

Charles Lever and Ireland

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## Abstract

### Charles Lever and Ireland

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Following imposition of the Act of Union, which came into force on 1 January (1801), a literary market developed amongst English readers who wanted to understand more about Ireland. The market for novels about Ireland flourished. Charles James Lever, a writer whose work too few are really familiar with today, and whose reputation deserves rescuing from obscurity, rose to tremendous popularity in the late 1830s. Charles Lever's remarkable commercial success was initially established using some carelessly constructed clichés of Irishness, intended to amuse an increasingly lucrative English market. This is one of the reasons that his work has subsequently been overlooked. Critical neglect of Lever's work can in part be attributed to Yeats' failure to appreciate the value of his later work, particularly in terms of Lever's post-1844 Irish historical fiction. Lever's posthumous reputation has also suffered because too many scholars have relied upon regenerating the opinions of earlier critics who have, like Yeats, not really engaged with the breadth of Lever's work.

Lever's contemporaries, Anthony Trollope and particularly William Makepeace Thackeray, drew inspiration from him, and sought to emulate Lever's success with their own 'Irish' novels, based on the popularity of Irish subject matter in the early stage of their careers. But Catholic Emancipation, the Great Irish Famine, the struggle for Repeal of the Union, the Papal Aggression, and discourse in England regarding the 'Irish Question', all served to dampen the market for novels with an Irish setting, prompting Trollope and Lever to leave Irish subject matter alone by the mid-nineteenth century. Charles Lever's continued insistence on chronicling Ireland's historic explanations of contemporary issues, had to compete with increasingly negative constructions of Irish national identity in England.

By the early 1850s, Lever had realised that the mythical vision of the landlord-tenant compact, that he had endorsed as a younger man, was no longer possible in light of the massive social upheaval manifested by the Famine, and his novels became increasingly complex, as he continued his mission to explain Ireland to an English market that was less inclined to want to understand. There is a discernible progression in Lever's writing towards an Irish nationalist argument, for which Lever has never fully been credited. His misconstrued reputation as an enduring Tory-Unionist, has obscured the value of his contribution to the nineteenth-century Irish nationalist debate, and this thesis seeks to rectify misinformed judgements on Lever's work.

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# INTRODUCTION

Word Count: 4, 429

This study began to develop through an initial interest in Anthony Trollope, and why he followed his publisher's advice against writing further novels with an Irish setting during the Great Irish Famine. In his *Autobiography* (1883), Trollope referred to Charles Lever three times; initially comparing him with his good friend George Henry Lewes, whom he called 'Billy Russell',<sup>1</sup> then referring to Lever's 'rattling, jolly, joyous' characters and admitting that he had not read Lever's later books.<sup>2</sup> Trollope's final reference to Lever was in a list of the people who were contributing to *St. Paul's* magazine during his time as editor.<sup>3</sup> This list included Lever alongside George Henry Lewes, Sir Charles Trevelyan, and Margaret Oliphant. Lever was a writer I had not been familiar with when I first read Trollope's *Autobiography*. So, it is thanks to Anthony Trollope that I discovered the writer whose work has come to be the focus of this thesis.

Nearly twenty-one years ago, in March 1988, at the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin, a number of eminent scholars convened at a conference to deliver papers on the nineteenth-century Irish writer Charles James Lever. A number of those papers delivered at that conference were subsequently compiled into a collection of essays entitled *Charles Lever: New Evaluations* (1991). In his introduction to that volume, the editor Tony Bareham wrote:

That phrase, 'the famous Irish Lever' is now likely to raise incredulity or incomprehension. The famous *who*? For fame and posterity have dealt harshly with Lever. First Carleton and then Yeats from among his literary compatriots gave him a bad press. Not one of the thirty-four novels is currently in print, several of the standard histories of Anglo-Irish literature barely mention him, and there has not been a full-length critical work on him for fifty-one years.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography* (Edinburgh and London: Blackwood, 1883; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 152.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 251-2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 286.

<sup>4</sup> Tony Bareham, *Charles Lever: New Evaluations* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1991), p. 1.

That phrase, ‘the famous Irish Lever’ is attributed to Elizabeth Barrett Browning,<sup>5</sup> who is obviously still famous, while Lever is decidedly not. Since the release of *Charles Lever: New Evaluations*, Stephen Haddelsey’s *Charles Lever: The Lost Victorian* (2000) then became the first full-length treatment of Lever’s work in over sixty years.

The paucity of extended critical work on Lever’s writing brings into question distinct but inextricably linked strands of my argument. Charles Lever’s posthumous and consequent critical neglect stem, in a significant measure, from the fact that critical opinion on his work has been recycled to the extent that certain misperceptions have been presented and represented as being fact. Lever’s exclusion from the Irish canon owes much more to William Butler Yeats’ oversight of the value of Lever’s body of work, than any lack of merit on Lever’s part, particularly with reference to his post 1845 work. Furthermore, I argue that more recent suggestions that Lever’s work underwent a transition from rollicking to more serious representations of Ireland in 1845, had in fact begun earlier than is broadly contended. Most scholars who have written about Lever acknowledge an important transition in his work from the earlier ‘rollicking’ novels, into more sombre novels, dating from 1845 onward, with the publication of *The O’Donoghue* and *St. Patrick’s Eve*. But this was only one of Lever’s transitions. From *Harry Lorrequer* and *Charles O’Malley* onward, Charles Lever’s body of work developed through certain distinct transitions. The first noticeable transition came with *Jack Hinton* and *Tom Burke*. In the second transition, *St. Patrick’s Eve* was more of a failed experiment than a progression but *The O’Donoghue* is a better example of Lever’s development towards exploring Ireland through historical novels. Then came a transition back to the ‘rollicking’ formula following the disappointing sales of *The Knight of Gwynne*. His final transition came with his increasingly nationalist novels and culminated with what Bareham and delegates at the 1988 conference acknowledged as Lever’s masterpiece, *Lord*

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<sup>5</sup> Lionel Stevenson, *Dr. Quicksilver: The Life of Charles Lever* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1939), p. 170.

*Kilgobbin*. Bareham noted that ‘Lord Kilgobbin (1872) was the Conference text, and agreement was universal that here, in Lever’s last novel, was a work of genuine intelligence and quality, an imaginative achievement sadly neglected and ignored.’<sup>6</sup> It was this novel in particular that demonstrated how Lever’s cosmopolitan perspective enabled him to set out the Irish question in a broader and European context, rather than framing it in the traditional position in relation to England.

Finally, I will argue that Charles Lever’s reputation as a die-hard Tory Unionist is misplaced, and that there is significant evidence that Lever’s political stance had shifted to a more impartial position which was in fact much closer to Gladstonian Liberalism and the aims of Repeal movements than has traditionally been assumed. This thesis represents the second full-length treatment of Charles Lever’s work in eighty years. Its significance, beyond how it challenges misconceptions about Lever which have somehow been accepted and regenerated by those critics who could not have fully engaged with his work, lies in my use of unpublished archival material from the Edmund Downey collection at the National Library of Ireland, and most importantly, the Charles James Lever collection of letters and notebooks, held at the Huntington Library in California.

## Works on Charles Lever

Whilst many contemporary scholars of Victorian literature will be aware of Charles Lever’s work, few of them will have read any of his novels and even fewer still will be familiar with all of his work. Since his death in 1872, a limited number of scholars have given the writer and his extensive body of work the attention it deserves. W. J. Fitzpatrick began his biography on Lever in 1872, but Lever’s eldest daughter Julia Nevill is said to have felt ‘most

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<sup>6</sup> Bareham, *Lever: New Evaluations*, p. 1.

intensely the utter inefficiency of Mr Fitzpatrick's' efforts.<sup>7</sup> She subsequently invited Edmund Downey to produce a more extensive collection of Lever's letters, which did not appear until 1906, after her untimely death. Edmund Downey was an Irish writer, journalist and publisher. His notes recalled:

Although the 'Life of Charles Lever,' published in 1879, contains almost every scrap of information and gossip about the novelist which was then available it does not afford a satisfactory glimpse of the inner life of Lever. Moreover, since 1879 a great deal of interesting matter concerned with Lever's career has cropped up from time to time. In 1896 I asked Mrs. Nevill, the novelist's eldest daughter, if she would be willing to furnish a sketch a [sic] of her father. In replying to me Mrs. Nevill said that although she 'felt most intensely the utter inefficiency [rest of sentence blotted out] she feared her health would not permit her to undertake so serious a task as a new biography but she would willingly give me any assistance in her power. Mrs. Nevill died somewhat suddenly [in India] in 1897.<sup>8</sup>

A further work entitled: *Dr Quicksilver: the Life of Charles Lever* by Lionel Stevenson was published in 1939. This takes us to the works I have already mentioned *Charles Lever: New Evaluations* where contributors other than Bareham included A. Norman Jeffares, Lorna Reynolds, Bill Rodgers, Richard Haslam and Christopher Morash. The only full-length critical treatment of Lever's work is Stephen Haddelsey's *Charles Lever: The Lost Victorian*. His subtitle aptly indicates the lack of attention Lever's work has attracted since Lever's death in 1872, beyond a handful of more recent journal articles. Haddelsey's work resonates with A. Norman Jeffares' two essays, 'Yeats and the Wrong Lever' (1980) and 'Reading Lever' (1991). Both maintain that Lever's contemporary critics focussed on Lever's first four novels *The Confessions of Harry Lorrequer* (1839), *Charles O'Malley: The Irish Dragoon* (1841), *Our Mess*, *Jack Hinton, the Guardsman* (1842), and *Tom Burke of 'Ours'* (1844) in which Lever was accused of tailoring his work to the taste of the English market.

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<sup>7</sup> Edmund Downey, *Charles Lever: His Life in His Letters*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1906), I, p. vii. The spelling Julia Nevill's name in the records of the Sydney Jones Library at the University of Liverpool has an 'e' on the end of her surname. Given that Lever's letters to his daughter were addressed to 'Mrs. Nevill', I have chosen to adopt that spelling.

<sup>8</sup> National Library of Ireland, Edmund Downey, Additional Papers, MS 50, 009/27.

The small number of articles, essays and references to Lever's work that do exist include: a 1989 article by J. Don Van, on Charles Dickens' unkind treatment of Elizabeth Gaskell by comparison with his attitude toward Lever, when both authors were writing for *Household Words*,<sup>9</sup> Albert J. Solomon's article 'Charles Lever: a Source for Joyce' in 1992,<sup>10</sup> Andrew Blake's chapter 'Writing from the Outside In: Charles Lever' in *Writing Irishness in Nineteenth-Century British Culture* (2004), and James H. Murphy's 'Ruin Through Rollicking' in *Irish Novelists in the Victorian Age* (2011) and his article 'Daniel O'Connell and the Catholic Lawyer in Irish Victorian Fiction' (2013). More recently John McCourt's article 'Charles Lever: an Irish Writer in Italy' (2016) explores the relationship between Lever's self-imposed exile in Europe and the parallels between Italian and Irish nationalism. Beyond Don Van's rather cursory treatment of Lever's work, most critics point out that Lever's later novels are worthy of inclusion in the Irish canon and that they deserve further critical attention.

Charles Lever's reputation as a staunch Tory and pro-Unionist has endured, and it has affected how his literary legacy has been perceived. It was not congruous with what came to be deemed legitimate and illegitimate treatment of Irish subject matter in England between 1845 and 1870. Interdisciplinary research into literature of the era has in recent years proven that there is a rich seam of material still to be investigated, particularly in respect of 'inconvenient' perspectives such as Lever's. Claire Connolly has briefly indicated that Lever's work influenced the development of Irish fiction:

Irish national fictions in fact are characterised by an interpenetration of topographical and historical modes, while the generic modes characteristic of the first national tales were to surface not only in historical and gothic novels of this period but also in such sub-genres as silver fork fictions and nautical and military tales. Lady Blessington, William Maxwell and Charles Lever all play key roles in the development of these latter trends.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> J. Don Vann, 'Dickens, Charles Lever and Mrs. Gaskell', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 22 (1989), 64-71.

<sup>10</sup> Albert J. Solomon, 'Charles Lever: A Source for Joyce', *James Joyce Quarterly*, 29 (1992), 791-798.

<sup>11</sup> Claire Connolly, *A Cultural History of the Irish Novel 1790 – 1829* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 4.



This is the only reference Connolly makes to Lever's work and the suggestion that his influence is limited only to the 'latter' two 'sub-genres' overlooks much of Lever's literary contribution. Connolly's oversight points either to a lack of familiarity with Lever's later work, or a reliance upon earlier misperceptions of the writer. Granted, Connolly's assertion applies to Lever's early novels but his later work, particularly from 1845 onwards offers valuable examples of historical Irish tales, culminating in Lever's final national tale *Lord Kilgobbin* (1872).

Early nineteenth century Ireland was a site of fascination for English readers, especially after the Act of Union 1801,<sup>12</sup> which had been imposed in response to the United Irishmen's unsuccessful rebellion in 1798. When Ireland's Dublin government was dissolved, and the country became subsumed as part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, middle-class English readers clamoured to find out what this paradoxically familiar, yet fascinatingly different, country was all about. Ireland attracted wealthy English tourists, whose tradition of the grand tour had been curtailed in consequence of the Napoleonic Wars (1803-15) in Europe. Ireland also became a destination for travel writers, journalists and social commentators.

The English appetite for Irish stories was in a significant measure a taste for a particular kind of sham 'Irishness'. In the first twenty years of this period there was a convergence of this English post-Union interest in Irishness and something of a dearth of literature with a wholly Irish provenance. The nineteenth century Irish writer William Carleton who is probably best known for his *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry* (1830), wrote in the introduction of that text of an earlier metaphorical literary 'famine':

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<sup>12</sup> The Act of Union was subject to ardent debate before getting royal assent on 1 August 1800 and coming into force on 1 January 1801.

For nearly a century we were completely at the mercy of our British neighbours, who probably amused themselves at our expense with the greater licence, and a more assured sense of impunity, inasmuch as they knew that we were utterly destitute of a national literature. Unfortunately the fact could not be disputed. For the last half century, to come down as far as we can, Ireland, to use a plain metaphor, instead of producing her native intellect for home consumption, was forced to subsist upon the scanty supplies which could be procured from the sister kingdom. This was a reproach which added great strength to the general prejudice against us. [...] To make this more plain I shall extend the metaphor a little further. During some of the years of Irish famine, such were the unhappy circumstances of the country, that she was exporting provisions of every description in the most prodigal abundance, which the generosity of England was sending back again for our support. So was it with literature. Our men and women of genius uniformly carried their talent to the English market, whilst we laboured at home under all the dark privations of a literary famine.<sup>13</sup>

Concern over this dearth of an established national literature in Ireland, led to calls for the restoration of Irish literature in *The Dublin Magazine*, *The Dublin and London Magazine*, the *Edinburgh Review*, *The Dublin University Magazine* and *The Dublin Review*.<sup>14</sup>

Charles Lever's early success owed much to the pre-Famine English fascination with Ireland, and he capitalised on it. Later in his life, Lever acknowledged what motivated his early work. In his 1872 revision of the preface to *Charles O'Malley*, he wrote:

I began to have a misty, half-confused impression that Englishmen generally laboured under a sad-coloured temperament, took depressing views of life, and were proportionately grateful to any one [sic] who would rally them even passingly out of their despondency, and give them a laugh without much trouble for going in search of it.<sup>15</sup>

In his efforts to please those 'sad-coloured' Englishmen, Lever certainly seemed to conform to English clichés regarding Irish traits in his first two novels, and as a consequence of his depictions of priests, and of his hard-drinking, skull-smashing, blood-thirsty Irish characters, these early novels inevitably became the focus of scathing criticism from Irish contemporaries. But Lever's early work was very much a product of a contemporary taste for

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<sup>13</sup> William Carleton, *Traits & Stories of the Irish Peasantry*, 2 vols (Dublin: 1830; repr. Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 2002), I, p. v.

<sup>14</sup> See Rolf Loeber, Magda Stouthamer-Loeber and Joep Leerssen, 'Early Calls for an Irish National Literature, 1820-1877' in *Writing Irishness in Nineteenth-Century British Culture*, ed. by Neil McCaw (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 13 and pp. 24-5.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Lever, *Charles O'Malley: The Irish Dragoon*, (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1876), p. v.

picaresque, humorous, regency style excess and adventure, and to his credit there were in fact promising signs of a reverse of that direction in his second and third novels, which then developed into a more definite and widely acknowledged transition from 1845 onward, where his work did reverse and redress his earlier depictions of such characters.

Lever's popularity is considered to have dwindled somewhat after this 1845 transition, during the Great Irish Famine. He was perfectly aware of the impact that Famine and diaspora was having on the commercial viability of Irish novels. In April 1847, at the height of the Famine, Lever wrote to Maria Edgeworth, saying: 'Perhaps the tone towards Ireland at this moment is not very favourable towards such portraiture: indeed, I am told that anything Irish is an ungracious theme to English ears just now'.<sup>16</sup> Lever knew that Ireland had lost at least some of its former popularity with his audience but he continued to write novels about Ireland.

## Scope and Limitations

One of the main problems encountered when embarking upon an investigation of Lever's work is the fact that his novels are not in print. Accessing good editions of Charles Lever's work is problematic. Whole collections are not to be found on the open shelves of most libraries, being confined instead to university special collections. Electronic versions are available and very useful in terms of simply reading Lever's work, but they bring with them the problem of Lever's haphazard approach to revised editions and the subsequent editing of his work. Interesting passages appear and disappear leaving the researcher seeking elusive issues, often without success. In his introduction to *Charles Lever: New Evaluations* Tony Bareham points out that 'Like Trollope Lever was never a scrupulous reviser'.<sup>17</sup> Bareham

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<sup>16</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, I, pp. 256-7.

<sup>17</sup> Bareham, *Lever: New Evaluations*, p. 3.

continued to explain that ‘re-issues of his [Lever’s] books never elicited a request from the author to make changes or corrections’,<sup>18</sup> so some editions have passages and blunders that do not appear in others. Furthermore, in the Downey volumes, which Lever’s daughter Julia Nevill initially helped edit, passages from earlier publications were omitted, causing further frustration for the researcher. Critical works on Charles Lever are similarly scarce and three of the very few critical works on Lever by Tony Bareham et al., Norman Jeffares and Stephen Haddelsey are held in the British Library’s Boston Spa repository, rather than in London, presumably because this most prolific of writers does not make it into the Irish canon (although Trollope’s work did) and, of course, because so few researchers actually request the material.

I have confined this investigation to a selection of Lever’s ‘Irish’ novels, which I have chosen because they chart a discernible progression of Lever’s development in terms of how he presented Ireland’s historical, social and political landscape, in a direction that counters widely accepted criticism of his work. They are: *The Confessions of Harry Lorrequer* (1839), *Charles O’Malley* (1841), *Jack Hinton* (1843), *Tom Burke of Ours* (1844) *St. Patrick’s Eve* (1845), *The O’Donoghue: a Tale of Ireland Fifty Years Ago* (1845), *The Knight of Gwynne: a Tale of the Time of the Union* (1847), *The Martins of Cro’Martin* (1856), some of the *O’Dowd Papers* (1864-70) and finally *Lord Kilgobbin* (1872), using for the most part the George Routledge and Sons editions (1876-1878) housed at Gladstone’s Library in Hawarden.

It should be noted that the collection at Hawarden is not thought to have belonged to Gladstone; acquisition records at the library simply refer to sections of the collection as ‘gifts’. Furthermore, the annotations in some of the novels do not match Gladstone’s handwriting. Having said that, there is irrefutable evidence in Gladstone’s diaries that he did

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<sup>18</sup> Bareham, *Lever: New Evaluations*, p. 4.

read at least some of Lever's novels. On 27 March 1872, Gladstone's diary entry recorded: 'Read Dollinger's Lectures on Church of England – Hook's Life of Parker – Lord Kilgobbin'.<sup>19</sup> On 23 November 1877, he read 'Ancien Diplomate' on Eastern Question – St Patrick's Eve'.<sup>20</sup> On 9 September 1879, Gladstone read 'In Memoriam, [and ] A Day's Ride'.<sup>21</sup> Footnotes in the diary indicate that this was the 1878 edition, the same year as the edition held in his library but it cannot be proven that any of that collection actually belonged to Gladstone.

In some instances, I have used the collection of Lever's novels that was edited by Edmund Downey and Julia Nevill, published from 1897-1899, held in the University of Liverpool's special collections. This is to show instances where quotes have been excised from earlier editions. I have used Edmund Downey's compilation: *Charles Lever: His Life in Letters* (1906), alongside the two biographies: William John Fitzpatrick's *The Life of Charles Lever* (1879) and Lionel Stevenson's *Dr Quicksilver: the Life of Charles* (1939). I have also used a number of manuscripts from the collection of Charles James Lever Papers housed in the Huntington Library in California, and notes from those belonging to Edmund Downey at the National Library of Ireland. I contextualise Charles Lever's work using some of his contemporaries: William Makepeace Thackeray and Anthony Trollope, Maria Edgeworth (whose influence Lever particularly acknowledged), and William Carleton.

My research extends upon the critical works I have already mentioned on Charles Lever, and most significantly, it brings to light some of the unpublished material held at the National Library of Ireland at the Huntington Library in California.

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<sup>19</sup> William Ewart Gladstone, in *The Gladstone Diaries*, ed. by H.C.G. Matthew, 14 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), VIII, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, IX, p. 270.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p. 441.

## Summary of Chapters

The chapters of this thesis work broadly chronologically, although there are some necessary disruptions of chronology and there is some overlap between chapters, due to the significance of Lever's experiences during his time in Dublin between 1842 and 1845, and of the events in Ireland following his departure in 1845.

Chapter One begins with an overview of Lever's life and sets out the reasons why a writer who had been so successful faded in to relative obscurity. I look at the influence of Yeats, and subsequent regeneration of Yeats' unfounded criticism of Lever. I explore events and circumstances that affected the success, or otherwise, of some of his novels during the years of Famine. I examine the novels that made him famous, and I demonstrate how his early work presented Ireland through particular lenses: the 'Big House', and the 'rollicking' military adventurer.

Chapter Two examines how Lever had already begun to include more serious subject matter, in what have previously been considered as his more light-hearted military novels. I reveal the nascent political messages Lever was engaging with, even at that early stage in his career. This chapter also expands on how Charles Lever, William Makepeace Thackeray and Anthony Trollope influenced each other's literary interpretations of Ireland. Ireland's pre-Famine mystery presented a perfect backdrop for irregular adventurers, something Charles Lever exploited for financial gain in *The Confessions of Harry Lorrequer* (1839) and *Charles O'Malley: The Irish Dragoon* (1841), and which Thackeray developed into a much darker realism with *The Luck of Barry Lyndon* (1844). In this case, Thackeray's adventurer is far more complex and resonates more perhaps with Maria Edgeworth's Sir Condy Rackrent than Lever's character Harry Lorrequer. But as I will suggest there is also a thinly obscured undercurrent of violence in both of Lever's early novels. This violence occasionally disrupts the veil of humour, and pre-figures the violence Thackeray used in his development of his

anti-hero. The violent dysfunction of marriage in *The Luck of Barry Lyndon* presents the antithesis of the more hopeful marital trope that Trollope employed in his 'Irish' novels to explain the Union, but as Lever's later novels suggest, it was an analogy that historical events would resist.

Chapter Three focusses on political influences surrounding Lever during the years in which he was editor of *Dublin University Magazine*. How his own hopes of playing a major part in the Tory political scene on his return to Dublin in 1842 were dashed, and how during the social, cultural and political upheaval of the time, the emergence of the Young Irelanders and their unstable relations with O'Connell, the rise of popular nationalism, and hostility toward Lever from nationalist publications, all combined to influence a shift in Lever's own political stance. These years were a pivotal time for Lever and the experience drove him into what proved to be a permanent self-imposed exile from Ireland.

Chapter Four addresses Lever's development as a writer of Irish historical novels, starting with *The O'Donoghue* (1845), then *The Knight of Gwynne* (1846), and covering a broad chronological span from the year that Lever left Ireland, up to publication of *The Martins of Cro' Martin* (1856). There is a rather obvious ten-year gap between these latter two novels, and this chapter will allude to how Lever responded to the relative 'failure' of *The Knight of Gwynne* in commercial terms during that gap. The Great Famine, Irish diaspora, the Young Irelanders' agitation, rebellion and the so called Papal Aggression all served to dampen the popularity of 'Irish' novels, and for a number of years Lever returned to the old 'rollicking' formula before resuming the challenge, with *The Martins of Cro' Martin*. These three novels trace the progression of pivotal events in Irish history, in which Lever sought to explain Ireland to the exoteric English reader.

Chapter Five examines the culmination of Lever's development as a writer, using *Lord Kilgobbin* to demonstrate just how far from the erroneous posthumous judgements of

Lever, as a Tory-Unionist writer of rollicking novels, Lever's latter work had actually come. Alongside *Lord Kilgobbin*, I use Lever's personal correspondence and material from his notebooks, which are held at the Huntington Library in California, to formulate an argument that Lever's political views regarding Ireland and arguments for Home Rule had, much like the general consensus in England at the time, shifted far closer toward Gladstonian Liberalism than has previously been contended.

This thesis seeks to rectify critical assumptions that have hitherto been broadly accepted by some scholars regarding Lever's work, to demonstrate Lever's unjustly neglected and valuable contribution to the nationalist debate in his more accomplished work, and to reinvigorate interest in a writer whose merits too few, as yet, have recognised. I build on the work where scholars such as James Murphy, Tony Bareham, Lorna Reynolds, Bill Rodgers, Richard Haslam, Christopher Morash, and Richard Haddelsey have acknowledged the value of Lever's post-1845 work. James Murphy has indicated why Lever's work does deserve more attention: 'Lever who had once been compared with Dickens and Scott was almost a forgotten figure in the 1860s. He was excluded from the Yeatsian canon on account of his humorous early novels, perhaps because Yeats had not read his later, more interesting, work.'<sup>22</sup> My argument adds to this conversation using new material to challenge some of the reasons behind the unwarranted neglect of someone whose work really is worthy of further critical attention. Charles Lever's copious output leaves a body of work that whilst no longer thought fashionable, still offers a different and valuable perspective on contemporary explanations of Ireland between 1830 and 1872.

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<sup>22</sup> James H. Murphy, *Ireland: A Social, Cultural and Literary History. 1791-1891* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), p. 162.



## CHAPTER 1

### Life, Legacy, and Rollicking

Word Count: 12,293

I came on a great house in the middle of the night,  
Its open lighted doorway and its windows all alight,  
And all my friends were there and made me welcome too;  
But I woke in an old ruin that the winds howled through;<sup>1</sup>

### Charles Lever's Life

Charles James Lever was born in Dublin in 1806. His father was English, and by the time Lever was born had become a successful architect. His mother came from a Protestant Ascendancy family, so ostensibly Lever's background allowed him a modest claim to the periphery of the Protestant Ascendancy, but only the periphery, and this was an early marginalisation that would become both an abiding factor in Lever's life and an influence on how he came to write so well about marginalised characters. Although Lever would adopt the crest of the family his father James had claimed kinship to, that of Sir Ashton Lever of Alkrington Hall near Manchester, suggesting a wealthy aristocratic provenance, his biographer Lionel Stevenson thought the relationship unlikely.<sup>2</sup> Even if there was a distant connection, James Lever had not come from wealth. As a young man, he left Manchester for London as an apprentice joiner. He moved to Ireland at the age of 27 in 1787, to work for a builder named Mr Lowe. After a few years James went into 'business on his own account, styling himself "architect and builder."<sup>3</sup> He did well; in 1796 James Lever was commissioned to build Maynooth Roman Catholic College. At the end of January 1798, James Lever wrote to his brother:

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<sup>1</sup> William Butler Yeats, 'The Curse of Cromwell' (1937).

<sup>2</sup> Lionel Stevenson, *Dr. Quicksilver: The Life of Charles Lever* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1939), pp. 1-3.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Lever, in *Charles Lever: His Life in Letters*, ed. by Edmund Downey, 2 vols (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1906), I, p. 5.

Now, to be serious, I am engaged in a very large building since May 1796. It is a College for Roman Catholics and is twelve miles from Dublin, the first institution of this kind in Ireland since the reign of Henry the eighth, as since the Protestant accession no papist was allowed to study in this country but now the Government have thought better and are now building them a College at the expense of the Nation.<sup>4</sup>

At the end of that same year, James wrote to his brother referring to concerns about the proposed Union between England and Ireland: ‘I gave a sketch of politics in my letter to Mary which you saw, so as we have nothing new (except grumbling against a supposed union with England), I shall not therefore trouble you this time on that head.’<sup>5</sup> As his business grew, James Lever’s social status elevated considerably and he and his family found themselves amongst the fashionable circles of Dublin society. Charles Lever’s biographer Fitzpatrick recalled:

As his business grew, James Lever found himself advancing in social paths. He was fond of good company, and of this there was a plenitude in Dublin. The commercial depression which followed the union of the parliaments, though it had undermined many of the city’s sources of wealth, tarnished its brilliancy, and destroyed its life as a political capital, had not succeeded in crushing the high spirits of its citizens. Many of the guests who enjoyed the hospitality of James Lever had suffered sadly from the political and other changes which had occurred in the early years of the nineteenth century, but they still enjoy a good dinner and a good story, and could appreciate a good host. Much of the conversation which took place at Lever’s supper- or dinner-parties was of the brilliant era immediately preceding the Union. Tales of the Parliament House, of its orators, its wits, its eccentrics; reminiscences of the clubs, anecdotes of duelling and drinking and hard riding, went the round of the table; and as a child the future author of ‘Charles O’Malley’ listened now and again to hilarious gossip which he moulded later into hilarious fiction.<sup>6</sup>

As a child, Lever also developed an early sense of mischief; he was known to have mimicked Daniel O’Connell and he loved to entertain people with his stories.<sup>7</sup> In terms of his education, the young Lever briefly attended a school run by a man called Ford, then to a school run by a Catholic named McCarthy. Edmund Downey would point out that it ‘speaks volumes for James

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<sup>4</sup> National Library of Ireland, Edmund Downey Additional Papers, MS 50, 009/25.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Downey, *Lever: Life in Letters*, I, pp. 9-10.

<sup>7</sup> W. J. Fitzpatrick, *The Life of Charles Lever*, 2 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1879), I, p. 14

Lever's liberal-minded-ness [sic] that he should have sent his son to a school presided over by a Roman Catholic.<sup>8</sup> Lever went on to Trinity College Dublin, where he gained a B.A. in 1827. What followed was a rather feckless and adventurous (if Lever's accounts are to be believed) time travelling Europe and Canada, and gambling, all at the expense of his father. According to another of his biographers, Stevenson, Lever made acquaintance with the future Emperor Napoleon III whilst studying in Gottingen. Stevenson qualified the claim by pointing out that 'If it be indeed true that the young Bonaparte studied at Gottingen, the fact does not appear in his biographies'.<sup>9</sup>

Lever returned to Dublin in 1829, to study at the Royal College of Surgeons but failed his medical exams in 1830, then a year later gained a B. Med. from Trinity College Dublin. In 1832, Lever was a dispensary Doctor in Kilrush during a cholera epidemic, so he became intimately acquainted with the precarious nature of Irish rural life. In autumn of that year he moved to Portstewart and married Kate Baker. Their first child Julia, the future Mrs. Nevill, was born the following year. It was during his time at Portstewart, that Lever met the writer who inspired him to embark on his own literary career. Edmund Downey explained:

Presently he formed one of the most important acquaintanceships of his life. Amongst the many visitors to Portstewart was William Hamilton Maxwell, Rector of Balla, near Castlebar. Maxwell had published his 'Stories of Waterloo [', in 1829 [...] To Lever at this period Maxwell was a literary demigod. The two men exchanges views about Irish life and character, and Maxwell fired the dispensary doctor with a desire to beget a novel of adventure.'<sup>10</sup>

Charles Gavan Duffy subsequently commented on Maxwell's influence on Charles Lever's early novels: 'In the London literature which concerned itself with Ireland and sought an audience there, Maxwell had begun to paint as Irish types the dashing dragoons and gossiping

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<sup>8</sup> Downey, *Lever: Life in Letters*, I, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Stevenson, *Quicksilver*, pp. 23-4.

<sup>10</sup> Downey, *Lever: Life in Letters*, I, p. 78.

campaigners who afterwards swarmed in such a multitude from the brain of Lever'.<sup>11</sup> In his

1872 revision of the preface for *Harry Lorrequer*, Lever acknowledged Maxwell's influence:

The amusing author of 'The Wild Sports of the West' – Hamilton Maxwell – was my neighbour in the little watering-place where I was living, [Portstewart] and our intimacy was not the less close from the graver character of the society around us. We often exchanged our experiences of Irish character and life, and in our gossiping stories were told, added to, and amplified in such a way between us that I believe neither of us could have pronounced at last who gave the initiative of an incident, or on which side lay the authorship of any particular event.<sup>12</sup>

Lever also admitted that they had engaged in the kind of behaviour that found its way into his early novels:

We often indulged in little practical jokes on our more well-conducted neighbours, and I remember that the old soldier from whom I drew some of the features I have given to Colonel Kamworth was especially the mark of these harmless pleasantries. Our colonel was an excellent fellow, kind-hearted and hospitable, but so infatuated with a propensity to meddle with every one, [...] I am forced to own that the small persecutions with which my friend Maxwell and myself followed the worthy Colonel, the wrong intelligence with which we supplied him, particularly as regarded the rank and station of the various visitors who came down during the bathing season; the false scents on which we sent him, and the absurd enterprises on which we embarked him, even to the extent of a mock address which induced him to stand for the "borough" – the address to the constituency being our joint production, - all these follies, I say, more or less disposed me, I am sure, to that incessant flow of absurd incident which runs through this volume, and which, after all, was little more than the reflex of our daily plottings and contrivings.<sup>13</sup>

Lever began writing *The Confessions of Harry Lorrequer* (1839) in 1836, and it was initially published serially in *Dublin University Magazine*. Following the birth of his son who was also named Charles, Lever moved his family to Brussels in an effort to live less expensively. A third child, Kate, was born in 1839. With a rapidly expanding family and an enduring penchant for gambling, Charles Lever began to rely upon the extra income he made from writing for *Dublin University Magazine*. Lever's success with *The Confessions of Harry Lorrequer* was followed by *Charles O'Malley the Irish Dragoon* (1841). Lever released *Jack*

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<sup>11</sup> Charles Gavan Duffy, *Young Ireland: A Fragment of Irish History 1840-1850* (London: Cassell, Petter, Galpin & Co., 1880), pp. 70-1.

<sup>12</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, II, pp. 342-3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 343-4.

*Hinton* and *Tom Burke of Ours* in (1843), before publishing two far more serious novels about Ireland, *The O'Donoghue* and *St. Patrick's Eve* (1845). Between 1842 and 1845, Lever held the editorship of *Dublin University Magazine*. This takes us up to the momentous year when Charles Lever left Ireland again to live in Europe on a permanent basis, and the same year in which the catastrophic Great Famine began in Ireland.

Lever and his family travelled slowly across Europe, staying variously in: Brussels, Bonn, Karlsruhe, the Tyrol, Lake Como, Florence and Lucca, then finally arriving back in Florence, where he would settle in 1847. His fourth child, another daughter who was named Sydney was born in 1849. Lever was appointed British Vice-Consul in La Spezia in 1858, then in February 1867, became Consul in Trieste. Lever did not enjoy living in Trieste. He found the place dull, and the job more demanding than he had anticipated. In letters written to John Blackwood and then Alexander Spencer in spring of 1867, he complained: 'Trieste means no books, no writing, no O'D., no leave nor go of any kind, but moral death, and d\_\_\_n too.'<sup>14</sup> He gave further explanation to Spencer:

I suspect my Trieste appointment is a bit of a white elephant. There will be a great deal to do, a large staff necessary, and the place is generally costly to live in. In fact, I believe it would have been fully as well for me to have retained my humble post at Spezzia, where, if I received little, I did less. But I was tired of being a country mouse, and began to fancy that I had a right to some more generous diet, than hard peas.<sup>15</sup>

There was another more pressing concern on his mind too. His beloved wife Kate was ill: 'My poor wife has gone back sorely in health. I have many causes for uneasiness, but this is the worst of all.'<sup>16</sup> Kate Lever did not regain her health, and she died in 1870. Charles Lever died quietly, having produced his best novel *Lord Kilgobbin*, in 1872. He remains buried next to his wife Kate in Trieste.

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<sup>14</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, II, p. 198. 'O'D' refers to his 'O'Dowd' articles.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, II, p. 199.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*.

## The Famous Irish Lever

In his day, Lever was a famous and successful writer whose reputation was such that when the publishers Chapman and Hall wanted someone to replace Dickens, they chose Lever.<sup>17</sup>

He was hugely popular, as Fitzpatrick noted:

“Ireland for the Irish” had long been the cry; but at last the attractiveness of “Ireland for the English” became plain enough. A newspaper leader casually recorded: “Many Rugbeans who in 1838 were drinking in wisdom at the feet of great Dr. Arnold will remember, that one of the most terrible fights ever decided in the school-close, was between two boys who quarrelled about the ownership of a magazine which contained an instalment of ‘Lorrequer’.”<sup>18</sup>

When Lever took up residence in Florence in 1847, Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote the comment already briefly mentioned, to her sister remarking on Lever’s presence in the city: ‘There have been great English private theatricals here in Florence at Mr. Lever’s house (the famous Irish Lever)’.<sup>19</sup> Important people sought his company. Downey wrote that in December 1853, ‘the Duke of Wellington dropped in, and, *sans ceremonie*, remained to dinner’.<sup>20</sup> The future Prime Minister, William Ewart Gladstone met him in 1867.<sup>21</sup> Those who knew Lever’s more mature work saw real merit in it, but by the time George Bernard Shaw commented on Lever’s influence in 1907, Lever’s reputation was already beginning to fade. In his preface to the play *Major Barbara* (1905) Shaw wrote seven passages, the first of which has since been completely excluded from the Norton Critical Edition of *George Bernard Shaw’s Plays* (2002).<sup>22</sup> That passage challenged assumptions that Shaw was influenced by far more famous names, and placed Lever firmly as an important but unrecognised inspiration. Its absence from the Norton Critical Edition provides one of many

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<sup>17</sup> J.A. Sutherland, *Victorian Novelists and Publishers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 91.

<sup>18</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Life of Lever*, I, p. 233; newspaper referenced as *Daily Telegraph*, No. 5,298.

<sup>19</sup> See Stevenson, *Quicksilver*, p. 170.

<sup>20</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Life of Lever*, II, p. 183.

<sup>21</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, II, p. 205.

<sup>22</sup> See *George Bernard Shaw’s Plays*, ed. by Sandie Byrne, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London: Norton & Co., 2002), p. 203.

examples how Lever has been neglected for too long. The excised passage from Shaw's 'First Aid to Critics' is worthy of extended quotation:

Before dealing with the deeper aspects of Major Barbara, let me, for the credit of English literature, make a protest against an unpatriotic habit into which many of my critics have fallen. Whenever my view strikes them as being at all outside the range of, say, an ordinary suburban churchwarden, they conclude that I am echoing Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Ibsen, Strindberg, Tolstoy, or some other heresiarch in northern or eastern Europe.

I confess there is something flattering in this simple faith in my accomplishment as a linguist and my erudition as a philosopher. But I cannot countenance the assumption that life and literature are so poor in these islands that we must go abroad for all dramatic material that is not common and all ideas that are not superficial. I therefore venture to put my critics in possession of certain facts concerning my contact with modern ideas.

About half a century ago, an Irish novelist, Charles Lever, wrote a story entitled *A Day's Ride: A Life's Romance*. It was published by Charles Dickens in *Household Words*, and proved so strange to the public taste that Dickens pressed Lever to make short work of it. I read scraps of this novel when I was a child; and it made an enduring impression on me. The hero was a very romantic hero, trying to live bravely, chivalrously, and powerfully by dint of mere romance-fed imagination, without courage, without means, without knowledge, without skill, without anything real except his bodily appetites. Even in my childhood I found in this poor devil's unsuccessful encounters with the facts of life, a poignant quality that romantic fiction lacked. The book, in spite of its failure, is not dead: I saw its title the other day in the catalogue of Tauchnitz.

Now why is it, that when I deal in the tragi-comic irony of the conflict between real life and the romantic imagination, no critics ever affiliate me to my countryman and immediate forerunner, Charles Lever, whilst they confidently derive me from a Norwegian author of whose language I do not know three words, and of whom I knew nothing until years after the Shavian *Anschauung* was already unequivocally declared in books full of what came, ten years later, to be perfunctorily labelled Ibsenism? I was not Ibsenist even at second hand; for Lever, though he may have read Henri Beyle, *alias* Stendhal, certainly never read Ibsen. Of the books that made Lever popular, such as Charles O'Malley and Harry Lorrequer, I know nothing but the names and some of the illustrations. But the story of the day's ride and life's romance of Potts (claiming an alliance with Pozzo di Borgo) caught me and fascinated me as something strange and significant [...] Potts is a piece of really scientific natural history as distinguished from funny story telling. His author is not throwing a stone at a creature of another and inferior order, but making a confession, with the effect that the stone hits each of us full in the conscience and causes our self-esteem to smart very sorely. Hence the failure of Lever's book to please the readers of *Household Words*. That pain in the self-esteem nowadays causes critics to raise a cry of Ibsenism. I therefore assure them that the sensation first came to me from Lever.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> George Bernard Shaw, *John Bull's Other Island, with How he Lied to her Husband, and Major Barbara* (London: Constable and company, 1931), pp. 203-5.

Over a decade after Shaw's tribute to Lever, in 1919, Edmund Downey's proposal for a further biography on Lever was turned down by Ernest A. Boyd of The Talbot Press in Dublin. Boyd said: "The Life of Lever" would not, I think, be a popular enough undertaking to make it worth our while to take it up'.<sup>24</sup> Less than fifty years after his death, Lever was already being consigned to relative obscurity.

However, there is clearly more to Lever's work than has traditionally been thought. Revision of the paucity of critical responses to Lever is long overdue, and the reasons behind his neglect are worth unpacking. Claire Connolly has identified part of the problem: 'Less accomplished studies of the Irish novel are marred by similar questions of exclusion, a problem greatly enhanced by the tendency of many critics to recycle judgements that were never in the first place the product of a full engagement with the breadth of writing characteristic of the period.'<sup>25</sup> Such judgements, in Lever's case, have typically been based on his early 'rollicking' novels, which I will address later in this chapter, on Yeats' towering influence in terms of the formation of the Irish canon, and indeed on repeated recycling of Yeats' particular judgements.

## William Butler Yeats and Lever's Exclusion from the Irish Canon

William Butler Yeats is first known to have alluded briefly to Lever in September 1888, in an article entitled 'The Poet of Ballyshannon'. In 'Yeats and the Wrong Lever',<sup>26</sup> A. Norman Jeffares has discussed the fact that the way in which Yeats aligned Lever's work with that of William Allingham, has lingered ever since it was originally published in *The Providence Sunday Journal*. Yeats said of Allingham: 'Though always Irish, [Allingham] is no way

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<sup>24</sup> National Library of Ireland, Edmund Downey Additional Papers, MS 50, 009/57.

<sup>25</sup> Claire Connolly, *A Cultural History of the Irish Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> A. Norman Jeffares, 'Yeats and the Wrong Lever', in *Yeats, Sligo and Ireland*, ed. by A. N. Jeffares (New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1980), pp. 98-111.



national. This widely effects [sic] his work. Like Lever and Lover he does not take the people quite seriously'.<sup>27</sup> Yeats continued:

Yes, they are not national. The people of Ireland seem to Mr. Allingham graceful, witty, picturesque, benevolent, everything but a people to be taken seriously. This want of sympathy with the national life and history has limited his vision [...] What a sad business this non-nationalism has been! It gave to Lever and Lover their shallowness, and still gives to a section of Dublin society its cynicism. Lever and Lover and Allingham alike, it has deprived of their true audience. Many much less endowed writers than they have more influence in Ireland. Political doctrine was not demanded of them, merely nationalism. They would not take the people seriously – these writers of the Ascendancy – and had to go to England for their audience. To Lever and Lover Ireland became merely a property shop, and to Allingham a half serious memory.<sup>28</sup>

In *The Leisure Hour* in 1889, Yeats also wrote:

The English reader may be surprised to find no mention of Moore, or the verses of Lever and Lover. They were never poets of the people. Moore lived in the drawing-rooms, and still finds his audience therein. Lever and Lover, kept apart by opinion from the body of the nation, wrote ever with one eye on London. They never wrote for the people, and neither have they ever, therefore, in prose or verse, written faithfully of the people. Ireland was a metaphor to Moore, to Lever and Lover a merry harlequin, sometimes even pathetic, to be patted and pitied and laughed at so long as he said 'your honour', and presumed in nowise to be considered a serious or tragic person.<sup>29</sup>

Yet in *Representative Irish Tales* Yeats paradoxically included a section from *Charles*

*O'Malley*. He did qualify the inclusion though:

He is the most popular in England of all Irish writers, but 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 dependants. 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 typical Irish men and women.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> William Butler Yeats, *Letters to the New Island*, ed. by Horace Reynolds (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 168. Samuel Lover was another contemporaneous Irish writer, who critics have often linked with Charles Lever.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 172-5.

<sup>29</sup> William Butler Yeats, 'Popular Ballad Poetry of Ireland', *The Leisure Hour*, November 1889, p. 38.

<sup>30</sup> William Butler Yeats, *Representative Irish Tales*, ed. by W. B. Yeats (New York and London: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1891), p. 323.

Yeats' judgements upon Lever were not just misguided, they were also confusing and contradictory. In his introduction to *Charles Lever: New Evaluations* Tony Bareham summarised the problem:

In 1891 he hedged by calling Lever's books 'quite sufficiently truthful', but said the vices and virtues of his characters were those of the gentry, and turned his attack on the gentry instead. The same year he included (in 'The Young Ireland League', *United Ireland*, 3 October 1891) 'the best novels' of Lever in a list of books Young Ireland Libraries should include; in a letter to the Editor *Daily Express* (Dublin), 27 February 1895, he put *Charles O'Malley* as 11<sup>th</sup> out of 13 in the *Novels and Romances* given later in an article in the *Bookman* of October 1895. Then in 1908, attacking the English influence running through the nineteenth-century Irish novels, he did find a 'rightful Irish gaiety in him'; but in *Autobiographies* he says the Wildes would have fed on Lever's imagination<sup>31</sup>

Yeats was clearly conflicted regarding his attitude to Lever's work. His criticism of Lever leads to the questions that Jeffares has put, how many of Lever's novels can Yeats have actually read? Jeffares also questions 'How could Yeats (and a horde of lesser writers after him) have got hold of the wrong Lever?'<sup>32</sup> The most obvious answer is that Yeats might not have read beyond Lever's early 'rollicking' novels but even if that was the case, it does not excuse Yeats' contention that Lever 'never wrote for the people' and that Ireland and Irish people were no more than 'pathetic', and 'to be patted and pitied and laughed at'.<sup>33</sup> There was a serious element to his early novels. If Lever did poke fun at Ireland at all, his real target was the class that he is considered to have aspired to, the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, and not the Irish Peasantry. Furthermore, Lever was in fact already modifying his approach in 1843. In *Jack Hinton, the Guardsman* (1843) Lever introduced Jack, a young Englishman, to Irish life and used him to expose English mis-rule of Ireland. In his 1857 revision of the novel's preface, Lever wrote:

My intention was to depict, in the early experiences of a young Englishman in Ireland, some of the almost inevitable mistakes incidental to such a character. I had so often

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<sup>31</sup> Tony Bareham, *Charles Lever: New Evaluations* (Worcester: Billing and Sons Ltd., 1991), p. 26.

<sup>32</sup> Jeffares, 'Yeats and the Wrong Lever', p. 110.

<sup>33</sup> Yeats, 'Popular Ballad Poetry of Ireland', p. 38.

myself listened to so many absurd and exaggerated opinions on Irish character, formed on the very slightest acquaintance with the country...<sup>34</sup>

In recalling his intention at the time of writing *Jack Hinton*, Charles Lever is alluding to English writers' constructions of Irish national character in the years before the Famine, many of which would have resonated with his own two first novels. Lever acknowledged that he made mistakes in those novels and sought to rectify them earlier than Jeffares and Haddelsey have suggested in terms of his post 1845 work. But in terms of Yeats', and earlier William Carleton's, criticisms of Lever as an Ascendancy writer, they did, to an extent, have a point. When taking all of his body of work into account, Lever predominantly wrote about the world he knew; this made and still makes Lever problematic; he does not fit conveniently in to Marxist critical readings of Irish nationalism and political tensions in the mid-nineteenth century. This has contributed significantly to a critical neglect of his work in the twentieth century, which is still to be fully rectified in the twenty first.

The damage was done over a century ago, Lever's legacy has been dismissed partly on the basis of Yeats' oversight, partly because his oeuvre became less fashionable, and certainly because his work was not included in the formation of the Irish Canon. It is an interesting and telling point that having established the 'the tendency of many critics to recycle judgements that were never in the first place the product of a full engagement' with material, Claire Connolly recently acknowledges Lever's importance, then does not expand upon his influence.<sup>35</sup>

## Charles Lever, the Great Hunger, and English Responses to Ireland

During his life there were other events that had at least some impact on Lever's success at the time. These include: his lack of centrality amidst writers whose reputations have since eclipsed him such as Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, and Anthony

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<sup>34</sup> Charles Lever, *Jack Hinton the Guardsman* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1876), p. ix.

<sup>35</sup> Connolly, *Cultural History of the Irish Novel*, p. 4.

Trollope; how reading fashions changed over the course of the nineteenth century, importantly, in terms of what Joep Leerssen has termed the exoteric English market interested in the auto-exoticism of Ireland; and the eventual consequences of Great Famine of the mid-nineteenth century. It would be remiss to overlook the impact of the Irish Potato Famine in a thesis on nineteenth-century Irish literature. Although Lever had left Ireland by the time of Ireland's most famous crisis, it is important to address such a seismic historical event and what effect that had on the popularity among Lever's English market for novels about Ireland.

Lever's formula for Irish tales before the Famine was so successful that both Anthony Trollope and William Makepeace Thackeray had sought to emulate his approach, using Ireland as a backdrop for their early novels. As the gravity of the effects of the Potato Famine emerged from 1845, however, the English reading market rejected that formula in a shift that Tony Bareham has encapsulated so concisely:

The great famine, the struggle for Catholic emancipation, the increasing savagery of nationalist reaction to repressive central government must all have made Ireland bad press for the average middle-class Englishman. Not-wanting-to-know-about-Ireland became an understandable vice with English novel readers.<sup>36</sup>

Had Lever followed the examples that Anthony Trollope, and William Makepeace Thackeray set when they heeded advice to silence Irishness in their fiction, he could, arguably, have maintained his earlier level of popularity but he never quite reached those heights again.

In England, where Lever's most avid readers were, the Irish Famine was a constant preoccupation at many levels: for the government in London, within its administrative structures in the civil service, and in English newspapers and magazines. The ways in which Ireland was presented depended, predictably, on their writers' interpretation of the causes and consequences of the crisis. To complicate matters though, no one publication maintained a

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<sup>36</sup> Bareham, *Charles Lever: New Evaluations*, p. 7.

particular standpoint throughout the duration of the calamity. Whilst most initial reports were sympathetic, the extent and prolonged duration of the Famine influenced fluid responses and interpretations during that period.

Under the Whig administration, the former government's level of intervention was reduced on the basis of the belief that market forces should prevail, and that English taxpayers were not responsible for Ireland's ills.<sup>37</sup> In his position as secretary to the Treasury, Charles Trevelyan was essentially responsible for the administration of relief measures, so he held an influential position in the hierarchical system tasked to respond to the crisis. Trevelyan's concern with how the government's measures would be interpreted from an historical perspective is particularly useful for researches, because he recorded so much information on the crisis, giving insight into prevalent contemporary ideology on the matter. One of Trevelyan's fiercest critics at the time, the radical nationalist John Mitchel, was just as concerned with constructing his own narrative of the Famine. Mitchel initially wrote for the *Nation* then became its editor in 1847. In his retrospective 1876 account of events, *The Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps)*, Mitchel lay the blame for the numbers of starvation-related deaths squarely with London:

Further, I have called it an artificial famine; that is to say, it was a famine which desolated a rich and fertile island, that produced every year abundance and superabundance to sustain all her people and many more. The English, indeed, call that famine a "dispensation of Providence;" and ascribe it entirely to the blight of the potatoes. But potatoes failed in like manner all over Europe; yet there was no famine save in Ireland. The British account of the matter, then, is first, a fraud – second, a blasphemy. The Almighty, indeed, sent the potato blight but the English created the famine.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> For an extended discussion on this see Peter Gray's chapter on 'The Coming of the Blight' in *Famine Land and Politics: British Government 1843-1850* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1999), pp. 95-141.

<sup>38</sup> John Mitchel, *The Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps)* (Glasgow: Cameron & Ferguson, 1876), p. 219. For an excellent extended discussion on historic readings of the Famine see Melissa Fegan's chapter on 'Historiography of the Great Famine', in *Literature and the Irish Famine 1845-1919* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), pp. 10-36.

Whilst Mitchel's analysis of the Famine as an act of English genocide is incorrect, his rhetorical argument has subsequently resonated profoundly in terms of perceptions of the catastrophe. There was always enough food in Ireland, if you had money to buy it. While his radical politics have to be taken into account when considering his criticism of the government, and Charles Trevelyan in particular, his work did indicate the extent to which adherence to principles of laissez faire and providential explanations of the Famine were part of common discourse that reinforced hostility toward Ireland during the crisis. Trevelyan has since been recognised as something of a scapegoat for the failure of relief measures in Ireland during the Famine, particularly since Jennifer Hart's article 'Sir Charles Trevelyan at the Treasury' (1960). In its contemporary context, in terms of the prevalence of providential explanations of the Famine, Trevelyan's handling of the Famine whilst obviously not nearly adequate, level of relief provided was at the time, nevertheless, unprecedented.

In a government report from the Irish Poor Law Committee in July 1846, The Earl of Clancarty was recorded in Hansard as explaining:

Whatever difficulties had been considered as attendant upon the government of Ireland, and whatever differences of opinion had been supposed to exist as to the policy by which those difficulties should be dealt with – whether by the policy of coercion, or that of conciliation; or, what had never yet been consistently followed out, the policy of impartial justice – there could be no second opinion as to the existence of a state of suffering and wretchedness among the lower classes of the Irish population, which required the earliest attention of Parliament. He did not mean to convey to their Lordships that this state of things was peculiar to the present day: it might, indeed, have been aggravated by the late failure of the potato crop, and by the progressive increase of the population; but the repeated inquiries which had taken place into the condition of the poorer classes of the Irish, and which had established the fact of great destitution, without leading to any practical result, had happily caused public opinion to be strongly pronounced upon the subject. Doubts had been expressed by some, whether the inquiries that had taken place were ever intended to lead to any practical result – whether inquiry were not, in fact, merely the same thing as postponement. He trusted that the inquiry that had now closed would not be of this character. He was impressed with the belief that Her Majesty's late Government, in consenting to the appointment of the Committee over which he had the honour of presiding, were animated in the desire of endeavouring to ameliorate the condition of

the poor in Ireland, as far as the same might be effected through the instrumentality of an efficient Poor Law.<sup>39</sup>

The Earl of Clancarty's reference to 'repeated inquiries [...] into the condition of the poorer classes of the Irish', gives an indication that the issue of Irish rural destitution had long been a focus of concern, that the government was seemed unable (and Ireland's ruling class had already failed) to address. The Famine accelerated an already pervasive problem that, as Clancarty's suggestion regarding 'postponement' of 'any practical result' alludes to, any relief measures the government agreed could not and would not be put in place quickly enough to avoid levels of devastation, which in turn demanded implementation of yet further similarly inadequate measures. Lord Clancarty's 'belief that Her Majesty's late Government' would endorse the necessary levels of interventions was either an ironic comment, or naively misplaced because humanitarian responses at government level had to contend with intransigent views that Famine was a form of divine retribution for Ireland's failings, and that Ireland's recovery was Ireland's responsibility. News of new relief measures broadcast in *The Times* was often couched in terms likely to antagonise feeling toward Ireland, bemoaning the cost of relief for an ungrateful and undeserving population. The extent to which class-conscious nineteenth-century anxiety regarding poverty manifested in condemnation of destitute Irish Famine victims as lazy, violent, dangerous, and ultimately sub-human abounded in the pages of *Punch*, *The Times* and Dickens' *Household Words*, and by the end of the 1850s. The non-threatening feckless, 'sham Irishman' of the pre-Famine era had been replaced by the spectre of Irish rebellion and the threat of Popery.

The problem for anyone such as Lever, hoping to make a living out of writing about Ireland from an Anglo-Ascendancy perspective, was that by 1847 both the government and the English press were laying the blame for the Irish question squarely with the Ascendancy.

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<sup>39</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, (London: Woodfall and Son, 1846), LXXXVIII, pp. 1-3.

Widespread tenant evictions attracted condemnation from both the English press and the government, and this condemnation reinforced perceptions that both blame for crisis and responsibility for addressing it lay with the Ascendancy in Ireland rather than with the government in London. In February 1847 *The Times* ran the following article:

When all men and all things – when the charity, the prudence, the calamities, of the empire, are incessantly repeating the question, “Who is to employ and feed the Irish poor?” it is no longer possible to avoid that one only answer which the ancient laws of this country supply. The Irish poor must be fed and employed at once. We can-not wait for the tardy improvement of habits and laws, till the peasant is taught independence, or the landlord enterprise and thrift. It must be done now. The question is, who is to do it? Not the British public – not the working men of this island, who are the chief taxpayers, and bear so many burdens. Necessity as well as justice points to the Irish proprietor.<sup>40</sup>

Condemnation of the Irish often engaged with clichéd stereotyping in terms of fecklessness and lack of industry. The most contentious issues influencing how Ireland was depicted over the course of the Famine were: irresponsible landlords, religion, Irish rebellion and violence, Ireland as a drain on English resources, and pronouncements regarding the Irish as the architects of their own misfortune. Immediately after the first reports of the potato blight and distress in Ireland, both *The Times* and *Punch* seemed relatively sympathetic, but their more balanced response shifted to increasing criticism of Ireland as the gravity of the crisis unfolded. Other more sympathetic publications such as the *Illustrated London News* and the *Morning Chronicle* did much to mobilise compassion but they also contributed to an eventual sense of compassion fatigue in England. In the broadest terms, one of the many consequences of the catastrophe was a shift from representations of Irish characters as generally harmless, feckless buffoons or hard-drinking rollicking adventurers, toward a binary of representations intended either to arouse pity and sympathy or, conversely, increasingly negative stereotypes.

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<sup>40</sup> *The Times*, 2 February 1847, p. 5.



As far as the English writers I address were concerned, this shift led to certain level of silencing of Irishness in popular fiction.

A corollary to the Famine and diaspora was the fear of Catholic expansionism, and what became known as the Papal Aggression, issues which I will discuss further in my fourth chapter.<sup>41</sup> It is important to remember that not all Irish people resident in either Ireland or England between 1830 and 1870 were Catholic. Similarly, not all people living in England were Protestant. There were always recusant aristocratic families particularly in areas such as Lancashire and Cumbria. There were also communities of Catholics exiled by the political upheaval in Italy. Nevertheless, to many people in England the Catholic faith was understood to be synonymous with being Irish. The significance of the relationship between religion and Irishness in this chapter is the extent to which anti-Catholic discourse served influence representations of Irishness following least five years of Famine in Ireland.

Ireland had become too contentious a subject for writers to dwell upon if they wanted to make money and this was something that all of the writers I have mentioned so far had in common. They all needed to make money. Charles Lever's love of gambling and hospitable largesse meant that he always lived beyond his means, so writing was a necessary way of earning more money, and as I will discuss later, this led to occasional reversion to the old rollicking formula in his later work, that harked back to his earliest novels.

## The Big House and Sub-Genres

Going back to the pre-Famine era, the 'Big House' William Butler Yeats referred to in the excerpt I have used at the beginning of this chapter, as a symbolic remnant of Cromwell's atrocities in Ireland, was a defining but initially less contentious theme for the 'Irish' novel at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Maria Edgeworth was the first exponent of the genre

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<sup>41</sup> See page 153 of this thesis.

and was a significant influence on Lever. In W. B. Yeats' assessment of Edgeworth's work, he wrote: 'When writing of people of her own class she saw everything about them as it really was. She constantly satirises their recklessness, their love for all things English, their oppression of and contempt for their own country.'<sup>42</sup> Maria Edgeworth's lampooning of her own class and her exposition of how the Ascendancy had failed Ireland was intended to explain the cause of Ireland's ills to the English market amidst political debate on the Act of Union, and it found an avid audience in England as well as Ireland. George III remarked 'I know something now of my Irish subjects.'<sup>43</sup> What differentiated Maria Edgeworth's representations of Ireland from others was that she did not poke fun at her Irish tenants. It was her own class, the Protestant Ascendancy that she caricatured and whose demise she predicted. The Rackrent examples of Ireland's ruling class offer little hope of redemption in terms of political authority. Given the date mentioned in the novel's title, and its publication in 1800, the tale was clearly a caution against *imposition* of the Act of Union, intended to arouse sympathy by explaining Ireland's predicament to English readers. Publishing *Castle Rackrent* during the contentious period anticipating the Act of Union, was a political act. Given that Richard Lovell Edgeworth voted against the Act of Union,<sup>44</sup> and the evidence suggesting that publication of *Castle Rackrent* was expedited,<sup>45</sup> so that it came out before the legislation was passed in 1800, Edgeworth's suggestion that this was a naïve 'plain unvarnished tale',<sup>46</sup> must be read as intentionally disingenuous.

What little hope Maria Edgeworth did allow for Ireland under the Union was contingent upon the emergence of more 'improving', responsible men like her father and a

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<sup>42</sup> W. B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 322.

<sup>43</sup> Declan Kiberd, *Irish Classics* (London: Granta Publications, 2000), p. 243.

<sup>44</sup> See Brian Hollingworth, *Maria Edgeworth's Irish Writing: Language, History, Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1997), p. 74.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent: An Hibernian Tale, Taken from Facts, and from the Manner of the Irish Squires, before the Year 1782* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 2.

more equitable political standing for Catholics. What purports to be a simple tale of the decline of a feckless landowning family has a serious political message. Edgeworth was clearly concerned about penal laws, sectarian tensions and the impact they had on political stability in Ireland especially given the lack of an adequate system of Government and rule in Ireland. An absence of responsible improving landlords had rendered Ireland unstable, but would also render the Union of England and Ireland problematic because those in power at the London government would not and could not understand Ireland and its particular problems. Imposition of the Act of Union in 1801 had done little to quell English fears of Irish rebellion. The largely Roman Catholic population were still subject to Penal restrictions. Catholic Emancipation in 1829 had little impact on the Irish electorate because the landownership requirements had been increased, the Irish Reform Act in 1832 extended the Catholic franchise in Ireland to an extent but the issue of tithes imposed on Catholics to support the Protestant Church of Ireland, continued to antagonise the largely Catholic population in the early 1830s. The 'Tithe War' escalated violently between 1830 and 1833, when police and yeomen exacted brutal repercussions upon Catholics who refused to pay; lives were lost. Lever was working as a dispensary doctor in the rural south west of Ireland during this agrarian violence.

In the period between 1800 and 1845, there were in the broadest terms three social strata in Ireland; English Protestant Ascendancy who had displaced ancient Gaelic rulers, their tenant farmers, and landless labourers. But there were also smaller social groups such as declining impoverished Catholic landowners clinging on to their property, middle-class Protestants, and an emerging middle-class of Catholics. The dynamics between these social groups and relations between post-Union England and Ireland were often explored in novels through three popular themes, the Big House, the military adventurer and the marriage trope.

Many of Lever's 'Irish' novels have more than one 'Big House' of some description. In later novels, he would juxtapose different types of Big House, for example in *The O'Donoghue* (1845). In earlier novels, the peripatetic nature of his adventurers would introduce various Big Houses, from castles, and mansions, both prosperous and faded. What Maxwell and then Lever both focussed on, was the development of the military tale as a sub-genre of the national and 'Big House' tale, and what predominated in Lever's first four novels were the adventures of his military characters. James H. Murphy has identified four kinds of rollicking, 'young Irish-based officers, with or without Irish family connections',<sup>47</sup> the 'rollicking Irish peasant'<sup>48</sup> in Mickey Free, a Falstaffian rollicking 'English Major',<sup>49</sup> in *Charles O'Malley*, and finally 'Irish ruling and upper classes'.<sup>50</sup>

### *Harry Lorrequer and Charles O'Malley*

Lever had established almost instant success with *The Confessions of Harry Lorrequer*, originally published serially from 1837 in *Dublin University Magazine*. He quickly built a reputation as a popular writer of the 'rollicking', comic, military novel.<sup>51</sup> His first novel was not originally intended to be anything more than a series of barely connected, and by Lever's own admission, hastily written adventures, but he was able to tap in to and provide exactly what his growing English market wanted to believe about Ireland; even if such representations of his own country did not necessarily resonate with his own ideas on the matter. As Fitzpatrick observed:

From different passages in his letters, it is clear that broad farce, at least in modern theatres, proved distasteful to him. He said that the farce that made his earlier novels so popular was done rather in violence to his own convictions, which felt that he had

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<sup>47</sup> James H. Murphy, *Irish Novelists & the Victorian Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 71

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>51</sup> Thackeray later used the pseudonym 'Harry Rollicker' in satirical response to Lever's character, *Harry Lorrequer*.

been destined to tread a higher walk. Their style, as already observed, was adopted mainly in deference to M'Glashan's hints.<sup>52</sup>

In the first 'episode' of *The Confessions of Harry Lorrequer*, Lever summed up what was to become the novel's subject matter: 'Such was our life in Cork – dining, drinking, dancing, riding steeple chases, pigeon shooting'.<sup>53</sup> In *Charles O'Malley* Lever continued in a similar vein, adding a few more romantic adventures, more duelling and numerous military battles. In *Harry Lorrequer*, Lever variously describes some of his Irishmen as 'blood-thirsty'<sup>54</sup>, 'common clod-hopping wretches',<sup>55</sup> and the unfortunate Mr. O'Leary as 'free from phrenological development'.<sup>56</sup> Lever's 'citizens of Cork' were reputed in the following terms: 'a harder drinking set of gentlemen no city need boast',<sup>57</sup> and Mrs. Healy, Lorrequer's landlady at Kilrush, fared little better: 'there was no subject, no possible circumstance, no matter, past, present, or to come, that she could not wind by her diabolical ingenuity, into some cause of offence'. Even the local priest, Father Malachi Brennan maintained he could not take tea with her 'until he was, in Kilrush phrase, "half screwed," thereby meaning more than half tipsy'.<sup>58</sup>

## Charles Lever's 'Priest Evils'

On the matter of priests, Lever would come to regret his early depictions of Catholic clergy and what he later called his 'priest evils'.<sup>59</sup> Lever's first novel certainly resonated with and reinforced a general, if apathetic, anti-Catholic prejudice in England.<sup>60</sup> In *The Confessions of*

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<sup>52</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Life of Lever*, II, p. 217.

<sup>53</sup> Charles Lever, *The Confessions of Harry Lorrequer* (Dublin, Curry & Co. 1839, repr. London: George Routledge and Sons, 1876), p. 8.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, p. 46.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, p. 202.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, p. 266.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, p. 8.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, p. 21.

<sup>59</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, I, pp. 174-5.

<sup>60</sup> Anti-Catholic hostility in England had, since the Gordon Riots of 1780, become a far less violent and had failed to prevent introduction of Catholic Emancipation – see G. I. T. Machin, *The Catholic Question in English*

*Harry Lorrequer* (1839) Father Malachi's questionable behaviour was clearly intended to entertain an English rather than an Irish market. People in the Kilrush community where Lever had worked as a doctor, recognised Malachy as the local priest Father Malachy Duggan. But that was where the similarity ended. According to Fitzpatrick 'a more unobtrusive, simple-minded, hospitable and moral clergyman' did not exist in Ireland.<sup>61</sup> Sadly, Lever's joke hurt the real Father Malachi.<sup>62</sup>

The Patriot Pastor in the 'supper at Father Malachy's' was a representation of the priest who had helped O'Connell to win the Clare election, signalling a turning point in the fight for Catholic Emancipation and political representation.<sup>63</sup> Lever also wrote a scene where two further Catholic priests were forced to shout anti-Catholic rhetoric to pass a sentry watch:

"Bloody end to the Pope," cried Father Luke in bitter desperation.  
"Bloody end to the Pope," echoed the Abbe.  
"Pass bloody end to the Pope, and good night," said the sentry, resuming his rounds, while a loud and uproarious peal of laughter behind, told the unlucky priests they were overheard by others, and that the story would be over the whole town in the morning.<sup>64</sup>

Lever's joke may not have been appreciated amongst Irish Catholics but his caricatures also irritated some fellow Protestants such as William Carleton.<sup>65</sup> Lever also implied rather more sinister inferences: 'ugly stories going about what the priests used to do formerly in these meadows; and bones were [that were] often found in different parts of them'.<sup>66</sup> He tapped into anti-Catholic rhetoric, extending speculation regarding evil practices such as debauchery

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*Politics 1820-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 8; and Maria Purves, *The Gothic and Catholicism: Religion, Cultural Exchange and the Popular Novel, 1785-1829* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), pp. 25-53.

<sup>61</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Life of Lever*, I, p. 141.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, p. 145.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, p. 148. The subject of O'Connell and his influence upon Lever is too broad to address here, and I will discuss them further in my third chapter.

<sup>64</sup> Lever, *Lorrequer*. p. 74.

<sup>65</sup> William Carleton, *The Nation*, 7 October 1843, p. 12; Stevenson, *Quicksilver*, p. 141.

<sup>66</sup> Lever, *Lorrequer*, p. 183-4.

and abuses in the confessional and convent, to implicate his priests in murder.<sup>67</sup> Lever's early novels resonated with the anti-Catholic rhetoric in England but sectarian divisions were, as both Anthony Trollope and William Makepeace Thackeray observed, also noticeable in Ireland. Thackeray commented on examples he found puzzling:

though the two gentlemen are on good terms, the clergyman will not break bread with his Catholic fellow-Christian. There can be no harm, I hope, in mentioning this fact, as it is rather a public than a private matter; and, unfortunately, it is only a stranger that is surprised by such a circumstance, which is quite familiar to residents of the country. There are Catholic inns and Protestant inns in the towns; Catholic coaches and Protestant coaches on the roads; nay, in the North, I have since heard of a High Church coach and a Low Church coach adopted by travelling Christians of either party.<sup>68</sup>

Thackeray's bewilderment also resonated with one of Trollope's earliest experiences of religious tension in Ireland. In his *Autobiography* (1883), Trollope recounted an instance in 1841, when he had 'dined one evening with a Roman Catholic'. Trollope continued, 'I was informed next day by a Protestant gentleman who had been very hospitable to me that I must choose my party. I could not sit both at Protestant and Catholic tables.'<sup>69</sup> Such tensions were an aspect of Irish life, in which Lever's 'casual' early prejudices should be contextualised and understood.

In *Our Mess: Jack Hinton, the Guardsman* (1842) Lever drew his inspiration for Father Tom Loftus from the Rev Michael Comys who he had known in County Clare. According to Fitzpatrick, 'The character of Father Loftus, if we except some undignified expressions at the card-table, is, on the whole, a tolerably correct picture of the traditional *Soggarth aroon*.'<sup>70</sup> Father Comys was, in fact, offended more by the illustrator Hablot Knight Browne's (better known as Phiz) caricature of him, than by Lever's actual description of the

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<sup>67</sup> See E. R. Norman, *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968), p. 15; and Diana Peschier, *Nineteenth-Century Anti-Catholic Discourses: The Case of Charlotte Brontë* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 25-42.

<sup>68</sup> William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Irish Sketch Book* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1898), p. 299.

<sup>69</sup> Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 72-3

<sup>70</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Life of Lever*, I, pp. 293-4. 'Soggarth aroon' translates as Dear priest, a reference to John Banim's patriotic poem.

character, but Comys' displeasure was inevitably directed toward Lever. Lever was using both Catholic and Protestant clergy as humorous characters. Following a joke aimed at the *Christian Examiner*, Fitzpatrick noted 'This remark, made in pure frivolity, was taken hold of by some dullard who could not see its innocent quizzing, and poor Lever was hauled up before the public as an insulter of the Protestant clergy.'<sup>71</sup>

Fitzpatrick also recorded Lever's recollection of an encounter with a Roman Catholic priest named O'Shaughnessy:

"We chatted freely over the weather and the crops, some chance expression escaped me to show that I had regarded him as a clergyman of the Established Church. He at once, but with peculiar delicacy, hastened to correct my mistake, and introduced himself as the Roman Catholic Dean O'Shaughnessy. 'I am aware whom I am speaking to,' added he, pronouncing my name. [sic]

"After a few very flattering remarks on the pleasure something of mine had afforded him, he said, 'You are very hard upon *us*, Mr. Lever. You never let *us* off easily, but I assure you for all that we bear you no ill will. These is a strong national tie between us, and we can stand a great deal of quizzing for the sake of that bond.' [sic]

"I knew he was alluding to his order, and when I said something about the freedoms that fiction led to, he stopped, saying, [sic]

"'Well, well! the priests are not very angry with you after all, if it wasn't for one thing.' [sic]

"'Oh, I know,' cried I, 'that stupid story of Father D'Arcy and the Pope.' "

[sic]

"'No, no, not that; we laughed at that as much as any Protestant of you all. What we could not bear so well was an ugly remark you made in "Lorrequer," where there was a row at a wake and the money was scattered over the floor, you say the priest gathered more than his share, because – and here was the bitterness – old habit had accustomed him to scrape up his coin in low places! Now, Mr. Lever, that was not fair; it was not generous, surely.' [sic]<sup>72</sup>

Following his rather hasty compilation of *Harry Lorrequer*, Lever produced perhaps his most commercially successful novel, *Charles O'Malley the Irish Dragoon* (1841). This work certainly helped secure the success of *Dublin University Magazine*. In one of the final paragraphs of the novel, Lever made certain confessions and apologies:

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<sup>71</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Life of Lever*, II, p. 324.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 27-9. [sic] Fitzpatrick's punctuation.



It was my intention, before taking leave of you, to have apologised separately for many blunders in my book; but the errors of the press are too palpable to be attributed to me. I have written letters without end, begged, prayed, and entreated that more care might be bestowed; but somehow, after all, they have crept in in spite of me. Indeed, latterly I began to think I had found out the secret of it. My publisher, excellent man, has a kind of pride about printing in Ireland, and he thinks the blunders, like the green cover to the volume, give the thing a national look. I think it was a countryman of mine of whom the story is told, that he apologized for his spelling by the badness of his pen. This excuse, a little extended, may explain away anachronisms, and if it won't I am sorry for it, for I have no other.<sup>73</sup>

This suggests a certain self-conscious justification of 'blunders', which James M. Cahalan alluded to in *The Irish Novel* (1988): 'No doubt Lever intended this as a typically self-deprecating remark, but we can also read it as pointing to the developing tradition within the Irish novel of deliberately breaking novelistic conventions and confounding traditional form.'<sup>74</sup> Cahalan suggests that 'In this sense, the novels of Lever and many of his contemporaries look ahead to *Ulysses* and other celebrated, deliberate "blunders" in the twentieth century.'<sup>75</sup> Cahalan's assessment of Lever's blunders here is interesting, and it could be the case that such blunders did influence Joyce, but it would have been an unintentional legacy because Lever was not known for his meticulous approach to revising any mistakes. Nevertheless, Roger McHugh, Barry Sloan and James M. Cahalan have all pointed to Lever's work as pre-figuring that of James Joyce.<sup>76</sup> Albert J. Solomon's article 'Charles Lever: A Source for Joyce' goes as far as listing thirty-nine examples of 'legitimate songs and Lever's adaptations of airs',<sup>77</sup> and makes a convincing argument for a number of potential influences that Joyce could have drawn from Lever's *Charles O'Malley*.

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<sup>73</sup> Charles Lever, *Charles O'Malley the Irish Dragoon* (Dublin, Curry & Co. 1841, repr. London: George Routledge and Sons, 1876), p. 632.

<sup>74</sup> James M. Cahalan, *The Irish Novel: A Critical History* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co. 1988), p. 65.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> See Cahalan, *The Irish Novel*, pp. 66-7; and Barry Sloan, *The Pioneers of Anglo-Irish Fiction* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe Limited, 1986), p. 192.

<sup>77</sup> Albert J. Solomon, 'Charles Lever: A Source for Joyce', *James Joyce Quarterly*, 29 (1992), 791-798 (pp. 797-7).

Going back to Cahalan, in his short piece on Lever, he suggests that ‘the year of the Great Hunger, marked a transition in Lever’s work’, which it did. But it was not the beginning of his various transitions. Cahalan also observes that ‘*The O’Donoghue and St. Patrick’s Eve*, [...] took English policies to task and presented more sombre portraits of Ireland’. Granted, they did. But then Cahalan claims that ‘the better of these was *St. Patrick’s Eve*’.<sup>78</sup> As I will discuss later, it was not.

If the market for the kind of ‘Irish’ stories Charles Lever’s career initially thrived on was enthusiastic in England, the case was not necessarily the same in Ireland. In a letter mistakenly attributing a perceived slander to Lever, Samuel Carter Hall had accused Lever of being: ‘employed in slandering his native country and its people; labouring somewhat successfully to persuade the English public that every Irish gentleman is a blackguard, and every Irish peasant a ruffian’.<sup>79</sup> William Carleton also accused Charles Lever of pandering to English prejudices by ‘writing for an English audience at the expense of the Irish peasantry’, and he called Lever’s representations of Irishness ‘disgusting and debasing caricatures’.<sup>80</sup> But the charges against Lever were only really at all applicable when it came to the first two of his four pre-Famine novels *Harry Lorrequer* (1839) and *Charles O’Malley the Irish Dragoon* (1841), *Our Mess: Jack Hinton, the Guardsman* (1842) and *Tom Burk of ‘Ours’* (1844). These novels were not representative of his extensive body of work, and their shortfalls can to an extent be understood in the context they were written. Like many of his contemporaries, Charles Lever was initially driven by financial necessity to write what appealed to the English reading audience. If his early novels capitalised on the middle-class English appetite for rollicking military tales and the sham Irishman, he was not alone.

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<sup>78</sup> Cahalan, *The Irish Novel*, p. 192.

<sup>79</sup> Stevenson, *Quicksilver*, p. 125; Andrew Blake, ‘Writing from the Outside In: Charles Lever’, in *Writing Irishness in Nineteenth-Century British Culture*, ed. by Neil McCaw (Vermont: Ashgate, 2004), p. 117.

<sup>80</sup> Stevenson, *Quicksilver*, p. 141.

Stephen Haddelsey suggests that Charles Lever's 'personal knowledge of the peasantry was limited, far too limited, indeed, to attempt anything like the detailed and properly informed portraiture of a class with which he had little contact'.<sup>81</sup> This is not entirely the case. Lever's exposure to that class during the cholera epidemic, did bring him into close contact with the Irish peasantry, and evidence of that experience informs a number of his novels such as *St. Patrick's Eve*, *The O'Donoghue*, certainly *The Martins of Cro' Martin* and even and the end of his life, there are powerful depictions of Irish poverty in *Lord Kilgobbin*. Haddelsey diminishes these later examples, suggesting that '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 epitomise the whole of the peasant class but rather a body of shrewd, cunning and humorous individuals within that class.'<sup>82</sup>

It would be easy to assume that Lever's early literary efforts were simply intended as 'light' entertainment, but whilst they were indeed written to entertain and to make money, there was also a political drive emerging. In a 2006 article in *The Times Literary Supplement*, John Sutherland wrote of Lever:

He was, for a decade, Ireland's great novelist. Nowadays he is little read. If, however, one's ear is attuned, echoes of Lever's fiction still resonate loudly in canonical places. His distinctive contribution can be traced from Thackeray to Tolstoy: *Vanity Fair* and *War and Peace* would have been different, had Charles Lever never written.<sup>83</sup>

James Murphy has reiterated the same point:

One of the ironies that attends the fate of the much-maligned military novel [*Charles O'Malley*] is that *Vanity Fair* was an influence on Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1863-9), as John Sutherland has pointed out. This makes Thackeray, Lever, and we might add Maxwell and Maginn, influences on arguably the greatest of all novels.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Stephen Haddelsey, *Charles Lever: The Lost Victorian* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 2000), p. 41.

<sup>82</sup> Haddelsey, *Lost Victorian*, p. 41.

<sup>83</sup> John Sutherland, 'Lever's Columns: A Novelist who Contributed to Great Fiction without becoming Great', *Times Literary Supplement*, 15 December 2006, p. 14.

<sup>84</sup> Murphy, *Irish Novelists*, p. 79.

Whilst Murphy's suggestion of an influence upon Tolstoy is somewhat tenuous, both critics have identified something that, once you have read Lever's work, becomes blatantly evident when you read Thackeray's work, especially in terms of characters and their names, battles, and military life.

### *Jack Hinton*

Barry Sloan's suggestion that alongside Lever's previous novels, *Jack Hinton* offers 'little more than collections of episodic adventures, anecdotes, songs and romantic encounters set partly in Ireland and partly in Europe',<sup>85</sup> is unjust. Granted, he includes *Harry Lorrequer* and *Charles O'Malley* in this description more appropriately, but there is evidence of efforts to reverse anti-Irish prejudice and introduce more serious matters in *Jack Hinton*. Sloan goes on to say that 'Harry, Charles and Jack are indeed the same person',<sup>86</sup> and remarks that Lever offered '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.'<sup>87</sup> Although Sloan does concede 'a few slight indications that Lever's thoughts are deepening, the squalor, unemployment and poverty of the majority of Dubliners are mentioned in passing, but the reader is promptly assured that they delight in observing the extravagance of their wealthy neighbours.'<sup>88</sup> Sloan, though, overlooks signs of real growth, particularly with reference to what Joep Leerssen has since developed into the concept termed 'auto-exoticism'.

Leerssen has identified Lady Morgan's use of auto-exoticism, one aspect of which is the explanation of Ireland in terms of a dynamic and as yet unfinished product of its historical past. To quote Leerssen: 'the constant automatism of explaining Ireland in terms of its past,

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<sup>85</sup> Barry Sloan, *The Pioneers of Anglo-Irish Fiction* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe Limited, 1986), p. 192.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 192-3.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. p. 193.

as if the Real Ireland is somehow unfinished business from bygone ages, or has a privileged relations with a past that here is more immediate than elsewhere'.<sup>89</sup> Another aspect 'lies in the tacit but by no means self-evident presupposition that Ireland is most itself in those aspects wherein it is most un-cosmopolitan, most unlike other nations.'<sup>90</sup> In the historiography of the Irish novel, the enduring problem of explaining Ireland to the exoteric reader was responded to by many early nineteenth-century Irish writers in a manner where they assumed the role of 'cultural intermediaries', or self-appointed interpreters using what Claire Connolly has described as 'an effect often achieved via the use of non-native focalising figures such as *The Wild Irish Girl's* Mortimer.'<sup>91</sup> This is exactly the effect adopted by Lever in *Jack Hinton*.

Toward the end of his life, Lever explained why he had wanted to counter English misconceptions of Ireland:

Some disparaging remarks on Ireland and Irishmen in the London press, not very unfrequent at the time, nor altogether obsolete now, had provoked me at the moment; and the sudden thought occurred of a reprisal by showing the many instances in which the Englishman would almost of necessity mistake and misjudge my countrymen, and that out of these blunders and misapprehensions situations might arise that, if welded into a story, might be amusing. I knew that there was not a class nor a condition in Ireland, which had not marked differences from the correlative rank in England; and that not only the Irish squire, Irish priest, and the Irish peasant, were unlike anything in the larger island, but that the Dublin professional man, the official, and the shopkeeper, had traits essentially their own. I had frequently heard opinions pronounced on Irish habits, which I could easily trace to that habit of my countrymen, who never can deny themselves the enjoyment of playing on the credulity of the traveller – all the more eagerly when they see his note-book taken out to record their shortcomings and absurdities.<sup>92</sup>

In the *Life of Charles Lever*, Fitzpatrick reproduced the same passage, explaining:

Had he desired to caricature English ignorance as to Ireland in the person of his Guardsman nothing would have been easier; but Lever preferred merely exposing him

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<sup>89</sup> Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representations of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), p. 38.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34-5; Connolly, *Cultural History of the Irish Novel*, p. 168.

<sup>92</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, II, pp. 361.

to such errors as might throw into stronger relief the peculiarities of Irishmen, and while offering something to laugh at, give no offence to either.<sup>93</sup>

In an attempt to achieve his aim, Lever introduced the bored young Englishman to Ireland in the second chapter of this, his third novel, announcing quite different intentions to those of his first two. On the packet sailing into Dublin, Jack recalls:

I could not help ruminating upon the land I was approaching, in a spirit which, I confess, accorded much more with my mother's prejudices than my father's convictions. From the few chance phrases dropped around me, it appeared that even the peaceful pursuits of a country market, or the cheerful sports of the field, were followed up in a spirit of recklessness and devilment; so that many a head that left home without a care went back with a crack in it. But to return once more to the cabin. It must be borne in mind that some thirty odd years ago the passage between Liverpool and Dublin was not, as at present, the rapid flight of a dozen hours, from shore to shore; where, on one evening, you left the thundering din of waggons, and the iron crank of cranes and windlasses, to wake the next morning with the rich brogue of Paddy floating softly around you. Far from it! the thing then was a voyage. You took a solemn leave of your friends, you tore yourself from the embraces of your family, and, with a tear in your eye and a hamper on your arm, you betook yourself to the pier to watch, with an anxious and a beating heart, every step of the three hours' proceeding that heralded your departure. In those days there was some honour in being a traveller, and the man who had crossed the Channel a couple of times became a kind of Captain Cook among his acquaintances.<sup>94</sup>

Lever is setting up an Ireland of the past as the antithesis of a more modern, industrialised country, with the 'thundering din of waggons, and the iron crank of cranes and windlasses'. He is also implying that the length of time it had taken to sail from Liverpool to Dublin rendered Ireland as distant and exotic. The reference to Jack Hinton's mother's prejudices sets up a position of expectation that Jack is to be disabused of, as he becomes more enlightened about Ireland, as that 'focalising figure' for the exoteric audience.

## Conclusion

Lever's first two novels were hugely successful, and they have a reputation for being little more than entertaining adventures, but there is a dark side to his characters' rollicking. As

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<sup>93</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Life of Lever*, I, p. 292.

<sup>94</sup> Lever, *Jack Hinton*, pp. 7-8.

James Murphy observes, ‘one important consideration to bear in mind is that he [Lorrequer] and his colleagues have just returned from the bloody arena of the Peninsular War. In such circumstances a little light-heartedness might not have been out of place.’<sup>95</sup> Murphy’s point invites a reappraisal of assumptions regarding the light-hearted reputation of Lever’s early novels. There are two passages in *Harry Lorrequer* that give an indication of how tense, fragile and often forced the apparent frivolity of the novel really is. In the nineteenth chapter, whilst still posted in Ireland, Lorrequer is shocked at the savagery of the response of the mob he is caught up in, regarding a guilty verdict at the court:

never, in any or all of these awful moments, did my heart vibrate to such sounds as rent the air when the fatal “Guilty” was heard by those within, and repeated by those without. It was not grief – it was not despair – neither was it the cry of sharp and irrepressible anguish, from a suddenly blighted hope – but it was a long pent-up and carefully-concealed burst of feeling which called aloud for vengeance – red and reeking revenge upon all who had been instrumental in the sentence then delivered.<sup>96</sup>

At dinner that night, Lorrequer is further disturbed to learn how the evidence for the verdict was secured, and to hear from the Justice how necessary he deemed the presence of the police and military are, in order to avoid ‘the death-wail for more than one of those who are well and hearty at this moment’. Lorrequer continues: ‘The train of thought inevitably forced upon me by all I had been a spectator of during the day, but little disposed me to be a partaker in the mirth and conviviality’.<sup>97</sup> A similarly disturbing passage appears in the penultimate paragraph of the twenty-ninth chapter:

The clock of the café struck nine, the hour at which Gendemar always retired, so calling to the waiter for his petite verre of brandy, he placed his newspaper upon the table, and putting both his elbows upon it, and his chin in his hands, he stared full in Trevanion’s face, with a look of the most derisive triumph, meant to crown the achievement of the evening. To this, as to all his former insults, Trevanion appeared still insensible, and merely regarded him with this never-changing half smile; the petite verre arrived; le Capitaine took it in his hand, and, with a nod of most insulting familiarity, saluted Trevanion, adding with a loud voice, so as to be heard on every side – “a votre courage, Anglais.” He had scarcely swallowed the liqueur when

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<sup>95</sup> Murphy, *Irish Novelists & the Victorian Age*, p. 72.

<sup>96</sup> Lever, *Lorrequer*, p. 169.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, p. 170.

Trevanion rose slowly from his chair, displaying to the astonished gaze of the Frenchman the immense proportions and gigantic frame of a man well known as the largest officer in the British army; with one stride he was beside the chair of the Frenchman, and with the speed of lightening he seized his nose by one hand, while with the other he grasped his lower jaw, and, wrenching open his mouth with the strength of an ogre, he spat down his throat.<sup>98</sup>

There is a profound darkness and brutality constantly threatening to break through the veneer of humour in *Harry Lorrequer*, echoing the undercurrents of upheaval in Ireland in the nineteenth century. In his essay on 'Transitional States in Lever', Richard Haslam explained that 'The sense of crisis suffered by those who exist in a transitional state of affairs is of course no new phenomenon. To certain observers, Ireland during the nineteenth century also seemed to be undergoing a transitional crisis'.<sup>99</sup>

Lever's own 'transition', his choice to leave rollicking behind, particularly of the Irish peasant, Mickey Free, variety was timely. As an article in the *Athenaeum* complained: 'The fact, indeed, is that plain, down-right *bona fide* blundering – particularly *practical* blundering – is not a trait of the Irish peasant's character at all, being inconsistent with the shrewdness for which he is proverbially remarkable.'<sup>100</sup> At the time Lever was writing both *Jack Hinton* and *Tom Burke*, Lever was back in Dublin, editing *Dublin University Magazine* and observing at first hand the tumultuous, transitional, political atmosphere during O'Connell and the Young Irelanders' briefly concerted efforts to work toward Repeal. I will investigate this era more fully in my third chapter, but it is important to recognise this is when Charles Lever's initial transition began.

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<sup>98</sup> Lever, *Lorrequer*, p. 242.

<sup>99</sup> Richard Haslam, 'Transitional States in Lever', in *Charles Lever: New Evaluations*, ed. by Tony Bareham (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1991), p. 75.

<sup>100</sup> *Athenaeum*, 17 December 1842, pp. 1077-8.



## CHAPTER 2

### William Makepeace Thackeray, Anthony Trollope and Charles Lever's 'Irelands'

Word Count: 14,140

Just before the onset of the mid-nineteenth-century Famine, in 1844, William Makepeace Thackeray observed that 'A characteristic of the Irish writers and people' was 'an extreme melancholy'.<sup>1</sup> Thackeray continued:

All Irish stories are sad, all humorous Irish stories are sad, all humorous Irish songs are sad; there is never a burst of laughter excited by them but, as I fancy, tears are near at hand; and from Castle Rackrent downwards, every Hibernian tale I have ever read is sure to leave a woeful tender impression.<sup>2</sup>

His remarks would prove chillingly prescient just a year later, at the beginning of at least five years of widespread Famine in Ireland. But Thackeray was making this comment before the horror that devastated the population and precipitated mass diaspora, at a time when Ireland was a popular setting for novels amongst middle-class English readers.

Between 1842 and 1845, the three writers addressed in this chapter found themselves influenced by, and writing about, Ireland. In September 1841, Anthony Trollope arrived in Dublin and began to reinvent himself. It was during his time working as a Post Office deputy-inspector in rural Ireland that Trollope began his career as a professional writer. In January 1842, Charles James Lever returned from Brussels to Dublin in order to take up his post as editor of *Dublin University Magazine*, having already achieved enough literary success to give up his medical career and focus on writing. In the summer of 1842, William Makepeace Thackeray embarked on his second attempt at researching for his *The Irish Sketch Book* (1843). All three writers would become acquainted and all three influenced, to a greater or

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<sup>1</sup> William Makepeace Thackeray, 'A Box of Novels'. *Fraser's Magazine*, xxix, February 1844, pp. 153-169 (p. 154).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 154.

lesser degree, each other's writing. This chapter explores the how Charles Lever's writing developed during this period. I will argue that contrary to broadly recycled assumptions, suggesting that Lever's work took a dramatic turn toward more serious writing on the matter of Ireland in 1845,<sup>3</sup> Lever's work was showing signs of that development before 1845.

In 1842, Charles Lever was by far the most successful of the three writers discussed in this chapter. William Makepeace Thackeray's literary career was just starting. According to Anthony Trollope, by 1842 he had made up his mind to use the fund of stories regarding 'rattling Irish life' and start writing, but he was yet to begin: 'When I reached Ireland I had never put pen to paper; nor had I done so when I became engaged [to Rose Heseltine in 1842].'<sup>4</sup> Lever had wanted to write more broadly about Ireland and Irishness, and to extend his work beyond the 'rollicking' military novel he had a reputation for, as early as 1839. He wrote a letter to the publisher M'Glashan on 1 November 1839, proposing the following:

I have thought so much over the idea of 'The Irish' that I send you a list of subjects conveying my idea of the thing which would, I am sure, beat 'Lorrequer' to sticks. Could I talk the matter over with you I could better explain my thoughts, but 'The French' will sufficiently convey the shape, style, and intention of the publication. [...] List of subjects for 'The Irish, Painted by Themselves': The Irish Artist (only think of Sharpe!), The Country Dancing Master, The Medical Student, The Irish Fellow, T.C.D., The Irish Widow, The Irish Author, The Common Council Man, The Auctioneer, The Irish Beggar, The Irish Lawyer, The Priest, The Boarding-House Keeper, The Hedge Schoolmaster, The Doctor, The Sporting Gentleman, Country Attorney, Popular Preacher, The Hackney-car Man, The Dublin Dandy, The Favourite Actor, The Dublin Belle.<sup>5</sup>

Lever's intentions were thwarted at that stage by the continuing popularity of what he himself called 'the slap-dash style of 'Lorrequer';<sup>6</sup> he admitted to M'Glashan that he had been

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<sup>3</sup> James M. Cahalan, *The Irish Novel: A Critical History* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co. 1988), p. 65.

<sup>4</sup> Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography* (Edinburgh and London: Blackwood, 1883; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 69.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Lever, in Edmund Downey, *Charles Lever: His Life in His Letters*, 2 vols (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1906), I, pp. 129-30.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

approached with ‘four applications from Bentley, Colburn, Lardner, &c., to write something in style of ‘Harry Lorrequer.’<sup>7</sup>

## Irish Politics in Charles Lever’s Early Work

Even in what has been supposed to be Charles Lever’s less political early work, there is evidence of his interest in Ireland’s political and social difficulties. According to Lever’s biographer William John Fitzpatrick, the following lines were edited out of the preface to the sixth chapter, in the original *Dublin University Magazine* version of *Harry Lorrequer*, for its first publication in novel form in 1839:

“Land of Potatoe, Tithe, and Priest,  
Punch, Peeler, Proclamation,  
Bog, Bull, and Blarney, famine, feast,  
And fearful agitation.”<sup>8</sup>

Fitzpatrick maintained that ‘Lever felt that this tone toward his Fatherland was unworthy of a national novelist’.<sup>9</sup> There is a curious error in the final line Fitzpatrick quoted. In the original the line reads ‘peaceful’ rather than ‘fearful’:

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1837.]                      *Confessions of Harry Lorrequer.*                      393

CONFESSIONS OF HARRY LORREQUER.

CHAP. VI.

“ Land of potato, pike and priest,  
Punch, Peeler, proclamation,  
Bog, bull, and blarney, famine, feast,  
And peaceful agitation !”

*Ireland, a Poem in Ten Cantos.*

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<sup>7</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, p. 132.

<sup>8</sup> W. J. Fitzpatrick, *The Life of Charles Lever*, 2 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1879), I, p. 231.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, II, p. 231.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Lever, ‘Confessions of Harry Lorrequer’, *Dublin University Magazine*, April 1837, p. 393.

Whether Fitzpatrick's error was intentional or not, the effect gives Fitzpatrick's version a more radical tone than perhaps intended. Whilst Fitzpatrick's biography of Lever should be read with a cautious approach toward the absolute veracity of every detail, the eradication of this preface (irrespective of the question of how peaceful or fearful Irish agitation might have been) indicates a compromise for the novel's publication, presumably for the English market, and it points to Lever's tentative attempt to introduce Irish social and political issues as early as 1837. Similar glimpses of such concerns are also evident in Charles Lever's second novel, *Charles O'Malley* (1841), which presents an encumbered family castle, a taste of both pre-Union Irish politics, and the religious divisions inherent in Irish social structures. In *Jack Hinton* (1843) Charles Lever addressed English misconceptions regarding Ireland through the growth of Jack Hinton, a young English officer whose prejudices are exposed and reversed as his experiences of Ireland and its people are expanded. *Jack Hinton* was originally published in *Dublin University Magazine* from 1842, and William Makepeace Thackeray would make direct references to the novel and to Jack Hinton as a character, in his own *The Irish Sketch Book* (1843).

## William Makepeace Thackeray, and Charles Lever: Leaving Rollicking Behind

In his article 'Twaddling Tourists in Ireland', Charles Lever wrote that 'There probably never was a country so completely overrun by the book-making generation as this land of ours.'<sup>11</sup> William Makepeace Thackeray was an apt example of one of those 'twaddling tourists' who had been sent to Ireland by his publishers to write *The Irish Sketchbook* (1843). Chapman and Hall had turned down Thackeray's suggestion of Italy as a subject for a tour book, insisting instead upon Irish subject matter. In a letter to his mother, on 10 September 1840 Thackeray

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<sup>11</sup> Charles Lever, 'Twaddling Tourists in Ireland', *Dublin University Magazine*, 24 November 1844, p. 505.

explained to Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth that he would have to delay a hoped-for trip to Italy in favour of this commission to write about Ireland:

I have made my arrangements with C & H, who have given me £120 down, & with this I shall be able to clear off some small scores, and carry the whole case to boot. A boat leaves London every Saturday: 3 days on the voyage, but it will do Isabella good I think, and so please God we shall all be at Cork on Tuesday. Cook goes. John remains behind to take care of the house, & let it if possible – a difficulty this dull season. When the book is done dearest Mammy we may talk about Italy or what you will: I tried C & H very hard to take an Italian book now but they would not. So we must wait.<sup>12</sup>

If William Makepeace Thackeray wanted to write about Italy instead of Ireland, he would clearly have to wait. He could not afford to quibble with Chapman and Hall. The assignment began in 1840, but Thackeray had to postpone the project following his wife Isabella's attempted suicide on the voyage to Ireland.<sup>13</sup> When Thackeray resumed this commission, he ended his four-month tour of Ireland staying at Templogue with Charles Lever. Thackeray later included the following dedication to his host in *The Irish Sketch Book*:

My Dear Lever,

Harry Lorrequer needs no complimenting in a dedication; and I would not venture to inscribe this volume to the Editor of the "Dublin University Magazine," who, I fear, must disapprove of a great deal which it contains.

But allow me to dedicate my little book to a good Irishman (the hearty charity of whose visionary red-coats, some substantial personages in black might imitate to advantage), and to a friend from whom I have received a hundred acts of kindness and cordial hospitality.

Laying aside for a moment the travelling-title of Mr. Titmarsh, let me acknowledge these favours in my own name, and subscribe myself, my dear Lever,

Most sincerely and gratefully yours,

W. M. Thackeray

London, April 27, 1843

Roy Foster has suggested that 'As a text [*The Irish Sketch Book*], it is almost obscured by the resentment and criticism it occasioned at the time – notably from Charles Lever, yet another

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<sup>12</sup> William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray (1841-1851)*, ed. by Gordon N. Ray, 4 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1945), I, p. 473.

<sup>13</sup> Isabella attempted suicide on the voyage to Ireland. Her enduring mental health issues meant she would have to spend most of her adult life in private asylums.

émigré Irish journalist'.<sup>14</sup> Yet Lever had actually defended Thackeray's *Irish Sketchbook* in a review in *Dublin University Magazine*, saying 'that he must be a sour critic who would find fault with him.'<sup>15</sup> According to Downey, Lever came in for criticism himself over his supposed approval of the text: "'The Irish Sketch-Book' did not tend to advance his [Lever's] popularity in his own land. It was rashly assumed that he had prompted or suggested many things in the 'Sketch-Book' which gave offence to Lorrequer's fellow countrymen.'<sup>16</sup>

William Makepeace Thackeray and Charles James Lever were both trying to recoup financial losses in the early stages of their careers. Lever's tendency toward lavish entertainments, including excessive drinking and gambling had diminished his patrimony. Thackeray had, similarly, also lost money through gambling, unwise investments and the collapse of two banks. Thackeray's need to make money should not be ignored when considering his representations of Ireland and how, on the surface, *The Irish Sketch Book* seems laden with derogatory stereotypes of Irish national identity that might appeal to the English market:

You see people lolling at each door [...] children whose rags hang on by a miracle, idling in a gutter. Are we to set all this down to absenteeism, and pity poor injured Ireland? Is the landlord's absence the reason why the house is filthy, and biddy lolls in the porch all day?<sup>17</sup>

This example sets up comparisons suggesting that Irish people at both ends of the social spectrum were inherently different from their ostensibly progressive, industrious English counterparts; whether it be the absentee aristocracy or a supposedly inherently lazy pauper class. A similarly Anglo-centric bias pervades Thackeray's presentations of one of Dublin's grandest hotels. In a letter to Edward Fitzgerald dated 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1842, Thackeray wrote:

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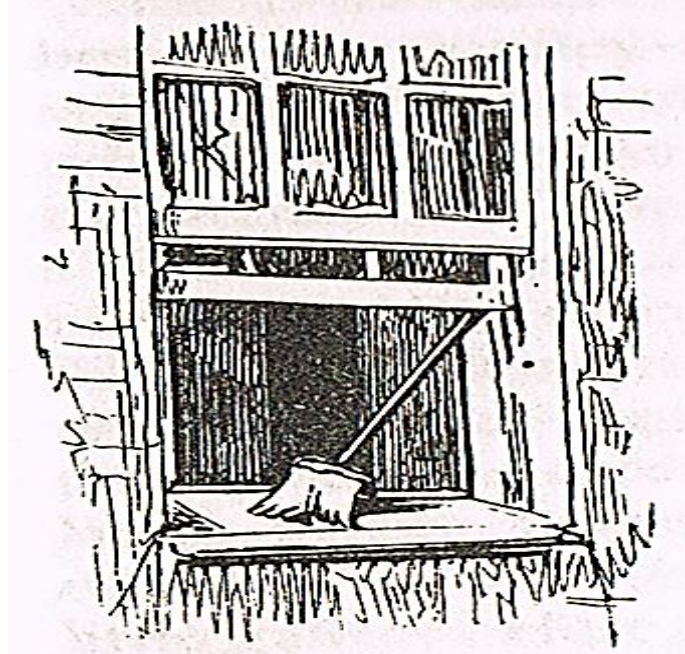
<sup>14</sup> Roy Foster, *Paddy and Mr. Punch: Connections in Irish and English History* (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 292.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Lever, 'The Irish Sketch Book', *Dublin University Magazine*, June 1843, p. 647.

<sup>16</sup> Downey, *Lever: Life in Letters*, I, pp. 174-5.

<sup>17</sup> William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Irish Sketch Book* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1898), p. 384.

‘Such a place as this hotel itself! – enough to make a chapter about – such filth, ruin and liberality’.<sup>18</sup> In the chapter inspired by this episode, Thackeray included a sketch to demonstrate his point:



As I came up to it in the street, its appearance made me burst out laughing, very much to the surprise of a ragged cluster of idlers lolling upon the steps next door, and I have drawn it here, not because as I fancy there is a sort of *moral* in it. You don't see such windows commonly in respectable English inns – windows leaning gracefully upon hearth brooms for support.<sup>19</sup>

If we apply Joep Leerssen's explanation of nineteenth-century literary interpretations of Ireland, whereby 'intermediaries [...] at one remove',<sup>20</sup> are employed as a conduit for explaining Ireland to the exoteric reader, this passage reveals how self-consciously Thackeray sought an unachievable end for an English visitor in Ireland. Thackeray's italicisation of the word '*moral*' is interesting in that, despite claiming he does not 'fancy' there is one, he presents this window as an allegory for the Union with an English broom metaphorically

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<sup>18</sup> Thackeray, *Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray*, I, p. 61.

<sup>19</sup> Thackeray, *Sketch Book*, p. 286.

<sup>20</sup> Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), p. 37.

supporting the Irish window, and suggests that, as an Englishman, he could only interpret Ireland from this perspective. Thackeray continued:

Is it prejudice that makes one prefer the English window, that relies on its own ropes and ballast (or lead if you like), and does not need to be propped by any foreign aid? [...] In the midst of these reflections (which might have been carried much farther, for a person with an allegorical turn might examine the entire country through this window) <sup>21</sup>

Thackeray was consciously offering a ‘window’ on Irish life that he knew could only skim the surface, and give a superficial picture of the staid Irish stereotype of difference by comparison with England. Beyond the elements of Roman Catholicism he found disturbing, Thackeray’s attempts to portray differences he perceived between Ireland and England even-handedly resulted in a certain sense of ambivalence throughout, and his descriptions were inevitably going to be open to interpretations, in Ireland, that he was being patronising.<sup>22</sup>

Thackeray was knowingly making observations on Ireland and Irishness from the perspective of an Englishman abroad, and in doing so he was exposing and subtly challenging a discourse of ethnocentric preconceptions regarding the Irish national character. He was using colonial discourse and mis-constructing Irish characters, with the tastes of the English reading audience in mind, and destabilising the idea of a stereotypical Irish national identity. In the opening chapter of the *Irish Sketchbook* Thackeray described ‘a carman, who is dawdling in the neighbourhood, with a straw in his mouth [...] as we began to parley; as to the fare, he would not hear of it – he said, he would leave it to my honour, he would take me for nothing. Was it possible to refuse such a genteel offer?’<sup>23</sup> The carman seems to fit convenient stereotypes but there is more going on here. Thackeray not just indulging in a comparison with England in this quaint picture of Irish ‘local colour’, he was borrowing from

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<sup>21</sup> Thackeray, *Sketch Book*, pp. 286-7.

<sup>22</sup> See Andrew Blake, ‘Writing from the Outside In: Charles Lever’, in *Writing Irishness in Nineteenth-Century British Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 117.

<sup>23</sup> Thackeray, *Sketch Book*, p. 273.



Lever, and Lever in turn borrowed from Thackeray. In his 1872 revision of the preface to

*Jack Hinton* Lever commented:

Some disparaging remarks on Ireland and Irishmen in the London press, not very unfrequent at the time, nor altogether obsolete now, had provoked me at the moment; and the sudden thought occurred of a reprisal by showing the many instances in which the Englishman would almost of necessity mistake and misjudge my countrymen, and that out of these blunders and misapprehensions, situations might arise that, if welded into a story, might be made to be amusing. I knew that there was not a class nor a condition in Ireland which had not marked differences from the correlative rank in England; and that not only the Irish squire, the Irish priest, and the Irish peasant were unlike anything in the larger island, but that the Dublin professional man, the official, and the shopkeeper, had traits and distinctions essentially their own. I had frequently heard opinions pronounced on Irish habits which I had easily traced to that quizzing habit of my countrymen, who never can deny themselves the enjoyment of playing on the credulity of the traveller, - all the more eagerly when they see his note-book taken out to record their shortcomings and absurdities'.<sup>24</sup>

Lever's reference to the 'traveller' and his note book describes exactly what Thackeray was doing when he arrived in Dublin to make his notes for *The Irish Sketch Book*. Joep Leerssen argues that 'Ireland is *made* exotic by the selfsame descriptions which purport to represent or explain Ireland.'<sup>25</sup> The author occupies an interpretive position mid-way between the reader and the subject matter and in doing so, whether it be an Irish or English writer presenting their picture of Ireland, obscures and 'exoticises' the very thing they mean to demystify. In the course of the dialogue between Lever and Thackeray, this effect reproduces its auto-exoticism, pushing the real Ireland further away and leaving behind layers of facsimile. In the first instance, Lever explained Ireland through Jack Hinton and described his first impressions of the country when he landed in Ireland:

At the same moment a burst of laughter and a half shout broke from the crowd, and a huge, powerful fellow jumped on the deck, and, seizing me by the arm, cried out, "Come along now, Captain, it's all right. This way – this way, sir."  
"But why am I to go with you?" said I, vainly struggling to escape his grasp.  
"Why is it?" said he, with a chuckling laugh; "reason enough – didn't we toss up for ye, and didn't I win ye."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, II, p. 362.

<sup>25</sup> Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination*, p. 37.

<sup>26</sup> Charles Lever, *Jack Hinton the Guardsman* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1876), pp. 9-10.

Thackeray referred directly to the passage in *Jack Hinton*, and responded quipping ‘The times are very much changed since those described by the facetious Jack Hinton, when the carmen tossed up for the passenger, and those who won took him; for the remaining cars on the stand did not seem to take the least interest in the bargain, or to offer to overdrive or underbid their comrade in any way.’<sup>27</sup>

The recurring theme in Thackeray’s observations was difference; the extent of poverty set against the wealth of landed classes, difference from England and English national identity, and religious difference. On this first journey from Dunleary to Dublin, Thackeray remarked:

The capabilities of the country, however, are very great, and in many instances have been taken advantage of; for you see, besides the misery, numerous handsome houses and parks along the road, having fine lawns and woods; and the sea is in our view at a quarter of an hour’s ride from Dublin. It is the continual appearance of this sort of wealth which makes the poverty more striking.<sup>28</sup>

Juxtapositions between rich and poor are reiterated throughout *The Irish Sketch Book*, with the emphasis on the extent of Irish poverty. In the seventh chapter of the ‘travelogue’, Thackeray described how the poor-house in Cork could not meet ‘a fifth part of the poverty of this great town’. Yet in the next paragraph, he points out ‘That the city contains much wealth is evidenced by the number of handsome villas round about it, where the rich merchants dwell’.<sup>29</sup> In Limerick, he observed: ‘But even this mile long street does not, in a few minutes, appear to be so wealthy and prosperous as it shows at first glance; for of the population that throng the streets, two-fifths are barefooted women, and two-fifths more ragged men’.<sup>30</sup> Thackeray’s contrast between wealthy landlords and the prevalence of Irish

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<sup>27</sup> Thackeray, *Sketch Book*, p. 273.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 274.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 337-8.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p. 392.

poverty was not a critical comparison, and his remarks were echoed in Charles Lever's review of *The Irish Sketch Book*:

Few men have ever come to Ireland, without having their theory in their portmanteau. He, however, has none: his object is, simply to stroll about the Island, see what he can, make a note of it when he gets home, and print the same as soon as may be. From the very hour of his landing he is struck by the neglected appearance of every thing about him: the close neighbourhood of poverty to wealth; the ruinous condition of houses in the best and most-frequented situations; the absence of all the stir and movement of a great city; and that fatal of all the evidences of decline – a certain air of careless indifference – a kind of reckless indifference, seems to pervade everyone, even to the carman, who does not take the straw from his mouth when inviting him to take a car to Dublin.<sup>31</sup>

Lever had already depicted Jack Hinton's arrival in Ireland. Thackeray's own arrival paralleled Jack's fictitious experience then was reproduced for *The Irish Sketch Book* as a comparison with the fiction. The emergent dialogue between Lever and Thackeray on distinctions between England and Ireland become increasingly distorted reflections of themselves, with Lever's review casting Thackeray as a 'portmanteau-and-theory-less' Jack Hinton. Lever's final contribution to the conversation in that revised preface 1872, emphasised the complicity his 'countrymen' when they played 'on the credulity' of the 'Thackerayesque' visitor, 'all the more eagerly when they see his note-book taken out to record their shortcomings and absurdities'.<sup>32</sup>

*The Irish Sketchbook* for all its stereotype 'shortcomings and adsurdities' was not Thackeray's idea of an attempt to explain Ireland. In September 1842, Thackeray wrote to his mother:

3 weeks more in the north and the job will be all but done; - done in a way that is the 2 volumes will be all will be all but written; and the material ready, but I am beginning to find out now, that a man ought to be forty years in the country instead of 3 months, and *then* he wouldn't be able to write about it.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Charles Lever 'The Irish Sketch Book', *Dublin University Magazine*, June 1843, p. 648.

<sup>32</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, II, p. 362.

<sup>33</sup> Thackeray, in Ray, *Letters and Private Papers*, II, p.

William Thackeray's perpetuation of some Irish clichés were on one level necessary because of the extent to which Ireland resisted adequate representation and on another, used to challenge the discourse that produced such stereotypes of national identity. Throughout *The Irish Sketchbook*, Thackeray constructed then undermined assumptions of difference between English, Irish, and here Scottish, national identity:

And here would be a good opportunity to enter into a dissertation upon natural characteristics; to show that the bold, swaggering Irishman is really a modest fellow, while the canny Scot is a brazen one [...] Let the above passage, then, simply be understood to say, that on a certain day the writer met a vulgar little Scotchman – not that all Scotchmen are vulgar...<sup>34</sup>

Thackeray extended the experiment in *The Luck of Barry Lyndon* (1844) where he drew on Lever's comic reckless Lorrequers and Hintons, but *Tom Burke of Ours* (1844) which appeared in the same year as *Barry Lyndon* presented a much more serious protagonist.

The influence that Charles Lever's numerous nationalist detractors had on the writer's work during his time at *Dublin University Magazine* will be discussed further in the next chapter, but Thackeray's influence was already evident before the appearance of what have formerly been identified as Lever's more political works from 1845, with *St. Patrick's Eve* and *The O'Donoghue*. In Thackeray's assessment, the strength of *Tom Burke of Ours* lay in its treatment of Ireland in the earlier chapters:

*Tom Burke of "Ours"* is so called because he enters the French service at an early age; but his opening adventures occur at the close of the rebellion, before the union of Ireland and England, and before the empire of Napoleon. The opening chapters are the best because they are the most real. The author is more at home in Ireland than in the French camp or capital, the scenes and landscapes he describes there are much more naturally depicted, and the characters to whom he introduces us are more striking and lifelike. The novel opens gloomily and picturesquely.<sup>35</sup> [...] In the company of this worthy [Darby], whose patriotic sentiments he unwarily adopts, the youthful Thomas makes his escape from the paternal attorney to whom he was to be bound apprentice, and takes to the countryside, where various adventures befall the couple. A cottage is burnt down over his ears (the scene, the farmer with his bravery

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<sup>34</sup> Thackeray, *Sketch Book*, p. 367.

<sup>35</sup> William Makepeace Thackeray, 'A Box of Novels' in *Fraser's Magazine*, February 1844, pp. 153-169 (p. 157).

and cunning, the terrible rebel-hunter Major Barton, with his brutal, undaunted resolution, and the accidents of the fight and explosion, are most capitally described), and presently we find young Tom in Dublin, in front of that celebrated building which is the Bank of Ireland now, but which sounded of Flood and Grattan. The picture of Irish life and an Irish mob is excellently lively:<sup>36</sup>

In the third chapter, Tom escapes with ‘patriot’ Darby M’Keown, in order to avoid being apprenticed to the corrupt attorney Basset. During the journey to Athlone, Darby stops to pay respects at a burnt-out cabin and Tom begins to absorb Darby’s explanation regarding causes and consequences of the 1798 rebellion. Tom’s personal experience as a dispossessed and neglected younger brother renders him vulnerable to Darby’s patriot sympathies:

It was a new notion to me to connect my own fortunes with anything in the political condition of the country; and while it gave my young heart a kind of martyred courage, it set my brain a-thinking on a class of subjects which never before possessed any interest for me. There was a flattery, too, in the thought that I owed my straightened circumstances less to any demerits of my own, than to political disabilities. The time was well chosen by my companion to instill his doctrines into my heart. I was young, ardent, enthusiastic; my own wrongs had taught me to hate injustice and oppression, my condition had made me feel, and feel bitterly, the humiliation of dependence; and if I listened with eager curiosity to every story and every incident of the bygone Rebellion, it was because the contest was represented to me as one between tyranny on one side and struggling liberty on the other.<sup>37</sup>

This was a marked difference from his first three novels. According to Fitzpatrick, Tom Burke’s explanation of Irish rebellion was a response to criticism from Daniel O’Connell.<sup>38</sup> Lever had tailored *Harry Lorrequer*, and *Charles O’Malley*, and *Jack Hinton* into the kind of roistering English and Irish adventurers that, at the time, suited the English reading market’s taste for comic military novels exactly.

That taste and that time had passed when Thackeray’s series of picaresque adventures was eventually published as the novel entitled *Memoirs of Barry Lyndon Esq., of the Kingdom of Ireland* in (1857). Thackeray suggested that the marital union between Barry and

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<sup>36</sup> Thackeray, ‘A Box of Novels’, (p. 159).

<sup>37</sup> Charles Lever, *Tom Burke of Ours*, 2 vols (London 1844; repr. London: George Routledge and Sons, 1876), I, p. 88.

<sup>38</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Life of Lever*, II, p.7.

Lady Lyndon was partly inspired by his friend John Bowes' family history. Bowes' grandfather's widow married an 'Irish adventurer' who eventually imprisoned his wife.<sup>39</sup> The novel owes more though to Lever's dark side of rollicking. Thackeray borrowed the character, and extended the emotional violence, to develop a far more sinister, more realistic protagonist. Thackeray disliked the glamorisation of criminality that characterised the Newgate novel; his following criticism had appeared in *Catherine: A Story* (1839-40):

We say, let your rogues in novels act like rogues, and your honest men like honest men; don't let us have any juggling and thimblerrigging with virtue and vice, so that, at the end of three volumes, the bewildered reader shall not know which is which; don't let us find ourselves kindling at the generous qualities of thieves, and sympathising with the rascalities of noble hearts.<sup>40</sup>

*The Luck of Barry Lyndon*, with its unremittingly dissolute protagonist who initially profits from his lack of morals, is on one level a criticism of a genre where villains are sympathetic characters, but it is also a criticism of a political and corrupt social system whereby a duplicitous, libertine, and immoral bully is both created and able to flourish. Barry is a product of his environment. In the tenth chapter, Thackeray uses Barry to explain part of what drives his contemptible nature:

The great and rich are welcomed, smiling, up the grand staircase of the world; the poor but aspiring must clamber up the wall, or push and struggle up the back stair, or, PARDI, crawl through any of the conduits of the house, never mind how foul and narrow, that lead to the top.<sup>41</sup>

Barry Lyndon is, at the same time, a product and manifestation of oppression. Thackeray had visited Drogheda during his tour of Ireland,<sup>42</sup> and he referred to Cromwell's historical atrocity in the town in a letter to his mother:

He put all the garrison (except about 200 the garrison being 3000) to death here, and a great part of the inhabitants, bible in hand, praising God, and talking of this crowning

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<sup>39</sup> Ray, *Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray*, I, pp. xci-xcii.

<sup>40</sup> William Makepeace Thackeray, *Catherine: A Story* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1872), p. 23.

<sup>41</sup> William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon, Esq.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 146.

<sup>42</sup> Cromwell slaughtered nearly 3000 of the town's inhabitants justifying it as a necessary example to the rest of Ireland.

mercy. His letter to the Speaker of the H of Commons is a wonder of fanaticism and brutal simplicity.<sup>43</sup>

In the novel *The Luck of Barry Lyndon*, Thackeray alluded to this pivotal event in the relations between Ireland and England in the first chapter, announcing the background to Barry's capacity for violence and duplicity:

Had there been a gallant chief to lead my countrymen, instead of puling knaves who bent the knee to King Richard II, they might have been freemen; had there been a resolute leader to meet the murderous ruffian Oliver Cromwell, we should have shaken off the English for ever.<sup>44</sup>

Barry Lyndon symbolised the schisms between the conquered Irish and colonising transplanted English aristocracy. Barry's schizophrenic assumption of whatever identity - Barry of Barryogue, Redmond Barry, Captain Barry, Chevallier de Balibari and indeed the variety of disguises necessary for his pretensions to advancement, collapses the idea of a fixed identity. With the benefit of twenty-first-century hindsight, there was a prescience in *The Luck of Barry Lyndon*. Despite his having, ostensibly, been born before: the uprisings of 1798, the imposition of the troubled Union that Barry's marriage to Lady Lyndon so resembled, and the subsequent escalation in repeal agitation, neither these events, nor Barry's connection with them, would have escaped Thackeray's contemporary readers. In respect of the emergence of the Young Irelanders' escalation of violence during the Famine, their agitation must have seemed too analogous with *Barry Lyndon's* savagery for English readers' comfort.

Thackeray's commentary on a world where Barry initially thrives, is elevated from a purely pessimistic narrative by its humour. That humour lies in Lyndon's pretension and his capacity for self-delusion. An early example occurs in a chapter entitled 'I make a False Start

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<sup>43</sup> Thackeray, *Letters and Private Papers*, ii, p. 83.

<sup>44</sup> Thackeray, *Barry Lyndon*, p. 4.

in the Genteel World'. During his flight to Dublin, Barry believes himself to be 'rescuing' a Mrs. Fitzsimons who appears to have been robbed:

These mishaps I sincerely commiserated; and knowing her by her accent to be an Englishwoman, deplored the difference that existed between the two countries, and said that in *our* country (meaning England) such atrocities were unknown. [...] To the lady's questions regarding my birth and parentage, I replied that I was a young gentleman of large fortune (this was not true; but what is the use of crying bad fish: my dear mother instructed me early in this sort of prudence) and good family in the county of Waterford; that I was going to Dublin for my studies, and that my mother allowed me five hundred per annum. Mrs. Fitzsimons was equally communicative. She was the daughter of General Granby Somerset, of Worcestershire, of whom, of course, I had heard (and though I had not, of course I was too well-bred to say...<sup>45</sup>

This exchange epitomises the cynicism that Thackeray's novel critiqued, that of a society where pretention and snobbery compromise real values. This passage is a foretaste of what developed into 'A Little More About Irish Snobs' in his serialisation of *The Snobs of England: By One of Themselves* (1846-7) for *Punch*. When Thackeray wrote: 'The Irish snobbishness developes [sic] itself not in pride so much as in servility and mean admirations, and trumpery imitations of their neighbours',<sup>46</sup> he could have been alluding to Barry Lyndon and Mrs Fitzsimons:

Two-penny magnificence, indeed, exists all over Ireland, and may be considered as the Snobbishness s of that country. [...] And who has not met the Irishman who apes the Englishman, and who forgets his country and tries to forget his accent, or to smother the taste of it, as it were? 'Come, dine with me, my boy,' says O'Dowd, of O'Dowdstown: 'you'll *find us all English there*;' which he tells you with a brogue as broad as from here to Kingstown Pier. And did you never hear Mrs Captain Macmanus talk about 'I-ah-land,' and her 'fawther's esteet?' Very few men have rubbed through the world without hearing and witnessing some of these Hibernian phenomena – these twopenny splendours.<sup>47</sup>

*Barry Lyndon* is the epitome of Thackeray's 'twopenny splendours', claiming a mis-constructed provenance, and maintaining pretensions of wealth and gentility. This duplicitous

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<sup>45</sup> Thackeray, *Barry Lyndon*, pp. 51-2.

<sup>46</sup> William Makepeace Thackeray, 'The Snobs of England: By One of Themselves', *Punch*, 22 Aug 1846, p. 63.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*



representation of himself extends to that of his countrymen on his return to Ireland in a second example:

There was a simplicity about this Irish gentry which amused and made me wonder. If they tell more fibs than their downright neighbours across the water, on the other hand they believe more; and I made myself in a single week such a reputation in Dublin as would take a man ten years and a mint of money to acquire in London.<sup>48</sup>

The irony is that Barry Lyndon's description of Irish people might equally apply to himself, so we have to question anything Lyndon suggests on the matter of Irishness or Englishness. Nothing is as it seems in this novel. It purports to be a military novel but lacks engagement in any actual battle. The closest Barry gets to the battle of Minden is 'two miles off from the cavalry'.<sup>49</sup> Instead of military valour, Barry's capacity for aggression is displaced into marital violence and oppression.

Joep Leerssen has referred to Lady Morgan's *Wild Irish Girl*, and her protagonists Glorvina and Horatio.<sup>50</sup> To quote Leerssen:

Their story is the standard type, as analysed by Bakhtin on the basis of Hellenistic, medieval and early modern examples, of 'boy meets girl', [...] In the case of *The Wild Irish Girl*, all these are occasioned, more or less directly, by the fact that the boy and girl represent two different and even hostile national traditions: Horatio is English, Glorvina is Irish; and Glorvina's ancestors have been ousted from their princely estates by those of Horatio.<sup>51</sup>

Thackeray reverses that traditional pattern, an approach that Leerssen points out 'is almost nowhere to be found: even in Maturin's *The Milesian chief* [sic]'.<sup>52</sup> Thackeray's use of marriage in *Barry Lyndon* leaves no scope for harmony. Although *Barry Lyndon* ostensibly predates the Act of Union, Thackeray's readers would have been acutely aware of the troubled consequences of its imposition, and the parallels draw attention to Ireland's

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<sup>48</sup> Thackeray, *Barry Lyndon*, p. 200.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, p. 70.

<sup>50</sup> Thackeray would later appropriate the name Glorvina for Vanity Fair.

<sup>51</sup> Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), pp. 53-4.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, p. 242, notes.

turbulent history. In the very same (February 1844) *Fraser's* review, where Thackeray had introduced 'sad' Irish 'songs' and 'stories', he wrote the following assessment of Charles Lever's early novels:

The main body of your laughter-inspiring books must be calm; and if we may be allowed to give an opinion about *Lorrequer* after all that has been said for and against him, after the characteristics of boundless merriment which the English critic has found in him, the abuse which the Irish writers have hurled at him for presenting degrading pictures of the national character, it would be to enter a calm protest against both opinions, and say that the author's characteristic is not humour, but sentiment, - neither more nor less than sentiment, in spite of all the rollicking and bawling, and the songs of Mickey Free, and the horse-racing, and punch-making, and charging, and steeple-chasing – the quality of the *Lorrequer* stories seems to me to be extreme delicacy, sweetness, and kindness of heart. The *spirits* are for the most part artificial, the *fond* is sadness, as appears to me to be that of most Irish writing and people.<sup>53</sup>

Thackeray was not always kind in his responses to Lever's work. According to Charles Lever's biographer Fitzpatrick, Lever's sensitivity to criticism, not just from his political opponents in Dublin but also particularly from his 'friend' Thackeray, motivated his more serious novels. Fitzpatrick maintained that: 'Thackeray's travesty had doubtless due effect in bringing about that thorough change in style'.<sup>54</sup> This 'travesty' was Thackeray's *Phil Fogarty: A Tale of the Onety-Oneth*, by Harry Rollicker (1847). It formed part of *Punch's Prize Novelists*, and introduced in the same volume in which the *Snobs of England* came to a close. Thackeray's series was presented as a competition for 'the most celebrated authors this country boasts of'.<sup>55</sup> Following a number of instalments between April and June 1847, volume 13 carried 'Barbature' By G. P. R. Jeames, ESQ, and then 'Phil Fogarty' appeared, opening with the following description of a military adventure:

The gabion was ours. After two hours' fighting we were in possession of the first embrasure, and made ourselves as comfortable as circumstances would admit. JACK DELAMERE, TOM DELANEY, JERRY BLAKE, the Doctor and myself, sate

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<sup>53</sup> William Makepeace Thackeray, 'A Box of Novels', *Fraser's Magazine*, February 1844, pp. 153-169 (p. 155).

<sup>54</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Life of Lever*, p. 340.

<sup>55</sup> William Makepeace Thackeray, 'Phil Fogarty: A Tale of the Onety-Oneth by Harry Rollicker', *Punch*, April 1847, p. 136.

down under a pontoon, and our servants laid out a hasty supper on a tumbrel. Though CAMBACERES had escaped me so provokingly after I cut him down, his spoils were mine; a cold fowl and a Bologna sausage were found in the Marshall's holsters; and on the havresack [sic] of a French private who lay a corps on the glacis, we found a loaf of bread [...]

How strange are the chances of war! But half-an-hour before he and I were engaged in mortal combat, and our prisoner was all but my conqueror. Grappling with CAMBACERES, whom I had knocked from his horse, and was about to dispatch, I felt a lunge behind, which luckily was parried by my sabretache; a herculean grasp was at the next instant at my throat – I was on the ground – my prisoner had escaped, and a gigantic warrior in the uniform of a colonel of the regiment of Artois glaring over me with a pointed sword;

“*Rends-toi, coquin!*” said he.

“*Allez au Diable,*” says I, “A FOGARTY never surrenders.”

I thought of my poor mother and my sisters, at the old house in Killaloo – I felt the tip of his blade between my teeth – I breathed a prayer, and shut my eyes – when the tables were turned – the butt-end of LANTY CLANCY'S musket knocked the sword up and broke the arm that held it.<sup>56</sup>

In perfect early-Leveresque style, Thackeray's Tom Delaney and then the Doctor each sing a song. From *Harry Lorrequer* through to *Jack Hinton*, many of Lever's chapters could be summarised by some, or all, of the following events: a battle, a misunderstanding, a duel, a romance, some gambling, a dinner or picnic and some heavy drinking, with an Irish or English military officer accompanied by his funny, and faithful Irish retainer. In the second instalment of 'Phil Fogarty', Thackeray mimicked Lever's impersonation of use of Irish dialect to present difference in Irish class structures:

“Faix, and, 'tis throe for you, Colonel dear,” cried another voice, with which I was even more familiar; 'twas that of LANTY CLANCY, who was blubbering at my bedside, overjoyed at his master's recovery.

“O masha! 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, to the lady, your mother, and your sisters, at Castle Fogarty; and 'tis his Riv'rence FATHER LUKE will jump for joy thin, when he reads the letthur! Six weeks ravin, and roarin' as bould as a lion, and as mad as MICK MALONY'S pig that mistuck Mick's wig for a cabbage, and died of atin' it!”

“And have I then lost my senses?” I exclaimed feebly.

“Sure, didn't ye call me your beautiful DONNA ANNA only yesterday, and catch hould of me whiskers as if they were the Signora's jet black ringlets?” LANTY cried.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Thackeray, 'Phil Fogarty', August 1847, p. 49.

<sup>57</sup> Thackeray, 'Phil Fogarty', August 1847, p. 56.

Thackeray's third and final episode has the obligatory duel followed by Phil Fogarty's fantastic escape, jumping his horse right over a mounted Napoleon's head.<sup>58</sup> The passage above is a re-presentation of one of Lever's scenes in *Charles O'Malley*, where having sustained an injury O'Malley regains consciousness to find out that Donna Inez and Mickey Free have been caring for him. Lanty Clancy's colloquial expressions of relief regarding Phil Fogarty's recovery, echo Mickey's Free's in Lever's original:

“By the rock of Cashel he's cured! – he's cured – the fever's over! Oh, Master Charles, dear! Oh, Master, darling, and you ain't mad after all?”  
“Mad! No, faith! but I shrewdly suspect you must be.”  
“Oh, devil a taste! But spake to me, honey; spake to me, acushla!”  
“Where am I? Whose house is this? [...]”  
“There now, darling; there now, Master, dear...”<sup>59</sup>

Thackeray was both exploiting and parodying Lever's use of the practice where, in Joep Leerssen's words, the ‘pleasant peasant of the Anglo-Irish nineteenth century’, whose literary forebear was the stage Irish ‘artless’ and ‘honest’ character of eighteenth century ‘sentimental comedy’, became a default stereotype necessary for the construction of a positive Irish foil for the ‘polished middle-class values of genteel urban English [and Anglo-Irish] society’.<sup>60</sup>

At the time they had first met Lever was by far the most successful of the two writers, and as Thackeray had written in his dedication for *The Irish Sketch-Book*, Lever had been kind to the lesser known artist, offering a ‘hundred acts of kindness and cordial hospitality.’ In his essay ‘Writing from the Outside In: Charles Lever’, Andrew Blake has commented that Lever and Thackeray ‘developed a growing friendship’.<sup>61</sup> But as James Murphy has observed, there were possible tensions between the two writers from the outset, during

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, pp. 67-8.

<sup>59</sup> Lever, *Charles O'Malley*, p. 388.

<sup>60</sup> Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination*, p. 172.

<sup>61</sup> Andrew Blake, ‘Writing from the Outside In: Charles Lever’, in *Writing Irishness in Nineteenth Century British Culture*, ed. by Neil McCaw (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 116-28, (p. 117).

Thackeray's stay at Templeogue: 'Thackeray was heard to say that he thought Lever's treatment of Waterloo was too vivid and that he would try it himself'.<sup>62</sup> There are also suggestions in Downey's collection of Lever's letters, of some posturing between the two men. It seems that Thackeray responded in a somewhat supercilious manner toward his host during a dinner thrown in honour of the visitor:

"After the ladies had retired the two protagonists began to skirmish. Neither knew much of the other, except what could be gleaned from their published works. ... The conversation had been led by Lever to the subject of the battle of Waterloo: he wished to afford Captain Siborne" – one of the guests – "an opportunity of saying a word; perhaps, too, he wanted to show that he himself knew something of the matter.... Thackeray soon joined in: he did not pretend to know anything about the great battle, but he evidently wished to spur on Lever to identify himself with Charles O'Malley.... Quickly perceiving his game, Lever met his (Thackeray's) feints with very quiet but perfectly efficacious parries. It was highly interesting, and not a little amusing, to observe how these two men played each a part seemingly belonging to the other: Thackeray assuming what he judged to be a style of conversation suitable for Lever, whilst the latter responded in the sarcastic and sceptical tone proper to an English tourist in Ireland."<sup>63</sup>

According to Downey, Thackeray also told Lever that 'he couldn't understand why the latter would prefer Dublin to London'.<sup>64</sup> Downey commented on Thackeray's somewhat tactless advice to Lever that: 'No Irishman of ability remained at home', and that 'Thackeray suggested that Lever should carry his Magazine across the water and establish it in London, where he would be in touch with numerous Irishmen of genuine ability.'<sup>65</sup> Such advice must have rankled, and so did Thackeray's subsequent parody of Lever's work.

In *Paddy and Mr. Punch* (1993), Roy Foster mentions Lever in passing, and largely in relation to other writers such as Thackeray. In a passage where Foster uses a brief quotation

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<sup>62</sup> James H. Murphy, *Irish Novelists & the Victorian Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 76-7.

<sup>63</sup> Downey, *Lever: Life in Letters*, I, p. 162.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 164-5.

from Lever, he does so in relation to the ‘divided identity’ imposed by ‘conditions of life under the Union’.<sup>66</sup> Foster maintains:

But for many of the Victorian Irish middle class, life was spent travelling back and forth across the Irish Sea, observing and participating in British forms of government, reading English books, attending British educational institutions, looking for employment within the structures of the British Empire and speaking English. It was never an identity comfortably accepted. A scathing reference in the *Dublin University Magazine* for 1842 describes the atmosphere of Dublin – ‘shrewd lawyers, suave doctors, raw subalterns and fat country gentlemen – waiting in town for remittances to carry them to Cheltenham – that Paradise of the Paddies and Elysium of Galway Belles’.<sup>67</sup> But the writer was Charles Lever, who sought his own fortune out of Ireland rather than in it.<sup>68</sup>

This is something of a harsh charge, implying a level of hypocrisy on Lever’s part. In Lever’s defence, at the time this reference to ‘shrewd lawyers, suave doctors, raw subalterns and fat country gentlemen’ was written, he had no thought of leaving Ireland to seek ‘his fortune’.

Lever’s response, according to Downey, to Thackeray’s suggestion to move to London indicates that he wanted to stay in Ireland: ‘Lever insisted that duty as well as his inclination bound him to his country, and that he would remain faithful to her as long as she would allow him to remain faithful.’<sup>69</sup> I will explain in my next chapter what influenced his ultimate departure from Ireland.

By the time ‘Phil Fogarty’ was being broadcast in *Punch*, Thackeray’s burlesque was misrepresentative of Lever’s contemporary work and whilst it did precipitate an eight year hiatus in the writers’ friendship, Fitzpatrick’s claim that the piece from *Punch* brought ‘about that thorough change in style’ in Lever’s work is anachronistic, simplistic and erroneous.

*Tom Burke of Ours* (1844), *The O’Donoghue* (1845), *St. Patrick’s Eve* (1845) and *The O’Donoghue* (1846) all predated Thackeray’s burlesque and demonstrated Lever’s earlier

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<sup>66</sup> R. F. Foster, *Paddy and Mr. Punch: Connections in Irish and English History* (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 282.

<sup>67</sup> Charles Lever, ‘Nuts and Nutcrackers IV’, *Dublin University Magazine*, vol. 19, no. 113 (May 1842), pp. 63-4.

<sup>68</sup> Foster, *Paddy and Mr. Punch*, p. 283.

<sup>69</sup> Downey, *Lever: Life in Letters*, I, p. 165.

‘change in style’. Lever was already developing toward that ‘change in style’, presenting Irish social and political concerns in his work during his time at the *Dublin University Magazine* and his early association with Thackeray.

## Anthony Trollope

Given that the Irish writer William Carleton criticized Charles Lever over his representations of the kind of Irishman most likely to sell books, we might expect William Thackeray to be similarly attacked. However, in conversation with his friend John McKibbin, William Carleton complimented Thackeray:

I think that Thackeray is your great man in drawing the upper English. I spent an endearing day with him. He knows Ireland very well in an English way. He was pleased to tell me quite sincerely that in point of graphic delineation of life I was all their master. Dickens is fertile, varied, and most ingenious, but all is caricature. There does not appear to be a genuine, fine, sensible Englishman in all his works.<sup>70</sup>

Knowing ‘Ireland very well in an English way’ could just as appropriately be said of Anthony Trollope. William Thackeray’s direct experience of Ireland was only ever as a visitor. Anthony Trollope lived and worked in Ireland for some eighteen years, and he felt himself qualified to make the following claim, in his *Autobiography* (1883): ‘I knew the country better than most other people, perhaps better than any other person’.<sup>71</sup> Clearly this claim needs qualification, he knew Ireland better than most English writers. Once in Ireland, Trollope left his reputation for ‘irregularity’ and his own confessed ‘hobbledehoy-hood’ behind. He initially ascribed ‘the commencement of my better life’ to his arrival in Ireland, but in deference to his wife, later revised this to the date he married Rose Heseltine.<sup>72</sup> Roy Foster has said of Trollope’s transformation after his arrival in Ireland: ‘Previous inertia,

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<sup>70</sup> David J. O’Donoghue, *The Life of William Carleton: Being his Autobiography and Letters; and an Account of his Life and Writings, from the Point at Which the Autobiography Breaks off*, 2 vols (London: Downey & Co., 1896), II, p. 158.

<sup>71</sup> Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography* (London 1883; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 87.

<sup>72</sup> Trollope, *Autobiography*, p. 68.

depression and failure fell away. He learned to measure himself by his own standards, not those imposed by his formidable mother.’<sup>73</sup> It seems that Lever would also find Mrs. Frances Trollope similarly formidable, as Downey wrote:

It is said that [...] he was particularly nervous in the company of Mrs Trollope. Possibly he was in dread that this authoress might be taking a leaf out of his own book and endeavouring to make a character sketch out of him. “It was amusing,” says a friend, “to observe his transparent manoeuvrings to avoid Mrs Trollope as a whist partner; and it was equally amusing to observe Mrs Trollope’s undisguised desire to secure Lorrequer as her partner.”<sup>74</sup>

## Anthony Trollope and the Great Irish Famine

Charles Lever had left Dublin by the time that the Great Famine began in 1845, Anthony Trollope however lived in Ireland throughout the crisis. Trollope’s first two ‘Irish’ novels *The Macdermots of Ballycloran* (1847) and *The Kellys and the O’Kellys* (1848) failed to find a market in this climate, and his publisher Mr. Colburn warned: ‘it is evident that readers do not like novels on Irish subjects as well as on others. Thus it is impossible for me to give any encouragement to you to proceed’.<sup>75</sup> Anthony Trollope responded by maintaining relative silence on the matter during the Great Famine. Diminishing or silencing the gravity of the situation in Ireland was not unusual, or particularly surprising. Anthony Trollope did not address the truth of the Famine at the time, and he attempted to defend Government measures and diminish the severity of what he must have observed in his *Six Letters to the Examiner* (1849-50).<sup>76</sup> There is a marked dissonance between Trollope’s support for the Government’s efforts to ameliorate the impact of the crisis in his *Letters to the Examiner*, and his more graphic consideration in *Castle Richmond* (1860). But then Trollope was writing *Castle Richmond* in 1859, at the end of his time in Ireland and nearly a decade after the worst

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<sup>73</sup> Foster, *Paddy and Mr. Punch*, p. 293.

<sup>74</sup> Downey, *Lever: Life in Letters*, I, p. 297.

<sup>75</sup> Trollope, *Autobiography*, p. 78.

<sup>76</sup> See Fegan, *Literature and the Irish Famine*, p. 2.



ravages of Famine began to dissipate. He was finally able to address some of the most harrowing scenes he must have observed over the course of the Famine years, so the novel inevitably gives something of a more balanced account than his *Letters to the Examiner* had offered.

In all, Anthony Trollope wrote five ‘Irish’ novels: *The Macdermots of Ballycloran* (1847), *The Kellys and the O’Kellys* (1848), *Castle Richmond* (1860), *An Eye for an Eye* (1879) and *The Landleaguers* (1883 – unfinished). Anthony Trollope was just as interested in politics as Charles Lever was. In 1868, Trollope stood for the Liberal party in the Yorkshire town of Beverley, but he failed to secure the seat. Trollope’s political aspirations prompted the following from Lever on 17<sup>th</sup> October 1868: ‘Of course I only spoke of O’Dowding Trollope in jest. I never had the slightest idea of attacking a friend, and a good fellow to boot.’<sup>77</sup> Lever continued on the same subject two days later, insisting ‘I never seriously thought of O’Dowding Trollope – he is far too good a fellow; and, besides, he is one of us.’<sup>78</sup>

## Marriage and Irish Big Houses: Anthony Trollope and Charles Lever

In his *Autobiography* (1883), Anthony Trollope described what had made Lever’s early work so appealing in England:

How shall I speak of my dear old friend Charles Lever, and his rattling, jolly, joyous, swearing Irishmen. Surely never did a sense of vitality come so constantly from a man’s pen, nor from a man’s voice, as from his! I knew him well for many years, and whether in sickness or in health, I never came across him without finding him to be running over with wit and fun. Of all the men I have encountered, he was the surest fund of drollery. I have known many witty men, many of who could say good things, many who would sometimes be ready to say them when wanted, though they would sometimes fail; - but he never failed. Rouse him in the middle of the night, and wit would come from him before he was half awake. [...] His earlier novels – the later I have not read – are just like his conversation. The man never flags, and to me, when I read them, they were never tedious.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Lever, *Life in Letters*, II, p. 232. Lever is referring to his ‘Cornelius O’Dowd’ articles.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Trollope, *Autobiography*, p. 251.

Anthony Trollope's *The Macdermots of Ballycloran* (1847), was inspired by exactly the kind of decaying 'Big House' originally described by Maria Edgeworth in *Castle Rackrent: An Hibernian Tale, Taken from Facts, and from the Manner of the Irish Squires, before the Year 1782* (1800), and later employed as a symbol of a declining Ascendancy, by Charles Lever in *Charles O'Malley, Tom Burke of Ours* and *The O'Donoghue*. Whilst walking near Drumsna, Trollope came across the ruin of a grand house prompting him to consider the 'causes for the misery we saw [...] among the ruined walls and decayed beams'.<sup>80</sup> He introduced the Macdermots' Big House in the opening chapter of the novel:

In Ireland, particularly in the poorer parts – to rank among which, County Leitrim has a right which will not be disputed – a few trees together are always the recognised signs of a demesne, of a gentleman's seat, or the place where a gentleman's seat has been; and I directly knew that this must be a demesne. But ah! how impoverished, if one might judge from outward appearances. Two brick pillars, from which the outside plaster had peeled off and the coping fallen, gave evidence of former gates; the space was closed up with a loose-built wall, but on the outer side of each post was a little well-worn footpath, made of soft bog mould. [...] The entire roof was off; one could see the rotting joists and beams, some fallen, some falling, the rest ready to fall, like the skeleton of a felon left to rot on an open gibbet.<sup>81</sup>

This 'impoverished' Big House announces the decline of the Trollope's besieged Catholic landowners, and sets out the tone of the grim realities of Irish life that Trollope would convey throughout this novel. *The Macdermots* presents several narrative threads. Larry Macdermot and his family may still live in their property, but their reduced circumstances and inability to maintain the over-mortgaged ruins of the house or the Ballycloran estate mark a rapid decline into abject poverty. In the case of *The Macdermots* this house is not an ancient ruin, it is a relatively new manor house built by successful local builder Joe Flannely. Flannely had hopes of his daughter, Sally, marrying into Larry's family, but Larry's rejection of a proposed

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p. 70.

<sup>81</sup> Anthony Trollope, *The Macdermots of Ballycloran* (London, 1847; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 3-4.

union between the Macdermots and Flannellys precipitates a series of events which bring about the Macdermots' ultimate ruin. Anthony Trollope repeatedly worked with the formula already established by Edgeworth and later by Lever, using both the Big House and marriage as a means for explaining Ireland to the English market during his writing career. In this case, the future of the Big House and its inhabitants depend upon decisions regarding various marital and sexual unions.

Larry Macdermot rejects 'offers of Sally Flannely's charms and cash',<sup>82</sup> seeing a potential alliance with the emerging Catholic middle-class as beneath his social status:

Mr. Macdermot thus regarded his creditor as a vulgar, low-born blood-sucker, who, having by chicanery obtained an unwarrantable hold over him, was determined, if possible, to crush him. The builder, on the other hand, who had spent a long life of constant industry, but doubtful honesty, in scraping up a decent fortune, looked on his debtor as one who gave himself airs to which his poverty did not entitle him; and he was determined to make him feel that though he could not be the father, he could be the master of a 'rale gintleman'<sup>83</sup>

Larry Macdermot's pride in his own provenance is not only an anachronism, it proves to be his family's downfall. The Macdermots are marginalised because both their Catholicism and their poverty alienate them from the Anglo-Ascendancy circles, and by the same token their own historic position as Catholic landlords alienates them from the local Catholic peasantry. In terms of social standing, they are neither peasant nor can they claim to be gentry, so they inhabit a liminal space between social spheres, and are misguided in their disdain for the emergent commercialised middle-class. Had Larry Macdermot married Sally, a pragmatic marital union might have secured the Macdermots' home and fortunes. Failure to adopt a more forward-thinking attitude and myopic adherence to the old social order acts as a metaphor for Ireland's outmoded, by comparison with the industrialised economy in England, agrarian economy. The subsequent marriage between Sally and the lawyer Hyacinth Keegan

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<sup>82</sup> Trollope, *Macdermots*, p. 14.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, p. 15.

seals the Macdermots' marginalisation, marking a shift in power dynamics recognised by the corrupt bailiff Pat Brady whose allegiance is as fluid as the power dynamics: 'the days of the Macdermots were over, [...] it was necessary for him to ingratiate himself with Keegan, the probable future "masther;"<sup>84</sup>

The most prominent of narrative threads addressing a failed marital union, is that of Feemy Macdermot and her seducer Captain Myles Ussher. This is an unlikely and disastrous match. Given that Feemy is descended from Catholic aristocracy and Ussher is the illegitimate son of a Protestant landowner, if Larry had objected to a marital union with the Keegans, then he certainly would not have condoned Ussher's pursuit of his daughter and neither did her brother Thady. When Thady intervenes with what he thinks is Ussher's abduction of Feemy, he unintentionally kills Ussher. Anthony Trollope used this element of the narrative to introduce a contentious subject. The Ribbonmen (a secret society engaged in agrarian violence in protest against tithes and fighting for tenants' rights) had been planning to kill Ussher. Thady saved them a job. Ussher was a police official, therefore in political terms associated with the very same Anglo-Irish authorities that will prosecute the murder trial against Thady. So as a Catholic who has been seen drinking with Ribbonmen, as Father John warned him, Thady's defence is inevitably compromised:

"I told you, Thady, that I thought but little of your having been drinking yesterday evening; not but that I think it very foolish for a man to make himself a beast; but what I did think of was the company your were drinking in [...] the very lowest of them – all of them infamous characters – men never, or seldom, seen at mass – makers of potheen – fellows who are known to be meeting nightly at that house of Mrs. Mulready, at Mohill, and who are strongly suspected to be Ribbonmen <sup>85</sup>

Father John's attempts to defend Thady at trial are undermined because, under coercion from Hyacinth Keegan, Pat Brady commits perjury and Thady is subsequently hanged.

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<sup>84</sup> Trollope, *Macdermots*, p. 173

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, p. 292.

This dark turn of events, a falsely executed protagonist whose mistaken associations with Ribbonmen, and the way in which Trollope represented agrarian violence in Ireland, was a bold move for a writer at the beginning of their career. Irrespective of the disastrous consequences of their violence, Trollope does suggest that the Ribbonmen's motivations are understandable, particularly in terms of their retributive attack on Hyacinth Keegan for the part he played in Thady's downfall. This was his first novel and Anthony Trollope was presenting a rather troubled picture of what he described in his *Autobiography* as 'what Irish life was before the potato disease, the famine, and the Encumbered Estates Bill'.<sup>86</sup> Mary Jean Corbett has identified a point at which Trollope and Lever can usefully be compared at this stage in their literary representations of Ireland's pre-Famine socio-political landscape. Corbett asserts that in *The Macdermots of Ballycloran* 'Trollope depicts "the lower Irish" as lacking the capacity for effective political action that distinguishes the civilian from the barbarian, while he more subtly if stringently critiques the colonial Irish ruling class for its failure to rule'.<sup>87</sup> By 1847, when *The Macdermots* was published, Lever had released *St. Patrick's Eve*, *The O'Donoghue*, and *The Knight of Gwynne*, all of which stringently and most un-subtly critiqued the 'colonial Irish ruling class for its failure to rule'.

In his second Irish novel Anthony Trollope adopted a lighter more humorous tone, but as Roy Foster has observed, the novel 'is an unwinking, accurate and thoughtful observation of Irish conditions just before the Famine'.<sup>88</sup> The full title of his second novel is *The Kellys and the O'Kellys: or Landlords and Tenants* (1848) and it is this particular connection between landlords and tenants, and the complexities of Irish society, that Trollope returned to

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<sup>86</sup> Trollope, *Autobiography*, p. 71. The Encumbered Estates Act of 1849, allowed for debt ridden estates to be auctioned off at the request of the creditors.

<sup>87</sup> Mary Jean Corbett, *Allegories of Union in Irish and English Writing 1790 – 1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 116.

<sup>88</sup> Foster, *Paddy and Mr. Punch*, p. 293.

in all three of his 'Irish' novels. In this case, it underpins a progression toward two interwoven marriage plots.

Beyond references to Daniel O'Connell's trial, Irish politics and social issues are less prominent in this novel, by comparison with the violence and tragedy of *The Macdermots of Ballycloran*. *The Kellys and the O'Kellys* presents pre-Famine Ireland's social structures and the connections between Protestant Ascendancy, former ancient Catholic landowners, and peasant Catholic in a far more harmonious vein. Social tensions are shifted from agrarian violence to focus on the position of women in *The Kellys and the O'Kellys*. That focus is manifested in progressions through the two marriage plots. Throughout his literary career, Trollope addressed problematic themes and, in this instance, Trollope's emphasis on the commodification of marriage is uncomfortably frank. Both marriage plots involve women with means, who are courted by men who are, at least in part, attracted by their future wives' money. In both cases these women's male relations object and try to control the women's choices, so romance is simultaneously competing and entwining with avarice and oppression. The aristocratic Lord Ballindine loves racehorses and spending beyond his means so, as his mother points out, he needs to ensure he has access to his fiancée Fanny's money:

'Well now, Frank, take my advice; they'll want to tie up her money in all manner of ways, so as to make it of the least possible use to you, or to her either. They always do; they're never contented unless they lock up the girl's money, so that neither she nor her husband can spend the principal or the interest. Don't let them do it, Frank. Of course she will be led by you, let them settle whatever is fair on her; but don't let them bother the money so that you can't pay off the debts. It'll be a grand thing, Frank, to redeem the property'.

Frank hemmed and hawed, and said he'd consult his lawyer in Dublin before the settlements were signed; but declared that he was not going to marry Fanny Wyndham for her money.

'That's all very well, Frank,' said the mother; 'but you know you could not marry her without the money, and mind, it's now or never. Think what a thing it would be to have the property unencumbered!'<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Trollope, *Macdermots*, p. 496.

Trollope displaced romance with commercial pragmatism, so whilst this novel was less contentious than his first, it was still made no concession to the Victorian idea of romance in terms of using the marriage allegory to represent the Union of England Ireland.

## Charles Lever, Big Houses and Politics

Lever's development as a writer took his work from the experiments in writing about Ireland's social and political problems in *Jack Hinton* and *Tom Burke* into his decidedly more serious work, with *St. Patrick's Eve* (1845) and *The O'Donoghue* (1845). *St. Patrick's Eve* was so different from his earlier work that his admirers were left disappointed with the moralising theme announced in the novel's dedication: 'those to whom Providence has accorded many blessings are but the stewards of His bounty to the poor; and that the neglect of an obligation so sacred as this charity is a grievous wrong.'<sup>90</sup> William Thackeray's attack on the novel in the following review from *The Morning Chronicle* must, given their initial friendship, have stung Lever:

### 'Lever's St Patrick's Eve – Comic Politics'

To some readers – callous, perhaps, or indifferent to virtue or to sermons – this morality is occasionally too obtrusive. Such sceptics will cry out – We are children no longer; we no longer want to be told that the fable of the dog in the manger is a satire against greediness and envy; or that the wolf and the lamb are types of Polk gobbling up a meek Aberdeen, or innocence being devoured by oppression. These truths have been learned by us already. If we want instruction, we prefer to take it from fact rather than fiction. We like to hear sermons from his reverence at church; to get our notions of trade, crime, politics, and other national statistics, from the proper papers and figures; but when suddenly, out of the gilt pages of a pretty picture book, a comic moralist rushes forward, and takes occasion to tell us that society is diseased, the laws unjust, the rich ruthless, the poor martyrs, the world lop-sided, and *vice-versa*, persons who wish to lead an easy life are inclined to remonstrate against this literary ambuscadoe. You may be very right, the remonstrant would say, and I am sure you are very hearty and honest, but as these questions you propound here comprehend the whole scheme of politics and morals, with a very great deal of religion, I am, I

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<sup>90</sup> Lever, *St Patrick's Eve*, p. 312.

confess, not prepared at the present moment to enter into them.[...] Without wishing to be uncomplimentary, I have very shrewd doubts as to your competency to instruct upon all these points; at all events, I would much rather hear you on your own ground – amusing by means of amiable fiction, and instructing by kindly satire, being careful to avoid the discussion of abstract principles, beyond those of the common ethical science which forms a branch of all poets and novelists’ business – but, above all, eschewing questions of politics and political economy, as too deep, I will not say for your comprehension, but for your readers’; and never, from their nature, properly to be discussed in any, the most gilded, story-book. Let us remember, too, how loosely some of our sentimental writers have held to political creeds;<sup>91</sup>

William Thackeray was right; the morality of the novel was obtrusive. *St Patrick’s Eve* might have been a laudable, earnest attempt to explain Ireland’s ills to an English audience, but that audience preferred Lever’s earlier humour. Thackeray’s point, that Lever’s shift from comedy to political moralising was ‘too deep’ for Lever’s ‘readers’, is ironic given the complexity of Thackeray’s commentary on Ireland in *Barry Lyndon*, but it reflects how much of Lever’s English reading public responded to the novel. *St. Patrick’s Eve* was humourless and overtly political. Lever structured *St. Patrick’s Eve* into three eras with specific socio-political themes. The ‘First Era’ reflects his ‘idyllic’ feudal system, where the landlord is revered by his loyal tenants. In the ‘Second Era’ the landlord’s abdication of his responsibilities during a cholera epidemic creates a space for that feudal system to be challenged by ‘dangerous and designing men’.<sup>92</sup> In the ‘Third Era’, the emphasis on the causes of social instability shifts again, as the impact of the epidemic declines. Young Mr. Leslie relinquishes his responsibilities to a brutal agent whose systematic mistreatment of tenants inevitably provokes agrarian violence. In a final twist that seems uncomfortably contrived, Mr. Leslie returns to assume his responsibilities just in time to defuse the situation.

Ironically, given his earlier Irish critics, although the novel did not meet with approval in England, it did in Ireland.<sup>93</sup> Despite Lever’s apparent Tory Unionist sympathies, his

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<sup>91</sup> W.M. Thackeray, ‘Lever’s St Patrick’s Eve – Comic Politics’, *Morning Chronicle*, 3 April 1845, p.5.

<sup>92</sup> Charles Lever, *St. Patrick’s Eve*, p. 355.

<sup>93</sup> *Nation*, 12 April 1845, p. 13.



critique of absenteeism resonated now with nationalist sentiments. What is more, Lever was suddenly being endorsed by a radically nationalist publication, and some in his circle began to suspect him as having Republican sympathies. In January 1846, he refuted the rumour in a letter to Alexander Spencer.<sup>94</sup>

Lever became increasingly frustrated with responses to his later novels, and he complained to a Dr Burbidge, in November 1863:

I never could bring myself yet, nor do I hope to arrive at the point hereafter, to respect my Public; and I often hug myself, in the not very profitable consolation, that they never thought meaner of me nor do I of them. I know that the very worst things I ever did were instant successes, and some one or two – as *The Dodds*, for instance, which had a certain stamp of originality – were total and lamentable failures. Now, mind, I do not say this in any spirit of misanthropic invective. I do not want, like poor Haydn, to slang the world that refuses to appreciate me – and, for this reason, they have taken carrion from me and eaten it for good wholesome ox beef; but I say that for such consumers the trouble of selection is thrown away, and [...] I feel that if I were to write for Fame, I might finish my book in the Fleet.<sup>95</sup>

Lever's geographical location after 1845 was part of the problem. Had he followed Thackeray's advice regarding moving to London, his literary career might have remained as successful. But he went instead to the Continent, so he was never really able or determined enough to drive his career amidst cut and thrust London's literati to the extent his contemporaries did. His first two more 'serious' 1845 novels *The O'Donoghue* and *St. Patrick's Eve* did not do as well as he had hoped.

## Conclusion

William Makepeace Thackeray was sent to Ireland by his publisher precisely because there was a market for the sham Irishman at the time his commission was set. To an extent,

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<sup>94</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, I, p. 204.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 386-7.

Thackeray delivered what the market had (until 1845) enjoyed reading, a mixture of the clichéd and humorous in *The Irish Sketchbook*, and the unprincipled, rebellious Irish adventurer in *The Luck of Barry Lyndon*, but he did so with conscious irony, acknowledging his own inevitably Anglo-centric bias and the extent to which Ireland resisted interpretation by an English visitor. In Anthony Trollope's case, his effective migration to Ireland from 1841 to 1859, inevitably gave him greater insight into Ireland's social and political problems but his presentations of Ireland were still Anglo-centric. Furthermore, Trollope's migration to Ireland was economically driven. It gave him a job on a practical level, and Ireland gave him the material to embark upon the literary career that would allow him eventually to leave the Post Office. Trollope was one of what Roy Foster described in his chapter on 'Marginal Men', who epitomised the converse of his 'Micks on the Make'.<sup>96</sup> He was an Englishman who had left London to make his fortune in the colonised country. Anthony Trollope simultaneously endorsed, interrogated and contested the literary tradition where the political union between England and Ireland was figured in terms of masculine England, imposing necessary regulation on an unruly feminine Ireland. The cultural tradition of representing Ireland as Erin, or Hibernia was deeply entrenched, and Trollope's symbolic use of exploited women as a metaphor for Ireland appears in all of his Irish novels. For a first novel, the subject matter for *The Macdermots of Ballycloran* flouted expectations in what was an audacious but probably ill-judged move on Trollope's part, given his need to make money. It rejected the possibility the kind of romantic 'love and marriage licences' outcome that Lever had described as the popular 'Colburn-and-Bentley fashion', which his intended English readers might have expected. Trollope focussed instead on poverty, drunkenness, seduction, Irish agrarian rebellion and violence. Catholic landowners and Protestant Ascendancy are, at this stage of his tenure in Ireland, presented as the cause of Ireland's problems and he had yet

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<sup>96</sup> See Foster, *Paddy and Mr. Punch*, pp. 292-3.

to develop his later antipathy for Ribbonism. In fact, at this stage of his literary career, although he fell short of expressing sympathy for the movement, he certainly sought to convey an understanding of what provoked their violence:

Ribbonism, about 183-, was again becoming very prevalent in parts of Ireland, [...] Joe was aware that he was a marked man, and consequently, if not actually a ribbonman, was very well inclined to that or anything else, which might be inimical to gaols, policemen, inspectors, gaugers, or any other recognised authority; in fact, he was a reckless man, originally rendered so by inability to pay high rent for miserably bad land, and afterwards becoming doubly so from having recourse to illegal means to ease his difficulties.

He, and many others in the neighbourhood of Mohill somewhat similarly situated, had joined together, bound themselves by oaths, and had determined to become ribbonmen; their chief objects, however, at present, were to free themselves from the terrors of Captains Ussher and Greenough, and to prevent their landlords ejecting them for non-payment of rent.<sup>97</sup>

Such consideration would not have impressed the English reading market by the time the novel was published – especially in the wake of the 1848 rebellion.

The Irish adventurers that Charles Lever and William Makepeace Thackeray initially marketed in their early novels, were the literary descendants of Regency excess. Lever's biographer Fitzpatrick used Harry Innes' commented on Thackeray's influence on Lever:

“ I think you under-estimate the effect of Thackeray's visit to Lever at Templeogue”, resumes Mr. Innes. “Up to that date, Lever's works were essentially Irish; at once they become [sic] cosmopolitan, a change so complete as to form an entirely new literary departure. It is possible a conversation I had with Lever in 1843 may throw some light upon the matter. Shortly after Thackeray's visit, Lever was in Thomastown for a short time, and he entered into a discussion of his affairs, public, private and literary, in the in the unreserved fashion customary with him. He told me that Thackeray arrived in Dublin under the impression that he (Lever) was under a cloud from some disagreement with London publishers, that otherwise he was unable to see a reason why he should settle in Dublin and not in London. And assuming this to be so, Thackeray offered assistance pecuniary or otherwise, to smooth matters, so as to open or re-open the way to literary head-quarters. Lever's reply was, that he was an Irishman, body, soul and spirit; that his good name and fame, such as they were, were also Irish, and that he thought his duties lay in Ireland, and that he expected to make them both pleasant and profitable.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Trollope, *Macdermots*, p. 37.

<sup>98</sup> Harry Innes, 'Recollections of Charles Lever's Boyhood', in Fitzpatrick, *The Life of Charles Lever*, 2 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1879), II, p. 396.

There is more evidence though of Lever's influence upon Thackeray. In 'Reminiscences of [sic]' a certain 'Major D\_\_\_\_[sic]' recounted how, during his stay with Lever,

Thackeray had talked of plans for what turned out to be *Vanity Fair* (1848):

"To return to our conversation, whilst walking in to Dublin after the review, - Thackeray remarked that a great amount of interest still attached to everything connected with Waterloo, the British public seeming never to tire of it; he had been thinking since we met at dinner of writing something on the subject himself, but he did not see his way clearly. Lever's treatment of it in 'O'Malley' seemed to him too imaginative and high-flown, in fact audacious and regardless of all probability. [...] Thackeray thought that the amount of interest shown was proof of the existence of a very deep-seated national feeling, and having survived so long, 'how intense,' said he, 'must it have been at the time, and how widely spread amongst all classes of society.' From what Captain Siborne had mentioned at Lever's house, added to what he had himself seen on that day in the review, he seemed to have arrived at the conclusion that it would be useless for him to attempt anything in the way of military scene-painting that could lay the slightest claim to correctness,"<sup>99</sup>

According to James Murphy, 'Thackeray was to continue to engage with Lever and his work through full-scale novels [...] In *The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon, Esq., of the Kingdom of Ireland* (1856), originally serialized in *Fraser's Magazine* as *the Luck of Barry Lyndon* in 1844, he was to satirize the Leveresque military novel. In *Vanity Fair* he was apparently to emulate and, in the view of most, to exceed it.'<sup>100</sup> Murphy is perceptive in his identification of Lever's direct influence on Thackeray's work, but there is something of an anachronism in part of one of his deductions. Murphy rightly attributes the given name of Thackeray's character Glorvina O'Dowd, to Lady Morgan's heroine 'Glorvina' in *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806), but his suggestion that he owed the surname to 'Lever, who used the name Cornelius O'Dowd',<sup>101</sup> is misleading. Lever's Cornelius O'Dowd did not appear in *Blackwood's Magazine* until at least fifteen years after Thackeray's initial serialisation of *Vanity Fair*.

William Makepeace Thackeray explained the kind of Irish caricature favoured by the pre-Famine market:

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<sup>99</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Life of Lever*, p. 415-6.

<sup>100</sup> Murphy, *Irish Novelists & the Victorian Age*, p. 78.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

But we in England have adopted our idea of the Irishman; and, like the pig-imitator's audience in the fable (which simile is not to be construed into an opinion on the writer's part that the Irish resemble pigs, but simply that the Saxon is dull of comprehension), we *will* have the sham Irishman in preference to the real one, and will laugh at the poor wag, whatever his mood may be.<sup>102</sup>

Charles Lever's first two novels took advantage of the market for the 'sham' Irishman and the military adventurer incredibly successfully. Whilst those early novels carry a reputation for light-hearted adventures, there is evidence of Lever's concern for Irish social and political issues. Thackeray's influence on Lever's transition toward more serious novels worked in two ways, initially by showing Lever that he could write about more serious issues and later by provoking his sensitivity through his burlesque of *Harry Lorrequer* and criticism of *St. Patrick's Eve*. Charles Lever was vulnerable to negative criticism and Thackeray's treatment of him must have seemed an ungrateful response given Lever's earlier defence of *The Irish Sketchbook*, at a time when Lever was the successful writer and Thackeray had yet to enjoy similar success. In that defence Charles Lever drew attention to the inevitable preconceptions of difference that Thackeray acknowledged in his own presentation of Ireland. What Lever called Thackeray's 'even-handed justice', manifested in apparent ambivalence toward Irish social, religious and political structures. Thackeray admitted: 'I wonder who *does* understand the place? not [sic] the natives certainly, for the two parties so hate each other, that neither can view the simplest proceeding of the other without distrusting falsifying & abusing it. And where in the midst of all the lies that all tell, is a stranger to seek for truth?'<sup>103</sup> That consciousness of what Joep Leerssen has since described as auto-exoticism infiltrates Lever's assessment in *The Irish Sketch Book*:

That any Englishman, without long and intimate acquaintance with Ireland, the result of residence in the country, and constant habits of intercourse with all classes of the population, could write a valuable book, and one which might be deemed an authority, we hold altogether impossible. The attempt to assimilate the institutions of

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<sup>102</sup> William Makepeace Thackeray, 'A Box of Novels', *Fraser's Magazine*, February 1844, pp. 153-69.

<sup>103</sup> Thackeray, *Letters and Private Papers*, II, p. 78.

two countries, where so many opposite modes of acting and thinking exist – the adoption of an English standard as the measure of Irish habitudes, would lead to innumerable errors, even were he fortunate enough to escape the selfish misrepresentations which, somehow or other, we are more or less prone to impose on our cockney friends, when visiting us with intentions of authorship.

That our friend Titmarsh proposed any very lofty object to himself in the volumes before us, we are not disposed to believe. He never, we are certain, dreamed that his dictum was to decide any one of the thousand disputed questions which agitate Ireland: he wisely saw that a tourists' sphere of vision is but a very limited one at best; and this fact, which every page of his work more or less evinces, gives a value to his observations far greater than that which appertains to any other writer we know of on Ireland. A desire for even-handed justice, however, leads him into the common error of attacking both sides: if he censures a parson to-day, he is quite prepared to serve you up a priest to-morrow: landlords and tenants, Whigs and Tories, town fold and country folk – all come in for their share; but so good humouredly withal, and with occasionally such pleasant little blunders of his own, that he must be a sour critic who would find fault with him.<sup>104</sup>

Charles Lever was simply reinforcing Thackeray's own acknowledgement of the inevitable 'prejudice'<sup>105</sup> inherent in English attempts to interpret an ineffable Ireland, but his favourable review of *The Irish Sketch Book* attracted hostility from contemporaries in Dublin. Those detractors that Lever contended with whilst editing *Dublin University Magazine* between 1842 and 1845, and whose influence also drove and shaped Lever's more mature literary direction, form one of the subjects of the next chapter.

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<sup>104</sup> Charles Lever, 'The Irish Sketch Book', *Dublin University Magazine*, June 1843, p. 647.

<sup>105</sup> Thackeray, *Sketch Book*, pp. 286-7.

## CHAPTER 3

### Charles Lever, Dublin, Politics, and Religion

Word Count: 13,609

Oh! Dublin, sure, there is no doubtin',  
Beats every city upon the say.  
'Tis there you'll see O'Connell spouting,  
And Lady Morgan making "Tay."  
For 'tis the capital of the greatest nation  
With finest peasantry on a fruitful sod,  
Fighting like devils for conciliation,  
And hating each other for the love of God.<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

James Cahalan notes that 'Edgeworth, Griffin, and their compatriots had founded a distinct tradition for the Irish novel during the first three decades of the nineteenth century'.<sup>2</sup> Charles Lever's early novels experimented with that tradition and its sub-genres, and over the course of the first half of the 1840s, his work became more political. Lever's biographer Edmund Downey wrote that 'Charles Lever loved politics almost as ardently as he loved whist'.<sup>3</sup> Lever's time editing *Dublin University Magazine* between 1842 and 1845 would crystallise Lever's transition to a more mature approach to Irish politics in his novels.<sup>4</sup> Cahalan has referred to this period, making certain assumptions regarding Lever:

The growth in Irish publishing and O'Connell's campaign to explicate "the Irish problem" as their predecessors such as Edgeworth and the Banims had done. It is striking and more than coincidental that in 1845, for example, a majority of the important novelists considered in this chapter, Carleton, Lever, Hall, and Le Fanu – published novels that examined Irish conditions in a sympathetic light, even though

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Lever, *The Confessions of Harry Lorrequer* (Dublin: Curry & Co, 1839; repr. London: George Routledge and Sons, 1876), p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> James M. Calahan, *The Irish Novel: A Critical History* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co. 1988), p. 46.

<sup>3</sup> Edmund Downey, *Charles Lever: His Life in Letters*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1906), I, p. 168.

<sup>4</sup> As discussed in previous chapters, Charles Lever is considered to have 'transitioned' from light-hearted 'rollicking' novels toward writing more seriously in 1845.

none of the four can be considered a clear-cut nationalist; the latter three were thoroughly of the Protestant Ascendancy in sensibility as well as background'<sup>5</sup>

Lever was indeed, by 1845, examining 'Irish conditions in a sympathetic light', but he was not 'thoroughly of the Protestant Ascendancy in sensibility as well as background'. I have already remarked that Lever's mother came from an Ascendancy background, but his father did not, he was a self-made man. Lever's sense of identity was quite fluid when it came to the matter of Ascendancy sensibility.

This chapter explores further influences on the ways in which Lever wrote about Ireland. Its foci include Daniel O'Connell, 'Young Irelanders' and the *Nation*. The ways in which these influences manifested in Lever's work during and after his time at *Dublin University Magazine* indicate a position at odds with suggestions that Charles Lever's political stance resonated entirely with those of the Tory Unionist magazine he worked for.

In his chapter entitled 'A Year of Growth', Stephen Haddelsey maintains that 'The year 1845 can be seen as a watershed in Lever's career as a novelist, as he moved away from the rambling and essentially light-hearted tales which had won him so much popularity'.<sup>6</sup> Although Haddelsey redresses some of the subsequent critical neglect that Lever's first four novels have suffered, he overlooks evidence of growth in both *Jack Hinton* and *Tom Burke*. James M. Cahalan, who Haddelsey quotes, did the same maintaining that '1845, the year of the Great Hunger, marked a transition in Lever's work, with the publication of *The O'Donoghue* and *St. Patrick's Eve*'.<sup>7</sup> Tony Bareham suggests that this transition was even later: 'The extent of the change which came over his career after about 1846 has only recently begun to be quantified in Lever's favour'.<sup>8</sup> Yet there is evidence of more serious representations of Ireland coming in to Lever's work three years earlier than Bareham

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<sup>5</sup> Cahalan, *The Irish Novel*, p. 47-8.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Haddelsey, *Charles Lever: The Lost Victorian* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 2000), p. 57.

<sup>7</sup> Cahalan, *The Irish Novel*, p. 65.

<sup>8</sup> Tony Bareham, *Charles Lever: New Evaluations* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1991), p. 8.



proposes, in *Jack Hinton* (1843). In this chapter I will offer examples of Lever's early work that contradict the assumption that all four of his first novels were of the carefree rollicking variety. These examples show evidence that Lever's shift toward more considered representations of Ireland was underway before 1845, and I will argue that his subsequent work suggests a position regarding the Union more complicated than has formerly been attributed to Lever.

Charles Lever's antipathy toward specific men, Daniel O'Connell, William Carleton and later on toward William Ewart Gladstone has done much to colour perceptions of Lever's politics. He has been considered a firm Tory Unionist. In the only relatively recent extended treatment of Lever's work, Stephen Haddelsey has claimed that 'Lever was opposed to repeal',<sup>9</sup> but Lever's work tells a different story. The case is more nuanced and Christopher Morash's description of Lever's 'lifelong antipathy to the politics of repeal',<sup>10</sup> is more apt. Lever's antagonism toward certain political personalities should not be mistaken for a 'lifelong antipathy' toward their political ends.

## Unionist or Repealer? Charles Lever, William Ewart Gladstone and Daniel O'Connell

In William Ewart Gladstone's *The Nineteenth Century* (1889), a chapter on 'Daniel O'Connell' included the following recollection: 'O'Connell has come to be nothing but a name ... But forty and fifty years ago, O'Connell was, and was felt to be, not only a name, but a power.'<sup>11</sup> Gladstone was writing in 1889, making the period of which he spoke roughly 1839-1849. At the beginning of that specific period, O'Connell's power and influence had

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<sup>9</sup> Haddelsey, *Lost Victorian*, pp. 74-5.

<sup>10</sup> Christopher Morash, 'Lever's Post-Famine Landscape', in *Charles Lever: New Evaluations*, ed. by Tony Bareham (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1991), p. 89.

<sup>11</sup> W. E. Gladstone, 'Daniel O'Connell', *Nineteenth Century Magazine*, January 1889, p. 1.

largely waned and were yet to be resurrected. O'Connell's ability to galvanise support and lobby for reform, had been a driving force in establishing Catholic Emancipation, allowing Catholics and dissenters to take seats in parliament in 1829. Yet his efforts to push 'Justice for Ireland' in parliament did not realise the full extent of his ambitions. The death of O'Connell's wife in 1837, concerns about his daughter's mental health and the apparent loss of his former support in Ireland left O'Connell dejected by 1839, but he was not quite the spent force some thought him to be. In 1841, O'Connell became the first Catholic Mayor in Dublin 'since the flight of James II',<sup>12</sup> and when his tenure ended in October 1842, he turned his full attention to the Repeal Association, which had been established in April 1840. O'Connell was a man in his latter sixties. He initially had some uneasy support from a group of young men; Thomas Davis, John Blake Dillon and Charles Gavan Duffy. These men became known as the Young Irelanders as they shifted towards outright opposition to O'Connell's political stance. Nevertheless, the Young Irelanders helped mobilise the movement and galvanise popular support following establishment of the *Nation* in October 1842. Their newspaper became the mouthpiece of the Repeal Association. In early 1842 Charles Lever had been living in Brussels, working as a doctor for nearly ten years, and was supplementing his income through writing. An invitation to take up editorship of *Dublin University Magazine* meant a return to Dublin.

### Charles Lever at *Dublin University Magazine*

A few months before this return, Lever wrote the following to Alexander Spencer in November 1841:

Dublin, if I am to trust, is a changed city, and indeed I am disposed to believe them, and have a great hope that a moderate Government with Tory leanings would be the fairest chance for peace in so disturbed a country.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Charles Gavan Duffy, *Young Ireland* (London: Cassell, Petter, Galpin & Co., 1880), p. 186.

<sup>13</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, I, pp. 153-4.

Dublin *was* a changed city and the country *was* increasingly disturbed; when Charles Lever arrived back in the city of his birth, he saw the evidence for himself.

In the same year of Lever's return to Dublin in 1842, Daniel O'Connell predicted that 1843 would be the 'Repeal year'. In preparation for that Repeal year an organisational network, reflecting the model formerly used for the Catholic Association, was set up. From March until September 1843, a campaign of meetings at an average of two a week took place.<sup>14</sup> Forty of these rallies attracted enough people to qualify as what *The Times* would dub as 'monster meetings'. The largest of these was held at the Tara, a site redolent with myths and associations such as St. Patrick's conversion of Irish kings to Christianity, and the anointment of ancient high kings of Ireland. This was a move likely to be interpreted as symbolic of a challenge to English rule and Anglo-Ascendency hegemony.

## Daniel O'Connell, Young Ireland and the *Nation*

Lever's biographer Fitzpatrick commented on Charles Lever's hostility toward Daniel O'Connell: 'Lever's mistake was in confounding O'Connell and the Catholics with those seditiously disposed. "High mass and high treason," he once bitterly exclaimed, "are the order of the day."' <sup>15</sup> But Lever was not alone in believing that O'Connell and Catholics were one and the same as 'those seditiously disposed'. Although O'Connell was the face of 'moderate' nationalism, to many, his involvement with the campaign for Repeal in the wake of his successful campaign for Catholic Emancipation, seemed to threaten the very fabric of the English and Irish political systems. Responses to O'Connell in Lever's circles in Dublin, in the English press – especially *The Times*, and English publications such as *Punch* indicate

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<sup>14</sup> Oliver MacDonagh, *The Emancipist: Daniel O'Connell 1830-1847* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1989), p. 227.

<sup>15</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Life of Lever*, II, p. 98.

just how dangerous an influence he was thought to be by both English and Irish pro-Unionists alike.



THE IRISH OGRE FATTENING ON THE FINEST PISANTRY.

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The cartoon above shows O'Connell serving himself from a pot of 'Agitation Soup', from which a cloud of 'Finest Pisantry in the World' steam emanates. He is supported on bags of 'rint' money, and holds a shillelagh indicating the threat of violent repeal agitation unfairly attributed to O'Connell.

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<sup>16</sup> *Punch*, 8 July 1843. p. 15.

The groundswell of support O'Connell had in Ireland by the end of 1843, presented a dilemma for supporters of the Union, and the emergence of more radical nationalism proved even more threatening to the status quo. Lever as the editor of the Tory-Unionist *Dublin University Magazine* found himself right in the middle of those 'politics of repeal'. As a consequence, he found himself targeted from every quarter. In his description of Lever's trials toward the end of his time in Dublin, Edmund Downey explained:

While he held the reins at the office of the 'The Dublin University,' Ireland was in an acutely nervous condition. O'Connell was struggling for repeal of the Act of Union; the Young Irelanders were urging people to adopt methods more drastic than O'Connell would countenance; the political sect to which Lever belonged was antagonistic to O'Connell and to the Young Irelanders. Party feeling ran high, party rancour flourished, and many a hard blow was struck.<sup>17</sup>

Lever had been the target of bitter criticism in the *Nation* and in other Dublin publications opposed to the *Dublin University Magazine's* political sympathies.<sup>18</sup> The following dialogue, and its corollary in *Tom Burke of Ours* (1844), emerged in direct response to some of those 'hard blows'. In March 1843, the *Nation* ran a report on comments that O'Connell himself had made at the Corn Exchange:

He [O'Connell] thought it right to vindicate his honourable friend, Sergeant Murphy, and next to complain of the manner in which the religion and the people of Ireland are libelled in such publications as *Harry Lorrequer*, *Jack Hinton*, and *Our Mess*, publications which were constantly interlarded with the worst species of bigotry and calumny of the Catholic religion and turned into ridicule the finest and noblest qualities of the people (cheers). The press ought to keep itself perfectly free from bestowing praise on such creatures as Lever...<sup>19</sup>

William Thackeray entered the fray to defend Charles Lever in *Fraser's Magazine*:

Certain Irish critics will rise up in arms against this dictum, and will fall foul of the author of the paradox and of the subject of these present remarks too. For while we have been almost universal in our praise of Lorrequer in England, no man has been more fiercely buffeted in his own country, Mr. O'Connell himself taking the lead to attack this kindly and gentle writer, and thundering out abuse at him from his *cathedra* in the Corn Exchange. A strange occupation this for a statesman! Fancy Sir

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<sup>17</sup> Downey, *Lever: Life in Letters*, I, p. 184.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Nation*, 4 March 1843, p. 16.

Robert Peel taking occasion to bring *Martin Chuzzlewit* before the House of Commons [...] The great Corn Exchange critic says that Lorrequer has sent abroad an unjust opinion of the Irish character, which he (the Corn-Exchange critic) is upholding by words and example.<sup>20</sup>

The spat inspired a direct literary response from Lever; Fitzpatrick would later remark that O'Connell's criticism had provoked Lever into addressing the question of rebellion in *Tom Burke* (1844):

O'Connell, it would appear, had attacked Lever in a public speech about this time; for the latter, in presenting No. 2 of "Tom Burke" to a friend, said, "Here is rebellion enough to make Dan recant his judgment of me in his next speech."<sup>21</sup>

Whilst the scholars mentioned in the introduction to this chapter suggest that 1845 and even 1846, marked the chronology for Lever's development toward more serious writing, both *Tom Burke* (1844) and its predecessor *Jack Hinton* (1843) emerge from their rollicking labels as Lever's early contributions to the Irish political debate. In the second chapter of *Jack Hinton*, Lever described Dublin Castle, where the site of the Viceregal court and Dublin city's great past is fading at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. 'Years and neglect had not only done their worst, but it was evident that the hand of devastation had also been at work'.<sup>22</sup> The third chapter has a passage indicating a sense of Dublin society careering toward self-destruction:

To me the most singular feature of all this was, that no one seemed too old or too dignified, too high in station or too venerable from office, to join in this headlong current of conviviality: austere churchmen, erudite chief-justices, profound politicians, privy councillors, military officers of high rank and standing, were all here mixed up together into one strange medley, apparently bent on throwing an air of ridicule over the graver business of life, and laughing alike at themselves and the world. Nothing was too grave for a jest, nothing too solemn for a sarcasm.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> William Makepeace Thackeray, 'A Box of Novels', in *Fraser's Magazine*, February 1844, pp. 153-169 (p. 155).

<sup>21</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Life of Lever*, II, p.7.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Lever, *Jack Hinton: The Guardsman* (Dublin: Curry & Co, 1843; repr. London: George Routledge and Sons, 1876), p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Lever, *Jack Hinton*, p. 18.

At this stage of the narrative, Lever was subtly building a picture juxtaposing decadence and frivolity with the impact of Ascendancy failure. In the fourth chapter, there is a description of a depressed Dublin, and signs of decay and poverty.<sup>24</sup> In a chapter entitled ‘Shannon Harbour’, Jack Hinton encounters more signs of harrowing distress:

Scarcely had I put foot on shore when the whole population of the village thronged around me. What are these, thought I? What art do they practise? What trade do they profess? Alas! their wan looks, their tattered garments, their outstretched hands, and imploring voices, gave the answer – they were all beggars! It was not as if the old, the decrepit, the sickly, or the feeble, had fallen on the charity of their fellow-men in their hour of need; but here were all – all – the old man and the infant, the husband and the wife, the aged grandfather and the tottering grandchild, the white locks of youth, the white hairs of age – pale, pallid and sickly – trembling between starvation and suspense, watching with the hectic eye of fever, every gesture of him on whom their momentary hope was fixed; canvassing, in muttered tones, every step of his proceeding, and hazarding a doubt upon its bearing on their own fate. “Oh! the heavens be your bed, noble gentleman, look at me, The Lord reward you for the little sixpence that you have in your fingers there. I’m the mother of ten of them.” “Billy Cronin, yer honour, I’m dark since I was nine years old.” “I’m the ouldest man in the town-land,” said an old fellow with a white beard, and a blanket strapped round him. [...] Throwing what silver I had about me amongst them, I made my way towards the hotel, not alone, however, but heading a procession of my ragged friends, who with loud praises of my liberality, testified their gratitude by bearing me company.<sup>25</sup>

This passage indicates a progression toward stark evidence of the consequences of an irresponsible ruling class in Ireland. I mentioned in my first chapter that Barry Sloan maintained that ‘*Harry Lorrequer* and its immediate successors, *Charles O’Malley* and *Jack Hinton*, form the basis of their author’s popularity, yet they are little more than collections of episodic adventures.’<sup>26</sup> Charles Lever was, in fact, building far more complex and often shocking tensions between self-destructive ‘rollicking’ and failure of an Ascendancy rule, which Sloan aptly calls ‘divorced from all social or political responsibility’.<sup>27</sup> To emphasise my point, in the chapter regarding ‘A Race Ball’, Lever’s Jack Hinton makes a suggestion:

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<sup>24</sup> Lever, *Jack Hinton*, p. 29.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 143-4.

<sup>26</sup> Barry Sloan, *The Pioneers of Anglo-Irish Fiction 1800-1850* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1986.), p. 192.

<sup>27</sup> Sloan, *Anglo-Irish Fiction*, p. 193.

‘Don’t tell me of your insurrection acts, of your nightly outrages, your out-breaks, and your burnings, as a reason for keeping a large military force in Ireland – nothing of the kind. A very different object, indeed, is the reason – Ireland is garrisoned to please the ladies.’<sup>28</sup> This glib observation is soon brutally undermined. A sinister event in a subsequent chapter brings Ireland’s social and political structural fractures to the fore, encapsulating the consequences of Ascendancy failure and the fragility of life for poor rural Irish people. On their journey through a mountain pass in Munster, Father Tom Loftus and Jack Hinton encounter a young woman whose mutilated and dying husband, Shaun, had tried to avenge the land agent who had evicted the couple and their small child. Jack Hinton narrates the scene:

But at him I looked no longer, for straight before us on the road, and in front of the little cabin, now not above thirty paces from us, knelt the figure of a woman, whom, where it not for the fearful sounds we had heard, once could scarcely believe a thing of life. Her age was not more than thirty years; she was pale as death; not tinge, not a ray of colour streaked her bloodless cheek; [...] Her dress bespoke of the meanest poverty, and her sunken cheek and drawn-in lips betokened famine and starvation.<sup>29</sup>

This was written before the Great Famine of 1845-51, and set toward the end of the pre-Union eighteenth century. Famine was a fact of Irish rural life, occurring between 1726-9 and 1739-41,<sup>30</sup> before the novel’s historical perspective then again in 1817, 1822 and 1836 as part of its author’s perspective. Lever’s treatment of the scene unfolds, gradually hinting at the back-story to this horrific denouement:

I drew near, and now perceived that the dead man’s chest was laid open by a wound of several inches in extent. The ribs had been cut across, and some portion of the heart or lung seemed to protrude. At the slightest touch of the body, the blood gushed forth anew, and ran in streams upon him. His right hand, too, was cut across the entire palm, the thumb nearly severed at the joint.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Lever, *Jack Hinton*, p. 193.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 236-7.

<sup>30</sup> Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (London: Pimlico, 1997), p. 637.

<sup>31</sup> Lever, *Jack Hinton*, p. pp. 237-8.



Intimations of what has led to this harrowing scene emerge the following morning. The older of three men who arrive to bury Shaun asks: ‘Shaun didn’t tell of Hogan’,<sup>32</sup> then comments ‘Isn’t it all fair: Blood for blood; and sure they dhruv him to it.’<sup>33</sup> Jack Hinton learns from the old man that Shaun ‘might have lived for many a year; but when he heerd that the boys was up, and going to settle a reckoning with Mr. Tarleton,’<sup>34</sup> it transpires that Shaun felt driven to take part in the attempt on Tarleton’s life. Tarleton had evicted Shaun’s family despite their son being ill: ‘they turned him out on the road last Michaelmas Day, himself and his wife and the little gossoon – the only one they had, too – with a fever and ague upon him. The poor child, however, didn’t feel it long, for he died in ten days after.’<sup>35</sup> The gravity of this example counters Sloan’s dismissal of *Jack Hinton* as having ‘slight indications’ of ‘deepening thought’. Sloan uses the following passage of dialogue from Father Tom to Jack, to argue that Lever does not allow gravity ‘to disfigure the pages of *Jack Hinton*’<sup>36</sup>: ‘Never speak to me nor question me about what we saw last night, and try only to remember it as a dream. And now let me tell you how I mean to amuse you in the far West’.<sup>37</sup> Yet this sentence, significantly, occurs after Father Tom’s entreaty to Jack:

This has been a sad scene. Would to Gould you had not witnessed it! Would to God, rather, that it might not have occurred! But promise me, on the faith of a man of honour and the word of a gentleman, that what you have seen this night you will reveal to no man, until I have passed away myself, and stand before that judgement to which we all are coming.’<sup>38</sup>

Jack Hinton’s response indicates the impact this incident has on the young English officer: ‘I promise you faithfully,’ said I. ‘‘And now let us leave a spot that has thrown a gloom upon my heart which a long life will never obliterate.’’ Lever’s shift to lighter subjects does not

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<sup>32</sup> Lever, *Jack Hinton*, p. 240.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 241.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>35</sup> Lever, *Jack Hinton*, p. 241.

<sup>36</sup> Sloan, *Anglo-Irish Fiction*, p. 195.

<sup>37</sup> Lever, *Jack Hinton*, p. 245.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p. 243.

come immediately after the ‘sad scene’.<sup>39</sup> It is preceded by the harrowing experience where Jack Hinton is utterly disabused of any illusions he might have had regarding the depths of Ireland’s social and political difficulties, an extended period of shocked silence between the two men as they continue their journey, by an episode where Father Tom Loftus is obliged to lie when they are questioned by Sir Thomas about Tarleton’s murder, and by a graphic description of that murder and the assailants’ motivations:

‘Yes, murdered! The house was attacked a little after midnight. The party must have been a large one, for while they forced in the hall door, the haggard and the stables were seen in a blaze. Poor George had just retired to bed, a little later than usual; for his sons had returned a few hours before from Dublin, where they had been to attend their college examination. The villains, however, knew the house well, and made straight for his room. He got up in an instant, and seizing a sabre that hung beside his bed, defended himself, with the courage of desperation, against them all. The scuffle and the noise soon brought his sons to the spot, who, although mere boys, behaved in the most gallant manner. Overpowered at last by numbers, and covered with wounds, they dragged poor Tarleton downstairs, shouting out as they went, “Bring him down to Freney’s! Let the bloody villain see the black walls and the cold hearth he has made before he dies!” It was their intention to murder him on the spot where, a few weeks before, a distress for rent had been executed against some of his tenants. [...] Yes, yes, father, Henry Tarleton saw it with his own eyes, for while his brother was stretched senseless on the floor, he was struggling with the others at the head of the staircase; and, strange enough too, they never hurt the boys, but when they had wreaked their vengeance on the father, bound them back to back, and left them.’<sup>40</sup>

Father Tom’s ‘Never speak to me nor question me about what we saw last night’<sup>41</sup> appears to conclude attention to darker political issues but he still has an extended explanation to add to Tom’s education regarding English misconceptions of Ireland ending with the following:

when, broken by poverty and paralysed by famine, a gloomy desolation spreads over the land, you meet in terms of congratulation to talk over tranquilised Ireland.

In this strain did the good priest continue to develop his view concerning his country – the pivot of his argument being, that, to a people so essentially different in every respect, English institutions and English laws were inadequate and unsuitable. Sometimes I could only but agree with him. At others I could but dimly perceive his meaning and dissent from the very little I could catch.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Lever, *Jack Hinton*, p. 243.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, p. 244.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p. 245.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, p. 247.

Charles Lever's 'deeper' approach to explaining Ireland developed even more dramatically in *Tom Burke of Ours* (1844). In the third chapter of *Tom Burke*, Darby M'Keown encourages Tom's emerging patriot sympathies. On the journey from Athlone to Dublin, a burned-out cabin serves as an introduction to the 1798 rebellion:

A ruined cabin in the road, whose blackened walls and charred timbers denoted its fate, here attracted my companion's attention. He stopped for a second or two to look on it; and then, kneeling down, he muttered a short prayer for the eternal rest of some one departed, and taking up a stone, he threw it on a heap of similar ones which lay near the doorside.

"What happened there, Darby?" said I, as he resumed his way.

"They wor out in the thrubles!" was his only reply, as he cast a glance behind, to perceive if anyone had remarked him.

Though he made no further allusion to the fate of those who once inhabited the cabin, he spoke freely of his own share in the eventful year of 'Ninety-eight' justifying, as it then seemed to me, every step of the patriotic party, and explaining the causes of their unsuccess so naturally and so clearly that I could not help following with interest every detail of his narrative, and joining in his regrets of the unexpected and adverse strokes fortune dealt upon them. [...] I heard the names of those who sided with the insurgent party extolled as the great and good men of their country; their ancient families and hereditary claims furnishing a contrast to many of the opposite party, whose recent settlement in the island and new-born aristocracy were held up in scoff and derision. In a word, I learned to believe that the one side was characterised by cruelty, oppression, and injustice; the other, conspicuous only for endurance, courage, patriotism, and truth.<sup>43</sup>

Lever's narrator Tom retrospectively includes an explanatory clause, 'as it then seemed to me', anticipating the modification in Tom's adult thoughts, nevertheless, this passage suggests an understanding of the patriot cause, explaining the injustice in Ireland's history to his contemporary exoteric English readers.

There is a direct comparison between the preceding novel *Jack Hinton the Guardsman*, and *Tom Burke* using the location in Kevin Street in Dublin, to illustrate the direction in which Irish Liberal Patriotism was developing. In *Jack Hinton*, Kevin Street was mentioned as the location where the 'Monks of the Screw' regularly met. Charles Lever was

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<sup>43</sup> Charles Lever, *Tom Burke of Ours*, 2 vols (Dublin: Curry & Co., 1843; repr. London: George Routledge and Sons, 1876), I, pp. 32-3.

alluding to a real drinking club, which had existed for about ten years, starting in 1779. The members included lawyers and Irish parliamentary politicians, who sympathised with the Patriot cause and they did indeed often meet in Kevin Street. Both novels' protagonists' entry into their respective buildings in Kevin Street are strikingly similar. Jack Hinton recounted: 'With these words he knocked three times in a peculiar manner at the door of a large and gloomy-looking house. An ill trimmed lamp threw a faint and flickering light upon the old and ruined building, and I could trace here and there, through all the wreck of time, some remnants of a better day'.<sup>44</sup> Tom Burke's words begin virtually identically: 'Darby knocked in a peculiar manner'.<sup>45</sup> Jack Hinton is initially refused entry by a 'dwarf, opposing himself as a barrier to my entrance';<sup>46</sup> Tom Burke's entry is also impeded: 'I pushed forward to follow, when suddenly a strong arm was stretched across my breast, and a gruff voice asked, - "Who are you?"'<sup>47</sup>

The chapter where this representation occurs in *Jack Hinton* presages a ruling system on the verge of collapse, with O'Grady's situation acting as a metaphor for the broader picture: 'From these I could glean that while O'Grady suffered himself to be borne along the current of dissipation and excess, yet in his heart he hated the life he led, and, when a moment of reflection came, felt sorrow for the past, and but little hope for the future.'<sup>48</sup> In *Jack Hinton*, nationalist interests are represented by the Monks of the Screw who reveal themselves to Jack as some of the most influential people of the era:

the Chief Baron, with a venerable dignitary of St. Patrick's on his right; there was the Attorney-General; there the Provost of Trinity College; lower down, with his skull-cap set jauntily on one side, was Wellesley Pole, the secretary of state; Yelverton, Day, Plunket, Parsons, Toler; in a word, all those whose names were a guarantee for everything that was brilliant, witty, and amusing, were there; while, conspicuous among the rest, the prior himself was no other than John Philpot Curran!<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Lever, *Jack Hinton*, p. 117.

<sup>45</sup> Lever, *Tom Burke*, I, p. 68.

<sup>46</sup> Lever, *Jack Hinton*, p. 118.

<sup>47</sup> Lever, *Tom Burke*, I, p. 69.

<sup>48</sup> Lever, *Jack Hinton*, p. 115.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, p. 121.

Members of the non-fictional Monks of the Screw also included politically Liberal figures such as Burke, Sheridan, and Grattan who led the Irish Patriot Party. These men were involved with relaxations of some penal laws against Roman Catholics. John Philpot Curran founded the Monks of the Screw. He was a barrister who defended members of the United Irishmen and who protested against the corruption employed in the process of imposing the Act of Union, indicating a political allegiance in favour of nationalism, but non-violent nationalism. In *Jack Hinton*, Lever's influential nationalists are of the safe, Protestant middle and upper-classes variety, lobbying through government and the legal system, ironically, in the same manner as O'Connell did. Lever's narrator Jack explains that the 'Monks of the Screw' were 'nothing more or less than an assemblage of nearly all the first men of the day in Ireland'.<sup>50</sup> They were dressed as monks, carrying cork screws on their girdles and drinking and singing their way toward ruin. Lever's succeeding novels would focus on the subsequent decline of the ruling class in Ireland and the impact their misrule had on the country's people.

In *Tom Burke of Ours*, Kevin Street had already become the location for far more violent nationalist activity. 'The Monks of the Screw' have been supplanted by dissident United Irishmen working in collaboration with the French. The French officer residing in No. 39 Kevin Street tells Tom: 'I came over here two years since to take the command. A command – but in what an army! An undisciplined rabble, without arms, without officers, without even clothes – their only notion of warfare a midnight murder, or a reckless and indiscriminate slaughter.'<sup>51</sup> Tom goes on to elaborate upon the change of tactics that Darby explains to him:

In fewer words than I could convey it, Darby informed me that the house was the meeting-place of the United Irishmen, who still cherished the hope of reviving the scenes of '98; that, conscious the failure before was attributable to their having taken the field as an army when they should have merely contented themselves with secret

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<sup>50</sup> Lever, *Jack Hinton*, p. 121.

<sup>51</sup> Lever, *Tom Burke*, I, p. 73.

and indirect attacks, they had resolved to adopt a different tactique. It was, in fact, determined that every political opponent to their party should be marked – himself, his family, and his property; that no opportunity was to be lost of injuring him or his, and, if need be, of taking away his life; that various measures were to be propounded to Parliament by their friends, to the maintenance of which threats were to be freely used to the Government members; and, with respect to the great measure of the day – the Union – it was decided that on the night of the division a certain number of people should occupy the gallery above the ministerial benches, armed with hand-grenades and other destructive missiles; that, on a signal given, these were to be thrown amongst them, scattering death and ruin on all sides.<sup>52</sup>

Within the passage of one year, Lever had displaced Kevin Street's 'first men of Ireland' with United Irishmen, and replaced the Monks' anti-sectarian democratic resistance to English dominion with men who have abandoned 'taking the field as an army' in favour of 'guerrilla' tactics, targeting individual MPs, their families and homes, in their efforts to challenge the Union.

Tom Burke is only fourteen years old, yet as he claims on his arrival at Kevin Street, that he believes himself to be 'Old enough to live for my country, or die for it either, if need be.'<sup>53</sup> He has already borne witness to the brutal reprisals dealt out by the Yeomanry, in the wake of the 1798 rebellion. Lever had direct access to first-hand information regarding the behaviour of Yeoman even before the rising. His father James Lever had been a Yeoman, and in January 1798, he wrote to his brother:

We are all soldiers here since last Christmas was 12 months. I have been a Volunteer, or as now termed a Yeoman, that is we mount guard &c., when we have time, which of late we have had too much of. I believe there is no Nation this day under Heaven more oppressed by soldiers than this. The licentiousness of the Scotch in particular is without parallel. In those parts of the country that are placed by law out of the King's Peace – if your wife or son were dying you dare not have a light after sunset in your house on pain of being thrown in prison or perhaps shot, if the soldier pleases.<sup>54</sup>

Charles Lever was clearly aware of the brutality his father had witnessed, and he used it to explain opposition to the Union to great effect in this novel. Tom Burke gets involved with

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<sup>52</sup> Lever, *Tom Burke*, I, p. 75.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, p. 69.

<sup>54</sup> National Library of Ireland, Edmund Downey Additional Papers, MS 50, 009/25.

the United Irishmen and a French agent sent to support a further rising, he is mixed up with an anti-Union mob in Dublin on the night of the vote for the Act of Union, then is imprisoned and witnesses a Patriot who is about to be hung. Tom's reflections in prison indicate the impact that such experiences have wrought on the boy:

From the hour I quitted my father's house to the present, I had seen nothing but what to me appeared the sufferings of a poor, defenceless people at the hands of wanton tyranny and outrage. I had seen the peasant's cabin burned because it had been a shelter to an outcast; I had heard the loud and drunken denunciations of a ruffianly soldiery against those who professed no other object, who acknowledged no other wish, than liberty and equality; and in my heart I vowed a rooted hate to the enemies of my country, - a vow that lost nothing of its bitterness because it was made within the walls of a prison.<sup>55</sup>

The potential for further rebellion was clearly on Lever's mind in 1844, and the events that led up to growing divisions between O'Connell and the Young Irelanders by early 1844 explain exactly why. The Repeal rally planned for Sunday 8 October 1843, was cancelled by O'Connell the night before it was due to take place, because the British government had become concerned enough to intervene. In the following issue of the *Nation*, dated 14 October 1843, O'Connell was reported as reiterating his insistence on non-violent means of protest: 'He thought of them in every waking moment – in his dreams was mixed anxiety for their safety: he wanted to carry the Repeal without one drop of blood – without crime of any description'.<sup>56</sup> Charles Gavan Duffy wrote later:

After careful deliberation it was determined to indicate our dissent from the course O'Connell had taken, as clearly as would be generous in the face of a triumphant enemy, and towards a chief whom that enemy aimed to humiliate. For the rest we could wait for the future. The future belongs to the young and self-reliant, and the policy of the country could not long be directed by a man who had passed his grand climactic.

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<sup>55</sup> Lever, *Tom Burke*, I, p. 140.

<sup>56</sup> *Nation*, 14 October 1843, p. 3.

The writers of the *Nation* – I accordingly said in the next number – did not agree with the new policy of O’Connell. They would not risk splitting up the national party however by contesting it at that moment.<sup>57</sup>

Yet in the publication of the *Nation* that Duffy alluded to, which reported on the subsequent Repeal meeting at the Corn exchange, it seems that even if Duffy and the other Young Irishmen did object to O’Connell’s decision, they did not appear to hold the general consensus:

He did not hesitate to repeat it, and if he were to go to the scaffold for it tomorrow, he would not hesitate to say that if the government had intended to trick the people into a massacre, they would not act otherwise than they did act (hear, hear). He did not say they had that intention. He could not look into any human mind, and he knew, besides, that there was so much folly and absurdity in their entire conduct respecting the Repeal, that he did not accuse them of intending that which, but for his interposition, might have ended in the massacre of unarmed people (hear, hear). He had two objects – one to proclaim to Ireland that there was but one safety and one mode of obtaining the Repeal of the Union, and that was the most perfect obedience to everything having the shape of legal authority. Let them not pause to question if it be exactly legal, but resistance was not legal – until even the shape and form of legality was done away with and the iron and red arm of violence distinctly raised (hear, hear). Let the illegality of the authority demonstrate itself; but as long as it kept itself legal, even by name, so long, he told the people of Ireland, if they wished for safety and above all the Repeal, they should obey it (loud cheers).  
A Voice – We will obey you.<sup>58</sup>

The *Nation* was a weekly publication edited by Charles Gavan Duffy, Thomas Davis, and John Blake Dillon, between 1842 and 1848. Their approach to supporting the repeal campaign was inspired by ideas of ‘nation’ evolving across Europe, and in particular by German idealist philosophers such as Fichte and Herder. They set out to use Irish poets, writers and historians to reclaim an Irish national identity. The newspaper played a significant part in attracting popular support for repeal, and its success in commercial terms indicated just how far public

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<sup>57</sup> Charles Gavan Duffy, *Young Ireland: A Fragment of History* (London: Cassell, Petter, Galpin & Co. 1880), p. 373. This edition belonged to Gladstone and bears a hand-written dedication to him ‘with the author’s respects’. Gladstone’s marginalia include marked passages and dates throughout the text.

<sup>58</sup> *Nation*, 14 October 1843, p. 835.



opinion in Ireland was shifting in favour of O'Connell and the Young Irelanders. In 1880, Charles Gavan Duffy would recall the *Nation's* early popularity:

The reception of the journal among the cultivated classes, even in circles where O'Connell's name was a challenge to battle, is intelligible; but it was a marvel then, and it is still a marvel how quickly it seized upon the classes to whom reading was not a necessity. Dillon writing to me early in '43 from Ballaghaderin, a village in Mayo, said "I am astonished at the success of the *Nation* in this poor place. There is not in Ireland perhaps a village poorer in itself or surrounded by a poorer population. You would not guess how many *Nations* came to it on Sunday last!"<sup>59</sup>

## William Carleton and Charles Lever

William Carleton was a regular contributor to the *Nation*, and he had a history of attacking Charles Lever. Carleton was born in Prillisk, County Tyrone in 1794, the youngest of a large Catholic family of tenant farmers. Carleton was something of a controversial figure in Ireland. Having converted to Protestantism, the former son of a Catholic 'peasant' and would-be priest's writing became bitterly anti-Catholic and he was deemed by some as something of a traitor to his own heritage. Carleton was both willing and capable of tailoring his writing to fit the political views of whichever editor was paying him, which lends a hint of irony to much of his criticism of Lever. Carleton's biographer, D. J. O'Donoghue, referred to just how vitriolic his criticism of Lever became in the *Nation*:

On Oct. 7, an equally long article was devoted to Lever. It also was anonymous and was written by Carleton. It is a savage onslaught, and cannot be justified. It is amazing that the *Nation*, which claimed to be impartial as a literary organ, should have allowed one novelist to denounce another in its columns under the cloak of anonymity. But that journal's dislike of Lever was constant<sup>60</sup>

William Carleton accused Lever of plagiarising the first story he had published in *Dublin University Magazine*. In 1833, Lever's manuscript for *The Black Mask* had apparently gone

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<sup>59</sup> Duffy, *Young Ireland*, pp. 184-5.

<sup>60</sup> David James O'Donoghue, *The Life of William Carleton: Being his Autobiography and Letters. And an Account to his Life and Writings from the Point at which the Autobiography Breaks Off* by David J. O'Donoghue. With an Introduction Mrs. Cashel Hoey, 2 vols (London: Downey, 1896), II, p. 61.

missing on its way to London publishers. Lever rewrote the story and it was published in *Dublin University Magazine* in May 1836. Unfortunately, as Edmund Downey explained: ‘the envoy to whom Lever had entrusted the MS. of “The Black Mask” in 1833 had surreptitiously disposed of it to ‘The Story-Teller’.<sup>61</sup> So, Carleton may have had some basis for believing his accusation was true. Nevertheless, Lever was furious at the charge and his dismay must have been compounded, to an extent, by his own admiration for Carleton’s work. In the covering letter that Lever sent with the first chapter of *Harry Lorrequer* in October 1836, he wrote to M<sup>rs</sup> Glashan: ‘Meanwhile, no comparison with my friend Carleton, I beseech you – so far, very far, beyond the standard by which I could wish anything of mine measured.’<sup>62</sup> The feud would continue. Edmund Downey wrote that ‘William Carleton fell foul of Lever at an early stage, and attacked him at every opportunity. ‘The Nation’ – that uniquely Irish paper, founded in 1842 – published in 1843 an article about the editor of ‘The Dublin University,’ accusing him of every literary vice. The article was written by Carleton, who lived in a glass house, but was not afraid to hurl stones at his brother novelist.’<sup>63</sup>

Carleton’s criticism continued in the *Nation*:

The first 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 [...] Mr. Lever, in truth, is literally selling us for pounds, shillings, and pence, and, not unlike a common informer, is receiving good pay from England for bearing false evidence against his country.<sup>64</sup>

Lever might have expected criticism from his perceived political opponents. What he did not expect was the way in which he was snubbed by Dublin Tories. He had hoped to play a part in political circles, working with the Tory party in Dublin, but they thought his reputation as a humourist and bon viveur unsuitable and too risky – he was shunned by the Viceroy Lord de

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<sup>61</sup> Downey, *Lever: Life in Letters*, I, pp. 73-4.

<sup>62</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, I, p. 81.

<sup>63</sup> Downey, *Lever, Life in Letters*, I, p. 184.

<sup>64</sup> William Carleton, *The Nation*, 7 October 1843, p. 12.

Grey, and it stung.<sup>65</sup> He was similarly rebuffed by the Archbishop of Dublin, Dr. Whately, with whom Lever had been on friendly terms in Brussels. It seems the Archbishop had similar reservations about Lever to that of the Tory party.<sup>66</sup> Lever had thought that he would be welcomed back to Dublin and that he would be able to take his place amidst the political ranks of Ascendancy society that he had so aspired to, but it was not to be. With political positions closed to him, Charles Lever chose instead to contribute to the political debate through his novels.

According to Charles Gavan Duffy, between 1832 and 1842, Dublin had little to offer in terms of nationalist literature or culture. William Gladstone would mark out the following sentence in his own copy of *Young Ireland* 1880: 'In Dublin they [streets] were named after a long line of forgotten English officials, Essex and Dorset, Harcourt and Sackville;'<sup>67</sup> Duffy explained:

Intellectually it was a period of reaction and depression. The enthusiasm of the Catholic contest had passed away. The flame lighted by the genius of Moore, and which Banim and Griffin, Callanan and Lady Morgan had kept alive, burned low. Whatever literature existed in Ireland belonged to the party dominant in Church and State. The class who lived by letters was not numerous, but it was in a decisive degree English in spirit and sympathy. The societies connected with antiquities and art were in the hands of Conservatives and of Whigs. There were not half a dozen men among the governing bodies who would have professed themselves Repealers, or to whom the name of O'Connell did not sound like an alarm bell. The one prosperous publisher was a Conservative, the one successful periodical [*Dublin University Magazine*] was more hostile to Irish ideas than the *Times*.<sup>68</sup>

That 'prosperous publisher' was William Curry, Charles Lever's publisher from 1842 – 1846. Lever had turned to writing because he needed to make money, so it was necessary to conform with both his publisher's and the *Dublin University Magazine*'s politics. Whilst his approach to writing about Ireland was already changing in *Jack Hinton*, with *Tom Burke* Lever was straddling two apparently opposing political perspectives and explaining Irish

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<sup>65</sup> Stevenson, *Quicksilver*, p. 141.

<sup>66</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Life of Lever*, II, pp. 72-4.

<sup>67</sup> Duffy, *Young Ireland*, p. 68.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 68-9.

nationalist sympathies. Charles Lever was not the rigid Unionist that his detractors at the *Nation* assumed, as his biographer Fitzpatrick commented: ‘It is remarkable that, while Lever’s editorial orders to his staff were, in attacking the Repealers, to “cut boldly and fear not,” he was, at heart, no unionist. Perhaps he felt with Plunkett that, though opposed to the Union and to the means by which it was brought about, he yet was unwilling to apply for a divorce.’<sup>69</sup> As William Carleton’s biographer, O’Donogue noted:

Even Lever and Lefanu were not proof against the growth of the national sentiment, for in 1845 they each issued books which were distinctly national in tendency. Both were Tories and closely connected with the leading Tory periodicals in Dublin, but the first in his “St. Patrick’s Eve,” and Lefanu in his “Cock and Anchor,” made a step in advance, whose importance was fully recognised and appreciated on the national side.<sup>70</sup>

Some of Lever’s contemporary nationalist critics were revising their opinion of his work.

## Leaving Ireland, and the Great Hunger

Lever’s experience of editing *Dublin University Magazine* could not have been further from what he had hoped, and he was struggling; he endured ‘vile headaches not leaving him night or day for months.’<sup>71</sup> Downey wrote that Lever ‘suffered from hyper-sensitiveness’,<sup>72</sup> and that toward the end of his time at *Dublin University Magazine* Downey said, ‘He was plainly the victim of overwork. Five novels and numerous short papers had been written in less than three years and during these years the editorship of ‘The Dublin University’ used up a considerable portion of his time, and played havoc with his nerves.’<sup>73</sup> Lever’s biographer Fitzpatrick commented that ‘The *Nation* assailed him from one side, the *Mail* and *Warder*

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<sup>69</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Life of Lever*, II, p. 123

<sup>70</sup> O’Donoghue, *The Life of William Carleton*, II, p. 69.

<sup>71</sup> Downey, *Lever: Life in Letters*, I, p. 185.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, p. 184.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, p. 185.

from the other.<sup>74</sup> To compound matters, Lever had to contend with prospective subscribers to the magazine regularly complaining that he had not published their work.

By 1845, Charles Lever was finding his position as editor of the *Dublin University Magazine* untenable, he was being ignored by the political party he supported and attacked by his political opponents. The pressure proved too much, and Lever took his family back to Brussels in February 1845. It is somewhat ironic that *The O'Donoghue* (1845) and then *St. Patrick's Eve* (1845), novels in which Lever criticised irresponsible and absentee landlords, were the last he wrote on Irish soil before abandoning Ireland himself. In becoming an effective absentee Irishman, Charles Lever fulfilled his own indictment of Mark in *The O'Donoghue* by 'deserting the cause of ould Ireland',<sup>75</sup> in her time of greatest need during the Great Famine. His adversary William Carleton's response to the Famine was to publish *The Black Prophet* in the magazine Lever had just left - *Dublin University Magazine*. In the opening chapter of *William Carleton: The Autobiography* (1896), the writer announced:

Alas! It is a melancholy task which I propose to execute – the narrative of such a continued and unbroken series of struggle, difficulty, suffering and sorrow as has seldom fallen to the life of a literary man. Indeed, there was something peculiarly calamitous in my fate, because it was to a disaster, which would have ruined the hopes and prospects of any other man, that I owe my fame. The reader will understand this in the due course of time. Goldsmith says that poverty is the nurse of genius – but Goldsmith, much and enthusiastically as I admire him, has said in this case what every man of experience feels to be untrue. The metaphor, indeed, is a poetical one, but he would have come nearer the truth had he said that poverty is the slave-driver who, with whip in hand, scourges the slave into the performance of tasks which otherwise he would never have thought of attempting.<sup>76</sup>

William Carleton's *The Black Prophet* (1846), was a direct challenge to the British Government, using Carleton's own experiences and observations of earlier famines to warn what the potential impact would be unless mitigating action was taken. As the crisis continued, Carleton became more strident and revised his preface for the 1847 publication,

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<sup>74</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Life of Lever*, II, p. 92.

<sup>75</sup> Lever, *The O'Donoghue*, p. 531.

<sup>76</sup> William Carleton, *William Carleton: The Autobiography* (Belfast: White Row Press, 1996), p. 15.

boldly dedicating the novel to Prime Minister Lord John Russell, with an explicit criticism: ‘I cannot help thinking that the man who in his ministerial capacity, must be looked upon as a public exponent of those principles of Government which have brought our country to her present calamitous condition by a long course of illiberal legislation and unjustifiable neglect’.<sup>77</sup> As Carleton pointed out, the British Government’s record of dealing with such problems in Ireland before the events of the mid-nineteenth century did not offer much in terms of reassurance. In an ironic paradox this opinion resonated entirely with Charles Trevelyan’s, on the matter of historical responses to Irish distress in *The Irish Crisis*, where Trevelyan used earlier examples of failed potato crops in Ireland to justify limited intervention in the nineteenth century:

The famine of 1741 was not regarded with any active interest in England or in any foreign country, and the subject is scarcely alluded to in the literature of the day. No measures were adopted either by the executive or the legislature for the purpose of relieving the distress caused by this famine. There is no mention of grants or loans;<sup>78</sup>

It is a bitter irony that the man who was responsible for administering government relief measures would use historical distress as a justification for continued inertia. Two such divergent conclusions on what should be done by the government for Ireland indicate on the one hand Trevelyan’s utter lack of understanding of the case, and on the other Carleton’s direct experience of former crises.

Whilst Carleton maintained that his novel was based on previous famines, it would quickly become a direct condemnation of the government because his descriptions of death and disease had such contemporary resonance. His 1847 preface indicates increasing dismay and impatience with the fact that ‘those who legislate for us’ were if not quite ‘allowing’ the

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<sup>77</sup> William Carleton, *The Black Prophet* (Poole: Woodstock Books, 1996), p. v.

<sup>78</sup> Trevelyan, *The Irish Crisis*, pp.12-13.

situation to continue, or at least failing to take adequate measures to alleviate the crisis.

Carleton wrote that:

a narrative founded upon it, or at all events, exhibiting through the medium of fiction an authentic detail of all that our unhappy and neglected country has suffered, during *past* privations of a similar kind, might be calculated to awaken those who legislate for us into something like a humane perception of a calamity that has been almost perennial in the country. [...] Aware of this, then, and knowing besides, that the memory of our Legislature is as faithless on such a subject as that of the most heartless individual among us, the author deemed it an act of public usefulness to his countrymen, to record in the following pages such an authentic history of those deadly periods of famine to which they had been so frequently subjected...<sup>79</sup>

William Carleton's revision of the preface is a scathing indictment of the government's relief measures and it gave the novel a harrowing contemporary relevance. Although Carleton and Lever were considered to be in opposition with each other, in political terms as far as their contributions to the *Nation* and *Dublin University Magazine* were concerned, Carleton's didactic appeal to elicit sympathy from the government in *The Black Prophet* resonated very much with Charles Lever's efforts to explain Ireland in his historical novels from 1845 onward, yet Lever has not been credited for his contribution to the nationalist argument.

As James Murphy indicates, Lever's approach to exploring how Ireland's greatest crisis came about, had to compete with increasing levels of anti-Irish prejudice in England:

In the trilogy of the mid- and late 1840s he addressed the issue in socio-economic terms in *St. Patrick's Eve* (1845), in moral terms in *The O'Donoghue: A Tale of Ireland Fifty Years ago* (1845), and in political terms in *The Knight of Gwynne, a Tale of the Time of the Union* (1847). It was not always a commercially inspired direction for his fiction, especially as the British public was becoming increasingly restive with the perceived intractability of Ireland as it faced the persistent and terrible famine of that period. This was the natural catastrophe towards whose relief, whatever the judgement of history, the British public at the time felt it had been more than generous.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Carleton, *Black Prophet*, pp. vii – viii.

<sup>80</sup> Murphy, *Irish Novelists & the Victorian Age*, p. 82.

Lever's direction was laudable, but it was not 'commercially inspired'. When he revised his preface to *The Knight of Gwynne* in 1872, Lever alluded to the anti-Irish rhetoric in British journalism that intensified during the course of the Famine and beyond.<sup>81</sup>

Perceptions of the crisis amongst Lever's English readership both informed, and were influenced, by the media and by the government's stance, thereby reproducing an ideology regarding Ireland on where responsibility for relief measures for Famine victims lay. The earlier quote by Charles Gavan Duffy ends: 'the one successful periodical [*Dublin University Magazine*] was more hostile to Irish ideas than the *Times*.'<sup>82</sup> *The Times* certainly did become more hostile to Ireland during the course of the Great Famine. Early reports on the first wave of potato blight in *The Times*, had been relatively compassionate:

We are aware that it is necessary to test and weigh an Irish fact before we can admit it to the currency of this more sober, not to say more sterling, isle. But it requires an amount of incredulity which borders on the inhuman to disbelieve the dreadful and very circumstantial accounts which daily arrive. It is at least safer to believe them, and therefore, on a principal which applies as well to our social as to our religious obligations, it is also more right.<sup>83</sup>

Eighteen months later, though, *The Times* was casting Ireland as an intolerable drain on English resources: 'The Irish ulcer is exhausting the resources of the empire. It was to be expected that it should come to this.'<sup>84</sup> The newspaper's endorsement of providential explanations of the blight prompted a letter to the editor, complaining about 'the cold-hearted and cruel doctrine that the present famine and pestilence in Ireland is of the nature of a providential dispensation, sent for the purpose of reducing the population down to its legitimate and natural extent'.<sup>85</sup> *The Times*' reports, though, resonated with those of many, including the government and the Civil Service.

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<sup>81</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, II, p. 382-3.

<sup>82</sup> Duffy, *Young Ireland*, pp. 68-9.

<sup>83</sup> *The Times*, 17 August 1845, p. 4.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, 25 February 1847, p. 4.

<sup>85</sup> *The Times*, 08 March 1847, p. 5.



I referred earlier to the relevance of Charles Trevelyan's ideological position on the matter of Irish distress, in comparison with Carleton's. Trevelyan was essentially responsible for the administration of relief measures during the Famine, and he held an influential position in the hierarchical system tasked to respond to the crisis. Trevelyan's Burkean ideology was reinforced by his religious tendencies,<sup>86</sup> bringing together a disastrous combination of belief in a free market and in the limits of Government responsibility, and a conviction that Famine was proof of God's disapproval of Ireland's indolence. Providential explanations of Famine became widely accepted and compromised already diminishing levels sympathy for Ireland, even before Young Irelanders' insurrection finished the job in 1848.<sup>87</sup> A letter from Trevelyan to a relief commissioner, Sir Randolph Routh, on 3 February 1846, indicates how economic ideology was used to suggest that Ireland would ultimately benefit from the transformative impact of the Famine:

That indirect permanent advantages will accrue to Ireland from the scarcity and the measures taken for its relief, I entertain no doubt; but if we were to pursue these incidental objects to the neglect of the precautions immediately required to save the people from actual starvation, our responsibility would be fearful indeed. Besides the greatest improvements of all which could take place in Ireland would be to teach the people to depend upon themselves for developing the resources of their country instead of having recourse to the assistance of the government on every occasion. [...] Up to the present date, nothing has, so far as I am aware, been done which should prevent a perfectly sound line from being taken, and one which will bear looking back upon, after the excitement arising from present circumstances shall have passed away.<sup>88</sup>

Charles Trevelyan consciously constructed an account of the Famine intended to defend the government's measures for relief in Ireland against potential future criticism. Whilst his commitment to principles of *laissez-faire* had been tempered until Peel's resignation toward the end of June 1846, Lord John Russell's Whig administration signalled an ideological

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<sup>86</sup> Trevelyan sent copies and extracts from Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* and Edmund Burke's *Thoughts on Scarcity* to Dublin. See Hart, 'Sir Charles Trevelyan at the Treasury', pp. 92-110.

<sup>87</sup> See Melissa Fegan, *Literature and the Irish Famine 1845-1919* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), p. 28.

<sup>88</sup> Charles E. Trevelyan, *Correspondence explanatory of the measures adopted by H.M. government for the relief of distress from failure of potato crop in Ireland* (London: W. Clowes & Sons, 1846), p. 109.

swing in attitude regarding Irish relief measures. Russell lacked the necessary support in his party to increase levels of relief intervention, and Clarendon's appointment as Lord Lieutenant coincided with both the apotheosis of the Famine in Ireland, and an economic crisis in England. So, with Russell's position weakened, Trevelyan and Clarendon would become even more influential in terms of the London government's handling of Irish relief. As the following excerpt from a letter to Lord John Russell dated 10 August 1847 shows, Clarendon's views on Ireland resonated very much with Trevelyan's: 'Esquimaux and New Zealanders are more thrifty and industrious than these people who deserve to be left to their fate instead of the hardworking people of England being taxed for their support, but can we do so?'<sup>89</sup> Clarendon's concern over how decisions would reflect on the Government indicates the tension between balancing Irish need against the interests of English workers, amidst an environment where similar prevalent opinions on the causes of, and appropriate response to, the crisis prevailed.

*The Times* continued to broadcast such reports on the causes and consequences of the Famine, claiming: 'we predicted that the crisis of Ireland would be her salvation', and in the same publication: 'we believe the potato-blight and the Poor Law will eventually prove blessings to Ireland.'<sup>90</sup> By November 1848, *The Times* was claiming that the Famine, in combination with the Government's response, was achieving a necessary Malthusian remedy – the depopulation of Ireland in order to reduce the financial strain of relief measures: 'The potato-rot, and its inevitable remedy, the new Irish Poor Law, are together depopulating the country. The smallest holders have lost all confidence in their only harvest, and throw themselves on the rates, or emigrate with the assistance of their landlords.'<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Bodleian Library, Clarendon Deposit, Letterbook 1.

<sup>90</sup> *The Times*, 22 November 1848, p. 4.

<sup>91</sup> *The Times*, 29 November 1848, p. 4.

*Punch* was just as aggressive. L. P. Curtis used the pages of *Punch* to support his argument that racism and anti-Irish prejudice manifested in ‘The process of simianising Paddy’s features [...] roughly between 1840 and 1890 with the 1860s serving as a pivotal point in this alteration of the stereotype’.<sup>92</sup> *Punch* began publication four years before the onset of the Famine in 1841, at a time when in political terms issues such as O’Connell and Catholic Emancipation, the Maynooth Bill, and again O’Connell’s and the Repeal Association had kept Ireland at the forefront of the popular media. Although there were, initially, balancing influences at the magazine in Richard Doyle and William Makepeace Thackeray, Mark Lemon and Douglas Jerrold were both hostile toward Ireland and Catholicism. They, like Lever, ‘were [also] confounding O’Connell and the Catholics with those seditiously disposed.’<sup>93</sup> Curtis maintained that ‘*Punch*’s artists did not really warm to their task of drawing Irish peasants with hyperprognathous features until the later 1840s’,<sup>94</sup> and that ‘the feckless, amusing, bibulous, and apolitical stage-Irishman or Teague of an earlier epoch evolved into the distinctly dangerous ape-man [in] the later nineteenth century’.<sup>95</sup> But as the following image shows the genesis of ‘Paddy’s’ dehumanisation was already underway, albeit specifically focussed on Repeal agitation, in 1843:

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<sup>92</sup> L. P. Curtis, *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), p. 29.

<sup>93</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Life of Charles Lever*, II, p. 98.

<sup>94</sup> Curtis, *Apes and Angels*, p. 31.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.



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This monstrous 'Frankenstein Repealer' has what appear to be horns sticking out from his hat. His lower jaw protrudes, and even though he crouches in an apelike stance, he still towers menacingly with a clenched fist and a raised shillelagh over the what we presume is supposed to be the more 'civilized' Englishman. This cartoon gives some insight into how O'Connell's 'Repeal Year' was perceived by many in England. *Punch* was promulgating

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<sup>96</sup> J. Kenny Meadows, 'The Irish Frankenstein', *Punch*, 4 November 1843, p. 199.

exactly the kind of ‘contemptuous estimate of Irishmen’ that Lever maintained, in his revised preface for *The Knight of Gwynne*, ‘formed the theme of English journalism’.<sup>97</sup>

Charles Lever’s concern for Ireland whilst in self-imposed exile, was evident in the way he continued to write about Ireland, either as a location for his narrative or as a starting and, or, finishing point for his more cosmopolitan novels, despite evidence of a dwindling market in England for novels with an Irish setting. Charles Lever understood that his market was less buoyant than it had been. In May 1847, he wrote the comment I used at the beginning of this chapter: ‘famine and money distress have cut off all the luxuries – of which books are the easiest to go without, - and so publishers won’t make any contracts till better days arrive.’<sup>98</sup>

Lever persisted in his attempts to counter English prejudice regarding Ireland during the Famine and beyond. *The Diary and Notes of Horace Templeton Esq.* (1848), was a tale based in Europe rather than Ireland. Once again Lever used an English character to, albeit more subtly, encourage an English market into a more favourable view of the Irish. In the opening chapter of the novel, Horace Templeton announces a concern with ‘that truly English disease – self-importance’,<sup>99</sup> exposing English prejudices against all that was deemed un-English:

we are the least tolerant to every thing that differs from what we have at home, that we unscrupulously condemn whatever is un-English; and, not satisfied with this, we expect foreigners to respect and admire us for the very censure we pass upon their institutions.<sup>100</sup>

Lever’s Anglo-Irish identity combined with his experience of living in Europe, gave him an interesting perspective on Anglo-Irish relations; he was equally capable of presenting the Irish question from both English and Irish perspectives. In a letter to Spencer in 1848, Lever

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<sup>97</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, II, p. 382-3.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, p. 236.

<sup>99</sup> Charles Lever, *The Diary and Notes of Horace Templeton ESQ.* (George Routledge and Sons, 1876), p. 4.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 4-5.

explained ‘As to Ireland. All foreign sympathy is over [?owing to] [sic] the late cowardice and poltroonery of the patriots. Even Italians can fight’, he continued, ‘As to the result of the attempt of Italian unity, however, the movement here is a complete failure. Naples is at feud with Sardinia, Sardinia with Tuscany, Rome with all these’.<sup>101</sup> Lever understood complexities in Ireland that the English government could not, and he also saw parallels between the Irish position and the nationalist movement in Europe.

## Conclusion

Despite evidence of his sympathy with the nationalist cause, Charles Lever was still opposed to O’Connell’s repeal movement and horrified at the Young Irelanders’ less law-abiding intentions. He continued his attempts to warn English readers of the dangers, if England failed to understand how ruling over Ireland from London demanded a different approach. His attempts would not find favour with English readers. By the time the novel was published as a book, his market had seen the ravages of ‘Black 47’. Lever was obliged to agree to the anonymous print run of *Horace Templeton*, and he confessed to Spencer that ‘it is a secret – to be published without my name. I thereby receive a small sum, but I hazard no fame, and would willingly try if, under a new sobriquet, I could lay siege to a new public.’<sup>102</sup>

Lever continued to argue for a greater understanding of Ireland in his later work. In *The Dodd Family Abroad* (1854), he countered English perceptions of Irish Famine victims exemplified by increasingly unsympathetic and often hostile representations of Ireland, and of Irish immigrants in England, in the English press directly. *The Dodd Family Abroad* is a skilfully humorous vehicle for a serious indictment of English xenophobia. In a reflection of much of English rhetoric on the matter of Irish indolence and culpability during the Famine, a

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<sup>101</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, I, p. 285.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, p. 262.

letter entitled ‘Letter XIII. From K. I. Dodd to Thomas Purcell, Esq., of the Grange, Bruff’, presents a critique of English Conservative attitudes toward Ireland:

Our English tenant, you tell me, is getting tired of Dodsorough; we guessed how it would be already. “He thinks the people lazy”! Ask him, did he ever try to cut turf with two meals of wet potatoes per diem? [...] “They won’t give up their old barbarous ways.” Isn’t that the very boast of the Conservative party? Isn’t that what Disraeli is preaching every day and every hour?<sup>103</sup>

James Murphy contends that, in part, ‘Lever blamed [...] British attempts at reform’<sup>104</sup> for the crisis. What Lever was really criticising, was attempts at reform by people who simply did not understand the country. Trevelyan’s *The Irish Crisis* (1848), was a case in point.

Trevelyan argued that Ireland’s reliance on the potato as a subsistence food invited Famine as a form of divine intervention:

the only hope for those who lived upon potatoes was in some great intervention of Providence to bring back the potato to its original use and intention as an adjunct, and not as the principle article of national food; and by compelling the people of Ireland to recur to other more nutritious means of aliment, to restore the energy and the vast industrial capabilities of that country [...] A population, whose ordinary food is wheat and beef, and whose ordinary drink is porter and ale, can retrench in periods of scarcity, and resort to cheaper kinds of food, such as barley, oats, rice, and potatoes. But those who are habitually and entirely fed on potatoes live upon the extreme verge of human subsistence, and when they are deprived of their accustomed food, there is nothing cheaper to which they can resort. They have already reached the lowest point in the descending scale, and there is nothing beyond but starvation or beggary. Several circumstances aggravate the hazard of this position. The produce of the potato is more precarious than that of wheat or any other grain.<sup>105</sup>

Such dogma fed into contemporary discourse on the question of Irish Famine. Lever’s response in a letter in *The Dodd Family Abroad*, speaks directly to the rhetoric propounded by Trevelyan, *Punch* and *The Times*:

what is the great reproach they bring against Paddy? Isn’t it that he is satisfied with the potato? There’s the head and front of his offence. That he doesn’t want beef, like the Englishman,’ [...] Poor Dan used to say that he was the best abused man in Europe: but I’ll tell you that the potato is the best abused vegetable in the universal

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<sup>103</sup> Charles Lever, *The Dodd Family Abroad*, 2 vols (George Routledge and Sons, 1876), I, p. 123.

<sup>104</sup> Murphy, *Irish Novelists & the Victorian Age*, p. 81.

<sup>105</sup> Charles E. Trevelyan, *The Irish Crisis* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longman’s, 1848) p. 9.

globe. From the “Times” down to the Scotch farmers, it’s one hue-and-cry after it, - “The filthy root” – “The disgusting tuber,” – “The source of all Irish misery,” – “The father of famine, and mother of fever,” – on they go, blackguarding the only food of the people, till at last, as if it were a judgment on their bad tongues, it took to rot in the ground, and left us with nothing to eat. Now Tom, you know as well as myself, Ireland is not a wheat country; it’s one year in three that we can raise a crop of it; for our climate is as treacherous as the English Government.<sup>106</sup>

Irrespective of the humorous tone employed in *The Dodd Family Abroad*, Lever was making a serious criticism of English attitudes toward Ireland during the Famine.

Charles Lever might have returned to Ireland in 1842, with Tory Unionist leanings but as Fitzpatrick noted and his post 1843 novels indicate, there was ‘a change in the author’s early political bias’,<sup>107</sup> and it was his time at *Dublin University Magazine* that had wrought that change. By 1845, he was no longer the staunch Tory Unionist those at the *Nation* and his subsequent critics would have us believe. Charles Lever’s consternation during this transition toward a more Liberally minded sympathy with the historical reasons for unrest in Ireland, during his time at *Dublin University Magazine* can in part be explained by his background. I have already explained that Lever had a tenuous claim to the social circles he had aspired to as a young man. His father’s money was not inherited, and he did not have an aristocratic provenance. Although James Lever eventually became known as a successful architect, as a letter he sent from Dublin in August 1787 explained, he started out with little:

You wished to know what footing I was here, which is this, A Mr. Lowe of Staffordshire now of Dublin, Builder, sent to London to his correspondent to engage half a dozen London joiners to come to Dublin. We have a guinea per week and had our wages paid coming here and our passage, coach fare, and carriage of tools, clothes &c.<sup>108</sup>

Whilst Lever’s mother was descended from an Ascendancy family, Lever did not really have much of a claim to that heritage. His education, particularly at Trinity College Dublin,

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<sup>106</sup> Lever, *Dodd Family*, I, pp. 123-4.

<sup>107</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Life of Charles Lever*, II, p. 89.

<sup>108</sup> National Library of Ireland, Edmund Downey Additional Papers, MS 50, 009/25.



though, set him right amongst the landed gentry. As a young man, Lever certainly favoured the Tory Unionism shared by many in Ascendancy circles and the people he was educated amongst. Lever's rather hedonistic existence, particularly before his marriage, was almost a parody of the irresponsible Irish Ascendancy landlord class. His excess and his continued tendency to live beyond his means, meant that he had to move his young family to Belgium in 1832, in an effort to live less expensively. Even his eventual return to Ireland ten years later was an indirect consequence of his continued need to make more money than he earned. Writing had become a lucrative occupation and he returned to Dublin in 1842, with high hopes of success both in literary and political circles. Lever's disappointment in being rejected by the party he had so wished to be a part of on his return to Dublin, his acute sensitivity to criticism, and the way in which he courted favour through entertaining guests so lavishly at his home, Templeogue House, during his time in Dublin hints in no small way to a sense of insecurity and a desperate need to belong. As Tony Bareham has observed:

The career of Charles Lever suggests very strongly a man striving to be at the centre of things, but constantly being impelled towards a periphery, a position of 'outsiderness'. The tendency is manifested both in the biography and in the fiction. [...] The outsider in Lever [his fiction] is a person who is ostracised, ignored, downgraded, put upon, misjudged, or deprived. Probably no other mid-Victorian novelist develops the theme of outsidereness more broadly or comprehensively or makes this character type so consistently the focus of his attention.<sup>109</sup>

During Charles Lever's tenure as the editor of *Dublin University Magazine*, he was on the one hand contending with having been rebuffed by the political party he had supported, and on the other with critics whose opinions conflicted his political standpoint. He saw establishment of *The Nation* in 1842, and the rise of popular nationalist politics Ireland. The magazine was ideologically opposed to the *Dublin University Magazine's* Tory stance, broadcasting Irish nationalist propaganda and giving a voice to the Young Irelanders' calls

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<sup>109</sup> Bareham, *Charles Lever: New Evaluations*, p. 96.

for repeal, and it was gaining widespread popular support. Lever had to acknowledge that Irish Tory Unionism had failed Ireland, and that the dark consequences of the light-hearted, irresponsible, rollicking classes of his first two novels were threatening to overwhelm Lever's naïve hopes that (to use an earlier quote) 'a moderate Government with Tory leanings would be the fairest chance for peace in so disturbed a country.'<sup>110</sup>

Charles Lever grew up during his time at *Dublin University Magazine*, and it was a painful process. The darker and more mature passages in *Jack Hinton* and then the extended exploration of Ireland's troubled history in *Tom Burke*, represent Lever's transition from 'rollicking' toward more serious work. Granted, he was still experimenting with his more serious approach in *St. Patrick's Eve* and *The O'Donoghue*, but by the time *St. Patrick's Eve* was published, even his critics at the *Nation* had to concede the transformation. Charles Gavan Duffy praised Lever's insight: 'Bolder or sounder view of the tenant question we have seldom met [...] It is in fact a political book as much as THE NATION is a political journal.'<sup>111</sup>

Charles Lever's relationship with Curry & Co. was precarious by the time of *The O'Donoghue's* publication in 1845. Lever's friend, the portrait artist, Stephen Pearce approached Chapman and Hall with the manuscript for *St. Patrick's Eve*, and they bought it, bringing Lever's partnership with Curry & Co. to a rather acrimonious end, with Curry contesting the copyright terms for Lever's work. In April 1847, Lever complained to Alexander Spencer that: 'I was charged with my share of the expense of all the copies of 'Hinton,' 'Burke,' and 'The O'Donoghue' printed but still unsold'.<sup>112</sup> Financial matters did not improve for him with the move to Chapman and Hall.<sup>113</sup> His more serious representations of Ireland did not find as much favour with his English market as his earlier work had.

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<sup>110</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, I, pp. 153-4.

<sup>111</sup> *The Nation* 12 April 1845, p. 13.

<sup>112</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, I, p. 232.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, p. 287.

After 1845 Charles Lever began a systematic assessment of how in his interpretation the collapse of the feudal compact, an irresponsible Ascendancy, and what he saw as Catholic demagoguery had impacted on Ireland's socio-political landscape. He would explore and explain how a lack of understanding of that landscape meant the English government's reforms regarding Ireland were ineffective, particularly during the Great Famine.

It is curious that Edmund Downey's collection of Charles Lever's letters reveal barely any reference to the Great Famine. There is the one already referred to in the first volume of Lever's letters, regarding 'famine and money distress', then another dated April 6, 1868 where Lever wrote the following to John Blackwood:

First of all, I hope you are about to print my short story this month. I'm sure you'll like it when in type, and I want to see it there.

Secondly, what would you say to an Irish tale, a serial, a story of modern – that is, recent – Ireland, as opposed to old Erin, with all its conflicting agencies of Tory and Whig, radical, rebel, and loyalist, dashed with something of that humour that even poverty and famine have not exhausted, without a bit of sermonising or anything at all 'doctrinaire'? I think I could put many strong truths forcibly forward, and insinuate much worth consideration and reflection [...] Of course, I do not mean this at once, but after some months of plan, plot and perhaps a visit to the Land of Bog as a refresher. Now say, would it not do *you* good? – as I feel it would do *me*. I believe I have one more effort in me, and I don't think I have two; but I'd like to give myself the chance of finishing creditably.<sup>114</sup>

Lever is negotiating here between commercial interests and his own continued commitment to explaining Ireland. The 'conflicting agencies of Tory and Whig, radical, rebel, and loyalist' are to be subsumed (but not necessarily abandoned) into 'many strong truths forcibly put forward' to 'insinuate' rather than *sermonise*, 'much worth consideration and reflection. Nearly two decades after the worst of the crisis, Charles Lever was remained aware that 'poverty and famine' still had a resonant influence, so it seems bizarre that someone with Lever's fascination with political issues would not comment on the crisis more often in his

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<sup>114</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, II, pp. 217-8.

published correspondence. Neither is there any reference to the crisis in the National Library of Ireland's collection of Edmund Downey's notes and additional papers regarding Lever, but his novels do counter increasingly negative presentations of Ireland during and after the crisis. Lever did on occasion return to his rollicking formula in novels such as *Confessions of Con Cregan*, (1850), and *The Daltons* (1852), *Dodd family Abroad*, (1854) for example, possibly as a direct response to dwindling sales during the Famine. But whilst the fashion for such Regency style excess and the rollicking military adventure had also declined, memories of military glory and the Battle of Waterloo were fading, the tastes in literary terms had become far more earnest, shifting toward austere domestic realism, Lever still went back to this exploration of the socio-economic, ethical and political issues regarding Ireland's history. Lever's more serious post-1845 novels are the focus of my next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### Charles Lever in Europe

Word Count: 14,912

#### Introduction

Charles Lever left Ireland toward the end of February 1845, unsure if this was to be a ‘brief period of exile’,<sup>1</sup> or a permanent migration from Ireland. He wrote to Alexander Spencer asking him to arrange the option to ‘resume my tenure of Templeogue’ with his landlord Gogarty, until ‘June or July’ of that year. Lever continued: ‘If there be a great difficulty with Gogarty, I should rather retain the house and let it for the season in the event of my not returning.’<sup>2</sup> The change did Lever good, and after a pleasant round of entertainments in Brussels, Lever took his family on a tour. In Bonn, he wrote to Alexander Spencer:

I am gaining in health and spirits and losing in flesh and depression, wellnigh down to 12 stone (vice 14 ½), and I can exercise from morning till night without feeling the slightest fatigue, and eat of everything most sour, greasy, and German, and never know the penalty of indigestion. For the three years I passed in Ireland I had not as many days of health as I have already enjoyed here.<sup>3</sup>

Lever was anxious to hear Alexander Spencer’s opinion of *The O’Donoghue* (1845), which was appearing in monthly parts.<sup>4</sup> His concern was delightfully assuaged a year later upon receipt of an approving letter from Maria Edgeworth, who was reading *The O’Donoghue* to her nephews and nieces.<sup>5</sup> Lever wrote to Spencer ‘I hope John told you – I’d rather he had than I – of a letter Miss Edgeworth wrote to me about ‘The O’Donoghue.’ I never felt so proud in my life as in reading it.’<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Edmund Downey, in *Charles Lever: His Life in Letters*, ed. by Edmund Downey, 2 vols (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1906), I, p. 189.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 189-90.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

In his chapter on ‘Poor Charles Lever’ in *Irish Novelists of the Victorian Age* (2011), James Murphy has addressed *St. Patrick’s Eve* (1845), *The O’Donoghue* (1845), and *The Knight of Gwynne* (1846) as a trilogy. Murphy contends that ‘Taken together [...] this trilogy constitutes something like a sustained attempt to reach a conspectus of the Irish question from a Leveresque perspective.’<sup>7</sup> Murphy suggests that ‘Lever went out of his way to conduct research for’<sup>8</sup> *St. Patrick’s Eve* (1845), during his tour of Ireland toward the end of his tenure at *Dublin University Magazine*, but the novel’s subject matter owes more to Lever’s time as a dispensary doctor during a cholera epidemic than to this trip. Murphy’s use of Lionel Stevenson’s passage regarding Lever’s stay in Mayo puts too much emphasis on the one novel. As Stevenson said:

After exploring Connemara and other parts of Galway, the Lever’s went on to Mayo, and even paid a visit to the Island of Achill, from which the novelist carried away a vivid recollection of dire poverty, and a feeling that ‘the very waves that thundered along the seashore were less stormy than the passions of man beside them.’<sup>9</sup>

Lever’s impressions of ‘dire poverty’ would manifest in many more of Lever’s more mature novels. *St. Patrick’s Eve* was Lever’s least appealing attempt at a serious novel about Ireland’s socio-political condition. It was an earnest but ultimately overly didactic text, with what, by the time of its publication, was already an anachronistic nostalgia for some mythical feudal compact. Murphy’s use of what was a far less effective example of Lever’s more serious novels, to form a trilogy diminishes the impact of Lever’s subsequent development, and focuses rather unhelpfully on what is a naïvely and immature Tory perspective in *St. Patrick’s Eve*. James Murphy extends the suggestion made by William Carleton’s biographer David James O’Donoghue, who maintained that *St. Patrick’s Eve* was ‘deeply conservative in

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<sup>7</sup> James H. Murphy, *Irish Novelists & the Victorian Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 82.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Lionel Stevenson, *Dr. Quicksilver: The Life of Charles Lever* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1939), p. 133.

its vision'.<sup>10</sup> On this point both are correct, but Murphy continues: 'As has sometimes been noted in connection with nineteenth-century Irish history, radical conservative critiques can paradoxically appear rather like nationalist ones at times. Nor would this be the last Lever novel to be misconstrued.'<sup>11</sup> I contend, that with a different choice of novels for a 'trilogy', there is evidence that Lever really was working towards a nationalist position.

There is a problem here with Murphy's choice of *St. Patrick's Eve* as a starting point in his 'trilogy'. Murphy skips to a brief examination of the third novel in his chosen trilogy, addressing how Lever presented passage of the Act of Union 1800 in *The Knight of Gwynne* (1846), before returning to what he calls 'the second book in the trilogy' *The O'Donoghue* (1845), which is set toward the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. *St. Patrick's Eve* does not fit, and it does not belong alongside *The O'Donoghue* and *The Knight of Gwynne*. I propose a different trilogy, giving *The O'Donoghue*, which Murphy calls 'the most significant of [his] three, indeed, probably the most significant of Lever's oeuvre',<sup>12</sup> the respect it deserves. This novel was significant, but as I will demonstrate later, it was not the most significant of Lever's oeuvre.

Putting aside *St. Patrick's Eve* as something of an anomaly in Lever's work, it makes far more sense to address three more clearly related novels: *The O'Donoghue*, *The Knight of Gwynne*, and *The Martins of Cro' Martin* (1856) in order to challenge Murphy's contention that Lever's 'apparently' increasingly nationalist leanings were being 'misconstrued'. *The O'Donoghue* was the first of Lever's novels to really achieve what *Tom Burke of Ours* had promised, in terms of a successfully fusing a sustained historical examination of Ireland's social and political position, with an engaging narrative. It signalled Lever's growth as an artist and began what can be traced as a discernible progression from the irresponsible male

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<sup>10</sup> Murphy, *Irish Novelists & the Victorian Age*, p. 83.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 83.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p. 85.

adventurers of his early work, to more serious appeals for the responsible rule of Ireland, addressing a chronological series of Irish political questions in subsequent novels. *The O'Donoghue* explored pre-Union misrule and the potential for dispossessed young Catholic men to become embroiled in rebellion. The following year *The Knight of Gwynne* (1846) tackled ruling class betrayal of Ireland during the Act of Union, and its troubled consequences in 19<sup>th</sup> century. Following a decade-long return to less contentious issues, *The Martins of Cro'Martin* (1856) confronted the political ramification of Catholic Emancipation in Ireland, and how the emergence of the Catholic middle-class undermined the dominance of what had become an enfeebled Ascendancy. The reason for my emphasis on 'less contentious issues' lies in the devastating impact of Ireland's crisis during the Great Famine from 1845 onward. *The O'Donoghue* (1845), *The Knight of Gwynne* (1846) and *The Martins of Cro'Martin* (1856) were all either contemporaneous with or followed Famine, diaspora, sectarian tensions in England, and the 1848 Young Ireland rebellion in Ireland, so the 'famine and money distress' mentioned in my previous chapter were not the only contentious issues regarding Ireland that Lever was confronting, when trying to explain Ireland to his English readers.

### *The O'Donoghue*

Joep Leerssen's development of the concept of an exoteric (non-Irish) readership in England, posits the significant theory that romantic Anglo-Irish authors, such as Lever, positioned themselves as intermediary interpreters between an authentic Ireland and the exoteric reader. The process, in which the very attempt to bridge the gap between an authentic Ireland and the reader, is self-defeating because 'that authentic Ireland is mostly encountered through intermediaries, by hearsay, at one remove',<sup>13</sup> thereby pushing that authenticity ever further

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<sup>13</sup> Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), p. 37.



away. Claire Connolly has since commented that ‘The model is not entirely satisfactory, especially when one considers the number of novels that diverge from the narrative and plot types assessed by Leerssen.’<sup>14</sup> Much of Lever’s work, however, fits comfortably within the form of Leerssen’s theory. *The O’Donoghue* (1845) is set in the remote regions of South West of Ireland, where in Leerssen’s words:

Real Irish characters exist only in the furthest corners of the country, often in spots that are inaccessible and somehow separate from the normal world. They live in remote glens, on islands in lakes, on the shore or even off-shore, in crumbling ruins that are leftovers from the past, almost as if they do not really belong to the same time-scale as the other characters.<sup>15</sup>

This is certainly the case for the ‘once proud castle of the O’Donoghue’, a crumbling relic of the past, with its ‘Two square and massive towers still remained to mark its ancient strength’.<sup>16</sup>

The character of the O’Donoghue himself is similarly a relic of the past and out of chronological step with other characters, such as the current English owner of his ancestral lands. Sir Marmaduke Travers is the cosmopolitan interloper who arrives in Ireland and whose gradual enlightenment is used to interpret and reinterpret Ireland, both at first and second hand. Sir Marmaduke has never seen his land in Ireland, and his failure in terms of attending to his responsibilities have resulted in such ‘poverty’ and ‘dreadful misery’ amongst his tenants, that his daughter is driven to tears on arrival at the estate.<sup>17</sup> Yet Sir Marmaduke thinks he understands Ireland’s problems. His preconceptions about Ireland include: ‘Irish indolence and superstition Irish bigotry and intolerance – the indifference to comfort – the indisposition to exertion – the recklessness of the present – the improvidence of

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<sup>14</sup> Claire Connolly, *A Cultural History of the Irish Novel 1790 – 1829* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 169.

<sup>15</sup> Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination*, p. 37.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Lever, *The O’Donoghue* (Dublin: Curry & Co., repr. London: George Routledge and Sons, 1876), p. 18.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.

the future'.<sup>18</sup> The extended opening exchange between Sir Marmaduke Travers, the English landowner, and Mark O'Donoghue, the dispossessed heir whose family originally owned the estate is worth quoting. It encapsulates Lever's explanation of historical injustice, and announces a narrative that does not align with the assumption that Charles Lever was convinced that the Union was working for Ireland:

"Here is some one will explain it," said the old man, as for the first time he perceived the youth, who still maintained his former attitude on the bank, and with a studied indifference, paid no attention to those whose presence had before so much surprised him.

"I say, my good fellow, what does that smoke mean we see yonder?"

The youth sprung to his feet with a bound that almost started his questioner, so sudden and abrupt the motion; his features, inactive and colourless the moment before, seemed almost convulsed now, while they became dark with blood.

"Was it to me you spoke?" said he, in a low guttural tone, which his passion made actually tremulous.

"Yes—"

But before the old man could reply, his daughter, with the quick tact of womanhood, perceiving the mistake her father had fallen into, hastily interrupted him by saying, -

"Yes, sir; we were asking you the cause of the fire at the foot of that cliff."

The tone and manner in which the words were uttered seemed at once to have disarmed his anger; and although for a second or two he made no answer, his features recovered their former half-listless look, as he said, -

"It is a cabin – there is another yonder, beside the river."

"A cabin! Surely you cannot mean that people are living there?" said the girl, as a sickly pallor spread itself across her cheeks.

"Yes, to be sure," replied the youth; "they have no better hereabouts."

"What poverty – what dreadful misery is this!" said she, as the great tears gushed forth, and stole heavily down her face.

"They are not so poor," answered the young man, in a voice of almost reproof. "The cattle along that mountain all belong to these people – the goats you see in that glen are theirs also."

"And whose estate may this be?" said the old man.

Either the questioner or his question seemed to have called up again the youth's former resentment, for he fixed his eyes steadily on him for some time without a word, and then slowly added –

"This belongs to an Englishman – a certain Marmaduke Travers – It is the estate of the O'Donoghue."

"Was, you mean, once," answered the old man quickly.

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<sup>18</sup> Lever, *The O'Donoghue*, p. 16.

“I mean what I say,” replied the other rudely. “Confiscation cannot take away a right...<sup>19</sup>

Sir Marmaduke’s arrival in this region of Ireland demonstrates what had, by the time Lever was writing, become an established convention amongst Anglo-Irish writers. His journey westward is the beginning of what Joep Leerssen has described: ‘The typical plot movement in romantic Anglo-Irish fiction is that of a cosmopolitan character moving towards Ireland; but that authentic Ireland is mostly encountered through intermediaries.’<sup>20</sup> If Sir Marmaduke is the cosmopolitan character, who becomes an intermediary as his prejudices and preconception regarding Ireland fall away, Mark is an initial but second-hand intermediary. He is the catalyst beginning the process whereby Sir Marmaduke’s impressions are eventually revised on the matters of Ireland, its culture and history:

“They are totally misunderstood,” said Sir Marmaduke, sententiously, rather following out the train of his own reflections, than noticing the remark of his daughter, “all one hears of their absurd reverence for the priest, or the devoted adherence they practise towards the old families in the country, is mere nonsense”<sup>21</sup>

Maria Edgeworth’s influence is evident in *The O’Donoghue*, in terms of the use of an interloper who is disabused of their misconceptions over the course of their time in Ireland. Whilst Edgeworth’s interpreter in *Ennui* (1809) was Lord Glenthorn and then Lord Colambre in *The Absentee* (1812), the device was reproduced by Lever initially in *Jack Hinton the Guardsman* (1842) and then again with *The O’Donoghue*, giving the exoteric English reader a character with whom they could empathise, thereby challenging prejudiced views of Ireland.

Lever also used the architecture of two ‘Big Houses’ in *The O’Donoghue* to explain Ireland to his English market. Although the ancient Catholic landowners are still in possession of their ancestral Castle, the head of the O’Donoghue family is cast very much in

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<sup>19</sup> Lever, *The O’Donoghue*, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination*, p. 37.

<sup>21</sup> Lever, *The O’Donoghue*, p. 42.

Maria Edgeworth's O'Shaughlin/Rackrent fashion, having lived beyond his means to the extent that there is virtually nothing beyond the family's history to pass on to his two sons. This dissipation is represented through a juxtaposition of the 'crumbling ruins' left over 'from the past',<sup>22</sup> O'Donoghue Castle, which is totally at odds in terms of timescale with the much more modern, grand Lodge that belongs to Captain Hemsworth. The once imposing O'Donoghue Castle clings precariously to 'a lofty pinnacle of rock',<sup>23</sup> and clues to 'its ancient strength',<sup>24</sup> are almost obscured by its decline into what Lever described as a 'strange incongruous pile'.<sup>25</sup> Conversely, the second Big House in the novel, Hemsworth's 'Lodge', has acquired a grandeur inversely proportionate to the castle's decline:

Originally a hunting box, it had been enlarged and ornamented by Captain Hemsworth, and converted into a cottage of singular beauty, without, and no mean pretention to comfort, within doors. It occupied an indenture of the glen of Keim-an-eigh, and stood on the borders of a small mountain-lake, the surface of which was dotted with wooded islands.<sup>26</sup>

But there is a dark side to the evolution of this house; in Sir Marmaduke's absence its improvements have been made at the expense of the tenants, by the scheming agent Captain Hemsworth. So, this analogy works in two respects, firstly as a litmus for social groups' fluctuating fortunes and secondly to expose the crux of Ireland's social and political challenges. The consequences of Hemsworth's abuses are clear: 'the eye ranged over a district of a poverty struck and starving peasantry, with wretched hovels, naked children, and rude unprofitable tillage'.<sup>27</sup> Hemsworth is cast as the villain of the piece, but Sir Marmaduke's absence has also enabled Hemsworth to conduct his corrupt exploitation

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<sup>22</sup> Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination*, p. 37.

<sup>23</sup> Lever, *The O'Donoghue*, p. 18.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

unchecked. Just as Maria Edgeworth predicted, increased absenteeism in the wake of the Union is, as far as Lever is concerned, partly the cause of Ireland's social problems.

Explaining Irish rebellion was a thread running through many of Charles Lever's post 1845 novels. His response to that threat in *The O'Donoghue*, was just as much of a cautionary warning as Maria Edgeworth's had been at the beginning of the Union. As Lever's ambitious Captain Hemsworth explains to Sir Marmaduke:

The youth of Ireland will always be dangerous, when left without a career, or a road to their ambition; and from them, any peril that may now be apprehended will certainly come. Many young men of the best families of the country, whose estates are deeply incumbered – heavy mortgages and large dowries weighing them down – are ready to join in any bold attempt which promises a new order of things.<sup>28</sup>

In his commentary on Charles Lever's letters, Edmund Downey pointed out that mid-way through writing *The O'Donoghue*, Lever was struggling:

Before he had got halfway through 'The O'Donoghue' its light-hearted author grew weary: he feared he was becoming too serious. He appealed to his publisher for advice, asking him how he would prefer to have the story: was he to wind it up amid the lightning and thunder which scattered the French fleet in Bantry Bay? or was he to end it "in Colburn-and-Bentley fashion, with love and marriage licences?"<sup>29</sup>

His publisher, M'Glashan, must have agreed that it was getting 'too serious', and he advised a 'love and marriage licences' ending.

In Lever's use of the marriage trope in *The O'Donoghue*, it seems initially that there might be scope for differences between England Ireland to be worked out through a potential marriage between Kate O'Donoghue and Sir Marmaduke's son Frederick. As an English Guards Officer posted to Ireland, Frederick also arrives in the country carrying misperceptions of Ireland. Kate O'Donoghue is the O'Donoghue's niece. She is cosmopolitan, has been educated on the Continent, but her time in Europe has done nothing

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<sup>28</sup> Lever, *The O'Donoghue*, p. 283.

<sup>29</sup> Edmund Downey, *Charles Lever His Life in Letters*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Blackwood and Sons, 1906), I. p. 182.

to diminish her sense of Irish identity. Fred's initial attempt to win her over in Dublin provokes the following response:

"You are an Englishman, sir, that's enough," said Kate hurriedly; "in your eyes, we are the people you have conquered, and it would be too much to expect to should entertain great respect for the prejudices you have laboured to subdue. But after all, there is a distinction worth making, and you have not made it."

"And that is, if I dare ask—"

"That is, there is a wide difference between conquering the territory, and gaining the affections of a people. You have succeeded in one; you'll never, at least by your present courses, accomplish the other."

"Speak more plainly to me," said Travers, who felt a double interest in a conversation which every moment contained an allusion that bore upon his own future.

"There, there, sir," said Kate, proudly, "your very request is an answer to yourself. We, here, who have known each other for some time, have had opportunities of interchanging opinions and sentiment, cannot understand a simple matter in the same way, nor regard it in the same light, how do you suppose, that millions separated by distance, habits and pursuits, can attain to what we, with our advantages, have failed in. Can you not see we are not the same people?"

"But need our dissimilitudes sever – may they not be made rather ties to bind us more closely together," said he, tenderly.

"Equality for the future, even if we obtained it, cannot eradicate the memory of the past. The penal laws"<sup>30</sup>

In his exploration of Anglo-Irish fiction, Barry Sloan contends that *The O'Donoghue* offers 'no clear scale of priorities',<sup>31</sup> but the passage above reiterates exactly what Lever's priority was. This impassioned speech resonates with Mark O'Donoghue's initial exchange with Sir Marmaduke, but Kate's is more developed and intellectually nationalist than Mark's emotive: 'Confiscation cannot take away a right'.<sup>32</sup> Kate sets out the inequalities that Lever wanted English readers to understand had been an incendiary for the unsuccessful 1796 French invasion and the 1798 rebellion.

*The O'Donoghue* also explained both English and Irish Ascendancy misrule of Ireland. Whilst set in the pre-Union, Rebellion era, the novel was written from the perspective of forty-four years under the Act of Union, with London as the seat of power and

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<sup>30</sup> Lever, *The O'Donoghue*, pp. 273-4.

<sup>31</sup> Barry Sloan, *The Pioneers of Anglo-Irish Fiction*, (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1987), p. 206.

<sup>32</sup> Lever, *The O'Donoghue*, p. 5.

Ireland as the focus of attempts to explain social and cultural differences to a governing body that understood as little as Sir Marmaduke initially did. The marriage between Sybella and Herbert suggests some hope for ‘dissimilitudes’ ‘binding together’, but their marriage slides to the periphery taking place in beyond the margins of the text. The ultimate union between Kate and Mark O’Donoghue is much more interesting, and it eclipses any potential for the harmonious allegorical union represented by a marriage between Herbert and Sybella. Unlike the somewhat passive Sybella, Kate is at the centre of the narrative and is the first to overtly and logically articulate the political drive of the novel. In this Bildungsroman, Mark’s direction and real development only emerge from his feelings for Kate:

his very patriotism, the attachment he thought he felt to his native country, his ardent desire for liberty, his aspirations for national greatness, all sprung from this one sentiment of hate to the Saxon, and jealousy of the man who was his rival.<sup>33</sup>

Kate is the catalyst for his political awakening. Mark’s initial response to Fred as a rival for both Kate, and for what remains of the O’Donoghue estate, is similar to his earlier sullen resentment toward Sir Marmaduke. He feigns being ‘sternly distant, or totally indifferent’<sup>34</sup> toward Kate, assuming she has accepted Fred’s advances, and his misperception has to be corrected before a marital union can become a possibility. This possibility is also contingent upon Mark’s growth. Jealousy initially motivates him to find real expression for his patriotic energy, as his political awareness develops beyond the childish resentment for the Travers’ ‘legal’ English claim on his ‘rightful’ ancestral heritage. Marriage between Kate and Mark is only suggested at the end of the novel, when the elderly nationalist innkeeper, Mary recognises the couple on their return to Ireland. This scene is set post-Union, in 1815. During the exchange, we learn that since converting to Protestantism in order to marry Sybella, Mark’s brother Herbert has prospered: “‘Is it the one that turned Protestant you mean?’” said

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<sup>33</sup> Lever, *The O’Donoghue*, p. 331-2.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p. 350.

the woman, as an expression of fiendish malignity shot beneath her dark brows: “he was the only one that ever prospered, because he was a heretic, maybe.”<sup>35</sup> But Herbert’s fortune has been made in India rather than England, so the potential for prosperous allegorical union between England and Ireland has still not been resolved.

Charles Lever had lived in Brussels, where the nationalist revolution had taken place in 1830. His time in Dublin between 1842 and 1845, also meant that by the time he was writing *The O’Donoghue*, he was acutely aware of the continued potential for similar revolution in Ireland. He warned:

Had the French fleet arrived in full force, and landed the troops, there was neither preparation for resistance, nor means of defence, undertaken by the Government.<sup>36</sup> How far the peasantry might or might not have associated themselves with a cause to which the Romish clergy were then manifestly averse, may be a matter of uncertainty; but there are a sufficient number in every land, and every age, who will join the ranks of battle with no other prospect than the day of pillage and rapine.<sup>37</sup>

It is worth mentioning that the second sentence in this passage was excised in the Downey/Nevill editions of Lever’s novels. We can only assume that Nevill and, or, Downey felt the suggestion that Catholic peasants might revolt was too controversial for inclusion, especially given that the time they were editing the novels, anticipated the centenary of the 1798 rebellion.

As far as Lever was concerned, Ireland seemed in imminent danger of a full-scale rebellion in 1845. The fact that Charles Lever published two novels in the same year, which in a dramatic departure from his early work, addressed both absentee landlords’ failure to maintain their responsibilities, and the English government’s concomitant failure to understand Ireland’s problems, indicates his growing level of concern for Ireland’s future. Lever emphasised that concern in the final pages of *The O’Donoghue* when Mary refuses

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<sup>35</sup> Lever, *the O’Donoghue*, p. 483-4.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Lever, *The O’Donoghue*, in *The Novels of Charles Lever: Edited by his Daughter*, 37 vols (London: Downey and Co, 1897), VIII, p. 529.

<sup>37</sup> Lever, *The O’Donoghue*, p. 478.



Kate and Mark O'Donoghue's charity: "I know you well, Mark O'Donoghue – ay, and your wife, Miss Kate there; but it isn't by a purse of gold you'll ever make up for deserting the cause of ould Ireland."<sup>38</sup>

### *The Knight of Gwynne*

Lever continued his exploration of Ireland's political history in his subsequent novel *The Knight of Gwynne* (1846). Shortly after his departure from Ireland, Charles Lever's relationship with Curry & Co. came to an unfortunate end, with the publishers claiming the author owed them money and the author equally adamant that he did not.<sup>39</sup> The disagreement did not seem to affect his spirits to the extent he had experienced during his time in Dublin. Edmund Downey commented on the change in Lever: 'Pleasantly situated and infected with the gaiety of life in a Continental capital, Lever quickly forgot his editorial worries. The Calumnies, the neglect, and the hard knocks which he had suffered at the hands of political journalistic opponents in Ireland were forgotten or forgiven'.<sup>40</sup> Downey might have been overstating the case here, as some of Lever's subsequent references to O'Connell indicate, not all of Lever's critics had quite been forgiven.

J. A. Sutherland suggested that '*The Knight of Gwynne* is a complete departure from the rollicking military tales he had hitherto specialised in. A political story centred on the Union between England and Ireland it was designed to reflect current concerns and to contribute something *serious* to the debate on repeal.'<sup>41</sup> Sutherland's statement seems to overlook the importance of *The O'Donoghue* in terms of Lever's progression from his earlier

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<sup>38</sup> Lever, *The O'Donoghue*, p. 485.

<sup>39</sup> Charles Lever, *Charles Lever: His Life in Letters*, ed. by Edmund Downey, 2 vols (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1906), I, p. 196.

<sup>40</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, I, p. 191.

<sup>41</sup> J.A. Sutherland, *Victorian Novelists and Publishers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 162-3.

rollicking characters, and the chronological links between to the two novels. *The Knight of Gwynne* explores the political upheaval that ensued after the failed rebellion addressed in *The O'Donoghue*. In the eighteenth chapter, Darcy, the Knight of Gwynne, lamented the 'venality' of those Irish MPs who were prepared to sell their votes; he warned:

“A dependent Parliament, attempting separate and independent legislation, means an absurdity [...] The scenes we have witnessed in France have been more bloody and more cruel, but they will leave less permanent results behind them than our own revolution; for such, after all, it is. The property of the country is changing hands, the old aristocracy are dying out, if not dead; their new successors have neither any hold on the affection of the people, nor a bond of union with each other. See what will come of it; the old game of feudalism will be tried by these men of yesterday, and the peasantry, whose reverence for birth is a religion, will turn on them, and the time is not very distant, perhaps, when the men who would not harm the landlord's dog will have little reverence for the landlord's self.”<sup>42</sup>

Lever's stance has been interpreted as dismay at the rise of a grasping middle-class, and the use of the legal system by the character that most epitomised this concern, the ambitious Irish Catholic lawyer, in order to undermine the old order. According to James Murphy, Lever's attachment to the mythical feudal compact was a driving force behind many his representations of Catholicism after 1845.<sup>43</sup> Whilst he had left his 'priest evils' behind, the impact of Catholic Emancipation on Irish politics and the position of the Ascendancy still concerned him. As Murphy puts it 'The figure of the Catholic lawyer on the make dates from as far back as Jason Quirk, an attorney who maneuvers [sic] Sir Condy Rackrent out of his estate in *Castle Rackrent* (1800) – though Marie [sic] Edgeworth thought of herself as an Enlightenment reformer, rather than a regressive Tory.'<sup>44</sup> Murphy proposes that Lever:

was a Tory writer who lamented the use of the law to erode what he saw as a properly "feudal" Ascendancy way of life [...] In tandem with this anxiety was a fear of the ambitious Catholic lawyer. Lever saw the legal profession as a route for advancement for ambitious parvenu Catholics intent on both economic and social advancement. The newcomers' use of the law for personal advancement and the advancement of the

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<sup>42</sup> Charles Lever, *The Knight of Gwynne*, 2 vols (London: Chapman and Hall 1846, repr. London: George Routledge and Sons, 1876), I, p. 89.

<sup>43</sup> James Murphy, 'Daniel O'Connell and the Catholic Lawyer in Irish Victorian Fiction', *New Hibernia Review*, (2013), pp. 119-26 (119).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p. 121.

Catholic tenantry [sic] appeared to the Ascendancy as an affront to the accommodating relationships of rural society.<sup>45</sup>

Murphy is assuming that Lever's political affiliations and sympathies resonated entirely with a pro-Union, Tory, Ascendancy and somewhat anti-Catholic stance that both Lever's correspondence, and his later fiction contradict. Lever's antipathy toward O'Connell was not a matter of objecting to the emergence of a Catholic middle-class and the demise of Ascendancy feudalism.

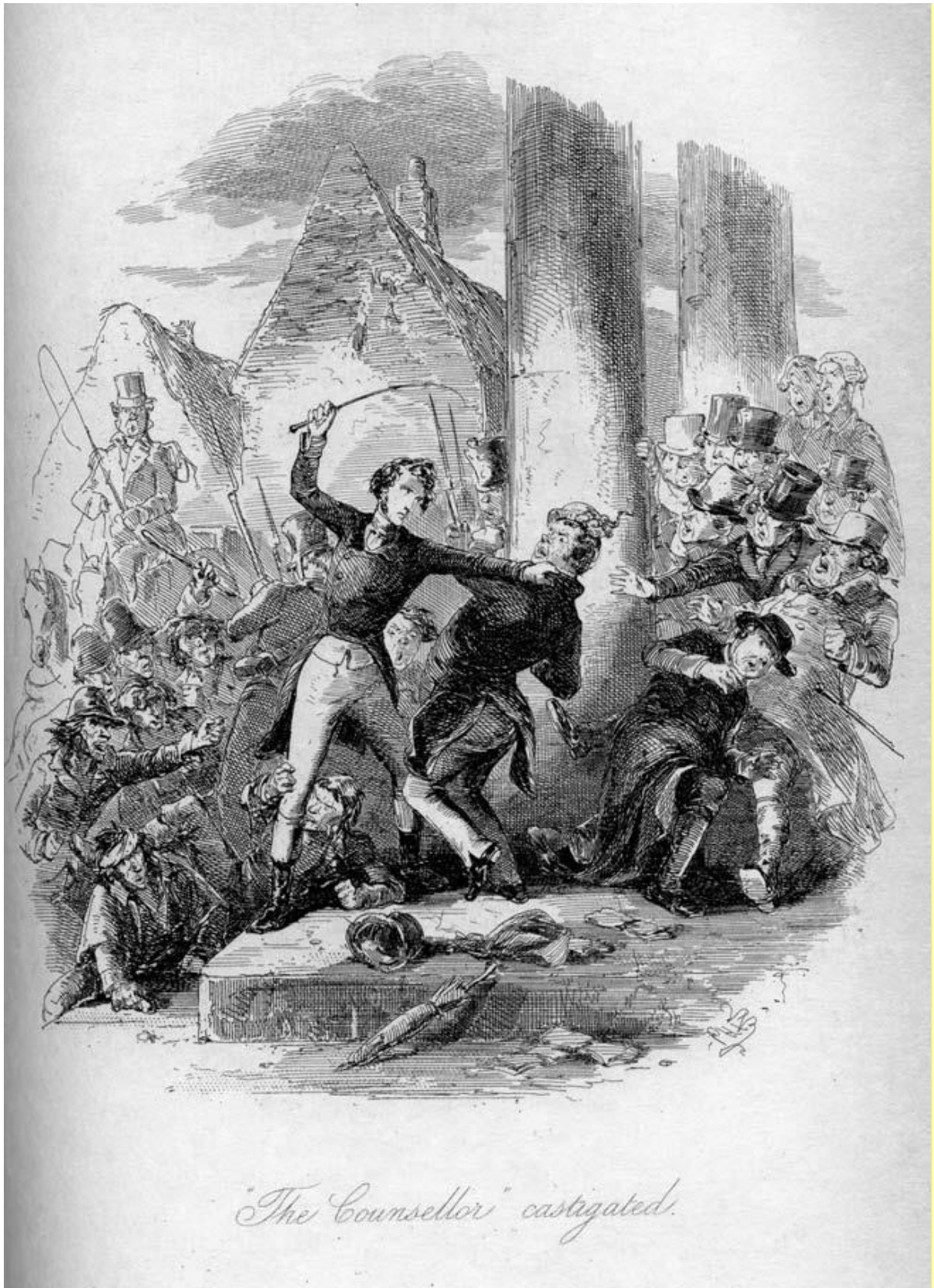
In his article 'Daniel O'Connell and the Catholic Lawyer in Irish Victorian Fiction', Murphy observes that in the image below, 'The Counsellor' O'Halloran bears 'a striking resemblance to O'Connell'.<sup>46</sup> Hablot Knight Brown, who is better known for his collaboration with Dickens, was the illustrator. The character O'Halloran does indeed resemble O'Connell, and Lever's literary depiction of him in the novel is broadly contemptuous but Murphy's reading of the incident illustrated, where O'Halloran is horsewhipped, as a sop 'As if to give his readers an outlet for their natural outrage at all of this',<sup>47</sup> is problematic.

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<sup>45</sup> Murphy, 'O'Connell and the Catholic Lawyer', p. 119.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p. 123.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.



The ‘this’ Murphy refers to is O’Halloran’s ‘demagogic control over the people’.<sup>48</sup> Yet there is a passage, which Murphy almost dismisses as ‘musing’, that has more relevance than Murphy allows. The chapter concerned is entitled ‘A Lesson in Politics’, and O’Halloran’s advice regarding the failure of the Irish Party has much to recommend it:

“The cause of failure was very different,” said O’Halloran, authoritatively. “It was one which has dissolved many an association, and rendered many a scheme abortive, and will continue to do so, as often as it occurs. You failed for want of a ‘Principle.’ You had rank and wealth, and influence more than enough to have made your weight felt and acknowledged, but you had no definite object or end. You were a party, and you had not a purpose.”

“Come, come,” said Heffernan, “you are evidently unaware of the nature of our association, and seem not have read the resolutions we adopted.”

“No, - on the contrary, I read them carefully; there was more than sufficient in them to have made a dozen parties. Had you adopted one steadfast line of action, set out with one brief intelligible proposition, - I care not what, - Slave Emancipation, Repeal of the Tests Acts, or Parliamentary Reform, any of them, - taken your stand on that, and that alone, you must have succeeded. Of course to do this is a work of time and labour; some men will grow weary and sink by the way, but others take up the burden, and the goal is reached at last. There must be years long of writing and speaking, meeting, declaring, and plotting; you must consent to be thought vulgar and low-minded, - ay, and to become so, for active partisans are only to be found in low places. You will be laughed at and jeered, abused, mocked, and derided at first; later on, you will be assailed more powerfully and more coarsely; but, all this while, your strength is developing, your agencies are spreading. Persuasion will induce some, notoriety others, hopes of advantage many more, to join you. You will then have a press as well as a party, and the very men that sneered at your beginnings will have to respect the persistence and duration of your efforts. I don’t care how trumpety the arguments used; I don’t value one straw the fallacy of the statements put forward; Let one great question, one great demand for anything, be made for some five-and-twenty or thirty years, - let the Press discuss, and the Parliament debate it, - you are sure of its being accorded in the end. Now, it will be a party ambitious of power that will buy your alliance at any price; now, a tottering Government anxious to survive the session and reach the snug harbour of the long vacation.<sup>49</sup>

Granted, Murphy concedes that O’Halloran’s views on securing political objectives are ‘pragmatic’,<sup>50</sup> but the passage deserves more than Murphy’s contention that such views

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<sup>48</sup> Murphy, ‘O’Connell and the Catholic Lawyer’, p. 123.

<sup>49</sup> Lever, *Knight of Gwynne*, II, pp. 342-3.

<sup>50</sup> Murphy, ‘O’Connell and the Catholic Lawyer’, p. 123.

demanded a horsewhipping, in order to please an exoteric readership. In this passage, Lever demonstrated an unmistakable (if grudging) admiration for O’Connell’s intelligent, measured and ultimately successful political approach regarding Catholic Emancipation, and for his constitutional approach to Repeal. In the aftermath of the example used by Murphy, Lever actually employed the whipping as ‘strong evidence of the insolent oppression of that faction that rules this country’.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, both O’Halloran’s patriotism and the Knight’s opposition to the Union bring together two seemingly opposed socio-political positions. In fact, there is much more understanding between them than might be expected. O’Halloran’s views on the Union indicate an understanding of the impact of Union upon the Ascendancy, middle classes, and the peasantry:

“Well, is he [Castereagh] satisfied with the success of his measure?” asked O’Halloran, caustically. “Is this Union working to his heart’s content?”  
“It is rather early to pass a judgment on that point, I think.”  
“I’m not of that mind,” rejoined O’Halloran, hastily. “The fruits of the measure are showing themselves already. The men of fortune are flying the country; their town houses are to let; their horses are advertised for sale at Dycer’s. Dublin is, even now, beginning to feel what it may become with the population has no other support than itself.”<sup>52</sup>

Lever is constructing the O’Connellesque O’Halloran as a less divisive character than Murphy would have us believe. Lever’s interest regarding O’Halloran’s understanding of the effect the Act of Union had on the Ascendancy can be traced back to Lever’s own childhood. William Butler Yeats introduced his chapter on Charles Lever, in *Representative Irish Tales* (1891), by explaining ‘His [Lever’s] father was a well-known Dublin architect, around whose table were wont to gather many who had been ruined by the union with England and the consequent flight from Dublin of the fashionable and wealthy.’<sup>53</sup> Edmund Downey also

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<sup>51</sup> Lever, *Knight of Gwynne*, II, p. 342.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, p. 343.

<sup>53</sup> William Butler Yeats, *Representative Irish Tales* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1891), p. 321.

commented on the upheaval consequent to the Act of Union amongst the Lever family's social circles:

The commercial depression which followed the union of the parliaments, though it had undermined many of the city's sources of wealth, tarnished its brilliancy, and destroyed its life as a political capital, had not succeeded in crushing the high spirits of the citizens. Many of the guests who enjoyed the hospitality of James Lever had suffered sadly from the political and other changes which had occurred in the early years of the nineteenth century, but they could still enjoy a good dinner and a good story, and could appreciate a good host. Much of the conversation which took place at [James] Lever's supper – or dinner-parties was of the brilliant era immediately preceding the Union. Tales of the Parliament House, of its orators, its wits, its eccentrics; reminiscences of the clubs, anecdotes of duelling and drinking and hard drinking and hard riding, went the round of the table; and as a mere child the future author of 'Charles O'Malley' listened now and again to hilarious gossip which he moulded later into hilarious fiction.<sup>54</sup>

It was not just 'hilarious fiction' that these childhood recollections informed. In *The Knight of Gwynne*, Lever's version of O'Connell presents the Union in terms of its disastrous effects, in terms of driving 'men of fortune' out of Ireland and leaving the poor population to fend for itself, thereby aligning O'Connell and nationalism with Ascendancy interests. Charles Lever's dislike of O'Connell was not so much a matter of politics, or of anti-Catholicism, nor did it stem from a Tory stance. It stemmed from Lever's own sensitivity to the criticism that O'Connell had directed at Lever during his time at *Dublin University Magazine*. His concern over religious tensions was more a matter of being pro-Church of Ireland than any sense of being anti-Catholic and Lever had in fact, by this stage, become far more liberal than Murphy contends. Murphy points to Lever's use of O'Halloran to criticise 'the rotten edifice of this feudal gentry',<sup>55</sup> suggesting an intended sympathy for Darcy. But the Knight is not a wholly sympathetic character either. He has been utterly irresponsible, and the ramifications of his failures are far reaching. Neither O'Halloran nor the Knight are clear cut delineations of the ambitious Catholic lawyer and honourable aristocrat.

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<sup>54</sup> Downey, *Lever: Life in Letters*, I, pp. 9-10.

<sup>55</sup> Lever, *Knight of Gwynne*, II, p. 68.

The following passage by Lever, recorded by Downey, forms part of the Downey collection of manuscripts held at the National Library of Ireland, and it gives further evidence of Lever's sympathy with O'Connell's politics and his antipathy toward the English government's rule in Ireland:

I am therefore not disposed to think (contrary, I confess to the general opinion) that Mr. O'Connell must have intended a very favourable representations of Mr Soulburn.<sup>56</sup> In the allusion which he made to him in a speech about the arrival of that gentleman in the country as Chief Secretary. Who said Mr O'Connell, who is this Soulburn? Where does he come from? I never heard from him till he was sent here; but I have heard of a great many statesmen, not a very [...] <sup>57</sup> God knows, yet such a heavy-handed statesman as the Soulburn.<sup>58</sup>

There was a deep rooted and long-standing antagonism between Daniel O'Connell and the real Chief Secretary to Ireland from 1830, Sir Edward Stanley. Stanley, a Whig who gravitated toward the Tory party when it took power, was indeed something of a heavy-handed statesman toward Ireland and certainly the Irish Catholic Church. This handwritten fragment of an unpublished novel 'The Pentagons', indicates a sympathy with O'Connell's dislike of Stanley and offers a criticism of English rule over Ireland.

Lever was still concerned about English attitudes toward Ireland toward the end of his life. In his 1872 revision of the preface to *The Knight of Gwynne*, he explained how he had intended the novel draw attention to a less contentious era than its contemporaneous years of Famine, diaspora and Repeal agitation:

At the period in which I have placed this story the rivalry between the two nations, was with all its violence, by no means ungenerous. No contemptuous estimate of Irishmen formed the theme of English journalism; and between the educated men of both countries there was scarcely a jealousy that the character which political contest assumed later on. The character which political strife subsequently assumed changed much of this spirit, and dyed nationalities with an amount of virulence which, with all its faults and all its shortcomings, we do not find in the times of "The Knight of Gwynne".<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> 'Soulburn' is the nearest approximation I can make of Downey's handwriting. Perhaps this name was Lever's jocular criticism of Sir Edward Stanley.

<sup>57</sup> It was not possible to decipher Downey's handwriting here.

<sup>58</sup> National Library of Ireland, Edmund Downey, Additional Papers, MS 50, 009/24, Notebook, p. 9.

<sup>59</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, II, p. 382-3.



When Lever wrote his revision of this preface, he was creating a further dimension to the auto-exoticizing of Ireland, further distancing the subject matter on a temporal level from his mature perspective. In *Remembrance and Imagination* (1996) Leerssen explained that:

the text, which, as we have seen, purposefully exteriorises itself from Ireland in order to mediate, to represent. Like an importunate tourist guide, the text says 'Ireland is there; I am here to show it to you'. The self-consciousness of the description) which devotes a good deal of space and attention to establishing its own credentials) interposes itself between reader and subject matter, hides Ireland from view, indeed pushes it beyond the horizon.<sup>60</sup>

Once again, in *The Knight of Gwynne* Lever introduces a stranger as his interlocutor for Ireland. This time it is the Englishman, Captain Forester whose impressions of Ireland's social and political problems are used to explain the Union to exoteric English readers. But there are further levels of auto-exoticism evident in this novel. The novel's historical subject matter is located at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Its revised preface was written in 1872, and it reflects back to the strife of the mid-nineteenth century, when Lever originally wrote the novel. As Leerssen puts it: 'the past is unfinished business, neither forgiven nor forgotten.'<sup>61</sup> In 1872, Lever reflected on the time he was writing *The Knight of Gwynne*, and on the time of its subject matter:

I had been turning over in my mind the Union period of Ireland as the era for a story. It was a time essentially rich in the men we are proud of as a people, and peculiarly abounding in traits of self-denial and devotion which, in the corruption of a few, have been totally lost sight of, the very patriotism of the time having been stigmatised as factious opposition or unreasoning resistance to wiser counsels. That nearly every man of ability in the land was against the Minister; that not only all the intellect of Ireland but all the high spirit of its squirearchy and the generous impulses of the people were opposed to the Union – there is no denying. If eloquent appeal and powerful argument could have saved a nation, Henry Grattan or Plunkett would not have spoken in vain; but the measure was decreed before it was debated, and the annexation of Ireland was made a Cabinet decision before it came to Irishmen to discuss it.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Leerssen, *Remembrances and Imagination*, p. 37.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>62</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, II, pp. 377-8.

In James Murphy's opinion, Lever was offering an essentially Conservative analysis of Ireland's problems in *The Knight of Gwynne*, where some members of the Protestant Ascendancy had failed its responsibilities in terms of ruling the country, and had compounded that betrayal by supporting Lord Castlereagh's bill in exchange for bribes and promises of preferment.<sup>63</sup> Yet if we apply Joep Leerssen's explanation of post-Union Irish politics, Lever's stance becomes more Liberal than Tory:

This is one momentous, immediate and disruptive effect of the Union: it pulled the parliamentary rug from under the ideological feet of Irish Patriotism. The failure of Patriotism in Ireland is, I think, one direct cause of the later absence of an effective Irish Liberal party: incipient liberalism was to be transmogrified into Home Rule movements and nationalism, whereas its ideological opposite number, the anti-revolutionary ideology which elsewhere in Europe was to develop into various brands of conservatism, took the guise, in Ireland, of Unionism. Thus, in the ideological field, one of the long-term consequences of the Union was a violent jolt in the alignment of a party-political spectrum: was elsewhere in Europe was to become a left-right polarity turned, in Ireland, into a unionist-nationalist one.<sup>64</sup>

After 1845, Charles Lever was writing amidst that broader picture of European politics, where the unionist-nationalist Irish debate was reflected in terms of the 'left-right polarity', and Lever's more serious novels reflect an increasingly Liberal position.

In the Appendices to *The Life of Charles Lever*, Fitzpatrick included 'Reminiscences of Thackeray and Lever', in which Major D\_\_\_ [sic] pointed out that when Lever first met Thackeray in 1842, Thackeray 'adopted liberal ideas of that period to their fullest extent', and that 'Lever's politics *at that time* [my italics] were of a very different character.'<sup>65</sup> Lever's politics changed. Lever was around forty by the time his writing took a decidedly more serious turn, and he had left many of the earlier Tory sympathies, that his nationalist critics had mistakenly applied to him, behind in Dublin. Lionel Stevenson expressed his bewilderment regarding Lever's nationalist critics:

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<sup>63</sup> Murphy, 'O'Connell and the Catholic Lawyer', p. 122.

<sup>64</sup> Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination*, p. 20.

<sup>65</sup> Major D\_\_\_, in Fitzpatrick, *Life of Charles Lever*, II, p. 406.

Lever's whole background was so widely identified with the ascendancy element that the partisans of nationalism had no mercy on him: that the most successful novelist ever produced by their country was a graduate of Trinity, a member of the Church of Ireland, and a friend of "the Castle set," was reason more than enough for classifying him as "an enemy of the people." The *Nation* took up the lead in condemning his stories as malicious libels upon the Irish character.

Looking back with the perspective of time, one is astonished at the short-sightedness of these latter adversaries. If they had wished for damaging evidence against the competence and intelligence of the ascendancy party, they ought to have realized that Lever had innocently revealed its basic weakness in glaring light. That political power and social authority still rested largely in the hands of the drinking, duelling, fox-hunting squirearchy which he enthusiastically flaunted before the eyes of the whole world, might easily have been turned into propaganda by which a skilled controversialist could have displayed the system as self-condemned. Instead, the contributors to the *Nation* went off on the false scent of decrying him for degrading his countrymen.<sup>66</sup>

As early as 1845, following publication of *St. Patrick's Eve*, M'Glashan, who represented Lever's Tory publishers, had complained that *St. Patrick's Eve* smacked of 'Repealism'. In response, Lever told M'Glashan that *St. Patrick's Eve* 'was not meant for either party, and that he was as sick of the ignorant stupidity of the high Tory, as he was disgusted with the sordid conduct of the Repealer.'<sup>67</sup>

Lever was writing *The Knight of Gwynne* during the early years of the Great Famine, and he recognised that the old feudal order was an anachronism, and he used the novel as a criticism of the imposition of the Act of Union. James Murphy contends that Lever's concern focused largely on the corruption employed in pushing the measure through. Murphy suggests that 'Writing in mid-century, Lever reflects a Tory opposition to Repeal based on fear of the very Ireland the Act of Union had itself created.'<sup>68</sup> Murphy recognises that as Lever's work developed, his explanations of Ireland became more nationalist. Nevertheless, his assessment rests on a belief that Lever clung to a Tory position throughout his life. As mentioned earlier, he submits that: 'radical conservative critiques can paradoxically appear

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<sup>66</sup> Stevenson, *Quicksilver*, pp. 103-4.

<sup>67</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Life of Charles Lever*, II, p. 89.

<sup>68</sup> Murphy, 'O'Connell and the Catholic Lawyer', p. 122

rather like nationalist ones at times'.<sup>69</sup> I suggest that Lever's work goes beyond a 'conservative critique' that only appears 'rather like a nationalist' argument.

Murphy overlooks the complexity Lever ascribed to Darcy, the 'honourable' Knight of Gwynne. Granted, Darcy rejected offers of bribery for his vote, but he was far from an ideal role model for Irish gentry. His faults and failings were compounded by an astonishing capacity for ironic self-delusion. In the following passage, Darcy pontificates on his view of Irish politics:

I am for giving them a higher position, - the heritage of the bold barons, from whom they are descended: but to maintain this, they must live on their own estates, dispense the influence of their wealth and their morals in their own native districts, be the friend of the poor man, the counsellor of the misguided, the encourager of the weak; know and be known to all around, not as the corrupt dispensers of Government patronage, but the guardians of those whose rights are in their keeping for defence and protection. I would have them with their rightful influence in the Senate; an influence which should preponderate in both Houses. Their rank and education would be the best guarantee for the safety and wisdom of their counsels, their property the best surety for the permanence of the institutions of the State. Suddenly acquired wealth can scarcely be intrusted with political power; it lacks the element of prudent caution, by which property is maintained as well as accumulated; it wants also the prestige of antiquity as a claim to respect<sup>70</sup>

Lionel Stevenson's point regarding contemporary Irish nationalists' misperceptions of Lever's attitude toward the nationalism and Ascendancy interests, falls marginally short in that he fails to give Lever credit for what he was doing here. Lever was not 'innocently' revealing the Ascendancy's 'basic weakness in glaring light,'<sup>71</sup> he was intentionally constructing a flawed, and somewhat hypocritical character who certainly was not equipped to be 'intrusted with political power'. Darcy, the Knight of Gwynne, had abdicated management of his own affairs and the consequences of this, ultimately, lead to his agent

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<sup>69</sup> Murphy, *Irish Novelists & the Victorian Age*, p. 83.

<sup>70</sup> Lever, *Knight of Gwynne*, I, p. 327.

<sup>71</sup> Stevenson, *Quicksilver*, pp. 103-4.

escaping with his money, which in turn prevented him from contributing to the debate on the Union at a time when his country needed him most.

*The Knight of Gwynne* was not the kind of commercial success Lever was accustomed to. Changing literary tastes and his geographical distance from literary circles had an impact. He complained about this to Alexander Spencer in February 1850:

You would scarcely believe how much I have sacrificed in not being a regular member of the Guild of Letters, - dining at the Athenaeum, getting drunk at The Garrick, supping with 'Punch,' and steaming down to a Whitebait feed at Blackwell with reporters, reviewers, and the other [? Acolytes] of the daily press. This you will say is no[t?] such fascinating society. Very true; but it pays – or, what is worse, nothing else will pay. The 'Pressgang' take care that no man shall have success independent of them.<sup>72</sup>

As I have mentioned before, further reasons behind dwindling sales after 1845, particularly for *The Knight of Gwynne*, were the impact of the Great Famine, diaspora, and reinstatement of the Catholic Hierarchy in England. The kind of anti-Irish-Catholic hostility I have mentioned was also evident amongst some members of that coterie Lever mentioned above. *Punch* and Charles Dickens were promulgating increasingly anti-Irish-Catholic representations in their magazines.

As James Murphy explains, over the course of the Famine and the 1850s: 'Serious and even humorous analysis [of Irishness] was banished. Ireland no longer seemed a candidate for assimilation into a British polity and culture and the Irish were best depicted as the apes of *Punch* or the hapless fools of the theatre.'<sup>73</sup> By September 1845, *Punch* was resorting to 'humour' of the poorest taste, recommending 'GRIMSTONE'S Eye Snuff' and 'ROWLAND'S Macassar' hair oil as cures for 'pugnacious' 'potatoes [...] suffering from black eyes'.<sup>74</sup> In October of that year, *Punch* suggested insurance for vegetables, warning:

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<sup>72</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, I, pp. 303-4.

<sup>73</sup> James H. Murphy, *Ireland: A Social, Cultural and Literary History. 1791-1891* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), p. 162.

<sup>74</sup> 'The Disease in the Potato', *Punch*, 27 September 1845, p 146.

‘but the premium will be large enough to guard against the consequences of excessive drinking, which is as bad for a vegetable as for a human being’.<sup>75</sup> In the November edition, *Punch* suggested that rotten potatoes could be used to throw at Repealers: ‘This is the use which a good Paddy would make of a good-for-nothing Murphy’.<sup>76</sup> English perceptions of Irish national identity were now being promulgated as synonymous with both O’Connell’s Irish Catholic nationalism, and the potato Famine. O’Connell continued to be one of *Punch*’s primary targets.

The caricature below amalgamated O’Connell’s image with a potato, and appeared with the title ‘THE REAL POTATO BLIGHT OF IRELAND’.<sup>77</sup> O’Connell’s notoriety and



the hostility he attracted in England, was distracting from the plight of starving Irish peasants. Although many of *Punch*’s representations of Ireland were hostile, there were still examples of an element of compassion to be found.

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<sup>75</sup> ‘Duration of Vegetable Life’, *Punch*, 11 October 1845, p. 157.

<sup>76</sup> ‘How to Use a Bad Potato’, *Punch*, 15 November 1845, p. 210.

<sup>77</sup> ‘THE REAL POTATO BLIGHT OF IRELAND’, *Punch*, 13 Dec 1845, p. 255.



In April 1846 *Punch* ran the adjacent cartoon entitled: ‘THE IRISH CINDERELLA AND HER HAUGHTY SISTERS BRITANNIA AND CALEDONIA’.<sup>78</sup> Ireland’s Cinderella sits in a pose of despair, with hair in disarray and rags for clothes, in contrast with Britain and Caledonia’s rich attire and superior demeanours. Despite the obvious intention to arouse sympathy, it was inevitable that Irish national identity was also becoming conflated with poverty and starvation, in stark contrast with the wealth and industrialisation associated with English national identity.

In a piece entitled ‘Hard of Hearing’, the magazine ran another sympathetic response on 8 August 1846:

A night or two since, LORD BROUGHAM declared that “he had heard nothing of the potato disease!” Mr. Curtis, the heurist, waited upon his Lordship the next morning, and has from that time been engaged upon his Lordship’s ears, with, it is feared, but very little hopes of opening them – to the misfortunes of others.<sup>79</sup>

In the latter months of 1846, *Punch*’s focus continued with a relatively balanced combination of critical, humorous and sympathetic representations of Ireland, covering Daniel O’Connell, the Young Irelanders, absentee landlords and in an article entitled ‘TREMENDOUS POTATO DISCOVERY’, attributing the ‘true causes of the potato evil’ to ‘the Pope’.<sup>80</sup> That same article opened with the sentence: ‘We are sad – very sad – when we think of the enormous outlay of public money to fit out and despatch a scientific commission to discover the true causes of the potato evil, for it is now plain the disease is not originally in the tubers, but in the heart of man.’<sup>81</sup>

<sup>78</sup> ‘THE IRISH CINDERELLA AND HER HAUGHTY SISTERS, BRITANNIA AND CALEDONIA’, *Punch*, 25 April 1846, p. 181.

<sup>79</sup> ‘Hard of Hearing’, *Punch*, 8 August. 1846, p. 55.

<sup>80</sup> ‘TREMENDOUS POTATO DISCOVERY’, *Punch*, 19 September 1846, p. 118.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

The cost of Irish distress would become an abiding preoccupation in England, especially when presented alongside what was to be interpreted as Irish ingratitude in the form of more radical Repeal agitation. One of the most controversial aspects of the Irish question during the Famine was the emergence of the group of Repeal Association members, who had become disenchanted with Daniel O’Connell’s pacifist approach. These increasingly violent ‘Young Irelanders’ afforded further opportunities for those at *Punch* who were already hostile toward Ireland, to present Irish national identity as increasingly monstrous and dangerous. In August 1846, the cartoon below appeared, depicting ‘Young Ireland’ with unmistakably simian features:



YOUNG IRELAND IN BUSINESS FOR HIMSELF.



‘Young Ireland in Business for Himself’,<sup>82</sup> refers to reports that relief funds intended to support Famine victims were being misused to buy arms. Two months later *Punch* ran another cartoon depicting John Bull offering Irish Famine victims a basket of what appears to be bread and a shovel, saying “here are a few things to go on with, brother, and I’ll soon put you in a way to earn your own living”.<sup>83</sup> Whilst apparently sympathetic, there were two significant messages. The first was this cartoon’s anti-Repeal title ‘UNION IS STRENGTH’ and the second, the English belief that Ireland needed to learn how to ‘earn [its] own living’, both of which fed into the idea that Irish Republicanism was an inexplicably ungrateful response to English benevolence. *Punch* was escalating an anti-Irish agenda during this period, inevitably drawing further hostile attention from English commentators. The cartoon on the next page is entitled: ‘The English Labourer’s Burden’, and it appeared in February 1849.

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<sup>82</sup> ‘YOUNG IRELAND IN BUSINESS FOR HIMSELF’, *Punch*, 22 August. 1846, p.79.

<sup>83</sup> ‘UNION IS STRENGTH’, *Punch*, 17 October 1846, p. 161.



## THE ENGLISH LABOURER'S BURDEN ;

OR, THE IRISH OLD MAN OF THE MOUNTAIN.

[See *Sinbad the Sailor*.

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<sup>84</sup> THE ENGLISH LABOURER'S BURDEN', *Punch*, 24 February 1849, p. 79.

Before the Famine *Punch* focussed on the Irish struggle for independence, on Catholicism and Daniel O’Connell, but Famine-related events broadened the magazine’s scope for criticising Ireland. This was particularly the case when it came to Ireland’s rebellious ‘ingratitude’ toward its English benefactors who, for the purposes of those intent on criticism, included poor English workers. Figuring English working-class victims of Ireland’s need was a recurring theme. In the cartoon above, the image depicts ‘The Irish Old Man of the Mountain’, ostensibly a victim of the Famine, carrying a sack containing a £50,000 relief grant, but being supported in turn by the English labourer, whose clothes appear much more ragged than his ‘burden’s’, and whose expression is grim by comparison with the Irish ‘peasant’s’ broad grin. The anti-Irish sentiment in *Punch*’s cartoons in its early years focussed on anti-Catholicism, O’Connell and the Repeal Movement. By 1850, when Lever complained of being snubbed by the ‘Pressgang’ who took ‘care that no man shall have success independent of them’,<sup>85</sup> Ireland was also being presented as a rebellious, dangerous and ungrateful drain on English resources.

In 1846, the publishers Chapman and Hall had lost Dickens to another publisher and needed someone as popular to replace him. They chose Lever on the basis of his literary success, expecting that his work would generate similar or greater revenue.<sup>86</sup> However, by November 1848, Lever was forced to acknowledge that ‘Chapman never reaped the large profits from me that he hoped’.<sup>87</sup> Lever’s commercial plateau was partly influenced by the impact of the Great Famine, and increasingly negative stereotypes of Irishness in English media, but it was also because, as Lever recognised, he was somewhat isolated from the cut and thrust of London literary life. As James Murphy speculates, ‘Had Lever’s own exile been in America, his work might have gained a greater resonance with the experience of the Irish

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<sup>85</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, I, pp. 303-4.

<sup>86</sup> Sutherland, *Victorian Novelists and Publishers*, p. 91.

<sup>87</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, I, p. 287.

Diaspora',<sup>88</sup> a prospect that might indeed have produced a reversal of the reality of Lever's post-1845 fortunes, and perhaps even spared Lever's subsequent reputation from the consequences of Yeats' oversight.

In February 1850, Lever complained to Alexander Spencer that he suspected Dickens of being partly responsible for his lack of recognition as a writer:

I have repeated assurances sent special to me of the high estimate of my books entertained by the directors of 'The Quarterly,' but from some underhand proceeding – some secret influence of whose machinery I can obtain information – they never have noticed my publicly. I have been given to understand that the Dickens and Thackeray cliques have conspired to this end.<sup>89</sup>

There is another plausible explanation which Lever was either oblivious to or that he stubbornly refused to accommodate. Following the restoration of the Catholic Hierarchy, the temperature of anti-Catholic hostility in England had rendered sympathetic representations of Ireland and Irish Catholicism deeply unpopular, and things were about to get worse. News of this restoration prompted Cardinal Wiseman to write his Pastoral Letter of the 7 October 1850. His enthusiastic response inflamed those already opposed to the Papal Aggression. The ensuing controversy was dramatic. Intense hostility was widespread; on 14 October 1850, *The Times* ran an article attacking 'Papal presumption':

But though we cannot enter upon the theological elements of this secular controversy, and we do not share the apprehensions which the defection of the feeble or the enthusiasm of the devout has sometimes inspired amongst us, yet we can never forget the part which Papal power has at different times played, or endeavoured to play, in presumptuous hostility to the independence and the liberties of this realm, and it may be well not to allow a recent and somewhat novel example of that same spirit to pass altogether unnoticed either from acquiescence or contempt. [...] In this sense, we are not surprised that Dr. WISEMAN, who has long been distinguished as one of the most learned and able members of the Roman Catholic priesthood in this country, should have been raised to the purple. We may regret that a deplorable perversion of religious opinions should have the effect of alienating a respectable Englishman from the Church of his country and clothing him with the paltry honours of an Italian Court. But England acknowledges no divided allegiance; she recognises no foreign honours, even in the civil or military career, without the express permission of her

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<sup>88</sup> Murphy, *Irish Novelists & the Victorian Age*, p. 79.

<sup>89</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, I, p. 303.

own Sovereign; and it is no concern of ours whether Dr. WISEMAN chooses in Rome to be ranked with the Monsignori of that capital. He is simply at Rome in the position of an English subject who has thought fit to enter the service of a foreign Power, and to accept its spurious dignities.<sup>90</sup>

Dickens' response in *Household Words*, gives an indication of levels of indignation on the part of many who saw the Papal Aggression as part of a reinvigoration of the Roman Catholic Church in England, which had effectively been precipitated by Famine and Irish diaspora. In 1850, following five years of Famine and the increase in Irish immigration, Dickens' treatment of Irish Catholicism in *Household Words* had become pitiless:

Little John, who had gradually left off squaring, looked hard at his aunt, Miss Eringobragh, Mr Bull's sister, who was grovelling on the ground, with her head in the ashes. This unfortunate lady had been, for a length of time, in a horrible condition of mind and body, and presented a most lamentable spectacle of disease, dirt, rags, superstition and degradation. [...] depend upon it, wherever you see a condition at all resembling hers, you will find, on inquiry, that the sufferer has allowed herself to be dealt with by the Bulls of Rome.<sup>91</sup>

Charles Dickens' use of Miss Eringobragh's name in his vicious attack was significant in terms of anti-Irish-Catholic rhetoric. Charles Lever used the term 'Erin go Brag' to introduce Irish characters into the narrative in *Horace Templeton* (1848). It is an Anglicisation of the Irish expression meaning 'Ireland forever' and it had become associated with Irish nationalism amongst Irish immigrant communities. So, at a time when Dickens was suggesting that allegiance to both Ireland and Catholicism was the root cause of 'disease, dirt, rags, superstition and degradation', Lever had developed a very different perspective that was evident in his letters. As a consequence of his 'long foreign residence,' Lever had grown what he described as 'a very tolerant feeling towards Romanism'.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> *The Times*, 14 October 1850, p. 4.

<sup>91</sup> Charles Dickens, 'A Crisis in the Affairs of Mr John Bull, As Related by Mrs Bull to the Children', *Household Words*, 23 November 1850, p. 1.

<sup>92</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, I, p, 253.

Following the disappointing reception to *The Knight of Gwynne*, (most probably in an effort to regain his former popularity) Lever returned to his picaresque, cosmopolitan, and rollicking formats for a number of years with: *The Diary and Notes of Horace Templeton* (1848), in *Roland Cashel* (1850), and *The Confessions of Con Cregan: An Irish Gil Blas* (1850) in which Lever drew upon his own youthful adventures. He continued in that vein with *Roland Cashel* (1850), *The Daltons* (1852), then *The Dodd Family Abroad*, *Maurice Tiernay*, and *Sir Jasper Carew* all in (1854). Some ten years after the disappointment of *The Knight of Gwynne*, Lever returned to his serious treatment of Irish political history, setting *The Martins of Cro' Martin* (1856) in the early 1830s, against the background of Catholic Emancipation.

### *The Martins of Cro' Martin*

*The Martins of Cro' Martin* (1856) explored issues surrounding Catholic Emancipation. Lever's presentation of the question had clearly developed further. In *The Knight of Gwynne* (1846), Lever's presentation of the O'Connellesque O'Halloran, usurping influence over 'the mass of people',<sup>93</sup> was not a sympathetic allusion to an aspirational Catholic lawyer. There is a distinct tempering in Lever's later characterisation of aspirational Catholics, in *The Martins of Cro' Martin* (1856). In Joe Nelligan, Lever developed a far more sophisticated exploration of the impediments Catholics had experienced, particularly before revocation of the Penal Laws. Joe Nelligan is an intelligent Catholic from a modest background. His talents get him into Trinity College Dublin, but they are not enough to overcome the impediments of his background and faith. Joe's privileged Anglo-Irish friend, Massingbred, advises him to turn Protestant in order to kick 'down the' barriers to advancement that Joe's Catholicism implied.

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<sup>93</sup> Lever, *Knight of Gwynne*, II, p. 65.

<sup>94</sup> Lever was still trying to explain how Catholics had been discriminated against in 1856, more than two decades after removal of the penal restrictions. *The Martins of Cro' Martin* was, however, exploring the emergence of a Catholic middle-class in Ireland at a time when anti-Catholic discourse was rife in England. In isolation, the incremental measures benefiting Catholics in both England and Ireland might not have precipitated a dramatic escalation of hostility, but cumulatively they built a picture of Catholic expansionism that the consequences of the Famine, diaspora, and restoration of the Catholic Hierarchy had put the final touches to, bringing anti-Catholic prejudice in England to a frenzy. Anti-Catholicism was a significant element of anti-Irish propaganda and a driving force behind sectarian tensions in English communities, where increased numbers of Irish immigrants had settled over the course of the Famine.<sup>95</sup> Whilst Lever's more enlightened approach to representing Irish Catholicism might appeal to today's reader, it was published at a time when its close contemporaneous resonance with the Irish Famine of the mid-nineteenth century, hampered its chances of retrieving Lever's former commercial success. Lever's target, once again, was Ascendancy failure. His criticism in Mary Martin's appeal to her absent uncle could have applied to all absentee landlords during the Famine:

Dearest Uncle,

You will not suffer these few lines to remain unanswered, since they are written in all the pressure of a great emergency. Our worst fears for the harvest are more than realized; a total failure in the potatoes — a great diminution in the oat crop; the incessant rains have flooded all the low meadows, and the cattle are almost without forage, while from the same cause no turf can be cut, and even that already cut and stacked cannot be drawn away from the bogs. But, worse than all these, typhus is amongst us, and cholera, they say, coming. I might stretch out this dreary catalogue, but here is enough, more than enough, to awaken your sympathies and arouse you to action. There is a blight on the land; the people are starving —

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<sup>94</sup> Charles Lever, *Martins of Cro' Martin*, 2 vols (George Routledge and Sons, 1877), I, p. 76.

<sup>95</sup> For extended discussions on this see: Sheridan Gilley, 'English Attitudes to the Irish in England, 1789-1900', in *Immigrants and Minorities in British Society*, ed. by Colin Holmes (London: Allen & Unwin, 1978), pp. 81-110; D. G. Paz, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England* (Stanford, Ca: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 49; Neville Kirk, 'Ethnicity, Class and Popular Toryism, 1850-70', in *Hosts, Immigrants and Minorities: Historical Responses to Newcomers in British Society, 1870-1914*, ed. by Kenneth Lunn (Folkestone: Dawson Publishing 1980), p. 66.

dying. If every sense of duty was dead within us, if we could harden our hearts against every claim of those from whose labour we derive ease, from whose toil we draw wealth and leisure, we might still be recalled to better things by the glorious heroism of these poor people, so nobly courageous, so patient are they in their trials. It is not now that I can speak of the traits I have witnessed of their affection, their charity, their self-denial, and their daring – but now is the moment to show that we, who have been dealt with more favourably by fortune, are not devoid of the qualities which adorn their nature.

I feel all the cruelty of narrating these things to you, too far away from the scene of sorrow to aid by your counsel and encourage by your assistance; but it would be worse than cruelty to conceal from you that a terrible crisis is at hand, which will need all your energy to mitigate.

Some measures are in your power, and must be adopted at once. There must be a remission of rent almost universally, for the calamity has involved all; and such as are a little richer than their neighbours should be aided, that they may be the more able to help them. Some stores of provisions must be provided to be sold at reduced rates, or even given gratuitously. Medical aid must be had, and an hospital of some sort established. The able-bodied must be employed on some permanent work; and for these, we want power from you and some present moneyed assistance. I will not harrow your feelings with tales of sufferings. You have seen misery here – enough, I say – you have witnessed nothing like this, and we are at but the beginning.<sup>96</sup>

This passage has all the power of contemporaneous reports of the Famine and must have been interpreted by the exoteric reader within that context.

According to Edmund Downey, Charles Lever was particularly sensitive about the poor reception this novel received. Downey cited one ‘literary weekly’ that called it a ‘dull novel’.<sup>97</sup> Yet *The Martins of Cro’ Martin* was far from being a dull novel. Once again (in Lever’s own words) it is the two young female protagonists, Mary Martin and Kate Henderson, who represent nationalist political energy. As Repton the wise old lawyer lamented: ‘The men that used to have dash and energy have become loungers and idlers, and the energy — the real energy of the nation — has centred in the women, — the women and the priests!’<sup>98</sup> In a parallel with Kate O’Donoghue, Mary Martin and Kate Henderson embody this ‘real energy of the nation’, exposing the male Ascendancy heirs’ torpor. Mary Martin is revealed at the end of the novel as the rightful heir to the Martin estate in both legal and

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<sup>96</sup> Lever, *Martins of Cro’ Martin*, II, pp. 41-2.

<sup>97</sup> Downey, *Lever: Life in Letters*, I, p. 348.

<sup>98</sup> Lever, *The Martins of Cro’ Martin*, I, pp. 349-50.



moral terms. When the male usurpers of her inheritance abandon Ireland, she remains to discharge the family's responsibilities during a famine.<sup>99</sup> James M. Cahalan maintains that Lever modelled Mary Martin on Maria Edgeworth,<sup>100</sup> representing Lever's ideal, who fulfils the landowner's duty in the symbiotic feudal relationship with loyal Irish cottiers. Tony Bareham has similarly described Mary Martin as Lever's 'most admirable and amiable young woman',<sup>101</sup> observing that she is the only character who 'remains behind, trying to bridge the gap between rich and poor, between privileged and unfortunate'.<sup>102</sup> But as I shall explain, Mary Martin was not quite the ideal that Cahalan and Bareham suggest. Whilst Mary Martin did what might be expected of a responsible, improving landlord, she was also inadvertently contributing to the ultimate demise of the estate, spending 'upwards of ten thousand a year [...] planting, draining, bridging, reclaiming waste lands, and other improvements, the wages of last year alone exceeded seven thousand!'.<sup>103</sup> Mary Martin, despite her noble intentions, is as flawed as Darcy had been in *The Knight of Gwynne* and her actions, however laudable and responsible, bring about similar consequences to those of the irresponsible forerunner. So, there is a real sense of hopelessness in this post-Famine novel, written during Lever's self-imposed exile from Ireland, following an era of diaspora, and lamenting the earlier post-Union Ascendancy abandonment of Ireland:

Have the brilliant talkers of other days left no successors?  
The altered circumstances of the country will doubtless account for much of this change. The presence of a Parliament in Ireland imparted a dignity and importance to society [...] the wit, the brilliancy, and the readiness which gives conversation its charm, obtained the high culture which comes of a learned profession, and the social intercourse with men of refined understanding.  
With the Union this spirit died out.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> I do not capitalise 'famine' here, because Lever was writing about an earlier chronological era. Its resonance with the 'Great Famine' though would not have been lost on his readers.

<sup>100</sup> James M. Cahalan, *The Irish Novel: A Critical History* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co. 1988), p. 69.

<sup>101</sup> Tony Bareham, *Charles Lever: New Evaluations* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1991), p. 10

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>103</sup> Lever, *Martins of Cro' Martin*, I, p.162.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

The novel makes it clear that Lever no longer sees any pre-Famine feudal compact as a possibility. Mary endeavours to try ‘hard to bring back the old feudal devotion to the Chief,’<sup>105</sup> but we are told ‘It is too late to try the feudal system in the year of our Lord 1829’.<sup>106</sup> The passage above also suggests enthusiasm for nationalist politics. In *The Martins of Cro’ Martin*, Lever sought to identify Catholic land agents as the culprits, in an effort to unite the Ascendancy with grass roots Irish nationalism.

Charles Lever had the benefit of a more cosmopolitan European perspective on the politics of the Union, and he could see the potential in Ireland for the kind of revolution that he had seen in Italy and across Europe. He sets up a comparison between Irish and French rebellion. When Captain Martin suggests that Mary’s letter regarding their tenants’ plight in Ireland might be an exaggeration, Kate Henderson who (like Lever) is more cosmopolitan and consequently more cognisant of that comparison, briefly reveals the extent of her contempt for the failed Ascendancy:

For some minutes she continued to read with the same impassive expression; but gradually her cheek became paler, and a haughty, almost scornful expression settled on her lips. “So patient are they in their trials,” said she, reading aloud the expression of Mary’s note. “Is it not possible, Captain Martin, that patience may be pushed a little beyond a virtue, [...] “And then,” cried she impetuously, and not waiting for his reply, “to say that now is the time to show these poor people the saving care and protection that the rich owe them, as if this duty dated from the hour of their being struck down by famine – laid low by pestilence! Or that the debt could ever be acquitted by the relief accorded to pauperism! Why not have taught these same famished creatures self-dependence, elevated them to the rank of civilised beings, by the enjoyment of rights that give men self-esteem as well as liberty!”<sup>107</sup>

The exchange between Kate and Captain Martin is a direct challenge revealing the impotent failure of masculine Ascendancy dominance. Captain Martin is only capable of resuming his responsibility with Kate’s intervention. Kate is politically dominant, recognising the imminent revolt in Paris and telling ‘Villemart that when the government spoke with grape-

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<sup>105</sup> Lever, *Martins of Cro’ Martin*, I, p. 113.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, p, 170.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, II, p. 48.

shot, the people replied with the guillotine'.<sup>108</sup> So there is a shift from Mary Martin, who as the representative of the feudal compact is perhaps too good to be true and certainly not fiscally pragmatic enough to represent a hopeful resolution, to Kate Henderson who like her namesake Kate O'Donoghue, rejects the opportunity for resolution through marriage with Massingbred and establishes herself as the centre of nationalist energy:

I am prouder in the independence of my present dependence than I should be in all the state of Mr. Massingbred's wife. You can see, therefore, that I could not accept this change as the great elevation you would deem it. You would be stooping to raise one who could never persuade herself that she was exalted.<sup>109</sup>

Steven Haddelsey has called Kate the 'novel's secondary heroine',<sup>110</sup> but Kate's dual position as Mary's half-sister, who has been brought up as the foster-child of the Martins' agent Paul Henderson, makes her a much more interesting character; not least because her sentiments are clearly passionately Republican. The two major protagonists of this novel were women who represented aspects of Ireland that had come to be the focus of English hostility, both the Ascendancy and Irish nationalism.

## Conclusion

As I have argued in previous chapters, although *The O'Donoghue* and *St. Patrick's Eve* are understood to have signalled Charles Lever's initial transition, when he left his 'Lorrequeresque' adventures behind and moved towards writing more serious political novels, there were promises of that change as early as *Tom Burke of Ours*. *St. Patrick's Eve* was something of an aberration for Lever, and *The O'Donoghue* serves as a far better starting point from which to explore how, once Lever left Dublin for Europe, he really began to engage earnestly with what he feared would be Ireland's fate. Lever's time at the helm at *Dublin University Magazine* had been fraught with friction, rejection, and a depressive

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<sup>108</sup> Lever, *Martins of Cro' Martin*, II, p. 73.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, p. 211.

<sup>110</sup> Haddelsey, *Lost Victorian*, p. 99.

episode of what we would now recognise as bi-polar syndrome. In ‘The Portfolio’ collection of appendices that Fitzpatrick included in *The Life of Lever*, Harry Innes, a family friend, recalled:

“There was no doubt a side to Lever’s character the public never saw. His high spirits were always followed by a reaction; the more furious the fun was, and the longer it continued, the more certain and the deeper was the depression, and the more difficult it was to rouse him out of it. This you will probably say is the common lot of humanity, where good and evil contrive to balance each other.”<sup>111</sup>

Antagonistic and unfair criticism of his work could not have helped his emotional state toward the end of his time at *Dublin University Magazine*.

Lever’s anxiety regarding the growing unrest he had seen in Dublin was intensified by his subsequent experience of travelling in Europe, where he saw the impact of revolution and could see the potential for further similarly violent rebellion in Ireland. It was during his effective exile from Ireland that Lever developed his commentary on reasons behind the ‘condition of Ireland’ question. The value of his post-1845, ‘historical’ novels lies in his explorations of tensions arising from the chasm between the improbably idealistic vision of a more responsible Ascendancy landlord, and a reality where the consequences of both Ascendancy and English misrule impacted on those less privileged in Ireland.

In *The O’Donoghue*, Lever explained the historic reasons behind the 1798 rebellion, and he extended his analysis in *The Knight of Gwynne* addressing imposition of the Act of Union. When he came in for criticism regarding his ‘repealism’ following *The O’Donoghue* and *The Knight of Gwynne*, he denied the charges; a wise move for someone who was still contributing to the mouthpiece of Irish Tory Unionism, *Dublin University Magazine*. In November 1845, Lever wrote to Alexander Spencer about his work on *The Knight of Gwynne*: ‘I hope you may like it. I have a great object in view – no less than to show that the

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<sup>111</sup> Harry Innes, ‘Recollections of Charles Lever’s Boyhood’, in W.J. Fitzpatrick, *The Life of Charles Lever*, 2 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1879), II, p. 395.

bribed men of the Irish Parliament are the very men who now are joining the Liberal ranks, and want to assist O'Connell in bringing back the Parliament they once sold.'<sup>112</sup> He wrote to Spencer again in January 1846, explaining:

You have before this read 'The Knight.' I hope your good opinion continues unabated. Are there any critiques in the Irish papers? 'The Mail,' I hear, will notice me now. Perhaps the Repealers think they have found a backer. Let them hug the belief till the 4<sup>th</sup> No., and I shall clear away the delusions.<sup>113</sup>

A week later Lever responded to what was obviously becoming a talking point, Charles Lever's apparent sympathy for Repeal:

The remark you heard at Curry's about my Repealism is no new thing. M'G. tried to fasten the imputation upon me when I sold 'St Patrick's Eve' to the London publishers, and the attempt to revive it displays his game. A very brief hint would make the Repeal editors adapt it for present gain and future attack when they discovered their error. However, the deception will not be long-lived, and I think after the appearance of No. 4 few will repeat the charge.<sup>114</sup>

Yet, the fourth number of *The Knight of Gwynne* did very little to reverse the suggestion of Lever's growing sympathy for repeal. The chapter centres on Forester's attempt to persuade Darcy to support the proposed Act of Union. The Knight's response counters Forester's English assumptions regarding what would be good for Ireland:

"In short, it is because bribery is an ugly theme, sir, and, like a bad picture, only comes out the worse the more varnish you lay on it." These words, uttered in a low, solemn voice from the corner of the apartment, actually stunned Forester, who now stood peering through the gloom to where the indistinct figure of a man was seen seated in the recess of a large chair. "Excuse me, Captain Forester," said he, rising, and coming forward with the hand out; "but it has so seldom been my fortune to hear any argument in defence of this measure that I could bring myself to interrupt you before. [...]" "I should say that there is more of moderation in the tone of all parties of late," said Forester, diffidently, for he felt all the awkwardness of alluding to a topic in which his own game had been so palpably discovered. "In that case, your friends have gained the victory. Patriotism, as we call it in Ireland, requires to be fed by mob adulation; and when the 'canaille' get hoarse, their idols walk over to the Treasury benches."<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Downey, *Lever: Life in Letters*, I, pp. 199-200.

<sup>113</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, I, p. 202.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, p. 204.

<sup>115</sup> Lever, *Knight of Gwynne*, I, pp. 35-6.

Lever was accusing both Ascendancy and populist Nationalist leaders of having mercenary motives and being capable of betraying Ireland, whilst at the same time defending the *idea* of Irish Nationalism. As already noted, Lever's biographer Fitzpatrick suggested that Lever's stance on the matter of the Union was 'opposed to the Union and to the means by which it was brought about' but that he 'was unwilling to apply for a divorce'.<sup>116</sup> Fitzpatrick also refers to a letter from Lever to Alexander Spencer (again not included in the Downey collection) where he expressed a sympathy for 'Home Rule' but certainly not 'Rabble Rule'.<sup>117</sup>

Although Lever fell back into writing cosmopolitan adventures in the years after publication of *The Knight of Gwynne*, he did return to writing about Ireland's political dynamics, explaining the next pivotal subject in Irish history, that of Catholic Emancipation.

In the original preface to *The Martins of Cro' Martin* Lever explained:

I only desire to call my reader's attention to the time itself, as a transition period when the peasant had begun to resent some of the ties that had bound him to his landlord, and had not yet conceived the idea of that formidable conspiracy which issues its death-warrants and never is at a loss for the agents to enforce them. There were at the time some who, seeing the precarious condition of the period, had their grave forebodings of what was to come, when further estrangement between the two classes was accomplished, and the poor man should come to see in the rich only an oppressor and a tyrant. There was not at that time the armed resistance to rents, nor the threatening letter system to which we were afterwards to become accustomed, still less was there the thought that the Legislature would interfere to legalize the demands by which the tenant was about to coerce his landlord; for a brief interval there did seem a possibility of reuniting once again, by the ties of benefit and gratitude, the two classes whose real welfare depends on concord and harmony. I have not the shadow of a pretext to be thought didactic, but I did believe that if I recalled in fiction some of the traits which once had bound up the relations of rich and poor, and give to our social system many of the characteristic of the family, I should be reviving pleasant memories if not doing something more.

To this end I sketched the character of Mary Martin. By making the opening of my story date from the time of the Relief Bill, I intended to picture the state of the country at one of the most memorable eras in its history, and when an act of the Legislature assumed to redress inequalities, compose differences, and allay jealousies

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<sup>116</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Life of Charles Lever*, II, p. 123.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, p. 128.

of centuries' growth, and make of two widely differing races one contented people.<sup>118</sup>

*The Martins of Cro' Martin* was published in 1856, just over ten years after Lever's departure from Ireland, when he was still preoccupied with the political and religious inequalities of the pre-Famine era in Ireland.<sup>119</sup> In *The Martins of Cro' Martin* Lever was recapitulating his view of the political events that led up to Repeal agitation, with a typically Leveresque anti-O'Connell spin. The suggestion that the government's intention at the time of passing the Relief Bill was to 'redress inequalities, compose differences, and allay jealousies of centuries' growth' diminishes O'Connell's and the Catholic Association's influence in the campaign for Catholic Emancipation. Previous petitions for withdrawal of penal restrictions against Catholics had been overruled in 1805, 1808, and 1819. In 1821, the Emancipation Bill passed through the House of Commons, only to be blocked by the influence of the House of Lords and King George IV. When the measure was finally passed, it was far more a matter of the government's hand being forced than the act of benevolence Lever was suggesting.

Charles Lever would come to feel that *The Martins of Cro' Martin* fell short of the intentions declared in the original preface. In his 1872 revision, he wrote an 'Apology for a Preface':

I remember once having made the ascent of a mountain in Killarney to see the sun rise, and watch the various effects the breaking day should successively throw on the surrounding landscape. With the sad fatality, however, so common to these regions, vast masses of cloud and mist obscured every object. [...] My guide, however, with the instincts of his order, pointed through the dim obscure to where Mangerton stood, the Turk Mountain, the waterfall, and Mucruss Abbey, and with a glowing eloquence described the features of the invisible land-scape.

Shall I confess that now, as I have completed this tale, I find myself in a position somewhat resembling that of the guide? The various objects which I had hoped and promised myself to present to my readers have been displayed faintly, feebly, or not at all. The picture of a new social condition that I desired to develop, I have barely sketched – the great political change worked on a whole people, merely glanced at.

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<sup>118</sup> Lever, *Martins of Cro' Martin*, I, pp. viii - ix.

<sup>119</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Life of Charles Lever*, II, p. 89.

Perhaps my plan included intentions not perfectly compatible with fiction – perhaps the inability lay more with myself - mayhap both causes have had their share in the failure. But so it is that now, my task completed, I grieve to see how little opportunity I have had of dwelling on the great problem which first engaged me in the social working of the Emancipation Bill of '29.<sup>120</sup>

Lever was self-consciously anticipating Joep Leerssen's explanation of auto-exoticism.

Lever's disappointment that Catholic Emancipation did not bring about the conciliation and social harmony that he had hoped would follow the 1829 Relief Act, had at least some of its roots in the tumultuous time he spent in Dublin. His growing frustration with both sides of the political debate is evident in both his later correspondence and his most accomplished work, *Lord Kilgobbin* (1872), which was Lever's final novel and is one of the subjects of my final chapter.

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<sup>120</sup> Charles Lever, *The Martins of Cro' Martin*, 2 vols, in *The Novels of Charles Lever*, The Novels of Charles Lever: Edited by his Daughter, 37 vols (London: Downey and Co, 1897), XXI, pp. xix- xx. This 'Apology' does not appear in the Routledge edition.



## CHAPTER 5

### Latter Years, *Cornelius O'Dowd*, and *Lord Kilgobbin*

Word Count: 12,788

#### Introduction

Charles Lever's position as an Irishman observing the socio-political dynamics between England and Ireland from abroad during the Great Famine gave him a particularly cosmopolitan perspective on Irish, English, and European politics, which filtered into his more serious novels after 1845. In some ways his self-imposed exile from Ireland was analogous with some aspects of both the absentee landlords he criticised in his novels, and diasporic Irish Famine emigres, alienated from the site of their cultural identity. Having left Ireland behind, Lever endeavoured to play his own political role in terms of engendering greater understanding between the two countries. Lever was arguing for inclusion rather than division and much of his work during the Famine era and beyond symbolised his attempts to mediate and conciliate between the two countries, and revealed political sympathies at odds with assumptions that he was a die-hard Tory Unionist. Nationalist and Unionist ideologies might have appeared dialectically opposed but as Charles Lever's post 1845 work serves to demonstrate, the reality was not so clear cut. Lever's presentations of the dichotomy between Tory idealism and Irish reality would blur into a picture more resonant with Irish nationalism than Unionism. Whilst Lever was horrified at Young Irelanders' militant tactics, acutely sensitive to the movement's leaders' criticism of him, and uncomfortable with their politics, he was paradoxically also increasingly sympathetic with the Repealers' cause.

In my previous chapter, I mentioned Lever's return to the old rollicking formula in response to dwindling sales, as James Murphy has commented: '*The Knight of Gwynne*, in

particular was a publishing disaster. Indeed, it may have contributed to Lever's return in the short term to the issue of rollicking.<sup>1</sup> Beyond the ways in which Famine and perceptions of Irish intractability impacted on sales of Irish novels in England, publication of *The Knight of Gwynne* was also eclipsed by the success of Dickens' *Dombey and Son* and Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. Lever responded by writing more cosmopolitan and humorous novels with: *The Diary and Notes of Horace Templeton* (1848), *The Confessions of Con Cregan: An Irish Gil Blass* (1850), *Roland Cashel* (1850), *The Daltons* (1852) *The Dodd Family Abroad*, *Maurice Tierney*, and *Sir Jasper Carew* (1854) *Davenport Dunn*, and *Gerald Fitzgerrald* (1855). In the revised preface to *Confessions of Con Cregan*, Lever recalled:

I adopted the alternative of writing another story, to be published contemporaneously with that now appearing, - "The Daltons;" and not to incur the reproach so natural in criticism - of over-writing myself - I took care that the work should come out without a name.

I am not sure I made any attempt to disguise my style; I was conscious of scores of blemishes - I decline to call them mannerisms - that would betray me: but I believe I trusted most of all to the fact that I was making my monthly appearance to the world in another story, and with another publisher, and I had my hope that my small duplicity would thus escape undetected.<sup>2</sup>

Lever confessed to being both amused and somewhat bewildered at critical responses to *Con Cregan*:

For one notice of "The Daltons" by the Press, there were at least three or four of "Con Cregan," and while the former was dismissed with a few polite and measured phrases, the latter was largely praised and freely quoted. Nor was this all. The critics discovered in "Con Cregan" a freshness and a vigour which were so sadly deficient in "The Daltons." It was, they averred, the work of a less practised writer, but one whose humour was more subtle, and whose portraits, roughly sketched as they were, indicated a far higher power than the well-known author of "Harry Lorrequer."

The unknown - for there was no attempt to guess him - was pronounced not to be an imitator of Mr. Lever, though there were certain small points of resemblance; for he was clearly original in his conception of character, in his conduct of his story, and in his dialogues, and there were traits of knowledge of life in scenes and under conditions to which Mr. Lever could lay no claim. One critic, who had found out more features of resemblance between the two writers than his colleagues, uttered a friendly caution to Mr. Lever to look to his laurels, for there was a rival in the field

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<sup>1</sup> James Murphy, *Irish Novelists & the Victorian Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, pp. 389-90.

possessing many of the characteristics by which he first won public favour, but a racy drollery in description and a quaintness in his humour all his own.<sup>3</sup>

Lever was so delighted with the novel's reception that he pasted forty-three reviews into his notebook. Comments included the following: 'This is a genuine Irish story, replete with adventure and fun; and is not called the adventures of the Irish Gil Blas without reason',<sup>4</sup> from the *Morning Herald*. The *Cambridge Advertiser* enthused: 'We may remark that *Con Cregan* (author incog.) begins promisingly. The very first chapter is a decided hit'.<sup>5</sup> The *Cambridge Chronicle* predicted: 'We think the venture will be successful. The writer is a new hand, but there is good stuff in him, and he begins his career in a promising way. There are innumerable minor illustrations on wood, independent of the main efforts by Phiz.'<sup>6</sup> Some commentators actually compared Lever with Lever. The *Hampshire Advertiser* announced:

A new tale from the exhaustless stores of Irish humour, sentiment, and satire with which Lever and his brother novelists have made us familiar. The title provokes a comparison with the immortal work of *Le Sage*, which the opening does not disappoint, either in the style or interest of the scene.<sup>7</sup>

The *Yorkshireman* warned that 'Henry Lorrequer had better look to his laurels. There is a poacher in his manner, in the person of the adventurous *Con Cregan*.'<sup>8</sup> Plaudits came from the Belfast *Northern Whig*, and the *Nottingham Mercury* suggested that the novel was worthy of Carleton or Lover.<sup>9</sup>

The old formula clearly still had a receptive audience, and it would be ten years after the failure of *The Knight of Gwynne*, before Lever addressed Ireland's history as seriously again, with *The Martins of Cro' Martin* (1856). Over the following years, Lever's take on Irish social, political and cultural factors became increasingly contextualised by his

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<sup>3</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, pp. 391-2.

<sup>4</sup> The Huntington Library, San Marino, California. MmsHM 269-272, Notebook (1849-1860), Charles James Lever Papers.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

experience of living in Europe. In this, my final chapter, I will address some of Lever's contributions to *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* under the pseudonym 'Cornelius O'Dowd', explore both how his shift toward the argument for Repeal of the Union and his cosmopolitan perspective informed his final novel, *Lord Kilgobbin* (1872).

During the sixteen years that separate publication of *The Martins of Cro' Martin* and *Lord Kilgobbin*, Lever's letters and literary production show glimpses of his frustration regarding political policies formulated in England, by people who did not understand Ireland. In 1864, Lever began writing a series of part factual, part fictional essays entitled 'Cornelius O'Dowd Upon Men and Women and Other Things in General'. Lever suggested to Blackwood, that Cornelius O'Dowd's motto should be: 'I care not a fig – For Tory or Whig',<sup>10</sup> a position indicating Lever's own.

In his essay on 'Charles Lever: An Irish Writer in Italy', John McCourt notes that 'Rather like Lever himself, O'Dowd is insecure about his identity defining himself' as Irish, 'before referring just lines later to "we English"'.<sup>11</sup> McCourt's observation regarding Lever's sense of identity is perceptive, but there is more to Lever's use of this fluid national identity than simply a matter of an insecure sense of identity. In the early instalment of *O'Dowd*, cited by McCourt, Lever initially suggested an Irish identity for O'Dowd: 'I seek for nothing more congenial to my taste, nor more amusing to my nature as a bashful Irishman.'<sup>12</sup> In the subsequent essay entitled 'Adventures', published in the same instalment of *Blackwood's*, Lever/O'Dowd adopted an English identity:

I wonder am I right in thinking that the present race of travelling English know less about the Continent and foreigners generally than their predecessors of, say, five-and-twenty years ago. Railroads and rapid travelling might be one cause; another is that English is now more generally spoken by all foreigners than formally [...] Now we

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<sup>10</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, II, p. 35.

<sup>11</sup> John McCourt, 'Charles Lever: An Irish Writer in Italy', *Studi irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies*, 6 (2016), 149-169 (p. 162).

<sup>12</sup> Charles Lever, 'Cornelius O'Dowd Upon Men and Women and Other Things in General', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, February 1864, p. 174.

English are not linguists; even our diplomatists are remarkable for their little proficiency in French.<sup>13</sup>

The shift from a position of a ‘bashful’ Irish identity, to the ‘we English’ identity, appears elsewhere in Lever’s contributions to *Blackwood’s*, demonstrating a clever choice of identity intended for different target audiences. Joep Leerssen has identified ‘a paradoxical dissociation of the Irish author from his/her Irish subject-matter. The destinator [sic] vector towards an English audience is so strong that the author no longer identifies with the country which is represented, but becomes an intermediary, an exteriorized, detached observer.’<sup>14</sup> Leerssen sets out his scheme whereby pre-1800 Irish authors, whose ‘primary target audience’ was Irish, would identify as ‘we-the-Irish’. For post-1800 Irish authors, Leerssen continues, with an English ‘primary target audience’, the subject matter became identified as ‘they-the-Irish’.<sup>15</sup> Lever is adapting to both an Irish and an English target audience in his *O’Dowds*. In the August 1864 publication of *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, Lever contributed essays demonstrating further examples of this fluidity. In the first example, O’Dowd’s essay is entitled ‘Abuse of Ireland’, and it opens with the following introduction, in which I have italicised the examples of ‘O’Dowd’s’ assumption of an Irish identity:

Daniel O’Connell used to say that he was the best abused man in Europe; had he only lived until now he would have seen that the practice has been extended to all his countrymen of every class and condition, of every shade of politics, and every section of opinion. The leading journal [*The Times*] especially has adopted this line, and the adjective Irish has been assumed as a disqualifier to all and everything it can be applied to. I am sure that is not generous – I have my doubts if it be just. First of all, *we are* abused too indiscriminately, and for faults diametrically the opposite of each other; secondly, *we are* sneered at for qualities which *the greater nation* is not sorry to utilise; and, last of all, *we are* treated as such acknowledged admitted inferiors as makes it a very polite peace of condescension for *Englishmen to occupy themselves*, even in *their* leisure hours, by admonishing *us our fault*. [...] If *we stay at home*, *we are* told that *we are* a poor-spirited set of creatures, satisfied with mere subsistence, and content to grovel in *our poverty*. If *we emigrate*, *we are*

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<sup>13</sup> Lever, ‘O’Dowd’, *Blackwood’s*, February 1864, pp. 174-5.

<sup>14</sup> Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), p. 34.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

reproached as people who have no loyalty, nor any attachment to the land of their birth.<sup>16</sup>

In the passage below, which appears in *Blackwood's* just a few pages later, my italics show that, having first complained of English attitudes toward Ireland, Lever's 'O'Dowd' suddenly identifies as English:

*We have got thus far in England*, and I would only say, let us not imperil the immense boon by presuming too far on its benefits; and, above all, *let us not* forget that this great change in manners has made but little progress beyond the limits of *our own* country, and is still as essentially *English as our Habeas Corpus, our bitter beer, or our beef*. *Foreigners*, let it be remembered will neither understand nor *give us* credit for it.<sup>17</sup>

Lever's personal correspondence gives a more stable picture of where his national affinity lay, and he was becoming increasingly disillusioned with the English government and the frequency with which policies toward Ireland changed. In November 1866 he wrote to Blackwood commenting:

“Universal suffrage in Australia has proved to be an eminently Conservative measure. What we have to bear most in England is not *great* change so much as *sudden* change. We can conform to anything, but we need time to suit ourselves to the task.’  
“I suspect that moderate Whigs have no intention of joining the Conservatives. There is first of all, the same disgrace attaching to a change of seat in the House as in a change of religion. Nobody hesitates to think that a convert must be a knave or a fool.<sup>18</sup>

A month later, Lever wrote again to Blackwood:

I'm sure you will agree with me as to Ireland: what we want is something like a continuous policy – something that men will be satisfied to see being carried out with the assurance that it will not be either discouraged or abandoned by a change of Government. We want, in fact, that Ireland should be administered for Ireland., and not for the especial gain or loss of party. [...] If I had had time, I would have liked to have written a long paper on Ireland and its evils. I believe I have lived long enough *in* Ireland to know something of the country, and long enough *out* of it to have shaken off the prejudice and narrowness that attach to men who live at home – and I suspect that I am a 'wet' Tory in much that regards Ireland...<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Lever, 'O'Dowd', *Blackwood's*, August 1864, p. 188.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Lever, in *Charles Lever: His Life in Letters*, ed. by Edmund Downey, 2 vols (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1906), II, p. 186.

<sup>19</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, II, pp. 188-9.

Lever's political stance regarding government policy for Ireland was increasingly more Liberal, and increasingly more national. In October 1867, Lever wrote to Blackwood that 'Without being a Fenian, I have an Irishman's hate of the Londoner'.<sup>20</sup> He continued to exert himself in making a political contribution through his historical novels about Ireland, yet he did so without the subsequent level of recognition he deserves for his contribution to the nationalist debate.

Charles Lever began his final novel *Lord Kilgobbin* (1872), around half way through 1869. In three successive letters to John Blackwood in late June and early July of that year, Lever reiterated his preoccupation both with his wife's failing health, and his own 'depression' which 'cost [him] such an effort to do anything.'<sup>21</sup> Lever couched his plans for *Lord Kilgobbin* in terms that indicated he was not sure he would remain well enough to complete the novel: 'I have begun my new story, which I call 'Lord Kilgobbin,' which will be essentially Irish, and for which, if I live and thrive, I mean to take a look at Ireland about May next.'<sup>22</sup> Two days later, Lever told Blackwood:

My malady is there, and must stay there; but I am going to tide over this time, and will not fret myself for the future.  
I'm glad you like my talk. How I'd like to read you my opening of 'Kilgobbin'. They like it much here, but I don't know how much may have been said to cheer me. I'm not able to write beyond a very short time, but I must do something or my head will run clean away with me.  
My wife's state keeps me in intense anxiety'<sup>23</sup>

In April 1870, Lever's wife Katherine finally succumbed, leaving him bereft. He wrote to Blackwood: 'The blow has fallen at last, and I am desolate.' He continued; 'All the happiness in my life has gone, and all the support.'<sup>24</sup> Lever's dedicated his finest novel *Lord Kilgobbin*, to his beloved wife Kate:

To the memory of one whose companionship made the happiness of a long life,

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 203.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 253.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 254.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 255.

<sup>24</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, II, p. 277.

and whose loss has left me helpless, I dedicate this work, written in breaking spirits. The task, that was once my joy and my pride, I have lived to find associated with my sorrow: it is not, then, without a cause I say, I hope this effort may be my last.

Trieste, January 20, 1872.<sup>25</sup>

## *Lord Kilgobbin*

I referred briefly in my last chapter to how Claire Connolly contends that Leerssen's theory regarding auto-exoticism is not always helpful; this is certainly not the case with Lever's *Lord Kilgobbin* (1872). The novel's narrator is positioned quite firmly within Leerssen's framework: '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'.<sup>26</sup> In the opening pages, Lever's narrator describes a panoramic view of the land:

At last, and by a transition that is not always easy to mark, the scene glides into those rich pasture-lands and well-tilled farms that form the wealth of the Midland Counties. Gentlemen's seats and waving plantations succeed, and we are in a country of comfort and abundance.<sup>27</sup>

Lever's use of the word 'we', is ambiguous in terms of whether or not this is intended as an Irish or English 'we', until his narrator is positioned as what Leerssen called the 'importunate tourist guide',<sup>28</sup> referring to 'the guide-books [in which] we read that it [Kilgobbin Castle] was once a place of strength and importance'.<sup>29</sup> The novel also exemplifies Leerssen's thoughts on history and 'antiquity'. Lever's narrator continues with his 'tourist guide':

Hugh de Lacy – the same bold knight “who had won all Ireland for the English from the Shannon to the sea” – had taken this castle from a native chieftain called Neal O'Caharney, whose family he had slain, all save one; and then it adds “Sir Hugh came one day, with three Englishmen, that he might show them the castle, when there came to him a youth of the men of Meath – a certain Gilla Naher O'Mahey, foster brother of O'Caharney himself – with his battle-axe concealed beneath his cloak, and while de Lacy was reading the petition he gave him, he dealt a blow that his head flew off

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<sup>25</sup> Charles Lever, *Lord Kilgobbin*. (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1878).

<sup>26</sup> Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination*, p. 36.

<sup>27</sup> Lever, *Lord Kilgobbin*, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Leerssen, *Remembrances and Imagination*, p. 37.

<sup>29</sup> Lever, *Lord Kilgobbin*, p. 2.



many yards away, both head and body being afterwards buried in the ditch of the castle.”<sup>30</sup>

*Lord Kilgobbin* is set around 1870, at the time of the first Irish Land Act, and it reflects over the historic consequences of English influence in Ireland. The novel opens with a description of the Bog of Allen, and the history of Kilgobbin Castle and its occupants, reaching back to an era just before ‘English’ interference in Ireland during the 12th century Anglo-Norman invasion. Lever briefly alludes to a catalogue of historical incidents, neatly weaving the provenance of the castle and the family into an Irish historical narrative for the exoteric reader. Kilgobbin Castle was originally the seat of a native chieftain Neal O’Caharney, until most of the family are slain by the man who effectively became the first English (Anglo-Norman) ‘Viceroy’ in Ireland, Hugh de Lacy. Lever establishes further ties with medieval Ireland by relating O’Caharney as the ‘foster brother’<sup>31</sup> of Gilla Naher O’Mahey, who killed de Lacy in 1186. He alludes to sixteenth century confiscation of Catholics’ land, by explaining that the O’Caharneys Anglicised their name ‘dropping their Irish designation, and calling themselves Kearney’, in order to be ‘restored to a part of the lands and the Castle of Kilgobbin’.<sup>32</sup> Lever moves to a reference to the late seventeenth century and the issue of religion:

In later times, again, the Kearneys returned to the old faith of their fathers and followed the fortunes of King James; one of them, Michael O’Kearney, having acted as aide-de-camp at the “Boyne,” and conducted the king to Kilgobbin, where he passed the night after the defeat, and, as the tradition records, held a court the next morning, at which he thanked the owner of the castle for his hospitality, and created him on the spot a viscount by the style and title of Lord Kilgobbin.<sup>33</sup>

An explanation of political and religious conflict follows: ‘It is needless to say that the newly-created noble saw good reason to keep his elevation to himself. They were somewhat

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<sup>30</sup> Lever, *Lord Kilgobbin*, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

critical times just then for the adherents of the lost cause'.<sup>34</sup> A period of 'more peaceful times',<sup>35</sup> brings us up to the contemporary Lord Kilgobbin, Mathew Kearney. Mathew has squandered his inheritance, and continued to live beyond his means until his 'creditors grew pressing, and mortgages threatened foreclosure.'<sup>36</sup> Mathew's listlessness, emblematic of the fading Ascendancy, leaves a vacuum filled by his daughter Kate who shares management of the estate with their land steward, Peter Gill. Gill's power lay in his understanding of how intricately the estate works:

[Kate] saw him dealing with the tenantry on the property; and in the same spirit that he made allowances for sickness here and misfortune there, he would be as prompt to screw up a lagging tenant to the last penny, and secure the landlord in the share of any seasons of prosperity.

Had the Government Commissioner, sent to report on the state of land tenure in Ireland, confined himself to a visit to the estate of Lord Kilgobbin – for so we like to call him – it is just possible that the Cabinet would have found the task of legislation even more difficult than they have already admitted it to be.<sup>37</sup>

In the space of one chapter, Lever has drawn attention to Irish political, religious and cultural historical events over nearly seven centuries, conflating earlier centuries in what Joep Leerssen has called an 'antiquarian' use of historical events:

It presents the past, not in its historical development and its own dynamism, but as an undifferentiated reservoir of 'Old Things'; it collapses the diachronic disparities between [in this case, the twelfth, sixteenth and nineteenth]<sup>38</sup> centuries and merges it all into an undifferentiated 'long ago but not forgotten'. This approach to the past I call *antiquarian* and I oppose it to a *historical* approach, which takes due note of the transitions, changes, disruptions, developments, causalities and filiations which between them differentiate the past into a succession of events.<sup>39</sup>

*Lord Kilgobbin* starts out, temporally, in an antiquarian vein in the first chapter, and becomes historic. Geographically, it begins in the heart of rural Ireland, becomes more cosmopolitan

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<sup>34</sup> Lever, *Lord Kilgobbin*, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>38</sup> My insertion.

<sup>39</sup> Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination*, p. 68.

with the introduction of Nina Kostalergi, and then more urban with the introduction of Dick Kearney's life at Trinity College Dublin.

Both James Murphy and Stephen Haddelsey have raised the issue of Lever's evident sympathy with Fenianism in his depiction of Daniel Donogan. They draw associated but divergent conclusions. Murphy argues that a brief 'alignment between Conservatism and nationalism, as some Tories toyed with the idea of home rule as a better alternative to the unwelcome Liberal interference', explains what he calls Lever's 'partial sympathy for Fenianism'.<sup>40</sup> Haddelsey introduces Lever's stance on the matter in *Lord Kilgobbin* as a contrast to Roy Foster's reference to the émigré's 'cultural insecurity':

With emigrant communities everywhere, the memory of homeland has to be kept in aspic. The perspective over one's shoulder must remain identical to that recorded by a parting glance – even if that moment happened two (or more) generations back, and even if the remembered impression is spectacularly contradicted by the mother country itself as experienced on return visits.<sup>41</sup>

Haddelsey, quite rightly, maintains that 'Lever is an exception to this rule, despite the fact that he spent the second half of his life on the Continent, returning to Ireland only briefly and irregularly.'<sup>42</sup> Lever's cosmopolitan perspective afforded him the ability to operate without the kind of 'restrictive nostalgia',<sup>43</sup> that Foster describes, and to present Irish matters objectively. But then Haddelsey repeats the assumption regarding Lever's politics suggesting that this is why Lever is able 'to portray sympathetically the Fenian Daniel Donogan, the traditional enemy of both his Toryism and Unionism'.<sup>44</sup> As I have argued throughout this thesis, assumptions that Lever held staunch Tory and Unionist views throughout his life are mistaken. It was not simply a matter of his cosmopolitan perspective (although that undoubtedly contributed) because his sympathy with nationalist politics was already evident

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<sup>40</sup> Murphy, *Irish Novelists & the Victorian Age*, p. 89,

<sup>41</sup> R. F. Foster, *Paddy and Mr. Punch: Connections in Irish and English History* (London: Penguin, 1993), p. xiii.

<sup>42</sup> Stephen Haddelsey, *Charles Lever: The Lost Victorian*, (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 2000), p. 22.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

in his writing before he left Ireland. It is high time that Lever's contribution to the nationalist cause is recognised.

### *Lord Kilgobbin* and Famine

Marguerite Corporaal has framed narrative displacement as a template for distancing the impact of suffering, as demonstrated in Lever's use of Mary Martin's letter to her uncle regarding the ravages of Famine. Corporaal has also discussed how writers who left Ireland before the full impact of the crisis unfolded, and therefore 'did not witness Famine horrors themselves',<sup>45</sup> aimed to 'create "prosthetic memory" for future generations' of diasporic Irish.<sup>46</sup> Lever's depictions of Famine in *The Martins of Cro' Martin* drew on his experience working as a doctor during the cholera epidemic that began in 1832, and on second hand information during the course of the Great Famine. Similarly, in *Lord Kilgobbin*, Lever's portrayal of residual vestiges of inept Famine relief, such as roads leading nowhere in the Bog of Allen, was based on second hand information. He arrived in Ireland at the end of April 1871 and left in May. There are no letters covering the duration of this stay in Downey's collection, but Downey does indicate some of the things that transpired during Lever's stay. Trinity College Dublin 'decided to confer upon him the title of Doctor of Laws – the actual bestowal of the title did not take place until July'.<sup>47</sup> Downey continued to describe the social whirl Lever enjoyed but then comments that 'The ramble through the south and west of Ireland was not undertaken. Dublin festivities had weakened the novelist's will.'<sup>48</sup> So Lever could not have actually seen much evidence of the Board of Works' legacy during this trip. He must have drawn upon second hand sources such as newspaper reports,

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<sup>45</sup> Marguerite Corporaal, *Relocated Memories: The Great Famine in Irish and Diaspora Fiction, 1846-1870* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2017), p. 38.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Downey, *Lever: Life in Letters*, II, p. 313.

<sup>48</sup> Downey, *Lever: Life in Letters*, II, p. 313.

letters and fictional treatments of the Great Famine, such as Anthony Trollope's *Castle Richmond* (1860).

Despite Trollope's defence of government relief measures in his *Letters to the Examiner* toward the end of the crisis, he did describe the absurd limitations of 'public works' as a relief measure. Describing one of numerous road building initiatives, Trollope wrote:

at last it got itself decided, again by the hands of the Government, that all hills along the country road should be cut away, and that people should be employed on this work. They were employed, – very little to the advantage of the roads for that or some following years.<sup>49</sup>

Anthony Trollope continued to explain exactly why the 'half-clad, discontented', hungry men struggled with the ill-planned and under-resourced project, making it clear just how much of the impact of the Famine he had understood, irrespective of his earlier silence on the matter. The gangs set to work on such projects were paid on a piece-work basis. As those who were in most need of this kind of relief, were obviously malnourished, the weakest received least for their efforts. Whilst Trollope presented the intention to ensure that people earned their relief as 'wise and good',<sup>50</sup> he made it abundantly clear that the execution of the public works programme was often flawed. Roy Foster phrased deeply misguided Whig adherence to public works in the following terms:

obsessive contemporary theories about keeping private traders in business and only distributing food to the unemployable interfered with the [relief] system's effectiveness.

So, in a sense, did the Board of Works that oversaw everything. Its public works schemes were doggedly adhered to amid conditions whose severity made such expedients irrelevant; the celebrated (and often mythical) piers where no boats could land, walls around nothing, roads to nowhere, are poignant metaphors for a policy that was neither consistent nor effective, but which expressed economic beliefs held by the governing classes in both countries<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Anthony Trollope, *Castle Richmond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 200.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600 – 1972* (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 326.

In *Lord Kilgobbin*, this ‘poignant metaphor’ for ‘beliefs held by governing classes’ takes shape during Cecil Walpole’s journey across the Bog of Allen, while travelling to Kilgobbin Castle. Walpole is the archetypal disdainful English ‘tourist’. His driver takes far longer to negotiate the journey than he should. They come to a dead end in the road and the driver explains:

‘Ye see, your honour,’ added he, in a confidential tone, ‘It’s one of them tricks the English played us in the year of the famine. They got two millions of money to make roads in Ireland, but they were so afraid it would make us prosperous and richer than themselves, that they set about making roads that go nowhere. Sometimes to the top of a mountain, or down to the sea where there was no harbour, and sometimes, like this one, into the heart of a bog.’<sup>52</sup>

Christopher Morash uses Charles Lever’s description of Walpole’s journey through the Bog of Allen to draw attention to Lever’s ‘almost Joycean effort of memory’,<sup>53</sup> when it came to his use of Irish landscape to underpin the dual context of ‘abundance’ and ‘destitution’ in Lever’s post-Famine novels.<sup>54</sup> Morash identifies Walpole’s inability to negotiate his environment once out of his urban ‘milieu’, and his failure to understand Ireland. As Morash observes, the Bog of Allen exposes Walpole’s ineptitude: ‘On his first visit to Kilgobbin Castle, he finds that he must pass through the Bog, whereupon a projected ride of an hour-and-a-half’s duration becomes a rain-soaked five hour odyssey through a labyrinthine maze of roads that double back on themselves and lead nowhere.’<sup>55</sup> The metaphor is worth extending; Walpole is a symbol of the British government’s ineptitude during the Famine and the maze of unfinished roads is also a cypher for indictment of that failure.

‘Knowledge of Ireland’,<sup>56</sup> or lack thereof, is at the root of Lever’s concerns regarding Ireland in his last novel. In the chapter where Lever introduces his two English tourists,

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<sup>52</sup> Lever, *Lord Kilgobbin*, p. 63.

<sup>53</sup> Christopher Morash, ‘Lever’s Post-Famine Landscape’, in *Charles Lever: New Evaluations*, ed. by Tony Bareham (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1991), p. 86.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>56</sup> Lever, *Lord Kilgobbin*, p. 44.

Lockwood and Walpole, who arrive at Moate in the vicinity of Kilgobbin Castle, he delivers an exemplary exercise in explaining Ireland to the exoteric reader, demonstrating perfectly Joep Leerssen's conceptualisation of how 'a paradoxical dissociation of the Irish author from his/her Irish subject matter',<sup>57</sup> renders that subject matter auto-exotic. Lever extends his narrator's focalising position as a tourist, telling us what the tourist book says about Kilgobbin Castle's history, to encompass the English visitors' perceptions of Ireland. Lockwood is a soldier working as the Viceroy's aide-de-camp, and Walpole is working as private secretary for his relative the Lord Lieutenant. Lever wrote that:

they had undertaken a ramble to the Westmeath lakes, not very positive whether their object was to angle for trout or to fish for that "knowledge of Ireland" so popularly sought in our day, and which displays itself so profusely in platform speeches and letters to the *Times*.<sup>58</sup>

Lever's use of the word 'our' interposes itself between Ireland and the reader, identifying the narrator with the exoteric reader and dislocating the Irish subject matter from its 'Irish' writer. Further dislocations and interpositions occur where Walpole ponders: 'This, then,' said the younger man – 'this is the picturesque Ireland our tourist writers tell us of; and the land where the *Times* says the traveller will find more to interest him than in the Tyrol or the Oberland.'<sup>59</sup> Lever is using layers of introduction, travel guides, English tourists and *The Times*, ostensibly taking the Irish voice about Ireland right out of the picture turning it in to the opinion of the *Times*, interpreted by Walpole, and reinforced through the experience he is having of travelling in Ireland. But as Walpole says later in the chapter, 'real knowledge of Ireland is not to be acquired from newspapers; a man must see Ireland for himself - *see it*,' repeated he, with strong emphasis.'<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination*, p. 34.

<sup>58</sup> Lever, *Lord Kilgobbin*, p. 44.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>60</sup> Lever, *Lord Kilgobbin*, p. 50.

## Charles Lever, William Ewart Gladstone and the Church

Seeing, understanding, and explaining Ireland was a significant preoccupation for Lever, especially so in *Lord Kilgobbin*. The novel has several references to William Ewart Gladstone, someone for whom Ireland was also a preoccupation. In 1835, Lever wrote a short piece, with the title 'Political Essay – W. E. Gladstone'. At this stage, Gladstone was a High Tory who had been elected as Member of Parliament for Newark in December 1832. In a somewhat meteoric rise, he was appointed as Junior Lord of the Treasury for Robert Peel's government at the end of 1834, and then appointed Under-Secretary for War and the Colonies in 1835. In that same year Lever wrote this early, unpublished, hand-written essay on Gladstone and remarked:

in other words, why should not the Irish Whigs take a lesson from what has happened [?]<sup>61</sup> with reference to the Whig party. The stampede among the followers of Mr. Gladstone is just remarkable, if it be not as dangerous as that with befel [sic] the [?].<sup>62</sup> The Liberals, like the [?]<sup>63</sup> had been submitted to a new mode of tethering – they have been hobbled [sic] in a fashion which made escape seem impossible'.<sup>64</sup>

This sentence appears to refer to the Lichfield House Compact between the Whigs, Radicals and O'Connell's Irish Repeal Party, an alliance formed in opposition to the Peelites, of whom Gladstone was a member, and who would later merge into the Liberal party. The Conservative government of 1835 was short lived. Although this was relatively early in Gladstone's political career, he was certainly a well-established member of the Conservative party and was at this stage opposed to Liberal values; a position apparently analogous with Lever's as a young man. Yet Lever already seemed concerned about Gladstone, even at this early stage in each man's career.<sup>65</sup> Both men were of a similar age, Gladstone was less than three years younger than Lever. Lever had political aspirations too, so perhaps this explains

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<sup>61</sup> This word is undecipherable.

<sup>62</sup> Two undecipherable words.

<sup>63</sup> This word is undecipherable.

<sup>64</sup> The Huntington Library, San Marino, California. MmsHM 78408, Political Essay – W.E. Gladstone (1835), Charles James Lever Papers.

<sup>65</sup> Lever, 'Political Essay – W. E. Gladstone'.



his interest in the young Gladstone's career. Edmund Downey, however, did not include much of Lever's correspondence for this period of Lever's life in his biography. Neither did he allude to this essay or include any reference from Lever regarding Gladstone in the first volume of *Charles Lever: His Life in Letters*. The first of Lever's references to Gladstone, that Downey published was in a letter dated March 1864. Lever remarked to Dr. Burbidge that 'Even Gladstone, so able in subterfuge, was not equal to the task assigned him of showing Black to be very frequently, but not naturally, White.'<sup>66</sup> Lever poked fun at Gladstone in two of his *O'Dowd Papers* in 1865, and wrote to Blackwood in 1866 saying that he was 'more puzzled than enlightened' at hearing 'that the country will stand at present no Ministry of which Gladstone is not a part'.<sup>67</sup> This letter was written just two days after Lever had complained to Blackwood, 'It is so like the Conservatives! They certainly are more deficient in the skill required to manage a party than any section in the House.'<sup>68</sup> Lever was right. In the 1868 election Gladstone swept to victory with the promise of Irish reform at the forefront the of the Liberal party's agenda. On learning he was to be Prime Minister, Gladstone told Evelyn Ashley that 'My mission is to pacify Ireland.'<sup>69</sup>

Lever had serious misgivings regarding Gladstone's support for disestablishment of the Church of Ireland. In an earlier letter to Blackwood dated 6 February 1867, he had explained:

I don't say Ireland is sound, but she is no sicker than she ever was. As to the Established Church in Ireland, I am convinced that they who urge its destruction are less amicably disposed towards the Catholics than that they hate the Protestants. They always remind me of what Macaulay said of the Puritans, who put down bear-baiting not because it was cruel to the bear, but because it amused the people.

"There are many in Ireland who think that to abolish the Church would at once cut the tie that attaches Ireland to England. I myself think it would weaken it. There

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<sup>66</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, II, p. 11. This was in reference to Lord Palmerston's response to questions regarding the proposed terms of a Conference regarding Denmark during the Second Schleswig War, in the House of Commons on 11 March 1864.

<sup>67</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, II, p. 140.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, p. 139.

<sup>69</sup> Evelyn Ashley, *National Review*, June 1898; see Roy Jenkins, *Gladstone* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p. 180.

was assuredly a time in which, if Protestants could only have been assured their religion would be respected, they would have joined O'Connell in Repeal. Though too loyal and too self-respecting to make outcry upon it, the Protestants in Ireland are far from thinking they are fairly dealt with."<sup>70</sup>

Lever's comment, 'if Protestants could only have been assured their religion would be respected, they would have joined O'Connell in Repeal', is significant. His perception of Gladstone's campaign to 'pacify Ireland' was that it was simply a bid to attract Irish Catholic voters to the Liberal. Lever also ascribed similar motivations to Disraeli:

I hope that the mode in which Gladstone proposes to *endow* Maynooth (while effecting mere compensation) will give the Tories a strong ground of attack. The Bill is a palpable project to buy everyone at the expense of the Irish Church. The landlord, the tenant, the priest, the Presbyterian, even the Consolidated Fund, are to be relieved of their charge for Irish charities; and yet it will pass, if for no other reason that the nation sees one party to be as dishonest as the other, and that if Gladstone were beaten by Dizzy, Dizzy would carry the measure afterwards.<sup>71</sup>

Charles Lever did not admire either party's leader. In a letter to John Blackwood from the British Consulate in Trieste, in December 1867, Lever had written: "Did I tell you that I met Gladstone here? I don't think I ever saw a more consummate actor, - what the French call *poseur*, - with all outward semblance of perfect indifference to display and complete forgetfulness of self. Even Disraeli himself is less artificial."<sup>72</sup> Beyond his concern over disestablishment the Church of Ireland, Lever was also troubled over how Gladstone, who at this stage had no first-hand experience of Ireland approached the Irish Land Question.

## Transformations in Patterns of Irish Landholding

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<sup>70</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, II, pp. 191-2.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 246-7.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, p. 205.

The sixth chapter of *Lord Kilgobbin* opens with an introduction to the hotel where Walpole and Lockwood are to stay on their tour of Ireland. The land agent presides in the Blue Goat hostelry, listening to complaints regarding the ‘grievous wrongs of land-tenure’.<sup>73</sup> Cecil Walpole is researching the ‘Land Question’,<sup>74</sup> and he tells his travelling companion, Lockwood, that a local man ‘gave me a great deal of very valuable information; he exposed some of the evils of tenancy at will as ably as I ever heard them treated, but he was occasionally hard on the landlord.’<sup>75</sup> By the end of the Famine, death and diaspora had devastated Ireland’s population levels and had contributed to a transformation in patterns of landholding. Numbers of those holding the smallest farms (one up to five acres) declined by at least 50% between 1831 and 1851, whilst large farms (over thirty acres) increased from 17% to 26%.<sup>76</sup> Such large farmers prospered during the years of the Famine, whilst many large landlords’ prospects dwindled, as their income from tenants dropped and their outgoings escalated. As Roy Foster notes, the Encumbered Estates Act 1849 ‘epitomised’ the downfall of bankrupt Irish landlords, ‘freeing up landed property from legal encumbrances that prevented its sale’.<sup>77</sup> Land was consolidated, and farms became bigger, the economically enfeebled Ascendancy diminished, and as the historian Alvin Jackson put it, Ireland became ‘a country of middling farmers’.<sup>78</sup> The years of Famine had also exposed the issue of tenant rights. Many Irish landlords had responded to the dual challenge of dwindling rental income and the cost of supporting relief with stringent methods of collecting rent and the threat of evictions. Such evictions highlighted the injustice inherent in lack of compensation for tenants who had made improvements during their tenure.

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<sup>73</sup> Lever, *Lord Kilgobbin*, p. 42.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, p. 50.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, p. 50.

<sup>76</sup> Foster, *Modern Ireland*, pp. 334-5.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, p. 336.

<sup>78</sup> Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 82.

By 1870, the year in which Lever situated the narrative of *Lord Kilgobbin*, Gladstone had won the election on the basis of his plans for Ireland, so he clearly had significant support in England. He brought in disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1869, then pushed for the Land Act of 1870, which introduced measures intended to protect tenants. Ultimately, the levels of compromise necessary to pass this bill weakened its impact and failed to achieve what Gladstone had hoped. The Act comprised the following: ‘The Ulster Custom’, whereby a tenant who maintained rental payments could expect reasonably security of tenure and sell their interest to another tenant subject to the landlord’s approval, became law in instances where it already existed. Where that custom did not exist, tenants became entitled to compensation for any improvements they had made if they were evicted, and to compensation for being evicted for any reason other than non-payment of rent. Provision was also made for tenants to be able to buy land, on condition that the landlord agreed to sell. In November 1869, Lever wrote to Blackwood:

I hear that Gladstone has got a fright about Ireland, and that his Land Bill will be ‘Moderate and even Conservative’ – in fact, he begins to feel that dealing with Ireland means ‘concession,’ and when you’ve given all you have, you’ve to make way for someone else who’ll give something more. Bright is very much disgusted at the moderation of the measure intended, and the Cabinet, I hear, not one-minded.<sup>79</sup>

It seems Lever had some reluctant admiration for Gladstone’s compromise, given that Lever had in fact advocated along similar lines regarding the issue of ‘*great change*’ as opposed to ‘*sudden change*’. Gladstone’s cautious approach actually resonated with Lever’s: ‘We can conform to anything, but we need time to suit ourselves to the task.’<sup>80</sup> Lever was, more than anything, frustrated with how in his view the two political giants of the time Gladstone and Disraeli used Irish interest to bolster their own political ambitions:

I hear from London that Dizzy is hopeful and in good heart, but of what or why I cannot guess. Certainly the country is not Conservatively-minded now, nor could the Tories succeed to power except by repeating the Reform Bill dodge of outbidding the

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<sup>79</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, II, pp. 263-4.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, p. 186.

Whigs and then strengthening the Radical party. That Dizzy is ready for this, and that he would push a Land Bill for Ireland to actual commission, I can easily believe; but are we not all sick of being ‘shuttlecocked’ between two ambitious and jealous rivals?<sup>81</sup>

Whilst Lever may have had a point in terms of Disraeli’s ambition, he did Gladstone something of a disservice. Disraeli was indeed prepared to adopt whatever was expedient to in order to pursue his own ambitions; as Patrick Maume observes, Disraeli subscribed to ‘the belief that politicians should primarily seek power, manoeuvring as circumstances dictate’, whilst Gladstone was considered the ‘embodiment of [...] moralist politics’.<sup>82</sup> Laudable though Gladstone’s intentions for Ireland might have been, having not set foot there until after Lever’s death, he did not and could not know the country as well as Lever felt he did (despite his own absence from the country). Gladstone had read broadly about Ireland’s history but according to at least two of his biographers, he was curiously reluctant to seek advice from those who did know Ireland well.<sup>83</sup> Patrick Maume uses Gladstone’s correspondence with Thomas MacKnight, editor of the Belfast *Northern Whig*, as an example of at least some evidence of Gladstone seeking more contemporary information about Ireland; MacKnight forwarded letters sent to the newspaper by Ulster tenant farmers.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, Lever was not alone, or indeed misguided in thinking that Gladstone did not understand Ireland well enough. Gladstone was also conflicted between wanting to ‘pacify Ireland’ and being ever cautious about protecting the Treasury. Gladstone’s biographer J. L. Hammond maintained that:

Gladstone was saved from this impotent conclusion by his European sense, by his power to see Irish history through a larger window. But though he could see Irish history as an Irishman saw it, he was slow to see Irish problems through Irish eyes. It has been said of Richelieu that if he had the not despotism in the heart, he had it in the brain. Most of Gladstone’s contemporaries, looking at Ireland, had England in their

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<sup>81</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, II, p. 270.

<sup>82</sup> Patrick Maume, ‘Thomas MacKnight, Gladstone and Liberal Unionism’, in *Gladstone and Ireland: Politics, Religion and Nationalist in the Victorian Age*, ed. by D. George Boyce and Alan O’Day, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 164.

<sup>83</sup> Jenkins, *Gladstone*, p. 319.

<sup>84</sup> Maume, ‘Gladstone and Liberal Unionism’, pp. 172-3.

heart, and England in their brain; Gladstone had Ireland in his heart, but he had in his brain a disturbing element of England, and of Treasury England.<sup>85</sup>

Charles Lever explained anxiety amongst struggling landowners in Ireland, regarding the impact of the first Land Act. In *Lord Kilgobbin* Mathew Kearney reads out Tom McKeown's letter:

'Be early,' says he, 'take time by the forelock; get rid of your entail and rid of your land. Don't wait till the Government does both for you, and have to accept whatever condition the law will cumber you with, but be before them! Get your son to join you in docking the entail; petition before the court for a sale, yourself or somebody for you; and wash your hands clean of it all. It's bad property, in a very ticklish country,' says Tom – and he dashes the words- 'bad property in a very ticklish country; and, if you take my advice, you'll get clear of both.' [...] 'There's no time to be lost; for once it gets about how Gladstone's going to deal with land, and what Bright has in his head for eldest sons, you might as well whistle as to try to dispose of that property.'<sup>86</sup>

John Bright's contribution to the act, in terms of government provision of loans for tenants to buy their property, ultimately had little effect; few were able to take advantage of the measure even if their landlords had been willing to sell. The Land Act of 1870 fell woefully short of what was necessary to pacify Ireland.

## Social, Political and Cultural Factors in the Decades Between the Irish Famine and Charles Lever's Death.

To borrow from Roy Foster, the 'traditional view' has it that in the decades between the Irish Famine and Lever's death in 1872, there were two strands of political activity in Ireland, 'constitutional' and 'revolutionary', with 'political initiative oscillating between Young Irelanders and Tenant Leaguers, Fenians and Home Rulers'.<sup>87</sup> Foster sees 'The eventual monolith of organised parliamentary nationalism from the late 1870s [as] not so much as a replacement of this confused picture [but] as a development of it.'<sup>88</sup> It is this confused

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<sup>85</sup> J. L. Hammond, *Gladstone and the Irish Nation* (London: Longmans, 1938), p. 86.

<sup>86</sup> Lever, *Lord Kilgobbin*, p. 113.

<sup>87</sup> Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p. 373.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

development that Lever used to greater effect in *Lord Kilgobbin* than in any of his earlier novels. Individual characters' views and beliefs, political and otherwise, are juxtaposed with each other. Mathew Kearney's apathy, and his nostalgic inertia are contrasted with his daughter Kate's energy and ambitions for the estate:

The contrast between the sufferance under which his Church existed at home and the honours and homage rendered to it abroad, were a fruitful stimulant to that disaffection he felt towards England, and would not unfrequently lead him away to long diatribes about penal laws and the many disabilities which had enslaved Ireland., and reduced himself, the descendant of a princely race, to the condition of a ruined gentleman.

To Kate these complainings were ever distasteful; she had but one philosophy, which was to "bear up well," and when not that, "as well as you could." She saw scores of things around her to be remedied, or, at least, bettered, by a little exertion, and not one of which could be helped by a vain regret. For the loss of that old barbaric splendour and profuse luxury which her father mourned over, she had no regrets. She knew that these wasteful and profligate livers had done nothing for the people either in act or in example; that they were a selfish, worthless, self-indulgent race, caring for nothing but their pleasures, and making all their patriotism consist in a hate towards England.<sup>89</sup>

Kate's philosophy is also juxtaposed with her brother Dick Kearney's. Toward the end of the opening chapter, Lever constructs Kate's character as the ideal landlord who manages the estate to the best of her ability, amid testing circumstances, not the least of which was her brother's continual demands for money:

Nor was this her only care. There was Dick continually dunning her for remittances, and importuning her for means to supply his extravagances. "I suspected how it would be," wrote he once, "with a lady paymaster. And when my father told me I was to look to you for my allowance, I accepted the information as a heavy percentage taken off my beggarly income. What could you – what could any young girl – know the requirements of a man going out into the best society of a capital? To derive any benefit from associating with these people I must at least seem to live like them. I am received as the son of a man of condition and property, and you want to bound my habits by those of my chum, Joe Alee, whose father is starving somewhere on the pay of a Presbyterian minister. Even Joe himself laughs at the notion of gauging my expenses with his."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Lever, *Lord Kilgobbin*, pp. 38-9.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 7-8.

The contrast between Kate and Dick extends to their respective understanding and ignorance regarding resentment among the tenants. Richard Kearney finds Kate asleep at a desk where ledgers show how complex and financially unsustainable management of the estate has become. When she awakes, he reveals to Kate that he had found some of their tenants less ‘cordial than they used to be’. He is perplexed that they ‘quoted the county newspaper twice or thrice when we talked of the land’,<sup>91</sup> and the subsequent exchange is telling:

“I am aware of that, Dick; they have got other counsellors than their landlords now,” said she, mournfully, “and it’s our own fault if they have.”

“What, are you turning nationalist Kitty?” said he, laughing.

“I was always a Nationalist in one sense,” said she, “and mean to continue so; but let us not get upon this theme.”<sup>92</sup>

In respect of political contrasts, Dick Kearney and Joe Atlee are juxtaposed with Daniel Donogan in terms of their motivations. Joe Atlee is ambitious, opportunist, and has a pragmatic approach to political principles. Lever constructs him as someone willing to tailor his work for newspapers of opposing political positions, perhaps inspired by William Carleton’s willingness to do the same in his early career. Dick Kearney’s eventual involvement in politics is not driven by any deep-rooted conviction, certainly when considered in contrast to the Fenian Daniel Donogan’s fierce nationalist integrity. On the journey from Dublin to Kilgobbin Castle, Joe and Dick discuss their views:

Is not your father a Whig?”

“He’s a Liberal, but he troubles himself little about parties.”

“He’s a stout Catholic, though, isn’t he?”

“He is a very devout believer in his Church,” said Dick with the tone of one who did not desire to continue the theme.

“Then why does he stop at Whiggery? why not go in for Nationalism and all the rest of it?”

“And what’s all the rest of it?”

“Great Ireland – no first flower of the earth or gem of the sea humbug – but Ireland great in prosperity, her harbours full of ships, the woollen trade, her ancient staple, revived: all that vast unused water-power, greater than all of the steam of Manchester and Birmingham tenfold, at full work; the linen manufacture developed and

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<sup>91</sup> Lever, *Lord Kilgobbin*, p. 147.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*



promoted -”

“And the Union repealed?”

“Of course; that should be first of all. Not that I object to the Union, as many do, on the grounds of English ignorance as to Ireland. My dislike is, that, for the sake of carrying through certain measures necessary to Irish interests, I must sit and discuss questions which have no possible concern for me, and touch me no more than the debaters in the Cortes, or the Reichskammer at Vienna. What do you or I care for who rules India, or who owns Turkey? What interest of mine is it whether Great Britain has five iron-clads or fifty, or whether the Yankees take Canada, and the Russians Caboul?”

“You’re a Fenian, and I am not.”

“I suppose you’d call yourself an Englishman?”

“I am an English subject, and I owe my allegiance to England.”

“Perhaps for that matter, I owe some too; but I owe a great many things that I don’t distress myself about paying.”<sup>93</sup>

The juxtaposition achieves an objective appraisal of Irish politics for the exoteric reader, encapsulating and achieving a blend of apparently opposing positions. Lever posits nationalism as a natural progression from the reforming Whig position. He gives a pragmatic justification for Repeal of the Union, on the basis of the irrelevance of much of the English Government’s preoccupations in relation to Irish interests, and in the context of a broader picture of European nationalism, and goes as far as explaining Fenianism. It is an indication of how Lever had developed both as a writer and in terms of his own political position, to the extent that he was able to present both a sympathetic picture of the position of Irish landlords without overlooking their valid concerns, alongside sympathetic explanations of Fenianism and arguments for Home Rule.

## Emergence of Gladstonian Liberalism and Arguments for Home Rule

Roy Foster indicates one of the many differences between Ireland and England in the period between the Famine and Lever’s death in 1872:

Collectively and statistically, post-Famine landlords constituted a rich and powerful interest; individually, their economic position left a lot to be desired. Unlike their English counterparts, they did not benefit from mineral deposits or urban growth. Taxation, recurrent charges, debt servicing, family encumbrances, and wages were all

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<sup>93</sup> Lever, *Lord Kilgobbin*, pp. 84-5.

fixed, and vulnerable to fluctuations in rents. ‘An Irish estate is like a sponge,’ wrote Lord Dufferin, having decided to sell up in 1874, ‘and an Irish landlord is never so rich as when he is rid of his property’. Farming conditions from the 1850s benefitted their demesne farms, but benefitted their tenants still more.<sup>94</sup>

Lever drew attention to the difference in terms of mineral deposits between England and Ireland. During Walpole’s journey across the bog his drunken driver, who juxtaposes Ireland’s primeval peat bogs with the basis of England’s industrial economy ‘The English, they say, has no bogs. Nothing but coal.’<sup>95</sup>

The Bog of Allen operates to reveal contrasts and not just between England and Ireland; it is central to the contrast between Cecil Walpole and the Fenian Daniel Donogan. As Christopher Morash has indicated in his assessment of Lever’s use of landscape, ‘For the wealthy, bourgeois Englishman, the Bog is an incomprehensible muddle, full of petty dangers’,<sup>96</sup> yet for Donogan it is a place of safety and a source of invigoration:

“I have had a burst of two hours’ sharp walking over the bog,” cried he; “and it has put me in such spirits as I have not known for many a year. Do you know, Mr. Kearney, that what with the fantastic effects of the morning mists, as they lift themselves over these vast wastes – the glorious patches of blue heather and purple anemone that the sun displays through the fog – and, better than all, the springiness of the soil that sends a thrill to the heart, like a throb of youth itself – there is no walking in the world that can compare with a bog at sunrise! There’s a sentiment to open a paper on nationalities!”<sup>97</sup>

Morash puts it perfectly: ‘It is more than one man’s youth, however, that springs from the soil. Donogan, the embodiment of romantic nationalism, is feeling the youth of an entire nation.’<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p. 377.

<sup>95</sup> Lever, *Lord Kilgobbin*, p. 64.

<sup>96</sup> Morash, ‘Lever’s Post-Famine Landscape’, p. 89.

<sup>97</sup> Lever, *Lord Kilgobbin*, pp. 181-2.

<sup>98</sup> Morash, ‘Lever’s Post-Famine Landscape’, p. 88.

## Birth of the Fenian Movement

Gladstone's speech at Southport in December 1867 announced his intention to support Irish Church reform and Irish land reform. It came in the wake of a spate of Fenian attacks. The Fenian Brotherhood had been established in America in 1856, and the Irish Republican Brotherhood founded in Ireland in 1858, by former Young Irelanders John O'Mahony and James Stephens respectively, who had escaped arrest following the failed rebellion in 1848. Fenianism became a transnational organisation and by 1865 there were estimated to be 80,000 Fenians in the United Kingdom.<sup>99</sup> Lever's treatment of Fenianism in *Lord Kilgobbin* goes far beyond Murphy's suggestion of a 'partial sympathy'.<sup>100</sup> Although as Morash discerns, Lever's association of Donogan with William Smith O'Brien indicates mitigating circumstances,<sup>101</sup> because Smith O'Brien famously ensured that the rebels he commanded maintained respect for the 'rights of property'.<sup>102</sup> Whilst some scholars may find this sympathy incongruous with assumptions of Lever's Tory Unionist leanings, it was evident as far back as *Jack Hinton* and *Tom Burke*. In *Lord Kilgobbin* the nascent nationalist sympathies in those early novels became fully manifested. In March 1870, Lever had written the following to Blackwood; the italics are Lever's:

The Whigs would like to blend up Fenianism and agrarian crime. *Now they are not to be confounded.* The National Party is anti-English, rebel, violent, cruel, anything you like, but the men *who shoot the landlords are not the Fenians!* It is a brief I should like well to plead on, and you will see ere long that there will be many to acknowledge its truth.<sup>103</sup>

There are other elements of nationalist sympathy in *Lord Kilgobbin*. Nina Kostalergi is Mathew Kearney's half-Irish-half-Greek niece, who escapes from her father's unscrupulous influence and finds refuge at Kilgobbin Castle. She rejects romantic prospects with Richard

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<sup>99</sup> Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p. 366.

<sup>100</sup> Murphy, *Irish Novelists & the Victorian Age*, p. 89.

<sup>101</sup> Lever, *Lord Kilgobbin*, p. 180.

<sup>102</sup> Morash, 'Lever's Post-Famine Landscape', p. 89.

<sup>103</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, II, p. 272.

Kearney, with Joe Atlee, and with Cecil Walpole, choosing instead to elope to America with the only male hero of the novel, Daniel Donogan, a Fenian Head-Centre. In *The Irish Novel* (1988) James Cahalan maintained that:

Nina is Lever's romantic projection, the Continental exile returned to Ireland, loved by its people, won over to Irish patriotism, and removed to an idyllic New World. Like Mary Martin, Nina is presented not as a pale heroine but as a forceful, self-sacrificing woman (with *dark* hair in this case); Lever's attention to these two independent-minded female protagonists deserves further study,<sup>104</sup>

In Cahalan's assessment, Nina appears to be something of a sympathetic character 'loved by its people'. She is not quite so straight forward though, and it is not until the development of her relationship with Donogan that she is really presented in a more sympathetic light. There is a fascinating contrast between the two female protagonists in this novel. Whilst Kate has a centrality and is the obvious ideal, Nina is marginalised, morally ambiguous, and forced to live on her wits. Tony Bareham has drawn out an obvious parallel with two of Thackeray's female characters:

Although the Kostalergis had set themselves up as a social centre in the various Italian cities where 'the Prince of Delos' served his government as ambassador, they were, we gather always repudiated by 'Society' which patronised their salon. Nina emerges from this rather shopsoiled [sic] background a tainted character. Despite her charisma and courage, there is always something which seems not quite straight and limpid. Her arrival as a refugee/guest at Kilgobbin castle allows Lever splendid scope to develop these contrasts between Nina and the transparent Kate Kearney. This is a genuinely creative development of the Becky/Amelia relationship in *Vanity Fair*.<sup>105</sup>

During the development of the narrative, Nina is only allowed to be the focus of the attention she attracts from the men with whom she flirts. Ultimately, it is her marginalisation that attracts her to nationalism, and to the other most marginalised character Donogan. She was not so much 'won over to Irish patriotism' as Cahalan would have it, but drawn to it out of necessity and lack of choice. By comparison, Kate's nationalism is intrinsically more

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<sup>104</sup> James M. Cahalan, *The Irish Novel: A Critical History* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co. 1988), p. 70.

<sup>105</sup> Tony Bareham, *Charles Lever: New Evaluations* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1991), pp. 120-1.

considered. As the quote I used earlier establishes, Kate ‘was always a Nationalist in one sense’.<sup>106</sup> Lever’s choice to name his most admirable female protagonist Kate is poignant. Throughout his literary career, Lever’s wife Kate helped edit all his work.<sup>107</sup> She had played an instrumental role in the development of his literary career, and as his biographer Fitzpatrick put it ‘There is a Kate in nearly all his books, and in the later ones a Julia’.<sup>108</sup>

Lever’s last Kate embodied his final example of female nationalist energy, albeit still in the guise of the ‘responsible’ landlord. She represents what Morash has called a ‘middle way between [...] ineffective ideologies’.<sup>109</sup> Lever juxtaposed her with Walpole after his bewildering journey through the Bog of Allen, using Kate’s politics as a humorous foil for Walpole’s consternation. In the chapter entitled ‘The Search for Arms’, Kate teases Walpole following his sycophantic declaration: ‘I wonder what I would not give to be allowed to join the tribe.’<sup>110</sup> Kate responds:

“Shall we put him to the test, Nina?”

“How do you mean?” cried the other.

“Make him take a Ribbon oath, or the pledge of a United Irishman. I’ve copies of both in papa’s study.” [...]

“I trust he does not suppose I would deceive him,” said Kate, gravely. “And when he hears you sing, ‘The blackened hearth – the fallen roof,’ he’ll not question *you* Nina. Do you know that song, Mr. Walpole?”

He smiled as he said “No.”

“Won’t it be so nice,” said she, “to catch a fresh ingenuous Saxon wandering innocently over the Bog of Allen, and send him back to his friends a Fenian!”

“Make me what you please, but don’t send me away.”

“Tell me really, what would you do if we made you take the oath?”

“Betray you, of course, the moment I got up to Dublin.”

Nina’s eyes flashed angrily, as though such jesting was an offence.

“No, no, the shame of such treason would be intolerable; but you’d go your way and behave as though you never saw us.”<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Lever, *Lord Kilgobbin*, p. 147.

<sup>107</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Life of Charles Lever*, I, p. 169.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> Morash, ‘Lever’s Post-Famine Landscape’, p. 89.

<sup>110</sup> Lever, *Lord Kilgobbin*, p. 69.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

Kate's Kearney begins as a central character, striving to fill the vacuum created by her father's indolence and her brother's indifference, and tending to the needs of their tenants. She is responsible for saving Walpole during an attack on the castle. She epitomises rational rather than radical nationalist sympathy, combined with the responsibility of an 'ideal' landlord, yet her efforts are ultimately overwhelmed as she too becomes more marginalised.

There are autobiographical elements to Lever's ability to portray marginalised characters. By the time Lever was writing *Lord Kilgobbin*, he was utterly disillusioned with the government's policies for Ireland. He had lived in Italy through tumultuous times and saw direct parallels with Ireland. The year 1848, saw the Tuscan Revolution and the Young Ireland Revolt. In 1849, the 'Italian War of Independence' took place at the Battle of Novara, where the Austrian forces defeated Sardinian troops. Giuseppe Garibaldi, someone that Lever would come to know well, had become 'General of the Roman Republic' in 1849, and led the Republican Army against the French. As Edmund Downey explained:

During the first fourteen or fifteen years of Lever's residence in Florence, Italy had been in the melting pot. The Tuscan Revolution of 1848, the defeat of the Sardinians, and the abdication of Carlo Alberto in the following year, the earlier struggle of Garibaldi, the long series of troubles with Austria (ending in the defeat of the Austrians), feuds with the Papal States, insurrections in Sicily, the overthrow of the Pope's government, the Neapolitan war, and to crown all, triumphant brigandage, had made things lively for dwellers in Italy. The recognition by the Powers of Victor Emanuel as king of United Italy promised, early in 1862, a period of rest; but the expectations of peace-lovers were shattered, for the moment, by Garibaldi's threatened march upon Rome.<sup>112</sup>

In *Tony Butler* (1865), Lever's protagonist was a young Irish man, working on behalf of British Foreign office on a mission in Naples during the 1860 revolt. Lever's focus on Garibaldi in the novel is another indication of Lever's shift toward a more sympathetic stance on nationalism, and on how he drew parallels between Irish and European nationalism. In *Lord Kilgobbin*, Donogan explains Fenianism to Richard Kearney in yet another example that

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<sup>112</sup> Downey, *Lever: Life in Letters*, II, p. 28.

surpasses Murphy's 'partial sympathy for Fenianism'.<sup>113</sup> The explanation changes Dick's understanding of Fenians, and is intended to do the same for the exoteric reader:

And now, with a clearness and a fairness that astonished Kearney, this strange-looking fellow proceeded to prove how he had weighed the whole difficulty, and saw how, in the nice balance of the two great parties who would contest the seat, the Repealer would step in and steal votes from both. [...] 'But I mistake you and your friends greatly,' said Kearney. 'If these were the tactics you always followed; I thought that you were the physical-force party, who sneered at constitutionalism and only believed in the pike.'

'So we did, so long as we saw O'Connell and the lawyers working the game of that grievance for their own advantage, and teaching the English Government how to rule Ireland by a system of concession to *them* and *their* friends. Now, however, we begin to perceive that to assault that heavy bastion of Saxon intolerance, we must have spies in the enemy's fortress, and for this we send in so many members of the Whig party. There are scores of men who will aid us by their vote who would not risk a bone in our cause. Theirs is a sort of subacute patriotism; but it has its use. It smashes an Established Church, breaks down Protestant ascendancy, destroys the prestige of landed property, and will in time abrogate entail and primogeniture, and many another fine thing. And in this way it clears the ground for our operations, just as soldiers fell trees and level houses lest they interfere with the range of heavy artillery.'<sup>114</sup>

Lever was writing his final novel during the final stage of Italy's unification. His use of political intrigues across Austria, Italy, Crete, Greece, and Turkey alongside political upheaval in Ireland, placed Irish politics firmly within a broader European context. As Richard Haslam has pointed out, this context was 'one which reflected the dismantling of ancient landowning traditions and the emergence of a new and ambitious class eager to gather up and redistribute the fragments.'<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Murphy, *Irish Novelists & the Victorian Age*, p. 89,

<sup>114</sup> Lever, *Lord Kilgobbin*, pp. 171-2.

<sup>115</sup> Richard Haslam, 'Transitional States in Lever', in *Charles Lever: New Evaluations*, ed. by Tony Bareham (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1991), p. 78.

## Conclusion

A. Norman Jeffares referred to *Lord Kilgobbin* as: ‘the novel by which Lever should be judged. It is a despairing picture, of a decaying and discontented Anglo-Irish Ascendancy at the mercy of political unrest, angry terrorism and that English ineptitude, swinging between repression and appeasement, which he could not venerate.’<sup>116</sup> Lever’s progression toward nationalist sympathy and the argument for Home Rule indicates how he had been influenced both by his frustration with the English Government’s failure to understand Ireland, and his own experience of nationalism in Europe. In *Lord Kilgobbin* Lever was able to present all aspects of the Irish Question in a balanced, impartial way.

James Murphy has suggested that Lever’s stay with the Lord Lieutenant during his visit to Ireland researching for *Lord Kilgobbin*, ‘must have been an anathema to Lever,’ because Lord Spencer was appointed by ‘that [Liberal] government, led by Gladstone’.<sup>117</sup> Yet there is nothing discernible in his unpublished letters to his daughter Julia Nevill from Dublin at the time, that suggests this was the case.<sup>118</sup> Furthermore, according to Downey, this stay with Lord Spencer in 1871 was far from being an ‘anathema’:

Lever arrived in Ireland at the end of April. He was in excellent spirits, and apparently in a more even frame of mind than he had been during his previous visit. Again, he found himself in a vortex of dining, whisting, talking, and laughter. Lord Spencer, who was Viceroy of Ireland at this period, made the author of ‘Lord Kilgobbin’ his guest for some days at the Viceregal [sic] Lodge. Lever “charmed and entertained” Lord and Lady Spencer.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> A. N. Jeffares, *Anglo-Irish Literature* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1982), p. 124.

<sup>117</sup> Murphy, *Irish Novelists & the Victorian Age*, p. 89.

<sup>118</sup> The Huntington Library, San Marino, California. MmsHM 78400-78725, Letters to Julia Nevill (1871), Charles James Lever Papers. As a point of minor interest, Lever did not spell his daughter’s married name with an ‘e’, as is indicated in the Downey collection of his novels and letters.

<sup>119</sup> Downey, *Lever: Life in Letters*, II, pp. 311-2.



Gladstone's approach to reform for Ireland might have been interpreted as a challenge to Protestant Ascendancy interests, but he always believed that Ireland's best hopes lay with 'landlords and Protestants',<sup>120</sup> giving us a further indication of how close Lever had come to sharing Gladstonian Liberal values. Lever's dislike of Gladstone was wrapped up in anxiety regarding disestablishment of the Church of Ireland and perhaps a matter of personality, the dour Gladstone may well have been an anathema to Lever's own buoyant character.

General consensus in England on the subject of Ireland also reflected Charles Lever's continued criticisms of irresponsible landlords. Criticism of the social class Lever had certainly once aspired to and identified with, had posed a real difficulty for him. When he rewrote the preface for *The O'Donoghue* in 1872, Lever reflected back on the time he was writing the novel, when he wondered 'were we right in extinguishing the old feudalism that bound the peasant to the landlord, ere we had prepared each for the new relations of mere gain and loss that were in nature to subsist between them?'<sup>121</sup> Whilst he could see that the class he is deemed to have identified with had failed Ireland, there was still, at that stage a lingering hankering for the old order. But this changed during his years in Italy. In August 1864, Lever had written an 'O'Dowd', where he half joked that 'They evidently never hear the remark of the absentee Irish landlord, when he was told that the people had shot his agent. "Strange nation the Irish! What an extraordinary notion to imagine that by shooting my agent they could possibly intimidate *me!*"'<sup>122</sup> Lever continued to move away from Ascendancy Unionism, toward the argument for Irish nationalism, to the extent that he was able to present Donagan in *Lord Kilgobbin*, as a Fenian with genuine integrity and understandable motivations.

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<sup>120</sup> Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p. 396.

<sup>121</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, II, p. 370.

<sup>122</sup> Charles Lever, 'Cornelius O'Dowd Upon Men and Women and Other Things in General', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, August 1864, p. 183.

Lever's disillusionment with the English Government in terms of its alternately coercive and placatory approaches to Ireland suffused *Lord Kilgobbin*. Walpole's travelling companion Lockwood artlessly articulates the vicissitudes of English rule in Ireland:

He saw, besides, that the game of politics was a game of compromises: something was deemed admirable now that had hitherto almost execrable; and that which was utterly impossible to-day, if done last year would have been a triumphant success, and consequently he pronounced the whole thing 'an imposition and a humbug.' 'I can understand a right and a wrong as well as any man,' he would say, 'but I know nothing about things that are neither or both, according to who's in or who's out of the Cabinet. Give me the command of twelve thousand men, let me divide them into three flying columns, and if I don't keep Ireland quiet, draft me into a West Indian regiment, that's all.'<sup>123</sup>

It was exactly this kind of coercive approach endorsed by Lockwood that made the memory of English suppression of Ireland over so many centuries, something so immediate and so relevant, demonstrating in Leerssen's analysis 'that the past, whenever it is contemplated in all its injustice and brutality, inspires fresh generations with renewed rancour and indignation'.<sup>124</sup> Kilgobbin Castle and the Bog of Allen become topographical symbols of that memory of 'injustice and brutality'. Walpole represents the antithesis of Lockwood's coercive measures, attempting to understand Ireland in order to make improvements, but as Leerssen said, 'the improvements of the present are at best but fragile ways of glossing over deep-seated traumas, constantly threatened by the continuing legacy of remembered hostility and violence.'<sup>125</sup>

The castle itself is a relic of that hostility and violence, evoking the memory of such trauma right back to an era before English domination, before Hugh de Lacy, the man "who had won all Ireland for the English from the Shannon to the sea" – had taken this castle from a native chieftain called Neal O'Caharney'.<sup>126</sup> As Christopher Morash observes, the Castle

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<sup>123</sup> Lever, *Lord Kilgobbin*, p. 44.

<sup>124</sup> Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), p. 180.

<sup>125</sup> Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination*, p. 180.

<sup>126</sup> Lever, *Lord Kilgobbin*, p. 2.

was originally built on an area that had formed ‘part of the Bog’,<sup>127</sup> where it sits incongruously, superimposed on the landscape and implying the ‘the economically precarious position of the Castle’. Conversely, ‘On this border-land between fertility and destitution’,<sup>128</sup> the peasants’ hovels seem to emerge from the ancient natural landscape of the Bog of Allen.<sup>129</sup> Using Leerssen’s view that the ‘ineluctable, impassable mid-way point between the English point of view and the ultimate *representandum*, the Real Ireland,’ is obscured because ‘that mid-way point is taken up by the representation itself’,<sup>130</sup> the Bog of Allen takes up both the geographical and metaphorical mid-way point as that representation. It is an incomprehensible maze to the Englishman Walpole, and the place where Hugh de Lacy’s body was buried, feeding the ground from which men like Donogan would pursue a new invigorated Irish nation.

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<sup>127</sup> Lever, *Lord Kilgobbin*, p. 2.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Morash, ‘Lever’s Post-Famine Landscape’, p. 87.

<sup>130</sup> Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination*, p. 37.

## CONCLUSION

Word Count: 7.669

A provenance can be traced from Maria Edgeworth's work, through to that of William Carleton and Charles Lever and their approaches to artistic representations of Irish life. All three worked toward the same objective, that of explaining Ireland, but from differing positions. Maria Edgeworth was the daughter of an enlightened intellectual Protestant Ascendancy landlord, who ensured she had an excellent education, and she wrote about the perspective of her own world of Ascendancy landlords. William Carleton was the son of a Catholic farmer and he wrote about the world he understood, that of the peasantry. If William Carleton and Maria Edgeworth came from backgrounds at opposite ends of the nineteenth-century Irish class structure, then Charles Lever's background was in the middle of that spectrum. He was brought up in Dublin and so, initially, sheltered from the brutal reality of rural Ireland that both Edgeworth and Carleton were more familiar with, until his tenure as a dispensary doctor tending to cholera victims in Portstewart and Kilrush in 1832. Charles Lever's depictions of rural life may have lacked the level of detail and authenticity seen in Carleton and Edgeworth's work, particularly in his pre-Famine novels, but in *St. Patrick's Eve* he did come close to a more authentic depiction of how precariously vulnerable life was for rural peasants in Ireland. His indictment of absenteeism in this novel resonated entirely with Edgeworth and Carleton's artistic concerns. In the Black Prophet 'Condy Dalton Goes to Prison', William Carleton wrote:

Many of our Landlord readers, and all, probably, of our absentee ones, will, in the simplicity of their ignorance regarding the actual state of the lower classes, most likely take it or granted that the picture we are about to draw exists nowhere but in our own imagination. Would to God it were so! Gladly and willingly would we take to ourselves all the shame – acknowledge all the falsehood – pay the highest penalty for all the moral guilt of our misrepresentations, provided only any one acquainted with the country could prove to us that we are wrong, change our nature, or, in other

words, falsify the evidence of our senses, and obliterate our experience of the truths we are describing.<sup>1</sup>

These Irish writers' criticism of absentee landlords shed light on a ruling class that had failed Ireland in the pre-Famine years. The impact of the emerging Famine after 1845 magnified scrutiny of the 'Irish question' further. In *The Black Prophet*, Carleton wrote: 'Alas! Little do our English neighbours know or dream of the horrors which attend a year of severe famine in this unhappy country.'<sup>2</sup> His 'English neighbours' did not want to know about those horrors, or about his opinion of them. On 13<sup>th</sup> March 1847, a reviewer in the *Athenaeum* complained about Carleton's 'prejudice' maintaining that 'is the most grievous aggravation of the calamities of Irish Famine'.<sup>3</sup> Carleton was already struggling financially before the Famine began. In October 1842, he had complained to Sir Robert Peel: 'I have never received for all Lever wrote - eleven volumes - the sum of seven hundred pounds [...] I have now eleven in family to support'.<sup>4</sup> Carleton was hoping that Peel would bestow the deceased John Banim's pension upon him, but Peel refused.<sup>5</sup> An impressive list of petitioners lobbied Lord Clarendon and Lord John Russell, requesting a pension on Carleton's behalf in 1847.<sup>6</sup> It was acknowledged that despite Carleton's genius, he could not support a large family on his meagre literary income at a time when the market for Irish novels was in decline. In 1848, Carleton protested to Charles Gavan Duffy that 'I did calculate on at least one hundred and twenty guineas from the *Black Prophet* – a single pound of which will never come to me.'<sup>7</sup> So when Lord John Russell finally granted him a pension in 1848,<sup>8</sup> it might have seemed fortunate but it also meant he was no longer in a position to openly criticise a government he

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<sup>2</sup> William Carleton, *The Black Prophet* (Poole: Woodstock Books, 1996), p. 256.

<sup>3</sup> Unsigned review, *Athenaeum*, 13 March 1847, pp. 278-9.

<sup>4</sup> See Carleton's letter to Peel in *William Carleton: The Authentic Voice*, ed. by Gordon Brand (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 2006), p. 39.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37-9.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> See Carleton's letter to Charles Gavan Duffey in *Carleton: The Authentic Voice*, p. 47.

<sup>8</sup> See David J. O'Donoghue, *The Life of William Carleton*, II, p.125.

was reliant upon for an income, to the extent he had done. Had Peel agreed to Carleton's original request for a pension, then *The Black Prophet* might never have been written and he certainly could not have revised its preface to express his anger and frustration to the extent he did in February 1847. Although, as I mentioned earlier, Carleton accused Lever of 'writing for an English audience at the expense of the Irish peasantry',<sup>9</sup> in Charles Lever's defence, both Anthony Trollope and William Makepeace Thackeray were also driven by Carleton's 'pounds, shilling and pence' in their early careers and Lever's 'rattling, jolly, joyous, swearing Irishmen' were exactly what the English market wanted to believe about Ireland in the pre-Famine, post Union era.

Between the imposition of the Act of Union in 1801, and the beginning of the Famines in 1845, certain things held true about English perceptions of Ireland and Irish national identity. As Anthony Trollope put it on his arrival in Dublin in 1841, 'I had learned to think that Ireland was a land flowing with fun and whisky, in which irregularity was the rule of life, and where broken heads were looked upon as honourable badges.'<sup>10</sup> Charles Lever's early work obliged those perceptions with humorous, stereotypically clichéd, hard-drinking adventurers. But the Famine changed everything. Before the Famine, Ireland as a subject for novels and travelogues was enormously popular with the English middle-class readership but this fascination would not be sustained as Ireland and English perceptions of Irish national identity became increasingly synonymous with reports of starvation, death and diaspora.

I referred in my first chapter to Tony Bareham's comments regarding how the Famine, its consequences, and Irish rebellion 'must all have made Ireland bad press for the average middle-class Englishman', and his conclusion that 'Not-wanting-to-know-about-

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<sup>9</sup> Lionel Stevenson, *Dr. Quicksilver: The Life of Charles Lever* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1939), p. 141.

<sup>10</sup> Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 62.

Ireland became an understandable vice with English novel readers.<sup>11</sup> With the exception of Maria Edgeworth, all of the writers I have discussed in this thesis were not simply driven by lofty morals, high aesthetics and artistic integrity, they also shared a pressing need to make money. Vulgar as it might sound to point out this base motivation for the likes of such esteemed literary figures, they all had bills to pay and needed as much as anything else to make a living. When William Makepeace Thackeray went to Ireland he was struggling financially and had to honour the contract he had already been paid for to complete *The Irish Sketchbook*. Anthony Trollope's decision to take up a position with the Post Office in Ireland was driven in part by his early money troubles. He continued to rely on the security of that steady income well into his literary career. Trollope was so concerned with commercial success that he meticulously recorded the sums he earned for each novel, and included the information in the final chapter of his *Autobiography* explaining: 'The following is a list of books I have written, with the dates of publication and the sums I have received for them. The dates given are the years in which the works were published as a whole, most of them having appeared in some serial form.'<sup>12</sup> Trollope then presented a table indicating the revenue earned from every single novel right down to the last penny, which over his lifetime amounted to £68,959, 17 shillings and 5 very important pennies.<sup>13</sup>

It is worth repeating part of a quote I used earlier here regarding William Carleton's criticism of 'Mr. Lever, [who] in truth, is literally selling us for pounds, shillings, and pence'.<sup>14</sup> William Carleton was equally guilty of mercenary motivations. He was capable of writing from opposing standpoints according to who was paying him. Carleton wrote virulently against the Catholic Church whilst working for Ceaser Otway at the *Christian*

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<sup>11</sup> Tony Bareham, *Charles Lever: New Evaluations* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1991), p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Trollope, *Autobiography*, pp. 363-4.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> William Carleton, *The Nation*, 7 October 1843, p. 12.

*Examiner*, but sometimes depicted admirable examples of Catholic priests.<sup>15</sup> He adapted the content of his writing according to whatever journal or magazine he was writing for, whether it be the *Nation* or the *Dublin University Magazine*. William Carleton had to produce ideologically flexible work according to who was paying him, he had a large family to support. Charles Lever was often financially pressed, he gambled and was irresponsible with money, so just like his contemporaries, his literary career was also driven by the ever present need to make money.

Charles Lever, William Makepeace Thackeray and Anthony Trollope all wrote about Ireland hoping to make money on the basis of the English market's fascination with the country in the years before the Famine. Both William Makepeace Thackeray and Anthony Trollope experimented with the Irish tale until that level of fascination diminished. Trollope and Thackeray followed the money and left Irish stories behind. Anthony Trollope returned to the subject of Ireland with the publication of *Castle Richmond* (1860). The novel's preface below has an interesting back story:

I wonder whether the novel-reading world – that part of it, at least, which may honour my pages – will be offended if I lay the plot of this story in Ireland! That there is a strong feeling against things Irish it is impossible to deny. Irish servants need not apply; Irish acquaintances are treated with limited confidence; Irish cousins are regarded as being decidedly dangerous; and Irish stories are not popular with the booksellers.<sup>16</sup>

By the time Trollope was writing *Castle Richmond* toward the end of 1859, he had established his reputation as a writer with the first three of his 'Barchester' novels. William Thackeray had teamed up with publishers Smith and Elder as editor for the new *Cornhill Magazine*. They wanted Trollope to contribute to the magazine and offered him £1,000 for a novel in three volumes, but they wanted it ready within six weeks of their offer. Trollope had half-finished *Castle Richmond* and although it was promised to Chapman and Hall, he

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<sup>15</sup> William Carleton, 'The Poor Scholar', in *Traits & Stories of the Irish Peasantry*, 2 vols (Dublin: 1830; repr. Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 2002), II, p. 262.

<sup>16</sup> Anthony Trollope, *Castle Richmond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 1.



secured permission to offer it for *Cornhill Magazine*.<sup>17</sup> In his *Autobiography*, Trollope recalled:

In our dealings together Mr. Edward Chapman always acceded to every suggestion made to him. He never refused a book, and never haggled at a price. Then I hurried into the City, and had my first interview with Mr. George Smith. When he heard that *Castle Richmond* was an Irish story, he begged that I would endeavour to frame some other for his magazine. He was sure that an Irish story would not do for a commencement; - and he suggested the Church, as though it were my peculiar subject. I told him that *Castle Richmond* would have to 'come out' while any other novel that I might write for him would be running in the magazine; - but he expressed himself altogether indifferent. He wanted an English tale, on English life, with a clerical flavour. On these orders I went to work, and framed what I suppose I must call the plot of *Framley Parsonage*.<sup>18</sup>

*Cornhill* was a new magazine, and Ireland was still something of a risky subject if you needed to make money. Anthony Trollope had been advised to abandon Ireland as a setting for his fiction by his publishers. Beyond his *Six Letters to the Examiner*, where he attempted to diminish the truth, Trollope fell relatively silent on the subject of Ireland and the Famine until 1860 and even then, Smith and Elder turned it down. There was no extended period between 1845 and Lever's death in 1872, when Irish politics, rebellion, diaspora and the Papal Aggression were not a subject of contention and often the target of hostility in England.<sup>19</sup> Evidence in Lever's personal correspondence and in his 'O'Dowd' essays, indicates his frustration regarding English attitudes towards Ireland, perhaps this was one of the reasons that Lever continued in his efforts to mediate on behalf of Ireland for an English audience throughout his life.

Ireland had a central role in Trollope, Thackeray and Lever's literary development. Trollope's experience was initially precipitated by difficult circumstances that drove him to take a role with the Post Office in Ireland. It transpired to be a fortuitous move because his

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<sup>17</sup> Trollope, *Autobiography*, pp. 136-41.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 141-2.

<sup>19</sup> Whilst Trollope was able to release *Castle Richmond* in 1860, his reputation had been in the ascendant rather than in decline, and he limited his representation of the Famine to one chapter.

experiences in Ireland gave him an initial fund of stories to tell. Thackeray was sent to Ireland and he took ideas and inspiration for later work from Lever. Referring again to what Morash called Lever's 'Joycean effort of memory',<sup>20</sup> Lever's ability to recapture not just a fund of stories he maintained that his earlier novels drew from, but to express Ireland's landscape with the power that he eventually achieved with *Lord Kilgobbin*, does suggest parallels with Joyce, who like Lever spent more of his life in self-imposed exile from Ireland, than he did in it. A further parallel is the two writers' choice of Trieste as a place to live whilst writing about their Irish homeland. Both were able to maintain and recreate a spiritual and artistic connection with Ireland. There is a discernible continuum through the novels I have addressed in this thesis demonstrating Lever's development as a writer and the value of his unique perspective on exploring Irish subject matter.

In 1872, Charles Lever looked back on his own literary career through the lens of experience. Downey used one of these latter reflections regarding Lever's decision to abandon medicine in favour of a literary career:<sup>21</sup>

He did not put aside the lancet lightly. Shortly before his death, referring to the crisis in his career, he made this avowal: "Having given up the profession, for which I believe I had some aptitude, to follow the precarious life of a writer, I suppose I am admitting only what many others, under like circumstances, might declare – that I have had my moments, and more than mere moments, of doubt and misgiving that I had made the wiser choice; and, bating the intense pleasure an occasional success has afforded, I have been led to think that the career I abandoned would have been more rewarding, more safe from reverses, and less exposed to those variations of public taste which are the terrors of all who live by the world's favour."<sup>22</sup>

This declaration speaks volumes on the financial insecurity Lever experienced, as a consequence of those 'variations in public taste'. In the early nineteenth century, the greatest market for literature about Ireland was in England and 'public taste', was very much in

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<sup>20</sup> Christopher Morash, 'Lever's Post-Famine Landscape', in *Charles Lever: New Evaluations*, ed. by Tony Bareham (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1991), p. 86.

<sup>21</sup> Yet a further comparison with Joyce in term of his leaving medical school in Paris.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Lever, in *Charles Lever: His Life in Letters*, ed. by Edmund Downey, 2 vols (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1906), I, p. 157.

favour of Irish tales of an entertaining and humorous nature. In a letter to Kate Field dated 3 June 1868, Anthony Trollope wrote that ‘your first object must be to charm and not to teach. [...] Your reader should not be made to think that you are trying to teach, or to preach, or to convince. Teach, and preach, and convince if you can; - but first learn the art of doing so without seeming to do it.’<sup>23</sup> This is something Lever failed to do with *St. Patrick’s Eve*, but he achieved it far more successfully with his subsequent novels about Ireland. Both Anthony Trollope and Charles Lever’s experience of writing and publishing novels about Ireland during the Famine brought with it an understanding that Irish subject matter was unlikely to sell hugely on the English market at the time. To recycle an earlier quote from Lever, ‘famine and money distress have cut off all the luxuries – of which books are the easiest to go without, - and so publishers won’t make any contracts till better days arrive.’<sup>24</sup>

The English press acted both as a barometer of, and an influence upon, increasing anti-Irish prejudice during the potato Famine of the mid-nineteenth century. During the earliest stages of the first wave of potato blight in 1845, newspapers were united in their concern and sympathy. Even the *Times*’ correspondent highlighted how vulnerable a lack of industrialisation and investment rendered the rural poor in Ireland, and initially news reports called for government intervention; but this was before anyone could have anticipated how long the crisis would last. Whilst the *Morning Chronicle* and *Illustrated London News* endeavoured to stir the sensibilities of the English readership, *The Times* soon fell back on stereotypes of Irish national identity. Emphasis lay on differences between England and Ireland, with those differences cast as Irish deficiency by comparison with England. The shift from sympathy toward ideas of the potential for Famine as a providential Malthusian catalyst for improving those Irish deficiencies was swift. This hardening of attitudes contributed to

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<sup>23</sup> Anthony Trollope, *The Letters of Anthony Trollope*, ed. by N. John Hall (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), p. 431.

<sup>24</sup> Trollope, *Letters*, p. 236.

the deterioration in how Irishness was represented in newspapers and periodicals. To compound matters, the difficulty of expressing the reality of the catastrophe silenced many. Both Charles Lever and William Carleton's careers suffered over the course of the Famine. Both William Thackeray and Anthony Trollope had the sense to base further novels in English settings as their careers took off.

In defence of Trollope's ambivalence toward Ireland and his apologia for the Government at the time, Trollope described himself as 'an advanced, but conservative Liberal, - which I regard not only as a possible but as a rational and consistent phase of political existence.'<sup>25</sup> Whilst Trollope, in his early life, had felt isolated from and somewhat resentful of systems of authority, he was still inevitably a product of it. The schools he attended were ones where the aristocracy sent their offspring to be formed into future leaders and Members of Parliament. Furthermore, Trollope's career eventually flourished in the Post-Office, which operated on a rigid hierarchical system and he was generally inclined to defend systems of hierarchical authority. He was also a civil servant, so reliant upon the same institution that administered Famine relief for his own income during the calamity. These considerations, his love of Ireland and his conservative liberalism, both governed and explained his conflicted stance regarding Irish matters. He could, at the same time, defend both the Government on the one hand and the Irish pauper on the other.

To his credit, Charles Lever wrote about Ireland throughout the crisis and beyond, and whilst he might have returned to the rollicking formula following the less enthusiastic reception of *The Knight of Gwynne*, he continued to produce increasingly sophisticated analyses of Ireland working toward an argument for repeal of the Union throughout his life.

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<sup>25</sup> Trollope, *Autobiography*, p. 291.

## Future Research

Before setting out the major conclusions for this thesis, it is worth suggesting some opportunities for further critical attention regarding Charles Lever's breadth of work. By comparison with the contemporary writers I have used to situate Charles Lever's work alongside, there is little scholarly criticism on this writer whose contribution to the nineteenth-century Irish nationalist debate deserves rescuing from obscurity. Clearly, given the incongruence between his early success and his subsequent relative neglect in England, there is scope for more focussed work on Lever. There is enormous potential for investigation of the women in Lever's novels from a feminist perspective, and in terms of his portrayal of women embodying nationalist energy. Another interesting area of work would be an assessment of his ballads, especially the street ballads which were understood to be so anti-Government that Lever disguised himself whilst delivering them on the streets of Dublin during his time as a student. Lever's shorter work, *Nuts and Nutcrackers* and his *Cornelius O'Dowd* articles alone would provide ample scope for further investigation. In his introduction to *Charles Lever: New Evaluations*, Tony Bareham observed that 'As he discovered himself more and more Lever seemed of necessity to lose his earlier audience, never quite to replace them with a solid body of fresh admirers.'<sup>26</sup> Other scholars, such as James Murphy have also alluded to a decline in Lever's popularity, explaining it (as I noted earlier) as a response amongst his English readers to 'perceived intractability of Ireland as it faced the persistent and terrible famine of that period.'<sup>27</sup> It would be interesting to carry out further research on this 'decline in popularity', to look at contemporary critical responses to Lever's work and to establish what evidence there really is of the extent of a fall in sales. We know that Lever continued to struggle financially, his letters repeatedly indicate anxiety over

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<sup>26</sup> Bareham, *Lever: New Evaluations*, p. 10.

<sup>27</sup> Murphy, *Irish Novelists & the Victorian Age*, p. 82.

finances throughout his life. He also complained that his later novels did not generate earlier levels of success and that Chapman's hopes that Lever would reap 'large profits' were never realised.<sup>28</sup> Yet Charles Lever did not respond to any perceived dwindling interest in Irish subject matter in England in the grasping way that Carleton's earlier accusations might have suggested, he persisted in writing about Ireland throughout his life.

One of Lever's recurring characters, the disenfranchised young man, offers a rich source for further investigation. This character reappears throughout Lever's work as a cypher for Ireland's lost promise in the aftermath of the pre-Union Grattan parliament. An obvious example, beyond those I have used in this thesis would be John Luttrell in *Luttrell of Arran* (1865). These dispossessed young men articulate Lever's own sense of disappointment in terms of being denied a part to play in Irish politics.

The collection of Lever's papers held at the Huntington Library in California offers a wealth of material and certainly an opportunity to establish what Edmund Downey chose not to include in his account of Lever's life. And this is an interesting point offering a further dimension to the scope for potential investigation in the future. Kate Julia Nevill's involvement with Downey's republication of Charles Lever's work took place at a time when William Butler Yeats and the Irish literary revival were gaining significant momentum during a period of resurgence for Irish nationalism and Gaelic culture. Perhaps Nevill and Downey had hopes of reviving Charles Lever's reputation on the new tide of interest in Irish literature, and in anticipation of the centenary anniversary of the 1798 Rebellion.

In the introduction to this thesis I set out my primary arguments in terms of how Lever's work underwent a number of transitions, the first of which began earlier than has widely been acknowledged, that a tendency to recycle erroneous critical opinions of the writer and his work had contributed to neglect and exclusion from the Irish canon, and that

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<sup>28</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, I, p. 287.

Lever's political position shifted as he matured, away from the Tory Unionist stance that he has so widely been associated with. My deductions lead us to a greater understanding of just how sophisticated and cosmopolitan Lever's political awareness had become since his days in Dublin.

## Charles Lever's Literary Transitions

There is far more to Lever's first two rollicking novels than has traditionally been allowed. The humour and adventures are set against a backdrop of war, descriptions of which drew approbation from the Duke of Wellington who was alleged to have said 'Good! But where did the fellow get that story? 'Tis not in the histories, not in the despatches, nor could anyone know of it unless he was present.'<sup>29</sup> There is also the darker side of rollicking that seeps through from the background trauma of the battles, puncturing the brittle veneer of humour. With the publication of *Jack Hinton* Lever was already making his first transition away from his first two novels, using the young Englishman as an extension of his own efforts to correct exoteric English misperceptions of negative Irish stereotypes. *Tom Burke* offers the promise of what was to come in terms of Lever's historical novels, and indicates just how early Lever was explaining the motivations for Irish nationalism. In this novel he developed the character of the disenfranchised Irish youth, moving away from the light-hearted Webber character toward a far more serious presentation of how marginalisation affected Tom Burke:

There is something dreadfully depressing in the aspect of a large city, to the poor, unfriended youth, who without house or home is starting upon life's journey. The stir, the movement, the onward tide of population, intent on pleasure or business, are things in which he has no part. The appearance of wealth humiliates, while the sight of poverty affrights him; and, while every one is animated by some purpose, he alone seems like a waif thrown on the shores of life, unclaimed, unlooked for. Thus did I feel among that busy crowd who now pressed to the deck, gathering together their luggage, and preparing for departure. Some home awaited each of these – some hearth, some happy faces to greet their coming; but I had none of these. This was a sorrowful thought; and as I brooded over it, my head sank upon my knees, and I saw nothing of what was going forward about me.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> W. J. Fitzpatrick, *The Life of Charles Lever*, 2 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1879), I, p. 135.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Lever, *Tom Burke of Ours*, 2 vols (George Routledge and Sons, 1876), I, pp. 66-7.

The pathos in this desolate sense of dispossession indicates how vulnerable Tom is, and how such levels of disenfranchisement could easily make radical nationalism attractive. Despite his early Tory-Unionist stance, Lever's time at *Dublin University Magazine* gave him an understanding of the nationalist argument that would develop into a sympathy for it.

In his revision of the preface for *Charles O'Malley*, Lever referred to his friend from Trinity College Dublin, Robert Torrens Boyle, as having had the potential to be 'a foremost leader of Fenianism', and who 'would have been a more dangerous enemy to English rule than any of those dealers in the petty larceny of rebellion we have lately seen amongst us.'<sup>31</sup> Webber was a character Lever would develop further in his fourth novel, *Tom Burke*. Lever's *Charles O'Malley* also anticipated his later work, in that he juxtaposed Ireland's socio-political landscape with that of the Peninsular War, setting up, even in one of his earliest novels, a broader European context for Ireland. Lever set out to do the same with *Jack Hinton*. In his revision for the preface of that novel, Lever explained:

I surrounded myself at once with all the histories and memoirs I could find of the Consulate and the Empire; and, so far as I could, withdrew my mind from the questions of home interest, and lived entirely amidst the mighty events that began at Marengo and ended at Waterloo.<sup>32</sup>

But he had to acknowledge that he failed to withdraw his 'mind from the questions of home interest', having been compelled by 'the many instances in which the Englishman would almost of necessity mistake and misjudge my country',<sup>33</sup> to attempt to rectify misperceptions of Ireland.

The disenfranchised young Irishman was developed further with *The O'Donogue* and in the revised preface for this novel, Lever pondered:

What would the descendants of these men [Irish gentry] prove when, destitute of fortune and helpless, they were thrown upon a world that actually regarded them as

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<sup>31</sup> Charles Lever, *Tom Burke of Ours*, 2 vols (George Routledge and Sons, 1876), p. 359.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 361.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*



blameable for the unhappy condition of Ireland? Would they stand by “their order” in so far as to adhere to the cause of the gentry? Or would they share the feelings of the peasant to whose lot they had been reduced, and charging on the Saxons the reverses of their fortune, stand forth as rebels to England?<sup>34</sup>

Lever described his inspiration for *The O'Donoghue*, explaining how ‘good and evil eternally lay side by side’ when it came to ‘national character’.<sup>35</sup> He was attempting to explain, and to an extent, defend Ireland to an English readership that did not understand how or why Irish rebels objected to English rule. Going back to Lever’s inspiration for Frank Webber in *Charles O'Malley*, we can see how the character developed in *The O'Donoghue*. Lever had described his Trinity friend Robert Torrens Boyle ‘a man of the highest order of abilities’ whose potential was ruined by ‘idleness’.<sup>36</sup> Lever’s description of Webber resonates with his creation of Mark O’Donoghue, whose involvement in pre-Union rebellion fulfils the destiny Lever feared for disenfranchised young Irishmen; namely, that the political vacuum in post-Union Ireland would inevitably make further rebellion against English rule attractive to men like Mark O’Donoghue. This reflection on late eighteenth-century Ireland was the first of his systematic treatments of Irish historical events and it was the last he would write on Irish soil. Lever’s literary transition in 1845 is already widely acknowledged but he underwent his own personal ideological transitions too. Had these transitions been appropriately recognised before now, Lever’s work might not have languished amidst relative obscurity for so long.

## Neglect

James Cahalan maintained that ‘in Ireland he [Lever] was condemned from the beginning of his career and has been either belittled or neglected ever since for the same reason that the English loved him: he made fun of Irishmen.’<sup>37</sup> This mistaken assumption has haunted

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<sup>34</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, II, p. 371.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p. 370.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, I, pp. 11-2; II, p. 358.

<sup>37</sup> James M. Cahalan, *The Irish Novel: A Critical History* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co. 1988), p. 65.

Lever's posthumous reputation. Granted, in his first two novels Lever made fun of both English and Irish military characters, of the Irish Ascendancy, certainly some Irish and English snobs, and occasionally a character of the 'Mickey Free' variety. Cahalan also remarked that 'Like Joyce, Lever continued while in exile to write about Ireland, his view of his native country mellowing and his portraits of Irish characters becoming more positive'.<sup>38</sup> Lever's portraits of Irish characters and his view of Ireland were already more positive before he left Ireland. This is evident as early as *Jack Hinton*, and *Tom Burke*, and certainly in *The O'Donoghue* and *St. Patrick's Eve*.

My deduction echoes that of Claire Connolly, whose opinion I used earlier in this thesis. It bears repetition here: 'Less accomplished studies of the Irish novel are marred by similar questions of exclusion, a problem greatly enhanced by the tendency of many critics to recycle judgements that were never in the first place the product of a full engagement with the breadth of writing characteristic of the period.'<sup>39</sup> The paucity of critical treatment of Charles Lever's work over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, owes as much to the recycling of erroneous critical assumptions regarding his political position, and upon the quality of his writing, as it does to Yeats' oversight in the formation of the Irish canon.

Stephen Haddelsey quoted Christopher Morash's comment on Lever and Lover, during a 1994 edition of RTE's *The Arts Show*: 'they were too Irish for an English canon but they were too English for an Irish canon, and, as a result, they fell somewhere into the Irish sea – and that's where they've been floundering ever since.'<sup>40</sup> Neglect of Lever's work also owes much to misperceptions regarding his political position. Whilst he espoused Tory Unionist views as a young man, his time at *Dublin University Magazine* and his subsequent emigration from Ireland in 1845 brought about a broader political perspective for Lever. But

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<sup>38</sup> Cahalan, *The Irish Novel*, p. 67.

<sup>39</sup> Claire Connolly, *A Cultural History of the Irish Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Morash, quoted in Haddelsey, *Lever, Lost Victorian*, p. 25.

focus on his earlier political position has fed in to what Andrew Blake described as Lever being ‘forgotten partly because he is inconvenient.’<sup>41</sup> Blake maintains that ‘much Irish opinion identified him with the Union’, and that ‘Lever did little to upset this view’.<sup>42</sup>

## Politics

Charles Lever certainly appears to have held Tory Unionist views as a young man but just as Gladstone did his views shifted as he matured and as his experience broadened. His harrowing experience during his time at *Dublin University Magazine* working for a Tory magazine, assailed by criticism from all quarters, brought with it the development of a greater understanding of, and eventual sympathy for, the Irish nationalist argument. His last novel, *Lord Kilgobbin* is suffused with Lever’s contempt for both political parties’ failure of Ireland. The twenty-third chapter of the novel opens with a searing and witty criticism of the English Government’s choice of Lord-Lieutenants for Ireland:

When the Government came into office, they were sorely puzzled where to find a Lord-Lieutenant for Ireland. It is, unhappily, a post that the men most fitted for generally refuse, while the Cabinet is besieged by a class of applicants whose highest qualification is a taste for mock-royalty combined with an encumbered estate.

Another great requisite, beside fortune and a certain amount of ability, was at this time looked for. The Premier was about, as the newspapers call it, ‘to inaugurate a new policy,’ and he wanted a man who knew nothing about Ireland! Now, it might be carelessly imagined that here was one of those essentials very easily supplied. Any man frequenting club-life or dining out in town could have safely pledged himself to tell off [sic] a score or two of eligible Viceroys, so far as this qualification went. The Minister, however, wanted more than mere ignorance; he wanted that sort of indifference on which a character for impartiality could so easily be constructed. Not alone a man unacquainted with Ireland, but actually incapable of being influenced by an Irish motive or affected by an Irish view of anything.<sup>43</sup>

The title of the chapter quoted here is ‘A Haphazard Viceroy’, and the novel’s somewhat intellectually challenged English soldier, Lockwood, epitomises an Anglo-centric the kind of

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<sup>41</sup> Andrew Blake, ‘Writing from the Outside In: Charles Lever’, in *Writing Irishness in Nineteenth Century British Culture*, ed. by Neil McCaw (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 116.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>43</sup> Charles Lever, *Lord Kilgobbin*. (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1878), p. 150.

ignorance and indifference to the complexities of Irish politics, that is suggested as the requirement for the above ‘Haphazard Viceroy’. Whilst on their tour of Ireland, Walpole was seeking ‘knowledge of Ireland’, whilst ‘Lockwood, not impossibly, would have said it was “to do a bit of walking” he had come.’<sup>44</sup> As far as Lockwood was concerned, Ireland was too difficult a question to dwell upon:

He was not – few hunting men are – an ardent fisherman; and as for the vexed question of Irish politics, he did not see why he should trouble his head to unravel the puzzles that were too much for Mr. Gladstone; not to say, that he felt to meddle with these matters was like interfering with another man’s department. “I don’t suspect” he would say, “I should fancy John Bright coming down to ‘stables’, and dictating to me how my Irish horses should be shod...”<sup>45</sup>

Charles Lever’s preoccupation with Gladstone had begun far earlier than Downey’s collection of his letters would suggest, as Lever’s 1835 ‘Political Essay’ on Gladstone indicates. Lever was not yet thirty years old, when he wrote this essay. Gladstone was in his mid-twenties, but he was already making enough of a name for himself in the Tory party for Lever to take notice. Although, as his editors and biographers have complained, Lever’s handwriting is often indecipherable, the tone of what can be made out indicates absolute frustration with the Whig party, and his early dislike of Gladstone, even when both men held Tory views.

Gladstone was a junior member of Peel’s Conservative government in 1835, he became a Liberal Conservative with Peel in 1846, joined the Liberal Party in 1859, took leadership of the party in 1867, and became Prime Minister in 1868. By the end of his life, Lever’s political stance on Ireland resonated very much with the conclusions Gladstone had drawn on the matter of Repeal of the Union, yet Lever’s opinion of Gladstone remained derisive. Gladstone’s rather dour personality was so different from his own, that Lever was

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<sup>44</sup> Lever, *Lord Kilgobbin*, p. 44.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

never going to admire somebody who took himself as seriously as Gladstone did. What is more, Gladstone's view the Irish Ascendancy was not congruent with Lever's broader experience and understanding of Ireland. As Roy Foster noted: 'The identity of the Irish landlord class was fortified by contemporary criticism from the kill-joy English establishment, especially pious young Whigs, who saw the Irish gentry as hopeless, feckless Bourbons.'<sup>46</sup> If Lever and Gladstone's views on the Irish landlord class were not congruent, their conclusions were, if arrived at from divergent starting points, certainly congruent on the matter of the Union between England and Ireland. In March 1870, Charles Lever wrote the following to John Blackwood:

"I send you the tailpiece to the O'D. Heaven grant that the Saxon intelligence, for which I daily feel less veneration, should not suspect me of being a Fenian in disguise, though if it should get me dismissed from my consulate and turned out into the streets, I'd almost cry hurrah! for, after all, picking oakum could scarcely be worse than cudgelling my brains for what, after all the manipulation, can't be got out of them."<sup>47</sup>

Lever's biographer Fitzpatrick noted Lever's shift from young Unionist to mature Repealer.

Fitzpatrick maintained that:

'Though Lever opposed O'Connell, and while discharging editorial duties, [at *Dublin University Magazine* between 1842 and 1845] waged war against Repeal, his latest political utterances favoured Home Rule. An "O'Dowd Paper" was rejected by *Blackwood* on these grounds, and the Proofs of it, presented by Lever himself, are now in the hands of the Rev. Joseph Galbraith'.<sup>48</sup>

As I have argued, there was evidence in Lever's work during his time in Dublin of a growing understanding of the Irish nationalist argument. His position by the time he was writing the 'O'Dowd' essays in 1864, indicated a far greater understanding of the argument for Home Rule, and this understanding from a more cosmopolitan perspective continued to develop. This more mature European perspective was something Edmund Downey now doubt

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<sup>46</sup> Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600 – 1972* (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 378.

<sup>47</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, II, p. 274.

<sup>48</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Life of Lever*, II, p. 128.

appreciated. In the year that Downey's collection of Lever's letters was published, Downey returned to Ireland as editor of the *Waterford News*, a publication that supported Sinn Fein, so Downey's political sympathies were clearly of the nationalist variety.

If Charles Lever's earliest novels initially perpetuated English prejudices, it was more a matter of producing material he could make much needed money from, without any real thought or effort whilst writing for a Tory Unionist magazine, than of any malice. His novels were becoming more thoughtful as early as *Jack Hinton* and *Tom Burke*. In *The O'Donoghue* and *St Patrick's Eve* Lever attempted to rectify English misperceptions and in doing so revealed an understanding of the nationalist cause, that he would have had to at least diminish or deny whilst still contributing to *Dublin University Magazine*. In a chapter entitled 'The national tale and allied genres, 1770s-1840', Miranda Burgess suggests that 'the national tale did not remain a genre of anti-colonial protest or small-national self-assertion. In Ireland, [...] it faded into the gentler regional novels of a Lever or a Griffin'.<sup>49</sup> Yet Charles Lever's post-Famine Irish novels were anything but gentle. His historical novels address oppression, failed responsibility and the reasons behind Irish rebellion, suggesting that Lever was working toward an argument for Irish nationalism, all at a time when Famine, diaspora, reinstatement of the Catholic Hierarchy and the ferocity of Irish nationalist resistance to English government, cumulatively rendered the subject of Ireland less attractive to the English middle-class readers. Lever may have misread his audience, been unaware of the intensity and virulence of anti-Catholic, anti-Irish discourse in England, or perhaps in spite of each of these considerations, he simply stubbornly refused to pander to the audience he had formerly sought to please. I would suggest that Lever's own abandonment of Ireland had something to do with his motivation. Lever was still intent upon contributing to the political debate just as

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<sup>49</sup> Miranda Burgess, 'Miranda Burgess, 'The National Tale and Allied Genres, 1770s – 1840s' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel*, ed. by John Wilson Foster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.51.

Edgeworth had done at the beginning of the Union between England and Ireland. Like Edgeworth, Lever had in the two final novels he wrote on Irish soil, pointed to the failure of the irresponsible and absentee contingents of the Protestant Ascendancy.

When Lever left Ireland, the country was already in a state of political instability and then the years of Famine hit. Were the imputations that his detractors had made in Dublin, regarding his betrayal of Ireland, and about which he was acutely sensitive, still resonating with Lever during what he described as ‘famine and money distress’ and ‘poverty and famine’? Surely this must have been at least part of his motivation to continue writing about Ireland, but it was also a matter of having been denied an active part in political life. He sought to make his contribution to the political debate on the condition of Ireland, in the only way open to him, through his novels. Charles Lever’s work offers insight into the ‘beginning of the end’ of Unionism. His early novels, his enduring dislike of O’Connell, and his distaste for ‘Rabble Rule’, may have earned him an unfair reputation but closer scrutiny of his work suggests that any aspirations to identify with the Ascendancy did not diminish the ‘nationalist’ tone of the novels he wrote in exile. It was exactly this self-imposed exile that influenced his own development of that increasingly nationalist tone in his Irish novels.

Lever’s position as an Irish émigré also gave him an objectivity that gave a dynamically fresh perspective to his Irish novels, as Haddelsey puts it:

His own unusual position of ‘outsiderness’ enabled him to survey the developments in Ireland with a critical objectivity perhaps lacking in other contemporary accounts. One of the attractions of popular literature may be its capacity to confirm us in our own view of the world; it offers a tantalising aestheticization of the normal. If this is the case, the objectivity born of Lever’s geographical separation, which enabled him to offer fresh and dynamic views of Irish affairs, may have been responsible in part for an exclusion from the affections of a reading public which preferred to have its prejudices flattered.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Stephen Haddelsey, *Charles Lever: The Lost Victorian* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 2000), p. 23.

Charles Lever spent more than half his life living outside Ireland, and it was Lever's cosmopolitan experience, amidst the broader European landscape of nationalist energy that gave his later literary depictions of Irish nationalist aspirations a context beyond its fraught relationship with England. Charles Lever was far more cosmopolitan than other contemporary writers, and he came to see Ireland's struggle for repeal of the Union in that broader context. His unique consular position meant that he was intimately involved in momentous international relations. He was present at Emperor Maximilian of Mexico's funeral in Vienna, and wrote to Blackwood in two successive letters the first on 16 January 1868: 'I have just returned from attending the ex-Emperor's funeral, - four mortal hours in a uniform on a mule, with a fierce north-easter [sic] and a High Mass!'<sup>51</sup> Then on 28 January he wrote: 'Did you read in 'The Times' - an extract from 'The Globe' - an account of Maximilian's funeral? It was written by my youngest daughter'.<sup>52</sup> Maximilian was the younger brother of the Austrian Emperor, and Lever was working in Trieste which was part of the Austrian Empire in these latter years. Lever saw both the beginning of the Austrian Empire's disintegration, and the unification of Italy. Lever did not just have a cosmopolitan perspective on Irish politics, he was working amidst seismic European political changes, with international leaders and heads of state; all of which fed in to and enriched his more nationalist novels. Lever's exclusion from the Irish canon has obscured a fascinating and unique perspective, whereby Lever sought to release literary representations of Ireland from the traditional, tense and ultimately limiting opposition between England and Ireland, and set Ireland and the Irish nationalist cause against the broader picture of European politics and nationalism.

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<sup>51</sup> Lever, in Downey, *Life in Letters*, II, p. 210.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, p. 211.



I am going to leave the last word to Anthony Trollope, the writer whose autobiographical comments led to my discovery of Charles Lever's work:

Of 'Billy Russell', as we always called him, I may say that I never knew but one man equal to him in the quickness and continuance of witty speech. That one man was Charles Lever – also an Irishman – whom I had known from an earlier date, and also with a close intimacy. Of the two, I think that Lever was perhaps the more astounding producer of good things.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Trollope, *Autobiography*, p. 152.

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<sup>1</sup> This is an error on the part of the Huntington Library, it should read 1870.

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