interesting failure.”⁴¹⁷ Though sometimes adopted by critics as a means of deflating the significance of the novel, this approach can also yield insight into its chimerical genius when innovations are explored as fully as correlations. Building to a larger consideration of the novel’s innovation on genre, this chapter has thus far distinguished *Barry Lyndon* from the author’s other Irish inventions and its most direct satiric target. Thackeray’s Irish stories, in different ways, evince a cynical contempt for the type of picaresque plotting techniques Lever adopted in his early novels, and, therefore, can be read as a critique of Lever’s whole project of adapting picaresque modes to explore Irish identity. On the other hand, however much Thackeray lampooned structural strategies of the genre, he was clearly enamored with the dramatic possibilities of the distinct character types of this tradition. And what began as a light-hearted attempt to parody a more popular author,

⁴¹⁷ Parker, David. “Thackeray’s *Barry Lyndon*.” *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*. 6:4. 1975. 68-80. (68)

ultimately resulted with *Barry Lyndon*, a sophisticated exploration of the ironic potential of such character types. However, it is not the shadow of Charles Lever that *Barry Lyndon* has had the most difficulty extricating itself from. The novel has been devalued by critics like Loofbourow and Parker as an inferior impersonation of Henry Fielding's *Jonathan Wild* (1743).⁴¹⁸

As with the *Charles O'Malley*, the connection between *Barry Lyndon* and *Jonathan Wild* is quite overt. Both novels cast traditional villains as protagonists, following the exploits of contemptable miscreants to prompt the reader to consider the communal conception of virtues held by society. However, although both Fielding and Thackeray utilize abject protagonists to offer biting satire, *Jonathan Wild* contains a much more overt and consistent didactic directive. The narrator acts throughout the novel as a conspirator, constantly asking the reader to accept a perverse moral code, one that identifies roguery and avarice as primary virtues.⁴¹⁹ Wild the character also constantly offers reasoned arguments for the primacy of self-interest while attempting to influence those around him.⁴²⁰ And while these appeals can at times sound similar to the self-

⁴¹⁸ See Loofbourow. (11) and Parker (68)

⁴¹⁹ Fielding, Henry. *Jonathan Wild*. David Nokes (Ed.) Penguin Group. 1986. Wild is called "an accomplished rascal, as the vulgar term it, a complete GREAT MAN in our language." (215) Also see (158): "Jonathan Wild had every qualification necessary to form a great man. As his most powerful and predominant passion was ambition, so nature had, with consummate propriety, adapted all his faculties to the attaining of those glorious ends to which this passion directed him."

⁴²⁰ A prime example of this is when Wild offers encourages one of his henchmen who is eager to rob but hesitant to murder: "Is it not more generous, nay, more good-natured, to send a man to his rest, than, after having plundered him of all he hath, or from malice or malevolence deprived him of his character, to punish him with a languishing death, or, what is worse, a languishing life? Murder, therefore, is not so uncommon as you weakly conceive it, though, as you said of robbery, that more noble kind which lies within the paw of the law may be so. But this is the most innocent in him who doth it, and the most eligible to him who is to suffer it. [...] Take my word for it, you had better be an honest man than half a rogue." Fielding. (130-131)

justifying remarks of Barry Lyndon, who constantly attempts to legitimize his own actions, the significant distinction between the characters is self-awareness.

Along with a greater sense of intimacy, the first-person narration of *Barry Lyndon* heightens the impression of isolation, as the narrator struggles to commend his own life's story and gain sympathy and acceptance from the reader. Wild offers arguments for the primacy of self-interest, but unlike Lyndon, he does not attempt to redefine it as altruism. Wild accepts his role as a diabolic figure, even adapting lines from Milton's Satan to voice his ambitions, saying "I had rather stand on the summit of a dunghill than at the bottom of a hill in Paradise."⁴²¹ The divergent emphases raise distinct questions. For Aurélien Digeon, the genius in Fielding's novel can be found in his taking the "low joke, in service of a general idea" characteristic of the British tradition of rogue biography, and turning it to a "philosophical irony."⁴²² And yet, the philosophical irony Fielding develops through his conspiratorial narrator comes at a cost.

Where Fielding presents his readers with a topsy-turvy world where virtues are condemned as vices and vices are praised as virtues, *Barry Lyndon* puts the reader in the mind of a character who, unaided by a narrator's affirmation, attempts to reconcile his own vices with the conceptions of virtue he anticipates in his audience. This formulation, emblematic of picaresque fiction, creates a much more ambiguous and personal psychological exploration of the impulse to justify one's life. It also carries with it the greater potential for dramatic irony. As Robert Colby has pointed out, the irony in

⁴²¹ Fielding. (51)

⁴²² Digeon, Aurélien "Jonathan Wild." *Fielding: A Critical Collection of Essays*. Ronald Paulson (Ed.) Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1962. (72). Digeon describes Jonathan Wild as possibly the first example in literary history of "the synthetic method employed by the great realistic novelists of the nineteenth century." (74)

Jonathan Wild emerges through the narrator's "taking a superior moral stance to the hero" while in *Barry Lyndon* it comes directly from a character "who, in his utter lack of self-consciousness, is unaware of the implications of what he is saying."⁴²³ That critics like Colby can understand the character as defined primarily by his misapprehensions points to the great complication Thackeray throws into Fielding's formula. Although written a hundred years after *Jonathan Wild*, *Barry Lyndon* returns to exploit more completely the psychological complexity of character paradigms established in the older picaresque tradition.

Despite contention over emphasis and variants, most definitions of classic picaresque genre rests primarily on the presence of two features: a fragmented plot structure and first-person narration from a class of protagonist called a pícaro. Howard Mancing admits a wide range of definitions for the pícaro but entertains certain attributes, such as low-birth, quick-wits, self-sufficiency, and nonconformity as the most common constituent qualities. "Pícaros" he writes, "tend to rejoice in their antisocial lack of responsibility and accountability."⁴²⁴ As the pícaro of Francisco de Quivedo's early picaresque novel *The Swindler (El Buscón)* (1626) says, "We live by our wits: more often than not our bellies are empty as it's very hard to get other people to feed you. [...] So we live on air and we're happy."⁴²⁵ Although disputes arise over representative samples from the picaresque tradition, contention amongst scholars primarily lies in connotation rather than denotation. For example, although deprivation and marginalization are key to the

⁴²³ Colby, Robert A. "Barry Lyndon and the Irish Hero". *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. 21:2. 1966. 109-130. (110)

⁴²⁴ Mancing, Howard. "The Protean Picaresque." *The Picaresque: Tradition and Displacement*. Giancarlo Maiorino (Ed.). University of Minnesota Press. 1996. 273-291. (281-283).

⁴²⁵ Quevedo, Francisco de. *The Swindler (El Buscón)*. *Two Spanish Picaresque Novels*. Michael Alpert (Tran). Penguin Books. 1984. 81-214. (151)

definitions offered by Shelly Godsend and Michael Alpert, what Alpert sees as a vindictive character “determined to treat others as cruelty as he has been treated,”⁴²⁶ Godsend views as a “victim of inescapable social determinism.”⁴²⁷ This points to the real critical discussion over how to interpret the implications of characters often defined largely by their antagonism with the society around them. As Richard Bjornson puts it -

Variously described as a social conformist in avid pursuit of material possessions and rebel who rejects society and its rewards, an optimist and a pessimist, a good-for-nothing without scruples and a wanderer with potentialities for sainthood, he [the pícaro] has been called immoral, amoral, and highly moral.⁴²⁸

It is little wonder that through a literary structure that favors disruption, digression, and inversions, the protagonist of such narratives often developed as a lawless and landless, sometimes comical, Ulyssean figure, surviving on wits and cunning and able to navigate the disorder of the world view promoted by a chaotic narrative structure. The pícaro as wanderer is what Sam Bluefarb accentuates when exploring James Joyce’s Leopold Bloom as a “passive picaresque hero,” as he seconds Anthony Burgess’ categorization of *Ulysses* as a work with close ties to the English mock-epic picaresque tradition. And yet, Bluefarb’s analysis admits that by internalizing action and subverting heroic convention, Joyce produces an inverted or “denigrated” pícaro because of Bloom’s passivity.⁴²⁹ This

⁴²⁶ Alpert, Michael. “Introduction.” *Two Spanish Picaresque Novels*. Michael Alpert (Ed). Penguin Books. 1984. 7-17. (7)

⁴²⁷ Godsend, Shelly. “The Neopicaresque: The Picaresque Myth in the Twentieth Century Novel.” *The Picaresque Novel in Western Literature: From the Sixteenth Century to the Neopicaresque*. J.A. Garrido Ardila (Ed.) Cambridge University Press. 2015. 247-269. (252)

⁴²⁸ Bjornson, Richard. *The Picaresque Hero in European Fiction*. The University of Wisconsin Press. 1977. (5)

⁴²⁹ See Bluefarb, Sam. “Bloom: Passive Picaresque Hero.” *Modern British Literature*. 3. 1978. 143-155. (143-146). initiates conflict, Bloom receives is the victim of it.

comparison reveals the traditional emphasis on physical movement and action⁴³⁰ that typifies both the plotting and character types of the picaresque. Often rascally and roguish, the traditional pícaro acts in opposition to surrounding communal structures. However, as Bjornson points out, this antagonism can be developed in various ways— a corrupt character who exploits a decent society, an unethical character striving in an unethical world, or a just character abusing an unjust system. Regardless of how the dynamics are arranged, the pícaro's most common characteristics establish this character as one at odds with the vested set of societal relations and communal understandings that surrounding her or him and as such, is a figure primed for social critique.

Thackeray relates the novel *Barry Lyndon* through the perspective of a socially ambitious, unscrupulous, Irish sell-sword who consistently calls forth societal prejudices to legitimize his own ruthless actions. From the opening lines of the ostensive memoir, Lyndon reveals himself as not only a questionable interpreter of events but also as an individual who has learned little from the life-story he intends to relate. Thackeray immediately alerts the reader to the fact that this will be a tale of mitigation not maturation, a story of stasis where the narrator's primary concern is defending his actions rather than reflecting upon them. Lyndon begins the narrative -

Since the days of Adam, there has been hardly a mischief done in this world but a woman has been at the bottom of it. Ever since ours was a family (and that must be very *near* Adam's time, – so old, noble, and illustrious are the Barrys, as

⁴³⁰ Alpert. (14): "The *pícaro* wants adventure, the spice of the forbidden, and he is quite happy to take a risk. Dullness and monotony are anathema to him."

everybody knows) women have played a mighty part with the destinies of our race.⁴³¹

Lest the reader mistake the first sentence as a seriously proposed thesis, the second reveals the Lyndon as an individual who deals in self-aggrandizing distortion. The hyperbolic condemnation of women demonstrates one of the driving impulses of this narrative: the utilization on communal prejudice to expel personal guilt. Lyndon will ultimately end the novel echoing the same sentiment he began with, lamenting that “the cunning artifice of woman is such that, I think, in the long run, no man, were he Machiavel himself, could escape from it,” while he sits in a debtor’s prison, “ek[ing] out a miserable existence, quite unworthy of the famous and fashionable Barry Lyndon.”⁴³² Borislav Knežević has pointed to the lack of development in the protagonist as key link between *Barry Lyndon* and the picaresque tradition:

As a character, Barry is a picaresque hero in that he remains unreconstructed – the nature of Barry’s adventures is essentially episodic, without any teleological drift into *Bildungsroman* territory. [...] True enough, Barry seems to be able to make progress in worldly knowledge, which means that he gets to know more of rogues and dupes; but his worldliness is of a picaresque tunnel-vision kind, that is, he remains subject to a basic premise of picaresque narratives, which is that no one is exempt from getting conned, and, appropriately, he is finally duped and outmaneuvered himself.⁴³³

⁴³¹ Thackeray, William Makepeace. *The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon, Esq.* Andrew Sanders (Ed.) Oxford University Press. 1999. (3). Hereafter referred to as *Barry Lyndon*.

⁴³² *Barry Lyndon*. (307)

⁴³³ Knežević, Borislav. “A Picaresque Historical Novel: Ireland in W.M. Thackeray’s *Barry Lyndon*.” *Studie romanica et anglica Zagabiensia*. 47-48. 2002-2003. 161-178. (166)

One aspect overstated above is the incoherence of events as a qualifier of *Barry Lyndon's* picaresque designation.

Thackeray's novel mocks the Bildunstroman model, not because the events themselves lack continuity, but because the narrator fails to recognize the linear causation of the events he relates. Though the action of the story moves from Ireland across Europe, and sees many social and occupational transitions in the protagonist, the progression of the plot maintains a centrality of focus and continuity that seems linear when compared to a novel like *Charles O'Malley*. After fleeing his mock-duel, Lyndon enlists in the Seven Years War as a private soldier in the British Army, deserts, then is forcibly inducted into the Prussian army before escaping to gamble across Europe with his disinherited, Catholic uncle, the Chevalier de Balibari. He then, after an aggressive courtship, becomes a lord with properties in both Ireland and England by marrying and taking the name of the wealthy Honoria Lyndon (his birth name is Redmond Barry), whom he shamelessly maltreats until she, after the death of their son, is able to outwit her persecutor and escape, leaving Barry Lyndon to deal with his many creditors. The narrative arc of the story follows Lyndon's rise and fall from fortune. The protagonist moves from servitude to great affluence and then back to penury, and these situational shifts separate the plot from even the least digressive picaresque novels. In the very first work of picaresque fiction, the short novel *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554),⁴³⁴ for example, the seeming aimlessness of plot is not created through incoherency but rather through the unchanging social and monetary circumstances of the narrator. The novel's structure follows a series of menial occupations Lazarillo engages in as he struggles to survive.

⁴³⁴ See Alpert (7)

The story of *Lyndon* follows a rising and falling action more familiar in the traditional romance novel, while maintaining the picaresque sense of aimlessness through the inertia of the protagonist's psychological state.

From start to finish, Barry Lyndon is a character who operates with a "let those laugh that win"⁴³⁵ philosophy that mocks conventional notions of martial heroism.

Thackeray develops his narrator as a feckless miscreant who equates wisdom with worldliness, often contrasting himself with that of the romantic, naïve fool, who values virtue over victory. Lyndon says of dueling,

I have never had any of that foolish remorse consequent upon any of my affairs of honour: always considering, from the first, that where a gentleman risks his own life in manly combat, he is a fool to be ashamed because he wins.⁴³⁶

And when he becomes rich, he justifies shirking military duty, saying "a man with thirty thousand pounds per annum is a fool to risk his life like a common beggar."⁴³⁷ Of courting, he proposes the maxim, "dare and the world always yields,"⁴³⁸ and when pursuing his future wife, Honoria Lyndon, advises that "terror, be sure of that, is not a bad ingredient of love. A man who wills fiercely to win the heart of a weak and vapourish woman *must* succeed, if he have opportunity enough."⁴³⁹ The crowning dramatic irony in a novel full of such irony comes when Barry is ultimately outmaneuvered and outsmarted by his long-suffering wife, an event that disqualifies him from being the hero of his own tale by the definition of hero that he himself proposes. Lyndon never articulates this

⁴³⁵ *Barry Lyndon*. (189)

⁴³⁶ *Barry Lyndon*. (49)

⁴³⁷ *Barry Lyndon*. (259)

⁴³⁸ *Barry Lyndon*. (191)

⁴³⁹ *Barry Lyndon*. (218)

realization, but it emerges in his many exorbitant denouncements of women. Micael M. Clark identifies three main prejudicial associations that receive Thackeray's sharpest parody throughout the novel: women with inferiority, goodness with prosperity, and killing with honor.⁴⁴⁰ Even critics like John Peck – who argues that as a simple inversion of the traditional military epic, *Barry Lyndon* still upholds the traditional concept of Victorian heroism – still admit the emphasis on brutality, both military and domestic, makes the novel itself a significant breach of convention.⁴⁴¹

Lyndon's stasis as a character presents its own unique problems not only with the interpretation but also with the categorization of the novel. At odds with Knežević's assessment, Alexander Blackburn, who refers to Lyndon as a "brutalized Quixote" in his *Myth of the Pícaro*, points to his lack of maturation and perpetual viciousness as aspects that disqualify Thackeray's protagonist from being a "true" pícaro. However, Blackburn does list three features that link Lyndon to the even the earliest character types in the picaresque tradition:

he [Lyndon] has a sense of illusion about his disreputable past; his will constructs honorable appearances by dishonorable methods; and he rationalizes failure to achieve membership in approved society as a misfortune caused by the corrupt ways of the world.⁴⁴²

⁴⁴⁰ Clark, Micael M. "Thackeray's Barry Lyndon: An Irony against Misogynists." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*. 29:3. 1987. 261-277. (261)

⁴⁴¹ See Peck, John. *War, the Army, and Victorian Literature*. St. Martin Press, Inc. 1998. (53-55). Conversely, Peck argues that the flippant tone of Lever's early works go some way in mitigating their wholesale advocacy of a traditional military ethos. Peck concludes that Thackeray was motivated by "conservative fears about social change and social disruption" (4)

⁴⁴² Blackburn, Alexander. *The Myth of the Pícaro: Continuity and Transformation of the Picaresque Novel 1554-1954*. The University of North Carolina Press. 1979. (143). Alpert also identifies an ironic lack of self-recognition in the protagonist, especially when criticizing others, as a common picaresque narrative strategy. See Alpert. (9)

Although deviating from the traditional character arcs proposed by Blackburn, Thackeray does so following a plausible trajectory of the traditional attributes of picaresque characteristics. Thackeray utilizes the hallmark character flaw, and shows it to be an impediment to the normal character development of the genre: it is Lyndon's sense of illusion and his rationalizations that cause his lack of maturation and perpetual viciousness. The inconsistencies in reasoning throughout the novel can be read as a sustained musing on the dangers of delusion and confirmation bias, as the narrator seeks to affirm his own legitimate place in history as a great tragic figure whose own wrongdoings amount to little when compared with those of his enemies. Indeed, even Heffernan, who argues that "Barry's capitulation to boisterous self-deceit is not as persistent as critics proclaim," nonetheless places the fallacy of final causes as a structuring aspect of the narrative.⁴⁴³

The comical irregularities in logic that cause Lyndon's arrested development are given an extra edge in the treatment of national identity because Lyndon's sense of identity, like so many other aspects of his character, is protean, allowing him to associate with both sides in what he himself presents as an antagonistic binary between Irish and English identity. As a child, he is proud to be called "English Redmond" and "treated like a little lord" on account of his English mother, but becomes infuriated when rejected by a sweetheart for an "Englishman!"⁴⁴⁴ And yet, he bristles at "contempt for Irishmen, as Englishmen sometimes will have," when he is called a "penniless Irish adventurer" by his English step-son or an "Irish Bluebeard" in the English papers (two accusations the

⁴⁴³ Heffernan, Julián Jiménez. "'At the Court of Bellona': Political and Libidinal Usurpation in Barry Lyndon." *Journal of Narrative Theory*. 44:2. 2014. 183-211. (188) &

⁴⁴⁴ *Barry Lyndon*. (9) & (25)

reader recognizes as just assessments), and yet he has no hesitancy in describing a crowd of Dubliners as “a set of wild gibbering Milesian faces as would frighten a genteel person of average nerves.”⁴⁴⁵

Lyndon’s conception of national identity emerges as part of a larger dissociative rhetoric the narrator consistently employed to elevate himself above his immediate peers. When a member of the Irish gentry, Lyndon can note the “simplicity about this Irish gentry which amused and made me wonder.”⁴⁴⁶ After spending time in the company of scoundrels, he claims, “I never had a taste for anything but genteel company, and hate all descriptions of low life,” and when forced to enlist in the army, he loathes the “wretched creatures with whom I was now forced to keep company; of the ploughmen, poachers, pickpockets, who had taken refuge from poverty, or the law (as, in truth, I had done myself), is enough to make me ashamed even now.”⁴⁴⁷ Serving as a soldier in various armies and making his fortune as a gambler across Europe, Lyndon’s actions establish no consistent integrity for any nation or cause, but he continually falls back upon malleable distinctions of national identity, class, and gender to justify actions.

Thackeray’s relentless emphasis on satire and parody also distances his novel from what some scholars identify as the traditional aims of the picaresque genre. Marina S. Brownlee, in her “Discursive Parameters of the Picaresque,” notes that “satire aims to expose, not to edify, and edification is an essential component of the picaresque,” adding that “the picaresque is – beyond its undeniably satiric dimension – as a rule mimetic, didactic, intended to convert the reader to the narrator’s and/or implied narrator’s point of

⁴⁴⁵ *Barry Lyndon*. (72), (271), (276), & (201)

⁴⁴⁶ *Barry Lyndon*. (200)

⁴⁴⁷ *Barry Lyndon*. (62-63)

view.”⁴⁴⁸ Indeed, Simon Dickie has pointed to the tendency of traditional picaresques to interrupt the narrative with “didactic reflections on man, society, and eternal truths” as a off-putting aspect for modern audiences.⁴⁴⁹ This is a feature preserved in *Charles O'Malley*, where the older, mature narrator often adds sermonizing commentary on youth, love, and war. *Barry Lyndon*, on the other hand, rarely strays from the dramatic irony of biting satire aimed at exposing the duplicity of both young protagonist or older chronicler. As Blackburn puts it, “Barry does not develop or reveal that kind of honesty that might permit him to escape convention. He *is*.”⁴⁵⁰

And yet, although Thackeray's creation deviates from the most popular types and conventions found in picaresque literature, acknowledging the varieties of representational modes within the genre can reveal *Barry Lyndon* as a provocative interaction with a tradition rather than a mere deviation from it. Thomas G. Pavel acknowledges two distinctive types of pícaros that emerge within the classical Spanish tradition.

The earlier ones [picaresques] focus on the way in which poverty destroys moral incentives; their protagonists are amoral pícaros who, out of naïveté or cynicism, live at peace with their own wickedness. Soon, however, these characters gave way to morally aware pícaros, who deplore their corrupt lives in religious terms,

⁴⁴⁸ Brownlee, Marina. “Discursive Parameters of the Picaresque.” *The Picaresque: A Symposium on the Rogue's Tale*. Carmen Benito-Vassels and Michael Zappala (Eds.) Newark: University of Delaware Press. (1994). 25-35. (27-28)

⁴⁴⁹ Dickie, Simon. “Picaresque and Rogue Fiction.” *The Oxford History of the Novel in English, Vol. 1: Prose Fiction from the Origins to Print to 1750*. Thomas Keymer (Ed.) Oxford University Press. 2017. 260-276. (265)

⁴⁵⁰ Blackburn. (143)

humbly acknowledging a higher order whose strictures they are unable to follow.⁴⁵¹

Pavel's distinction between the "preaching" pícaro that would come to dominate the later tradition and the earlier amoral pícaro, who is either too busy trying to survive or not inclined to sermonize, can be used to appreciate Thackeray's manipulation of genre. Lyndon does not fit well into either of these categories because he is an amalgam of the two. For Pavel, morally aware pícaros "never fully accept their own wickedness" and demonstrate to the reader that "even the lowest human beings have the capacity to look at themselves and understand the depths of their own corruption."⁴⁵² And so, if the amoral pícaro illustrates the dangers of those socio-economic forces that encourage corruption and repress consideration of one's actions and the morally aware pícaro affirms the redemptive power of reflection, then *Barry Lyndon* can be viewed as a work that pose a unique set of questions by reconciling these two frameworks. Like the sermonizing pícaro, *Barry Lyndon* is preoccupied with preaching and drawing universal morals from the experiences of his life. Like the earlier amoral pícaro, Lyndon is lost in his own depravity and characterized by naïveté or cynicism. It is this naïveté that Thackeray utilizes to create the thickly-layered dramatic irony throughout this work.⁴⁵³ The end result is a character who denies the reader the more comforting aspects of either narrative tradition: the hope of redemption expressed in the reformed preaching pícaro's reflections and the deferral of personal culpability produced by the amoral pícaro's desperate

⁴⁵¹ Pavel, Thomas G. *The Lives of the Novel: A History*. Princeton University Press. (2003). (58)

⁴⁵² Pavel. (59) & (60)

⁴⁵³ This dramatic irony through willful or unconscious self-deception plays a role in early picaresques as well. The first pícaro, Lazarillo de Tormes, for example, ends the novel proclaiming his wife's virtue while the whole town along with the reader recognize his wife's secret romance with the Archpriest of St. Salvador. See *Lazarillo de Tormes*. (77)

struggle to survive against impossible odds. Lyndon, through both poverty and affluence, remains amoral despite changing circumstances. His ability to rationalize, sermonize, and philosophize mocks a faith the preaching pícaro implies in the redemptive power of reflection, used as reason is only to craft justifications rather than reach understanding.

Given the ethical inertia of the protagonist and his dizzying web of absurd justifications and equivocations, all without an intermediating moderator, it is little wonder that *Barry Lyndon* provoked confusion over how best to interpret the text. Though it is not a novel unique in its fascination with criminality and vice, it does still exhibit these attributes in a uniquely troublesome manner. In the year of the novel's publication, *The Examiner* thought the novel's moral covert enough to warrant an overt explication, writing that –

we beg here respectfully to declare that we take the moral of the story of Barry Lyndon, Esquire, to be, – that worldly success is by no means the consequence of virtue; that if it is effected by honesty sometimes, it is attained by selfishness and roguery still oftener.⁴⁵⁴

For a reviewer for the *Dublin Review* nearly thirty years later, the end of the novel does not justify the means, and the reviewer concludes that *Barry Lyndon* is “a work of extraordinary talent, but we heartily wish Mr. Thackeray had not written it. It is an evil book, though the vileness which it portrays is sternly reprobated and severely punished.”⁴⁵⁵ Much of the confusion in *Barry Lyndon* stems not from its absence of condemnation but from its seeming lack of affirmation typical in the English novelistic tradition.

⁴⁵⁴ “The Moral of Barry Lyndon.” *Examiner*. Dec. 14, 1844. 1924. (789)

⁴⁵⁵ “Two English Novelists: Dickens and Thackeray.” *The Dublin Review*. 17:32. April 1871. 315-350. (333)

In a novel like *Jonathan Wilde*, the title character is presented as evil incarnate and is ultimately overcome by his persecutee Heartfree, a man, as the narrator tells us, with such “an artless, simple, undesigning heart, as must render the person possessed of it the lowest creature and the properest object of contempt imaginable.”⁴⁵⁶ Of course, the irony of inversion here makes it easy for the reader to recognize that the ridiculed figure is the real hero of the story. *Barry Lyndon*, on the other hand, has no such clear antipodal relationships. Though scholars have seen in Lyndon’s maltreatment and imprisonment of his wife Honoria a reflection on Anglo-Irish relations and commentary on misogynistic laws,⁴⁵⁷ she does not stand as a countervailing virtue to Barry’s vice. Though a sympathetic character because of the torture she endures at the hands of her husband, Honoria Lyndon is, indeed, a proud, often disdainful, English aristocrat. And so, when Barry complains of his wife that “Lady Lyndon was a haughty woman, and I hate pride,”⁴⁵⁸ the humor comes not from a recognition of Lady Lyndon’s humility but rather from the blatant projection of the narrator. This creates in the novel a disconcerting lack of moral alternative to the showcased iniquity.

So too, *Barry Lyndon* takes disconcerting deviations from other tales of vice in the English novel tradition that followed the pattern of the preaching pícario, such as Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (1722). *Moll Flanders* offers an interesting point of comparison not only because of its connection with the picaresque novel but also its troubling use of irony. The intent of the novel is laid out in the preface: “all the exploits of this lady of fame, in her depredations upon mankind, stand as so many warnings to

⁴⁵⁶ Fielding. (89)

⁴⁵⁷ See Berol. (109) [Berol notes the inversion Thackeray makes of presenting the military as a unifying force within the United Kingdom]; Colby (118); Clark (266-267) &(270); and

⁴⁵⁸ *Barry Lyndon*. (235)

honest people to beware of them.”⁴⁵⁹ And as Flanders catalogues her innumerable crimes, she continually reminds the readers of the high morals she hopes to project, warning them to take “sober and just reflection” on the events and offering “caution to the readers of this story, that we ought to be cautious of gratifying our inclinations in loose and lewd freedoms, lest we find our resolutions of virtue fail us.”⁴⁶⁰ In his introduction to the 1989 Penguin Classics edition, David Blewett firmly defends the explicitly stated aims of Flanders’ pious sermonizing within the novel but still summarizes the scholarly debate over the role irony plays in undermining the novel’s stated purpose.⁴⁶¹ Exploring the picaresque influences on Defoe’s novel, Nicholas Spadaccini points out that criticism of this dual structure can be found as early as 1604 in the Spanish picaresque tradition, that “one cannot mix the spiritual and profane to the advantage of the former.”⁴⁶² Defoe was clearly aware of this disconcerting tension, hoping his readers will “be much more pleas’d with the Moral than the Fable,”⁴⁶³ but the acknowledgement of the issue does not necessarily decide it. For modern critics like Mark Schorer, the greatest ironies of the novel emerge from Defoe’s failure to recognize his own inability to reconcile the two,⁴⁶⁴ but picaresque scholars Bjornson, Spadaccini, and Alessandro Vescovi emphasize the

⁴⁵⁹ Defoe, Daniel. *Moll Flanders*. David Blewett (Ed.) Penguin Group. 1989. (40).

⁴⁶⁰ Defoe. (365)

⁴⁶¹ See Blewett, David. “Introduction.” *Moll Flanders*. David Blewett (Ed.) Penguin Group. 1989. 1-24. (12) & (18-19). The aim of the novel is stated in the preface: This debate, Blewett, argues rests on the critics’ assumptions about how aware Defoe was of his own craft.

⁴⁶² Spadaccini, Nicholas. “Daniel Defoe and the Spanish Picaresque Tradition: The Case of *Moll Flanders*.” *Ideologies & Literature*. 2:6. 1978. Spadaccini is here summarizing the position taken in the preface of López de Ubeda’s 1604 picaresque novel *La Pícaro Justina*, a copy of which was found in Defoe’s library.

⁴⁶³ Defoe. (38)

⁴⁶⁴ See Schorer, Mark. “Moll Flanders.” *Daniel Defoe: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Max Byrd (Ed.) Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1976. 120-126: (122) & (123): “Thus we may conclude that the real meaning of the book is to be discovered in spite of Defoe, whose point of view is, finally, indistinguishable from the point of view of Moll Flanders; and we may therefore conclude, further, that the book is not the true chronicle of a disreputable female, but the true allegory of an impoverished soul – the author’s;”

novelist's awareness and manipulation of ambiguities and ironies inherent in the genre.⁴⁶⁵

However deep the irony runs or from what source, it is none the less a story that overtly and repeatedly recommends itself as a narrative of repentance, and one where the protagonist ends the novel content and affluent. *Barry Lyndon*, even on a superficial level, proposes an entirely different way of interacting with the narrative. Lyndon has experienced no conversion or revelation. Though very opinionated, he none the less, seeks primarily to gain something from the audience, namely sympathy and respect, rather than, like Flanders, to impart a coherent message.

The perplexing didactics of the novel also prompted early commentators to anchor their critique through literary and historical precedent. "The Real Barry Lyndon" of 1896 focuses on a comparison with the memoirs of Casanova, speculating on the continued allure of lurid characters in popular fiction.⁴⁶⁶ Reviewers also looked to the records of Irish criminals, comparing the novel to "Fighting" George Robert Fitzgerald and William "Tiger" Roche (two eighteenth-century Irish adventurers)⁴⁶⁷ as well as James "Captain" Freney whose memoirs Thackeray read while in Ireland.⁴⁶⁸ However, this last comparison holds connections with the novel only through a cursory glance at incident. The similarities fall apart when style or emphasis are examined. Freney's

⁴⁶⁵ See Bjornson (191); Spadaccini (14-15); and Vescovi, Alessandro. "Moll Flanders: The Cohesion of the Picaresque." *Wrestling with Defoe, approaches from a workshop on Defoe's prose*. 30. Marialuisa Bignami (Ed.) Cisalpino Istituto Editoriale Universitario. 1997. 131-143. (141-142)

⁴⁶⁶ Fisher, W.E. Garrett. "The Real Barry Lyndon." *The English Illustrated Magazine*. 150. March 1896. 625-628. (627). "Perhaps it is because the best of us have still a touch of the rogue at heart that a rogue's memoirs make universally popular reading; perhaps it is only that we who are assured of our own rectitude are not unwilling to see what less upright persons have made of their tussle with the world."

⁴⁶⁷ See "A Real Barry Lyndon." *Catholic World*. 36:212. Nov. 1882. 194-204. (198-199).

⁴⁶⁸ See Melville, Lewis. "The Real Barry Lyndon." *Fortnightly Review*. 90:535. July 1911. 44-55. Thackeray mentions in his *Irish Sketches*, where he notes "the noble naïveté and simplicity of the hero as he recounts his own adventures, and the utter unconsciousness that he is narrating anything wonderful." (44)

autobiography, for example, is, like many of *Barry Lyndon*'s biographical and pseudo-biographical predecessors, concerned primarily with chronicling action and not with developing character, being little more than a catalogue of highway robberies, home invasions, and flights from the law. The early uncertainty over evaluation alongside readily found antecedents further suggest that Thackeray was adding innovative and disorienting variations onto recognizable literary models.

Despite a heightened fixation on cruelty and psychological paralysis, Thackeray's humorous exploration of alienation and turpitude shares many common preoccupations with earlier picaresques. As a foil to the romantic genre, the picaresque has always humorously reveled in character types and narrative dynamics that undermine (or at very least prompt) a reconsideration of communal notions of propriety and heroism. Quevedo's appeal to his audience in the preface to *The Swindler (El Buscón)* perfectly harmonizes with the tenor and tone of *Barry Lyndon* when he urges his audience to "praise the genius of its author who had enough common sense to know it is a lot more amusing to read about low life when the story is written with spirit, than about other more serious topics."⁴⁶⁹ The same could be said of *Moll Flanders*, but the chimerical formula of Thackeray perplexes the tensions between spiritual and profane or moral and fable that Defoe relied on to give consistency and guide the reader through his narrative of vice. And so, moving back into a consideration of the Irish aspects of *Barry Lyndon*, it is important to recognize that although the novel can easily be situated within literary traditions, the most consequential aspects of the work are found in the ways the author has chosen to violate the conventions of those traditions, often in ways that radically alter

⁴⁶⁹ Quevedo. (83)

the heuristic mode of the genre. This insight becomes particularly important when considering the work within the British tradition of fictitious criminal biographies or rogue literature, a tradition that from its inception was used to exoticize and criminalize Irish identity.

Although David Clark has argued that the British rogue fiction tradition has been influential to Irish authors from Lawrence Sterne to James Joyce as well as modern Irish crime writers as a vehicle for expressing the “instability and rootlessness of the Irish subject,”⁴⁷⁰ the genre’s legacy is more commonly viewed as part of the wider English tradition of satirizing and criminalizing Irish identity throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries. Even within the English tradition, this genre has not been well thought of. Schorer calls it a “low form of literary expression,” and a genre that, while claiming its propose is to warn against vice, in reality only seeks to “thrill an indiscriminating audience with melodrama.”⁴⁷¹ Clark, who uses the terms pícaro and rogue synonymously, explores the tradition of British rogue fiction inaugurated with Richard Head’s *The English Rogue, Described in the Life of Meriton Latroon, A Witty Extravagant* (1665) as an amalgam of the Spanish picaresque literature and criminal biographies. A subgenre with similarities to both the plotting and character types of Spanish picaresque, British rogue fiction, as Calhoun Winton and Leah Orr have argued, places an added emphasis on exhibiting criminality.⁴⁷² After *The English Rogue*, the later

⁴⁷⁰ Clark, David. “‘A Company of Rogues’: Richard Head and the Irish Picaresque.” *Estudios Irlandeses*. 14. 2019-2020. 1-11. (4) & (9)

⁴⁷¹ Schorer. (120)

⁴⁷² Winton, Calhoun. “Richard Head and Origins of the Picaresque in England.” *The Picaresque: A Symposium on the Rogue’s Tale*. Carmen Benito-Vessels and Michael Zappala (Eds.) University of Delaware Press. 1994. 79-93. (81). & Orr, Leah. “*The English Rogue*: Alternatives and Imitations, 1665-1741.” *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*. 38: 3. 2015. 361-376. (366)

seventeenth and early eighteenth-centuries saw rogue narratives published with title rogues from France, Germany, Holland, and Scotland as well as Ireland,⁴⁷³ but the genre has a unique historical ties to the projection of a criminalized Irish identity.

Not only has George O'Brien identified Head's Latroon as "one of the earliest appearances made by the fictional Irishman," (both Richard Head and his literary creation were Irish natives), but as a character who inaugurated a tradition popular throughout the eighteenth-century of equipping fictional rogues of Irish origins to "dramatize a certain set of moral concerns, social exigencies, or areas of experience beyond the reality familiar to most readers."⁴⁷⁴ One of these anxieties explored by Stafford stems from the perceived threat to a developing English national consciousness for which the hybridity of the Anglo-Irish threatened emerging sense of Englishness, calling "Irish otherness into question."⁴⁷⁵ O'Brien too, notes the importance to rogue fiction in exploring the "grey area occupied by the Irish in the English public mind. Neither truly foreign, since he was at all times implicated in the designs of the English state, nor wholly familiar, since his domain was offshore territory, he presents a test-case of norms, a figure on the border."⁴⁷⁶ One of the earliest imitations of Head's English rogue⁴⁷⁷ was the 1690 work *The Irish Rogue: or, the Comical History of the Life and Actions of Teague O'Divelly* [later changed to Darby ô Brolaghan in the 1740 edition],⁴⁷⁸ a work where the narrator

⁴⁷³ Clark. (6) & Orr (367)

⁴⁷⁴ O'Brien, George. "The Fictional Irishman 1665-1850." *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*. 66:264. 1977. 319-329. (320), (321), &(324)

⁴⁷⁵ Stafford, Brooke A. "Englishing the Rogue, 'Translating' the Irish: Fantasies of Incorporation and Early Modern English National Identity." *Rogues and Early Modern English Culture*. Craig Dionne and Steve Mentz (Eds.) University of Michigan Press. 2004. 312-366. (315) &

⁴⁷⁶ O'Brien, George. "The Fictional Irishman 1665-1850." (328)

⁴⁷⁷ Orr. (368)

⁴⁷⁸ See Clark. (16) & Orr (369). Orr mentions only minor alterations to names and plot in the 1740 republication. The later edition will be used for reference here: See The Late Earl of Rochester. *Irish*

consistently digresses from bragging of his robberies, debaucheries, and murders to point out the degradation of the Irish people and society.

While considering *Barry Lyndon* as part of this tradition, it is important to note that unlike many of its progenitors, much of the comical effect of the novel comes not from a simple direct affirmation of prejudice but the narrator's ability to exploit the liminal space pointed out by Stafford and O'Brien to his own ends. Again and again throughout the novel, Lyndon demonstrates his ability to condemn others for his own defining vices as when he accuses his step-son of "leading a life of insubordination and scandal" for keeping company with a "Romanish priest" after commending himself in the proceeding chapter for entertaining a Catholic priest at Castle Lyndon despite the prejudices of his fellow gentry.⁴⁷⁹ And, at first glance, the type of castigation found in these two words share a number of superficial similarities. In *The Irish Rogue*, the protagonist, though clearly labeled as Irish, nevertheless freely sermonizes about the Irish throughout as though not associated with them. Indeed, "Irish" is used as a superfluous epithet often thrown in to modify particularly villainous characters or lurid scenes. For example, when telling of a lascivious priest, the narrator labels him an "Irish priest" when in context the only national modifier required for clarity would be one that identifies the priest as being anything but Irish.⁴⁸⁰ In the *Irish Rogue*, the same paradox between moral

Rogue: or, the Comical History of the Life and Actions of Darby ô Brolaghan, from his Birth to this Present Time. To which is Added The Gold-Merchant; or, the Notorious Cheats of Turlough, and His Man Patrick. Far Umper na Fuole. Also, Letters of Courtship, and Love-Letters. James Dalton. 1740.] Hereafter referred to as *The Irish Rogue*.

⁴⁷⁹ See *Barry Lyndon*. (250) & (259)

⁴⁸⁰ See *The Irish Rogue*. (39). The condemnation of the Irish often comes as part of the religious commentary of the work. The incident with the Irish priest occurs when the narrator is relating his mother's story of following the army during the Confederate Wars, when "the massacred Protestant's fat served for Confederate Candles to light the shrines of popish saints."

and fable found in Defoe develops with much less subtlety or forethought. Caveats on Irish customs and language create breaches in the pseudo-biographical fascade in a pandering, obtuse manner. In *Barry Lyndon*, so great is the emphasis on the psychology of the narrator, the text demands scrutiny over its sincerity.

The emphasis of *The Irish Rogue* is on the sensationalism of misdeeds, and this comes at the cost of the ironic potential of the pontificating villain narrator. The aspects of Irish identity that the narrator steps aside to condemn seldom carries any implication on the narrator's own actions, as when Darby ô Brolaghan tells the reader in the 1740 edition,

They [the Irish] are naturally condemners of all other nations, and carry a kind of irreconcilable hatred for the English; insomuch that many of the heads of their clans have cursed their posterity [...] They are naturally of a cruel temper, bloody in their dispositions, and rigorous in execution, and much subject to ingratitude...⁴⁸¹

Though tempting to detect an intended irony here – accusing the Irish of defamation while defaming the Irish – there is little continuity of castigation found in the work to suggest that this statement should be read as anything but as a straight-forward proposal. At best, it is only the latent irony inherent in the picaresque formula left unexplored by the author. A discussion of a similar type of colonial cognitive dissonance can be found in the previous chapter's treatment of Kingsley's *Westward Ho!*, where a censure of Spanish bigotry is proposed through a novel of excessive bigotry against the Spanish. The comedy in *The Irish Rogue* can be found in the anthropological explanations of the

⁴⁸¹ *The Irish Rogue*. (61). Spelling, capitalization, and italics changed in this and subsequent quotations.

absurd Irish customs, such as when the narrator tells the audience about “a kind of feasting, called by them [the Irish] *ceshering*, where the rhymers and harpers sing and play, and their songs are usually in commendation of theft, murder, rebellion, treason, and fictions.”⁴⁸² Although the picaresque tradition also has historical ties to anxiety over liminal figures in society⁴⁸³, *The Irish Rogue* demonstrates a much more overt intent on demarcation and denunciation of the Irish people, an emphasis, according to Orr, missing from the subsequent Scottish rogue fiction.⁴⁸⁴

Barry Lyndon complicates the direct denunciation of Irish identity found in rogue narratives like *The Irish Rogue* by incorporating condemnation into the pattern of self-deception and projected guilt of the narrator. After opening his narrative by blaming women for all the troubles of the world, Lyndon moves on to tie this self-delusion to his sense of national identity:

I presume that there is no gentleman in Europe that has not heard of the house of Barry of Barryogue, of the kingdom of Ireland,[...] and though, as a man of the world, I have learned to despise heartily the claims of some *pretenders* to high birth who have no more genealogy than the lacquey who cleans my boots, and though I laugh to utter scorn the boasting of many of my countrymen, who are all for descending from kings of Ireland, and talk of a domain no bigger than would feed a pig as if it were a principality; yet truth compels me to assert that my family was the noblest of the island, and, perhaps, of the universal world;⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸² *The Irish Rogue*. (63)

⁴⁸³ See Blackburn (10-11) and Rodríguez-Luis, Julio. “*Pícaras*: The Modal Approach to the Picaresque.” *Comparative Literature*. 31:1. 1979. 32-46. (43-44). Both critics entertain social anxieties over converted Jews, or *conversos*, as a dynamic at play in the early picaresque novels.

⁴⁸⁴ Orr. (369)

⁴⁸⁵ *Barry Lyndon*. (3)

The narrator's audacity is comical, but more importantly, the irony further alerts the audience that the "knowledge" the narrator will attempt to impart is a useless knowledge, at very least for the narrator himself for whom it has failed to prompt any greater awareness or introspection. And by throwing suspicion on the narrator's ability to learn, Thackeray also calls into doubt the wisdom he imparts. *The Irish Rogue* begins with a similar denunciation of preposterous Irish pedigrees. The narrator questions his father's claim of their descent from the kings of Munster and blames his father's delusions on the "begging Harpers; a kind of strolling vagabonds, that infest the country, under the pretense of keeping records of pedigrees, and fortunetelling future things."⁴⁸⁶ Again, however, the narrator distances himself from his own Irish identity when making his didactic asides, playing tour guide for his reading and moving to stand beside a foreign, prejudiced audience and offer affirmation. This chaperone approach to writing about Ireland and the Irish, which would become common procedure all through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is almost entirely absent from *Barry Lyndon*. When it does appear, it serves to justify or explain Lyndon's actions, as when he explains the problem Ireland has with "banditti" in preface to his own decision to become one.⁴⁸⁷

As when attempting to interact with the novel's moral dynamics, the excess of condemnation and absence of affirmation also causes problems when assessing *Barry Lyndon*'s presentation of national identity. Lyndon castigates the Irish for being haughty in a passage made humorous by the relator's inability to recognize his own haughtiness. Does it follow that his assertions about Irish bravado are erroneous? Possibly. If Lyndon is Irish, then it seems his outrageous arrogance is confirmation of his prejudice. However,

⁴⁸⁶ *The Irish Rogue*. (2)

⁴⁸⁷ See *Barry Lyndon*. (222)

interpreting Lyndon as the proof positive for Irish iniquity becomes precarious when Lyndon's self-serving movement between national affectations is taken into account. In fact, throughout the novel Lyndon switches between national affiliations with a fluidity that seems to undermine the validity of the designations themselves, if not showing an absolute contempt for the categories entirely, at very least illustrating what the unscrupulous can do to manipulate them.

As Lyndon continues detailing his family history, the absurdity of his own ability to reconcile opposing identities becomes increasingly comical. He laments that if only his ancestors had been in the field fighting against King Rickard II or Cromwell, "we should have shaken off the English for ever" only to reveal later that, in fact, his ancestor Simon de Bary came to Ireland in the invading force of King Richard and married the daughter of the King of Munster after killing all the male descendants in that line. The next ancestor Lyndon proudly tells of, Phaudrig Barry, attempted to murder English guests in their sleep, only to be betrayed by his wife with the result that "the dastardly English prevented the just massacre of themselves by falling on the Irish."⁴⁸⁸ The sheer silliness of such comments alongside the heavy dramatic irony of the novel makes all commentary emerge in the novel as either two-faced or tongue-and-cheek. The question each reader faces is whether or not Thackeray's treatment of Irish national identity is similar to his treatment of gender, where a recognition of the narrator's farcical duplicity subverts the overt commentary. Or, on the other hand, in his Irish characters, settings, and situations, was Thackeray simply and irresponsibly playing with the comedic potential of stereotypes with no real intent to undermine them?

⁴⁸⁸ See *Barry Lyndon*. (4) &(5)

Like with Charles Lever, biographical information often strongly colors interpretations of *Barry Lyndon*. Calling *Barry Lyndon* a “truly picaresque hero in the most objectionable way,” James Murphy points out to that “fortune-hunting Irish predators” feature prominently not only in Thackeray’s early stories but also in his more famous novels *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis*.⁴⁸⁹ Thackeray’s own opinion on Irish politics and identity remain contentious. McCaw notes Thackeray’s affinity towards Ireland but also his “contradictory and deeply partisan” attitude towards the Irish people.⁴⁹⁰ Although Laura Berol commends both Thackeray and Anthony Trollope as “alone among English novelists in giving prominence to Irish characters and scenes in their fiction of the 1840s,” she interprets *Barry Lyndon* as a paradoxical text that on one hand legitimizes English prejudices and on the other highlights the role England has played in the disruption of that identity.⁴⁹¹ Berol, significantly, does not criticize the novel based on its use of stereotypes but rather on its placing blame for lawlessness on character rather than policy and emphasizing the threat posed by conceptions of Irish identity. The inconsistencies in the novel reflect Thackeray’s treatment of the Anglo-Irish identity as presented in the lineage of Lyndon. And while modern critics like Colby and Berol can read in Barry’s lineage and relationships poignant interactions with the convoluted history of Anglo-Irish relations,⁴⁹² the comic farcicality of tone and presentation can easily be interpreted as a careless, irresponsible interaction with identity.

⁴⁸⁹ Murphy, James. *Irish Novelists and the Victorian Age*. Oxford University Press. 2011. (77) & (78)

⁴⁹⁰ McCaw, Neil. “Some Mid-Victorian Irishness(es): Trollope, Thackeray, Eliot.” *Writing Irishness in Nineteenth-Century British Culture*. Neil McCaw (Ed.) Ashgate Publishing Company. 2004. 129-157. (138)

⁴⁹¹ Berol, Laura M. “The Anglo-Irish Threat in Thackeray’s and Trollope’s Writings of the 1840s”. *Victorian Literature and Culture*. 32:1. 2004. 103-116. (104). See (109), and (107)

⁴⁹² See Colby. (118) and Berol (115)

The representation of Irish people found in *Barry Lyndon* was early on defended as being too absurd to be taken seriously, and while this interpretation carries problematic implications, it still demonstrates an attempt to engage with Thackeray's use of hyperbole. *The Dublin Review* in 1871 describes the novel as intentionally exaggerated to the point of innuendo: "for no man knew better than he [Thackeray] that a caricature does no harm; that it is only truth which hurts; and he was as well aware as his reader that "Barry Lyndon" is the grossest of caricatures."⁴⁹³ Certainly, the many simian representations of Irish men and women found in Victorian political cartoons need not be considered well-founded to be deemed offensive. And yet, there is, clearly, in *Barry Lyndon*, as well as Thackeray's earlier Irish creations, an overt attempt to inflate stereotypes so far beyond believability that it seems to mock a tradition of representation.

Just as there has been, from its publication, a struggle to decipher the depravity of the novel, so too the seriousness of the blatant pandering to prejudice can be understood in different ways. George O'Brien picks up on this while examining the themes of façade, futility, and ultimate self-deception in the narrative, concluding that by "mocking Irishness in terms of self-representational failures [*Barry Lyndon*] does throw a revealing light on the formal and thematic challenges with which the development of the nineteenth-century Irish novel had to contend."⁴⁹⁴ The confusion over how to interpret the presentation of identity in *Barry Lyndon* parallels the moral confusion caused by the reckless form of satire, one with many objects of derision but few signals of affirmation. Thackeray's novels, as Patrick Parrinder puts it, display "a freak show, a box full of puppets strutting their way through a pompous charade that presages the vanity of human

⁴⁹³ "Two English Novelists: Dickens and Thackeray." *The Dublin Review*. 17:32. April 1871. 315-350. (333)

⁴⁹⁴ O'Brien, George. *The Irish Novel: 1800-1910*. Cork University Press. 2015. (78)

life and the impermanence of empires.”⁴⁹⁵ That Thackeray presents such a parade of foolishness makes the absence of characters from the Irish peasantry and middle class a merciful and meaningful omission.⁴⁹⁶

Healthy and encouraging forms of national identity are also conspicuously absent from the work, and this too must be considered in the context of this same reckless satire. The protagonist’s end is not only ignominious; there is something hellish in Lyndon’s condition when the reader leaves him in prison being tormented by a nameless “small man” who continually offers challenges that Lyndon is too broken or afraid to accept but still calling himself “the famous and fashionable Barry Lyndon.”⁴⁹⁷ It would be simplifying this conclusion to call it the bad end of an Irish adventurer. Lyndon has spent his life relying on his energy and vitality to force his way up the social ladder. Throughout the novel, he has proposed definitions of heroism, masculinity, virtue, and identity that are all made suspect by the grossly pathetic end. His end signifies something about the way he, and many in the society around him, understand and utilize national identity.

Because Thackeray’s satire seeks to diagnose a problem rather than prescribe a solution, the lack of affirmation need not be understood as a condemnation of all expressions of national identity but rather as an exploration of a problematic manifestation of national expression.

⁴⁹⁵ Parrinder, Patrick. *Nation and Novel: The English Novel From Its Origins to the Present Day*. Oxford University Press. 2006. (235)

⁴⁹⁶ See Knežević (162), where he attributes the absence of these elements of Irish society to Thackeray’s preferred theme of “social mobility within a class system defined by patrician notions of distinction.”

⁴⁹⁷ *Barry Lyndon*. (306-307)

In some respects, this novel makes identity based on national affiliation seem an absurd concept. This is exposed immediately in the novel in the humorous hybridity of Lyndon's pedigree. It can also be seen in the ambiguous use of national epithets, which can be used to commend or condemn. Lyndon praises himself as a "humble Irish adventurer" when wooing his wife but becomes outraged when, soon after, he is called a "penniless Irish adventurer" by his adopted son.⁴⁹⁸ Similarly, he is pleased to be called a "Tipperary Alcibiades" by an English lord but scorns being called "Irish Bluebeard" by the English press. The national adjective in each of these examples can be read as a meaningless accentuations. Like punctuation marks, they referring to nothing concrete, but are thrown in as either a positive or negative implication. Remembering that this information is all filtered through the persona of Barry Lyndon, the reader recognizes that this narrator's conception of national identity, like his conception of honor and valor, consists of nothing more than affectation. More than a specific group of people, such as classes in Irish society, Thackeray's main object of derision seems to be those in both Irish and English society who adopt such a self-serving and ultimately meaningless conception of identity and use them to insinuate superiority or inferiority. And this critique is not limited to characters as reprehensible as Lyndon. The narrator exhibits merely an exaggerated version of the parlance and preconceptions of the communities around him, and many in the novel who dismiss him as a simple Irish adventurer are undone by him.

When considering how this novel fits into an Irish tradition of writing and genre development, the problem of affirmation again presents itself. I have referred to Thackeray's strategy of satire in this novel as reckless because it lacks the normal

⁴⁹⁸ See Barry Lyndon. (256) & (271)

conventions of resolution and counterbalance that add focus to didactic direction. So successfully does the iniquity and delusion of the protagonist saturate his narrative that, with a few notable exceptions,⁴⁹⁹ all the commentary seems aimed at berating with thick irony and double-edged meanings. Günther Klotz argues, however, that Thackeray's literary strategy can be appreciated as a reaction to the politically conflicted society Thackeray lived in, where an author "could not favour one thing without disparaging another."⁵⁰⁰ And so, where Charles Lever reacted to this political situation by attempting to pass around olive branches, Thackeray went around knocking off hats, including Lever's.

The unique hybridity of Thackeray's formula in *Barry Lyndon* can be unsettling even to the point of suggesting its failure as a project. Lashing out at everything and defending little might be accused of being a petulant and ultimately ineffectual literary approach. It can also be encountered as an insensitive and inappropriate mode of representation. The novel cannot be praised for being sensitive or even accurate in its depictions of Irish life, and Thackeray can be and has been justly censured for this neglect. However, the lack of direct engagement in either exploring fully or proposing solutions to the Irish situation can also be appreciated as a prudent and appropriate move on Thackeray's part. It could be argued that he lacked both the insight and the personal investment necessary to contribute meaningfully to such a conversation. He could,

⁴⁹⁹ See Colby. (128). Colby claims that the author's true feelings are directly voiced in certain passages on European society, the Irish people, and war. I would argue that the last of these is by far the least ambiguous of the three. See *Barry Lyndon* (68) and (102-103) for heartfelt passages on the plight of common soldiers that carry a level of compassion uncharacteristic of the rest of the narrative.

⁵⁰⁰ Klotz, Günther. "Thackeray's Ireland: Image and Attitude in The Irish Sketch Book and Barry Lyndon." *Literary Interrelations, Ireland, England, and the World*. Wolfgang Zach and Heinz Kosok (Eds.). 3. 1987. 95-102. (95). Also see Colby. (118) for an exploration of the tumultuous political situation in Ireland at the time of the novel's release.

however, engage with the Irish situation as it existed in the literary landscape. Though rude in its delivery, *Barry Lyndon*, by fully exploiting the ironic potential of a rogue narrative, ultimately exposes the paradox ignored in traditional rogue fiction, where an overtly villainous narrator also serves as reliable translator of foreign peoples. Lyndon's delusion and self-deception are so foregrounded in the narrative that whether he is calling an Irish crowd a "set of wild gibbering Milesian faces" or offering seemingly astute observations about the lack of sympathy between the upper and lower classes in Ireland,⁵⁰¹ everything he utters is suspect. The filter of Barry Lyndon functions throughout as a logical fallacy, not disproving anything but invalidating everything. Chesterton observed that for satire, Thackeray used "the method of a million small touches reoccurring at intervals,"⁵⁰² and the most repetitious elements in *Barry Lyndon* are the reminders that the narrator has motives to deceive and mislead that are operating either consciously and unconsciously in everything he utters. Recognizing that sincere sentiment sometimes breaks the façade can yield interesting speculations, but the sentiments of the narrator are presented in such a way so that only a great deal of conjecture can disentangle sincerity from the carefully laid pattern of ironic deception that is interwoven into the entire narrative. The lack of either reliable affirmation or condemnation creates an unsettling situation in the text where pronouncements from the narrator that confirm the readers' prejudices must always be treated as Trojan horses since no one wishes to make an ally of the villain who voiced them.

It is in the implementation of frustrated and reckless irony and utilization of a perversely compelling narrator that *Barry Lyndon*'s significance within the trajectory of

⁵⁰¹ See *Barry Lyndon*. (201) & (250)

⁵⁰² Chesterton. (15)

Irish literature can be appreciated. Julián Jiménez Heffernan notes that *Barry Lyndon*'s "vitriolic anti-heroism is often spurred by social *ressentiment*, thus foreshadowing a moral trope popularized by the soldier-poets of the Great War."⁵⁰³ Similar connections could be made between Thackeray's approach and, what Emer Nolan calls, "Joyce's mock or anti-heroic treatment of Irish culture."⁵⁰⁴

The "complex process of reactions and counter-reactions [...] characteristic of twentieth-century Irish fiction"⁵⁰⁵ identified by critics like Norman Vance, vacillates between forms of idealism and cynicism, can also be seen operating throughout the nineteenth-century as well. Just as Joyce's fiction can be appreciated as reaction against a perceived idealism in Yeats and the Celtic Revival,⁵⁰⁶ so too can Thackeray's early works be read as a derisive rebuff to both the hopeful and reconciliatory tone of Lever's writing. However, the legacy of the unique manipulation of literary traditions found in *Barry Lyndon* can also be seen more concretely in an influential twentieth-century Irish-themed novel, one fittingly written by an author who, like Thackeray, viewed Ireland from the position of an outsider.

J.P. Donleavy's 1955 novel, *The Ginger Man*, is a work that demonstrates a marked affinity with tone, character development, and dark irony exhibited in *Barry*

⁵⁰³ Heffernan, Julián Jiménez. "'At the Court of Bellona': Political and Libidinal Usurpation in Barry Lyndon." *Journal of Narrative Theory*. 44:2. 2014. 183-211. (187)

⁵⁰⁴ Nolan, Emer. "James Joyce and the Mutations of the Modernist Novel." Joe Cleary (Ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Irish Modernism*. Cambridge University Press. 2014. 95-110. (106)

⁵⁰⁵ Vance, Norman. "Region, Realism and Reaction, 1922-1972." *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel*. John Wilson Foster (Ed.) Cambridge University Press. 2006. 153-170. (164)

⁵⁰⁶ See Nolan (95): "These three did not just pursue parallel if distinct projects: Joyce defined himself in part against Yeats; Beckett certainly defined himself against Joyce."; and Castle, Gregory. *Modernism and the Celtic Revival*. Cambridge University Press. 2001. Castle argues that "Joyce's critique of the Revival's redemptive ethnographic imagination within the larger framework of a critique of realism and the Western novelistic tradition." (39)

Lyndon. In a 1997 article in the *Literary Review*, Thomas E. Kenney holds up *The Ginger Man* alongside Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* as "one of the most influential American novels of the past fifty years,"⁵⁰⁷ and Patrick Shaw places it alongside Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March*, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* as a dark, modern manifestation of the picaresque tradition that emerged in the United States after the World Wars.⁵⁰⁸ Drawing on the picaresque tradition, both novels propose the world through the perspective of violent reprobates,⁵⁰⁹ and many parallels can be drawn between Lyndon and Donleavy's protagonist, Sebastian Dangerfield: their common fixations on wealth and prestige, abusive behavior towards women, contempt for nearly all individuals in their community save their confederates in crime, and, most significantly, their constant attempts to justify reprehensible behavior, which in both novels serves as a primary source of comedy. Thomas DeClairs description of Dangerfield as "a harried pseudo-aristocrat who cares nothing for the knowledge that experience brings"⁵¹⁰ could be equally applied to Lyndon. Like in Thackeray's, many humorous scenes in Donleavy's novel emerge from the protagonist's inability to recognize his own naked reprehensibility while he affects respectability. In one

⁵⁰⁷ Kennedy, Thomas E. "Only for the Moment Am I Saying Nothing: An Interview with J.P. Donleavy." *Literary Review*. 40:4. 1997. 655-671. (655)

⁵⁰⁸ Shaw, Patrick W. "The Satire of J.P. Donleavy's *The Ginger Man*." *Studies in Contemporary Satire: A Creative and Critical Journal*. 1:2-2. 1975. 9-16. (26)

⁵⁰⁹ Although *The Ginger Man* does not make the pretense of being a memoir and is written in third person, the narrative moves constantly and increasingly as the novel progresses in and out of Dangerfield's thoughts with little demarcation between narrator and protagonist. See Sherman, William David. "J.P. Donleavy: Anarchic Man as Dying Dionysian." *Twentieth Century Literature*. 13:4. 1968. 216-228. (217), where Sherman speculates that the narrative is meant to be read as the protagonist's vacillation between telling the story in first and third person.

⁵¹⁰ LeClair, Thomas. "A Case of Death: The Fiction of J.P. Donleavy." *Contemporary Literature*. 12:3. 1997. 329-344. (335)

particularly symbolic scene from *The Ginger Man*, Dangerfield, while returning to his wife and child after consummating a secret liaison, complains of the “damn sexual privation of this city [Dublin].”⁵¹¹ After mentally condemning several of his fellow passengers on the train of being lechers, Dangerfield discover that because his trousers were not properly secured after the tryst, he has been indecently exposing himself to his fellow passengers the entire ride home. While offering seemingly astute complaints about religiosity and scrupulosity of the society around him (he even has nightmares of being persecuted by Catholic for immorality),⁵¹² Dangerfield exemplifies an unappealing alternative to the moral model he condemns.

Strangely enough, it is those very features of *The Ginger Man* that carry the greatest affinity with *Barry Lyndon* that critics note as being the most modern and praiseworthy. *Barry Lyndon* shares with *The Ginger Man* the style of aggressively mocking social satire that seems to target every person and aspect of society that plays a role in the narrative, disrupting conventional modes of deriving meaning from the text. For Shaw, Dangerfield is the “atomic age Everyman”, “the isolated picaro,” and “a worthless man living in a worthless society.”⁵¹³ Maurice Vintener describes it as a novel of “savage indignation” with no plot and little character development, except for that of the central character who is defined by his “undiluted rascality, casual cruelty and selfishness.”⁵¹⁴ For Vintener, *The Ginger Man* is not a uniquely modern but only a

⁵¹¹ Donleavy, J.P. *The Ginger Man*. Dell Publishing Co., Inc. 1965. (87)

⁵¹² Donleavy. (73)

⁵¹³ See Shaw, Patrick W. “The Satire of J.P. Donleavy’s *The Ginger Man*.” *Studies in Contemporary Satire: A Creative and Critical Journal*. 1:2-2. 1975. 9-16. (26) & (25)

⁵¹⁴ Vintener, Maurice. “The Novelist as a Clown: The Fiction of J.P. Donleavy.” *Meanjin Quarterly*. 29. 1970. 108-114. (110)

particularly inventive modern manifestation of the comic carnivalesque tradition of Rabelais that through universal farce mocks the pretensions of the world.⁵¹⁵

And, like with *Barry Lyndon*, critics point to the unsettling lack of development in the protagonist as an important facet of the novel's commentary. Noting that Dangerfield refuses to even begin the process of self-reflection, William Sherman describes him as a character who chooses "isolation as a life-style, denies all authority, and uses laughter as a strategic response to the chaos of the external world." The third person narrator in *The Ginger Man* allows Donleavy to display the irony of his character as an automatic reaction rather than the more planned defense suggested by the memoir form of *Barry Lyndon*, but in each story even the most lively, farcical scenes contain pathos when the reader is reminded that the crowning irony of the narrative rests on the narrator's inability to effectually interact with the events he narrates. For example, in *The Ginger Man*, Dangerfield – after getting drunk, starting a fight, wrecking a pub, stealing a pedestrian's clothes, and fleeing from the authorities – laments to the woman he is having an affair with,

I want you to tell me how I can get away from evil in this world. How to put down sinners and raise the doers of good. I've been through a frightful evening.

Indeed, my suffering has been acute and more. More than sin or evil or anything. I have arrived at the conclusion that these people on this island are bogus.⁵¹⁶

In *Barry Lyndon* too, the reader is often asked to laugh at a narrator's absurd attempts to present himself as an innocent martyr, as when Lyndon laments after his wife's escape from being imprisoned, "I am lost in wonder at the depth of her hypocrisy. Who can be

⁵¹⁵ See Vintener. (111) & (113-114)

⁵¹⁶ Donleavy. (116)

surprised that an unsuspecting person like myself should have been a victim to such a consummate deceiver!”⁵¹⁷ But perhaps, it is this lack of awareness that functions as one of the primary sources of sympathy and good-will that either character can hope to garner. What Heffernan says of Lyndon could also be said of Dangerfield: “His talent for imposture betrays the violence of the trope that he incarnates. Since he assumes no position of truth, no fixed origin to ground his endless repetitive gesture, he cannot be considered a liar...”⁵¹⁸

The greatest connection between the two works lies in the similar utilization of a strangely sympathetic reprehensible protagonist. Andrew Nixon calls it the “troubling mystery of *The Ginger Man*,” that “Donleavy sacrifices our sympathy for his protagonist early in the book, yet asks us to stay with him, even laugh with him. And despite ourselves we do.”⁵¹⁹ Similar sentiments were written of Thackeray’s hero by Trollope, who called Lyndon “as great a scoundrel as the mind of man has ever conceived” but towards whom the reader cannot resist having “friendly feelings.”⁵²⁰ When considering the implications of these two absurdly self-serving scoundrels who run roughshod across a ludicrously embellished Irish landscape, the position of both authors as outsiders is not insignificant. Donleavy the American and Thackeray the Englishman could offer no inside information on the island that fascinated them, and so each narrowed the lens of their narratives to the perspective of egocentric outsiders whose jokes against the Irish only serve to develop the greater joke on themselves. Both protagonists gain some

⁵¹⁷ Barry Lyndon. (304)

⁵¹⁸ Heffernan. (198)

⁵¹⁹ Nixon, Andrew. “The Wild Ginger Man.” *Slightly Foxed*. 37. 2013. 39-44. (41)

⁵²⁰ Trollope, Anthony. “Thackeray.” *William Thackeray: The Critical Heritage*. Donald Hawes & Geoffrey Tilotson (Eds.) Taylor & Francis e-Library. 2003. 30-32. (30) Trollope also calls *Barry Lyndon* the most remarkable of Thackeray’s creations.

sympathy from their isolation and the vivacity of their entertaining but ultimately unprofitable striving for success and acceptance. But neither protagonist can transcend the paradoxes and ironies that make their lives laughable.

The folly of both Lyndon and Dangerfield creates overarching farces in each novel allowed both authors to take great liberties in their exploration of stereotypes. This is what Johann Norstedt argues when she writes,

The one-sidedness is necessary for Donleavy to achieve his comic effects – the slapstick people and situations which are the novel’s greatest strengths, with Sebastian, the magnificent Irish-American rogue, being the crowning touch.⁵²¹

These sentiments echo *The Dublin Review*’s 1871 defense of *Barry Lyndon* on the grounds of hyperbole, as Norstedt argues fault can only be found by “those who might be reading it for some sort of accurate picture of the country.”⁵²² Other critics who have defended Donleavy’s brash representation of the Irish link the novel to an Irish tradition of self-censoring humor. Three years after the novel’s release, a review in the *Nation* claimed that though some “portions may give offense to those who are Irish by birth or sentiment,” the novel “does not differ greatly from a number of satirical or humorous works by native Irishmen – Swift, Brian Merriman, Joyce.”⁵²³ David Seed draws this last connection further, comparing Dangerfield with Buck Mulligan from Joyce’s *Ulysses*, as both caricature the Irish people and blame Irish society for the misfortunes in their lives.⁵²⁴ Vintener also defends the novel as part of the Irish tradition, and that

⁵²¹ Norstedt, Johann A. “Irishmen and Irish-Americans in the Fiction of J.P. Donleavy.” *Irish American Criticism: Essays and Criticism*. Daniel J. Casey (Ed.) AMS Press, Inc. 1979. 115-125. (121)

⁵²² Norstedt. (121)

⁵²³ Mercier, Vivian. “The Fool-Rogue.” *Nation*. 186:21. 1958. 480. (480)

⁵²⁴ Seed, David. “Parables of Estrangement: the Fiction of J.P. Donleavy.” *Irish Writing: Exile and Subversion*. Paul Hyland and Neil Sammells (Eds.) St. Martin’s Press. 1991. 209-223. (210)

exaggeration has “always been a prime component in Irish humor, but J.P. Donleavy sometimes even succeeds in exaggerating his exaggerations.”⁵²⁵ So too, *Barry Lyndon* is a work that overtly pushes its exaggerations beyond all credulity. Both are novels of excess: excessive irony, excessive brutality, and excessive insolence. Lyndon himself is a grotesque exaggeration of the stage-Irish adventurer. Although the characters of Lyndon and Dangerfield play on national stereotypes, stretching them out to laughable degrees, the characters themselves view national identity as having little meaning beyond what can be exploited for personal gain. Though an American, Dangerfield affects an English accent when convincing Irish shopkeepers to extend him the lines of credit he never intends to repay.⁵²⁶ In each novel, assumptions about national characterizations are things to be preyed upon for profit.

Thackeray’s is a formula that anticipates objections over positive or accurate depictions by fully integrating the dubious vantage of the rogue narrator into the text. Regarding *The Ginger Man*, Vintener suggests too much attention to analyzing symbolism and social satire puts the critic at risk of becoming part of the novel’s joke about the pretensions of the world, and that the creator of Sebastian Dangerfield “is perhaps more concerned with him as a clown than as a protestor.”⁵²⁷ Far from being a critical cop-out, this is an interpretation that the absurdity of the text invites. *Barry Lyndon*, even more than *The Ginger Man*, makes a concerted mockery of the protagonist’s ability to interpret the events of his own life. Fischers’ 1896 article in *The English Illustrated Magazine* speculates that even “the best of us have still a touch of the

⁵²⁵ Vintener. (109)

⁵²⁶ See Donleavy, J.P. *The Ginger Man*. Dell Publishing Co., Inc. (1965). (9-14)

⁵²⁷ Vintener. (110-111)

rogue at heart that a rogue's memoirs make universally popular reading..."⁵²⁸ But

Lyndon's allure is not merely from a shared rascality. He personifies the danger everyone faces when becoming too confident in the conclusions they have drawn from the events of life, and a potential conceit at the heart of every memoir.

Beyond showing *Barry Lyndon* to be something more than an anomaly in the tradition of Irish picaresques, a comparison with *The Ginger Man* also demonstrates the extent to which the specifics of the Irish tradition played into the formulation of Thackeray's impish innovations. As critics have pointed out, Lyndon's liminal position in British society and self-contradicting sense of identity cause him to fixate on the integrity of the ruling class in Ireland. But as much as he seems to reflect the contradictions of the Anglo-Irish class, the alluring eccentric dynamism of the characters resists such a reading. When a lord, Lyndon is equally destructive to both his Irish and English estates, selling off the timber of both properties for ready cash.⁵²⁹ And though his short-sighted prodigality can certainly be read as a commentary on the fecklessness of the Irish aristocracy, the Lyndon the pícaro defies the reins of the type of Anglo-Irish landlord allegories inaugurated by Maria Edgeworth and characteristic of the highly allegorical national romance genre. Like the traditional pícaro, Barry Lyndon is an outsider, but a strangely successful outsider, always striving for and, at times, attaining acceptance and recognition. Able to move between social stratas, often through cunning and violence. He exemplifies the worse tendencies of his adopted rank and class from his brutality as a soldier to his debauchery as an aristocrat. John A. Lester has argued that "every Thackeray novel is in some degree a novel without a hero; in all of them the chief

⁵²⁸ Fischer. (625)

⁵²⁹ See *Barry Lyndon*. (236) & (239)

protagonist is society itself,”⁵³⁰ and *Barry Lyndon* certainly contains scathing satire on Victorian conceptions of love, war, and honor, but the unusual and seemingly contradictory commentary the novel makes on Irish representation becomes greatly enriched when considered in the context of Thackeray’s manipulation and contribution to the development of genre in the Irish tradition.

In creating *Barry Lyndon*, Thackeray was playing with a number of literary traditions. He made the didactic moralizing of the later picaresque tradition absurd by projecting it through a character that resembles in his ethical immaturity the earlier, immoral picaro. He disrupts the moral assurances of predecessors like Defoe and Fielding through a relentless miopy with no pretense of reform or noble counterweight to the vice of the protagonist. And he does all this very overtly, exaggerating the tropes of Irish representation developed in British fiction through rogue fiction. Lever and Thackeray viewed together present an interesting example of genre adaptation in nineteenth-century Ireland. Lever experimented with plotting, drawing on the picaresque tradition of circuitous plotting to develop expansive, rolling, reveling tales that countered the narrative logic of the allegorical romance. Thackeray’s foray into the Irish picaresque produced a disconcertingly intimate character study that is paradoxically more assertive and ambiguous. With aggressive satire, he lashes out in all directions, even at the genre and stereotypes he engages in. On the surface, Lyndon seems just another arrogant, violent, heedless reiteration of an Irish stock character. However, as quick as the reader is introduced to Lyndon’s nationality, it becomes swept up in the rampant satire that

⁵³⁰ Lester, John A. “Thackeray’s Narrative Technique”. *PMLA*. 69:3. 1954. 392-409. (398)

preoccupies the entire narrative. One hundred years later, Donleavy would borrow from this same formula and setting to express the alienation, disillusionment and frustration he found in his time.

CONCLUSION

A theme throughout my study has been that historical, social, political, and cultural realities within the Irish tradition are often easy to acknowledge but difficult to integrate into literary evaluation. Nineteenth-century Ireland was an era of great social upheaval, competing forms of nationalism, bitter class conflict, developing dogmas on identity, crumbling conceptions of order, and emerging possibilities for progress. And yet, in all this hurly burly, aesthetic demands of accurate representation, clear forecasting, and unambiguous loyalties often prevail. In this study, I have sought to emphasize how four significant but underappreciated authors have contributed to the development of genre in the Irish novelistic tradition. That these works have received harsh criticism is not the problem, but rather that they have never gone through the proper vetting process that other Irish authors have been allowed. I wish to explore this point further by dwelling on one of the most famous— if not the most famous — events in Irish literary history: the public reaction against J.M. Synge’s *Playboy of the Western World*.

From its opening night at the Abbey Theater in 1907, the play caused a series of escalating disturbances that grew more farcical as time went on. The audiences arrived on that first night already suspicious of the production. Negative reception of Synge’s earlier play *The Shadow of the Glen* (1904) had already forced W.B. Yeats to defend the artistic license required to cultivate a “national theater.”⁵³¹ When the crowd disrupted the first performance, there was, from the start, confusion over the cause, Lady Gregory famously wiring Yeats that the uproar arose on account of the word “shift” being used in

⁵³¹ See Yeats, W.B. “An Irish National Theater.” *Modern Irish and Contemporary Drama*. John P. Harrington (Ed.) 2009. 412-414.

the play. From there, subsequent protests became more lively, with factions fighting each interrupting the performers with choruses from either “God Save the King” or “God Save Ireland.”⁵³² When the play traveled across the Atlantic, Irish-Americans proudly followed the tradition. In a comical twist worthy of the play, the 1912 performance in Philadelphia saw not only twelve protesters arrested for disturbing the performance,⁵³³ but also arrest warrants issued for the entire cast for “taking part in a theatrical performance of an immoral character.”⁵³⁴

But more significant than the aftermath was the initial reaction in Dublin by the Irish public. Paige Reynolds alludes to a wide-ranging debate on proposed causes for the reaction, from “unionist anxiety over home rule to growing awareness to venereal disease,” but places the primary culprit as the perception that the play “offered its public an offensive and unflattering picture of Irish peasant life, rather than an affirmative of national folk culture.”⁵³⁵ A short 1907 blurb from the *The Nation* can serve to summarize the nationalist sentiment that remained after the initial fracas:

J.M. Synge’s Irish comedy, “The Playboy of the Western World” which created a riot in Dublin, has just been produced in the Great Queen Street Theatre, in London. That it should have given offence in Ireland does not seem strange. It is a satire, of which the burthen is that in County Mayo the inhabitants would make a hero of a man who killed his father, merely because he had the pluck to kill him out in the open with a “loy,” or potato-spade, not from behind with a rusty fork, as

⁵³² See Reynolds, Paige. “The First Playboy.” *Modern Irish and Contemporary Drama*. John P. Harrington (Ed.) 2009. 464-468. (464-465)

⁵³³ “Stale Eggs for Actors: Rioting Again Marks Performance of ‘Playboy of the Western World.’” *The Washington Post*. January 17, 1912. 3.

⁵³⁴ “Irish Players Arrested.” *The Washington Post*. January 18, 1912. 3.

⁵³⁵ Reynolds. (464-465)

the Widow Quinn killed her husband. It is said in construction, character, and dialogue, to be the best play Mr. Synge has written: and its setting, its incidents, and its treatment are so unfamiliar as to double its value in the eyes of English theatregoers.⁵³⁶

What makes the whole affair convoluted to the casual observer is that the conflict arose between nationalists and a national theater with both sides posturing as champions of the Irish people. G.J. Watson calls it the “great irony of Synge’s work” that he “encountered hostility not because of his dislike of aspects of Irish life, but more because of what he chose to celebrate in that life. He idealized the Irish in ways which they could not feel to be ideal.”⁵³⁷ This is a generous assessment, no doubt influenced in the subsequent dramatic shift in the public perception, the play being later understood to glorifying rather than mocking rural Ireland. However, as much as Synge might have sought to idealize aspects of Irish life, a great deal of reproof is readily apparent in the play, from the provocative premise of a strong-brogued Irish peasant population fawning over a cowardly self-proclaimed murderer to the jabs at Catholic religiosity through the craven character Sean Keogh. Certainly, when Keogh becomes terrified at the prospect of spending the night protecting his paramour and attempts to flee, crying out to his detainers,

Oh, Father Reilly and the saints of God, where will I hide myself to-day? Oh, St.

Joseph and St. Patrick and St. Bridgid, and St. James, have mercy on me now!

⁵³⁶ “Drama and Music.” *The Nation*. 84:2191. 1907. 595-596. (595)

⁵³⁷ Watson, G.J. *Irish Identity and the Literary Revival: Synge, Yeats, Joyce, and O’Casey*. Critical Studies in Irish Literature, Vol. 4. The Catholic University of America Press. (71)

[...] Leave me go, or I'll get the curse of the priests on you, and of the scarlet-coated bishops of the court of Rome,⁵³⁸

the audience had every right to seriously scrutinize what the author was leading them to laugh at.

As with *Shadow of the Glen*, Yeats largely defended Synge's work by framing the issue as a question of artistic liberty rather than wading into the semantic particulars of the play, and when he took to the stage after the contentions began to introduce the performance, he accused protesters of committing the very thing they are protesting: caricature.⁵³⁹ This irony Kiberd would much later concur with when concluding that "the only Stage-Irish scenes had been enacted away from the stage amidst the uproar of the pit."⁵⁴⁰ From a literary perspective the conflict has been understood, as R.F. Foster proposes it, as a symbolic confrontation between the modernism of the Abbey Theater and 'Irish Ireland' provincialism.⁵⁴¹

On one level, the play itself and reaction it caused exemplify a confusion over the definition of a national literature, whether it should be a vehicle for affirming or critiquing the nation,⁵⁴² the former directive always in danger of falling into the insipidity of propaganda the latter the insult of parody. Another, later article from the *The Nation* illustrates this tension:

⁵³⁸ Synge, J.M. *The Playboy of the Western World*. *Modern Irish and Contemporary Drama*. John P. Harrington (Ed.) 2009. 68-112. (72)

⁵³⁹ See Yeats, William Butler. "The Controversy over *The Playboy of the Western World*." *Modern Irish and Contemporary Drama*. John P. Harrington (Ed.) 2009. 462-464. Yeats accuses the viewers of caricaturing Synge.

⁵⁴⁰ Kiberd, Declan. "The Fall of the Stage Irishman." *The Genres of the Irish Literary Revival*. Pilgrim Books, Inc. 1980. 39-60. (46)

⁵⁴¹ Foster, R.F. *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972*. The Penguin Press. 1988. (452)

⁵⁴² See Castle, Gregory. "Staging Ethnography: John M. Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* and the Problem of Cultural Translation." *Theatre Journal*. 49:3. 1997. 265-286. (266)

It may be that Synge has lived up to the high praise artistically, which Mr. Yeats is trying to win for him. If so, he has created a picture which is great and true, not by virtue of its Irish setting, but because human nature in one of its most appalling aspects has been wrought to a noble purpose.⁵⁴³

In other words, it might be a great play, but if it is, it is not a particularly Irish great play. The distinction proposed in the concession implies a separate set of criteria to allow the work full recognition in the sub-category of “Irish” literature. One of these criteria that manifests strongly in subsequent criticism are mimetic demands that dispute the author’s accurate portrayal of his subject matter. Synge was an Irish Protestant, “a true child of the Ascendancy”⁵⁴⁴ as Corkery would later call him, who molded his plays out of his experience living amongst Irish speaking communities in the west of Ireland. In his preface to the play, Synge condemns the artifice of other Irish plays, which lacks the “rich joy found only in what is superb and wild in reality.”⁵⁴⁵ And yet, contrivance is exactly what later Irish authors would accuse him of. Patrick Kavanagh called Synge’s fictional Irish peasants “picaresque conventions” that “provided Irish Protestants who are worried about being ‘Irish’ with an artificial country.”⁵⁴⁶ And Flann O’Brien famously wrote of Synge, “In this Anglo-Irish literature of ours...nothing in the whole galaxy of fake is comparable with Synge. In Synge we have the virus isolated and recognizable.”⁵⁴⁷ These objections have not been sufficient to dislodge Synge’s position as a preeminent

⁵⁴³ “Drama: “National” Plays.” *The Nation*. 93: 2416. 1911. 376-377. (377)

⁵⁴⁴ Corkery. (ix)

⁵⁴⁵ Synge, J

⁵⁴⁶ qtd. in Foster, John Wilson. *The Poetry of Patrick Kavanagh: A Reprisal. Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*. 12:3. 1979. 139-159. (146)

⁵⁴⁷ qtd in Monique, Gallagher. ““The Poor Mouth’: Flann O’Brien and the Gaeltacht.” *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*. 72:287. 1983. 231-241. (237)

Irish author, but questions over his mode of representation still prove a point of contention. Is the play best characterized, as Edward Hirsch argued, as an “attacked the urban middle class’s flattened portrait of the noble Irish farmer (an inversion of the stage stereotype),”⁵⁴⁸ or a soothing conceit for the privileged class? Seamus Dean places the object of the plays derision more forcefully, characterizing Synge’s glorification of the peasant as an “attack upon the small and squalid soul of the modern bourgeois,” and Yeats’ defense stemming from a desire to guard a “heroic and aristocratic” figure “attacked by the plebian mob.”⁵⁴⁹ By emphasizing the issue of class distinctions between author and audience, Deane further complicates issues of authenticity and purpose, which are confounded even further when religious dynamics are included.⁵⁵⁰

As tempting to dismiss the whole affair as an instance of philistinism now that Synge is safely ensconced in national canon, the event demonstrates the complex way authenticity and representation play in the Irish critical tradition. If the play did indeed constitute an artistic but unflattering portrait, then the Dublin public had cause to be a bit displeased. Whether the play is best understood as a parody or a panegyric is still debated. And if their methods cannot be condoned, the public’s reaction can still be allowed some sympathy given the long history of negative Irish exhibition on the stage.

The event brings to the fore questions concerning the ability of literature, and particularly literature promoting itself as “national,” to remove itself from the primary

⁵⁴⁸ Hirsch, Edward. “The Imaginary Irish Peasant.” *PMLA*. 106:5. 1991. 1116-1133. (1126-1127)

⁵⁴⁹ Deane, Seamus. *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880-1980*. Faber and Faber Limited. 1985.(33) & (35)

⁵⁵⁰ See Hoppen, K. Theodore. *Ireland Since 1800: Conflict & Conformity*. Longman Group UK Limited. 1989. (149). Hoppen interprets the reception of Synge’s play as evidence of the influence of the Catholic Church, which created “general distrust of all but the safest and most deferential literary representation of social behavior and morality.”

concerns and sensibilities of the nation. Even if nationalist resentment can be simplified as, as Malcom Brown puts it, against the “unpatriotic aspirations against Irish chastity and loving kindness,”⁵⁵¹ they had ample reason to be sensitive to the unflattering aspects. Though Synge saw poetic vitality in Irish speech patterns, he also recognized their comic potential. When audiences witnessed a father hire a self-proclaimed murderer to guard his daughter, saying, “Now by the grace of God, herself will be safe this night, with a man killed his father holding danger from the door,”⁵⁵² the humor springs as much from the silly sentiment as the unusual turn of phrase. And the play’s reception in England would certainly suggest a connection to past negative exhibition on the English stage. When the play came to England, *The Academy* proudly announced that, “Mr. Synge’s three-act comedy, which was hailed in Dublin with shouts of opprobrium, was greeted in London with peels of laughter,”⁵⁵³ and *The Bookman* praised the plays for its “quite unbookish phrases” that were “like the speech of very young children of high courage, and yet have in them at times great subtlety and fitness to the moods of modern men.”⁵⁵⁴ That Irish audiences did not laugh at the portrayal and the English ones did could indicate that the play was tailored to appease the tastes of a foreign rather than a domestic audience, whether intentionally or unintentionally. However, just as reasonably, the conflicting reactions could indicate the exact opposite – that the play affected the people it was meant to affect, if perhaps cutting close to the bone, and only elicited mild amusement

⁵⁵¹ Brown, Malcom. *The Politics of Irish Literature: From Thomas Davis to W.B. Yeats*. University of Washington Press. 1972.

⁵⁵² Synge, J.M. *The Playboy of the Western World*. (76)

⁵⁵³ Shore, W. Teignmouth. “The Playboy of the Western World.” *The Academy*. 72. January 15, 1907. 586. The review chastises Synge only for its use of tragic elements in a comedy, “

⁵⁵⁴ “They Playboy of the Western World.” *The Bookman*. 32:191. August 1907. 181.

from disengaged, foreign audience. It is a point that both advocates and antagonists of the play could hold up as evidence.

While acknowledging the ambiguous evidence at work in the scales, it is important also to not mistake *Playboy of the Western World* as an anomalous case, far from it. Indeed, it is part of a greater pattern in history of Irish representation and critical reaction. Twenty years after the play, Sean O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* (1926) would be, as Shaun Richards puts it, "condemned as bitterly as *Playboy* had been [...]" and in almost identical terms,⁵⁵⁵ and Elizabeth Butler Cullingford draws the same connection back to the earlier condemnation of the previous generation's playwright Dion Boucicault, an author who "declared that it was his 'vocation' to abolish the stage Irishman" but still received the "same charge [of reinstating caricature] that was leveled against both J.M. Synge and Sean O'Casey."⁵⁵⁶ For critics like Kiberd, this pattern has clear divisions that separates the figures like Boucicault who "abjectly conformed to English notions of the Stage Irishman" and those associated with the "artistic revolution initiated by Yeats [that] gave to the people their own theater in which they could depict their own life as it was truly lived."⁵⁵⁷ On one side of this division, critical artists are constructive and insightful, on the other they are derisive and petty. On one side, the laudatory efforts of artists are empowering, on the other they are two faced. However, my contention throughout this project has been that such a line is a convenient illusion, one

⁵⁵⁵ Richards, Shaun. "Plays of (Ever) Changing Ireland." *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama*. Cambridge University Press. 2004. 1-17.

⁵⁵⁶ Cullingford, Elizabeth Butler. *Ireland's Other: Ethnicity and Gender in Irish Literature and Popular Culture*. University of Notre Dame. 2001. (15-16)

⁵⁵⁷ Kiberd, Declan. "The Fall of the Stage Irishman." *The Genres of the Irish Literary Revival*. Pilgrim Books, Inc. 1980. 39-60. (51) & (45)

that helps focus attention on the stellar accomplishments of Irish modernism to the detriment of the larger tradition.

A strange irony of the Irish national cannon, worth noting briefly here, is the high number of famous Irish authors who left Ireland and only gained acknowledgement after acquiring a substantial foreign audience. This would be true of Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw who preferred England to Ireland as both a residence and focus of literary efforts, and the latter's response to James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) is a telling testament to his regard for his homeland:

I have walked those streets and know those shops and have heard and taken part in those conversations. I escaped from them to England at the age of twenty; and forty years later have learnt from the books of Mr. Joyce that Dublin is still what it was, and young men are still drivelling in slackjawed blackguardism just as they were in 1870 [...] In Ireland they try to make a cat cleanly by rubbing its nose in its own filth. Mr. Joyce has tried the same treatment on the human subject. I hope it may prove successful.⁵⁵⁸

Shaw's critique is not that Joyce used caricature, but that it was too unflatteringly true, which makes it distasteful, an inversion of *The Nation's* criticism of Synge.

Joyce as well, left Ireland because of its insularity, calling the island "an afterthought of Europe" and its people "the most belated race in Europe."⁵⁵⁹ Although the complexity of Joyce's attitude towards his native land cannot be contained in a comment, his highly critical stance on many aspects of Irish culture made his acceptance into the

⁵⁵⁸ Deming, Robert H. "Chapter 8: ULYSSES: Part 94: Shaw's Reaction to the Ulysses Prospectus." *James Joyce. Volume I: 1907-27*, 1997. 189–90. (189-190)

⁵⁵⁹ qtd. in Stewart, Bruce. "James Joyce." *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel*. Cambridge University Press. 2006. 133-152. (135)

Irish canon a struggle. Even though Ireland can boast of being the only English-speaking country to not ban *Ulysses*, the novel itself was a rare commodity in the country even up to the 1960s when its cause was championed by a younger generation of authors like Sean O'Faolain that aspired, in his words, to take "Joyce rather than Yeats as our inspiration."⁵⁶⁰ Though this might seem like a recognition emerging from within the tradition, this came at a time when world-wide Joyce criticism had reached what editor of *James Joyce: A Critical Introduction* (1960) Harry Levin called "appalling proportions."⁵⁶¹

Sufficed to say, it has been, historically, a rocky road to recognition for artists in Ireland, which is what makes simple line of assumed authenticity all the more troublesome. Such a partition has allowed the most damnatory accusations to lay undisturbed atop a whole corpus of literature, while the same accusations are loudly and fruitfully contested for works across the barrier. It is because the initial interpretation of *The Playboy of the Western World* were not allowed rest long enough to calcify into axiom that the play has enjoyed such a rich and varied appraisal. The same cannot be said of the authors like Rosa Mulholland, Charles Lever, and Sheridan le Fanu, where a century of static consensus causes modern readers approach them, as the audience to Synge's play, predisposed to see find inauthenticity and offense. This is an issue particularly pressing within the narrower realm of Ireland's novelistic tradition. Derek Hand presents it as a paradox that the Irish novel still faces general critical disregard despite the fact that

⁵⁶⁰ qtd. in Brooker, Joseph. *Joyce's Critics: Transitions in Reading Culture*. The University of Wisconsin Press. 2004. (197). See (187-189) & (193) for Joyce's reception in Ireland.

⁵⁶¹ qtd. in Brooker. (3)

Ireland has produced so many world-famous novelists, and proposes the singular achievements of authors like Laurence Sterne, James Joyce, Elizabeth Bowen, Samuel Beckett, and John McGahern have skewed the overall narrative of the novel's development in Ireland.⁵⁶² Because authors like Sterne, Joyce, and Beckett – and I would add here Flann O'Brien – were so invested in drastically mutating the novel form, their contribution to the story of the Irish novel is doubly distracting from the more subtle developments within the Irish tradition.

The four studies I have presented here are meant to encourage the much needed integration of the nineteenth-century Irish novel into the discourse on Irish literature, but this integration is also significant to the wider discussion of the unique developments of the Irish novel of the twentieth-century. The gothic tradition's influence on the modern Irish short story and contemporary playwrights like Marina Carr and Conor McPherson are easily recognizable, but greater appreciation of the Irish novels of Sheridan le Fanu and William Carleton can lead to insights into the unique strategies Irish novelists have developed to interact with history. As James Cahalan notes about the difficulty of defining the genre of historical novel in Ireland, "if every Irish novel with history in it were to be included, just about every Irish novel ever written would have to be examined."⁵⁶³ The reclamation of a hidden history of Irish female novelists should include more scrutiny into the diversity of this heritage. The story of women authors' contribution to the novel in the nineteenth-century is often limited to the early century

⁵⁶² Hand, Derek. *A History of the Irish Novel*. Cambridge University Press, 2011. (5) Hand also argues that because the prominence of authors who operate outside or the tradition reinforce a perception that the novel is "singularly unsuited to the task of rendering the Irish world and Irish experience."

⁵⁶³ This is something particularly important because of the Cahalan, James M. *Great Hunger, Little Room: The Irish Historical Novel*. Syracuse University Press. 1983. (xiii)

pioneers, Maria Edgeworth and Lady Morgan (Lady Morgan). Analysis of neglected authors like Rosa Mulholland and Emily Lawless help paint a much more varied picture of the role women authors played not only in the founding but the development of the Irish novel and reveal significant challenges to predominant modes of female representation. And why cannot Charles Lever take a place among the great Irish self-exiled authors? More than the other authors in this study, accusations of misrepresentation and caricature have effectively removed him from critical consideration, and yet not only was he the most popular Irish author of the century but a singularly innovative one. His early picaresques along with Thackeray's consequent pasquinade deserve further analysis as part of comedic tradition, alongside Flann O'Brien and J.P. Donleavy, as well as in this history of how demands on authenticity and accurate representation have influenced genre innovation.

The accusations leveled against Synge – of pandering, parody, caricature, disdain, misrepresentation, and snobbery – were all standard denouncements by the start of the twentieth-century, ones used to condemn most works of the previous century into obscurity. Given the weight of these accusations in the Irish tradition and the prominence of those who proposed them, it is worth considering, then, how well Synge's legacy might have fared had Yeats not used the Abbey Theater to defend him against public reaction long enough to get a full hearing. As Daniel Corkery, puts it "Fortunately for his [Synge's] memory, his friends were of ripe age and of old experience in literature. [...] their voices carried far, for they had for long been in possession of the ear of the world."⁵⁶⁴ I end my study with short consideration of *The Playboy of the Western World*

⁵⁶⁴ Corkery, Daniel. *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature: A Study*. Russell & Russell Inc. 1965. (v)

not to completely denounce the intense scrutiny to establish authenticity, historicity, identity, and sincerity that works of Irish fiction undergo. This is part of the richness of the tradition, proposing elaborate demands on its artists and provoking a robust critical discourse. The tempest of strong reactions, too, has played no small role in the brilliance of the Ireland's literary output. One direct example is Flann O'Brien's hilarious lampoon on Gaelic romanticism *An Béal Bocht* (*The Poor Mouth*) (1941), which Monique Gallagher connects with the author's contempt for the Irish veneration of Synge's literary creations.⁵⁶⁵ However, the strong opinioned and high passionate approach of such discourse should be also recognized as chronically liable to certain types of oversight. Not only does it allow relevant but highly contentious evidence into discussions of quality, but it also tends to focus on major points of contention. John Wilson Foster points out that although movements directly opposed to the Revival receive ample consideration, "credible Irish writing that neither promoted nor repudiated the Revival has been neglected."⁵⁶⁶ In this regard, it is a discourse that can be viewed as well suited for contending singularity while neglecting continuity. Just as Irish historical account are always susceptible to simplified binaries that obscure complex realities, Irish literary study inclines towards dramatized narratives. The authors I have analyzed in this study have played no small role in the development of the Irish novel, and their further inclusion in conversations on the development of Irish literature can only lead to greater

⁵⁶⁵ See Gallagher. (237-238) Another curious aspect of the play's legacy worth noting is the complete reversal of interpretation that occurred in public opinion. Though the play was initially seen as a lampoon on the Irish people, it was, by Flann O'Brien's time, viewed as a romanticized portrait of western Ireland.

⁵⁶⁶ Foster, John Wilson. "The Irish Renaissance, 1890–1940: prose in English." *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature*. Cambridge University Press. 2006. 113-180. (113)

appreciation for the ongoing and complex struggle interact with the Irish situation through the novel form.

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