

**Erin's 'Revolting Daughters' and Britannia:
The Fiction of Diasporic Irish Women in
Britain,
1890-1916**

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Abstract

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This thesis focuses on the novels written and published by expatriate Irish women resident in Britain between the years 1890 and 1916, concentrating particularly on the ways in which their texts engaged in the dialogue and participated in the debates surrounding events of import to the political relationship between Britain and Ireland from the downfall of Charles Stewart Parnell to the Easter Rising. The poet William Butler Yeats defined this era as the 'long gestation' of Ireland's violent struggle towards independence from Britain, and it is to the works of Yeats and his Revivalist cohort that critical attention has overwhelmingly turned in assessments of the role that Irish literature played in the politics of the period. The practice of privileging Revivalist texts has tended to occlude the contribution of Irish writers whose work was extrinsic to that movement, and has most notably obfuscated the participation of novels written by Irish women. This study seeks to redress the imbalance of scholarly work by taking into account the critically neglected texts of a group of Irish women writers who were living and working in Britain during the period, and were thus placed in the complex cultural locus between 'Irish' and 'English'. The work of six authors — Emily Lawless, L. T. Meade, George Egerton, Katherine Cecil Thurston, M. E. Francis and Katharine Tynan — who were producing and publishing texts from just such a cultural location is the focus of this study. Between them, these writers generated nearly 500 novels, almost all of which are now out of print and few of which have received sustained scholarly attention. By excavating biographical details for each of these authors and examining a selection of their works in their relevant historical contexts, this study assesses the extent to which novels written by six Irish migrant women from varying class-based and religious backgrounds communicate the experience of living in-between two cultures and at the centre of the prevailing political and social debates of the era.

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Introduction

"M. E. Francis," otherwise Mrs. Francis Blundell, is like so many of the younger writers of to-day, Irish.' — Sir William Robertson Nicoll, 'New Writers', *The Bookman* (1894)¹

'Mrs. Thurston, the author of *The Circle*, the novel which has been so much talked about, is one of the numerous young Irishwomen who have made a name for themselves in the literary world.' — 'A Rising Novelist', *The Tatler* (1903)²

'I think it is pretty generally recognised to-day that one of the most effective, if not quite the most effective, vehicles for conveying ideas to the general public is the novel. Few, at all events, will deny that it may be a most powerful means of propaganda.' — Stephen J. Brown, 'Novels of the National Idea', *The Irish Monthly* (1920)³

Three decades into the twentieth century, the ardent Irish nationalist Daniel Corkery produced a list of those writers among his compatriots who had chosen to live and work outside of Ireland. In expounding on what he identified as a peculiarly Irish tendency, Corkery suggested that the exodus of literary talent from his homeland was nearly absolute. Most of Ireland's actively professional writers were at that time living elsewhere, he asserted, and those few who remained in the country tended to be either less committed to the pursuit of writing, or more amateurish in stature. 'It is to be noted that whereas most of those expatriate writers live by the pen,' Corkery wrote, 'there are hardly more than one or two of the home-staying writers who do so, so that in a way we have no home-staying *writers* at all'.⁴ In offering as evidence of his contentions a list of literary exiles that included James Joyce, Austin Clarke, Sean O'Casey, Liam O'Flaherty, George Moore and George Bernard Shaw, Corkery made a compelling argument that there was indeed an ongoing and troubling haemorrhage of native literary talent from Ireland.

¹ Sir William Robertson Nicoll, 'New Writers', *The Bookman*, vol. 6, no. 35 (August 1894), p. 138.

² Clipping 'A Rising Novelist', *The Tatler* (18 February 1903), n. p., Katherine Cecil Thurston Papers, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 11378, Box 9.

³ Stephen J. Brown, 'Novels of the National Idea', *The Irish Monthly*, vol. 48, no. 563 (May 1920), p. 254.

⁴ Daniel Corkery, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1931), p. 4.

This proclivity was not in any regard new, however. It had been in evidence for decades by the time of Corkery's writing and was attributable to the fact that the Irish literati had been disillusioned with the 'depressed state of the Irish publishing industry [since] the nineteenth century'.⁵ The preferred site of relocation for Irish authors was very often the nearest point of expatriation: Britain. The magnetic attraction that London in particular held for Irish writers is exemplified in the letters and diaries of the Irish poet and novelist Katharine Tynan, who, when embarking on a visit to the English capital in 1884, wrote to her mentor Father Matthew Russell, the editor of the Jesuit-owned periodical *The Irish Monthly*, to request a letter of introduction into a literary household: 'You will understand that I am very anxious to make some literary friends,' Tynan confessed. 'To get into a London literary circle is my earthly ambition'.⁶ By the end of that same year, Tynan had become characteristically dismissive about Dublin and the prospects for publishing there: 'I should not go to [the Dublin publishing house M. H. Gill & Son] unless as a dernier resort,' she commented to Russell when considering options for the publication of her first volume of poetry:

You must not think me presumptuous when I say that publishing in Dublin would not please me very much. I have always thought that to publish there is almost to ensure that the book shall be still born. Tell me anyone whose book published by Gill has had a vogue outside Ireland, and I am ambitious enough to wish for a larger audience than the Ireland of *to-day*.⁷

As a middle-class Catholic and the daughter of a farmer, Tynan may have come from a more modest background than did her contemporaries William Butler Yeats and George

⁵ Rolf Loeber and Magda Stouthamer-Loeber, 'Literary Absentees: Irish Women Authors in Nineteenth-Century England', in Jacqueline Belanger (ed.), *The Irish Novel in the Nineteenth Century* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), p. 169.

⁶ Letter from Katharine Tynan to Father Matthew Russell (24 January 1884), papers of Father Matthew Russell, Jesuit Archive, Dublin, Folder J27/73. Hereafter cited as 'Russell Papers'.

⁷ Letter from Katharine Tynan to Father Matthew Russell (8 December 1884), Russell Papers, J27/73.

Moore, yet she viewed late nineteenth-century Dublin in much the same manner as they did: as a literary backwater.

The exodus Corkery referred to may have been longstanding and had its viable reasons for existing, yet there is an element of his list of exiles which remains unexplained: its gendered one-sidedness. His is a roll call which strongly indicates that the tradition of leaving Ireland for the sake of literary endeavour was a peculiarly masculine phenomenon. Expanding Corkery's list still further to incorporate other prominent exemplars of the practice such as Thomas Moore, Oscar Wilde and Samuel Beckett, it becomes overwhelmingly apparent that, in popular conception, Ireland's literary exiles are predominantly or even exclusively male. If it was indeed the case that it was solely men who were leaving the country to forge their writing careers, however, the literary exodus would have been distinctly at odds with the prevailing gendered divide in Irish emigration. Between 1891 and 1921, more than half — approximately 53% — of emigrants from Ireland were female.⁸ Where Britain was the intended destination, Irish women not only outnumbered their male counterparts but were more numerous than any other ethnic group. Over the course of the entire 150-year period between 1850 and the turn of the twenty-first century, it was in fact Irish females who continually constituted 'the largest migrant group to come to Britain'.⁹ These figures are commensurate both with Irish literacy rates, which climbed from 53% in 1851 to 88% in 1911, and with a sharp decline in marriage rates in Ireland over the same period, indicating that, lacking viable or advantageous marital prospects, women were leaving Ireland in pursuit of the jobs they required, and were better

⁸ Pauline Jackson, 'Women in Nineteenth-Century Irish Emigration', *International Migration Review*, vol. 18, no. 4 (Winter 1984), p. 1007.

⁹ Mary J. Hickman and Bronwen Walter, 'Deconstructing Whiteness: Irish Women in Britain', *Feminist Review*, no. 50 (Summer 1995), p. 6.

equipped than ever before to enter the professions rather than follow the traditional routes of mill work or domestic service.

Katharine Tynan's name may at first appear to be a gendered anomaly among the larger list of literary exiles, but, in actuality, she was far from atypical. Just as wider trends saw women emigrating from Ireland in greater numbers than men in the decades that surrounded the turn of the twentieth century, the same statistics appear to have applied to the gendered divide among literary exiles. While actual figures are difficult to ascertain, the 1890s marked a significant point of entry for Irish women onto the British publishing scene, and the proliferation of these authors did not escape the notice of contemporary commentators. Sir William Robertson Nicoll, editor of the magazine *The Bookman*, and thus one of those best placed to comment on publishing trends, noted in 1894, for instance, that the Laois-born author M. E. Francis (Mary Sweetman Blundell) was, 'like so many of the younger writers of to-day, Irish'. Nearly a decade later, *The Tatler* suggested that the trend continued to hold true: about Katherine Cecil Thurston, a Cork native, a reviewer commented that she was 'one of the numerous young Irishwomen who have made a name for themselves in the literary world'. Evidencing the inclination for emigration to Britain among female authors in his 1916 bibliography of Irish fiction, Stephen J. Brown managed to place more than a dozen Irish women novelists in England at the turn of the century alongside an only marginally greater number of male writers in similar circumstances, and this despite the relative scarcity of biographical details for female writers in the volume.¹⁰ More recently, in a brief review of Irish women whose literary careers were forged in Britain during the nineteenth century, Rolf Loeber and Magda Stouthamer-Loeber name nearly thirty prominent Irish women who were both domiciled and publishing novels in

¹⁰ See Stephen J. Brown, *Ireland in Fiction: A Guide to Irish Novels, Tales, Romances and Folk-Lore* (Dublin and London: Maunsell, 1916).

England during the 1800s, with a marked increase in their numbers discernable towards the close of the century.¹¹

Nearly twenty years ago, the historians Margaret MacCurtain, Mary O'Dowd and Maria Luddy created 'An Agenda for Women's History in Ireland', in which they asserted that the 'whole idea of female literacy leads one to investigate the contribution made by women to literature and culture in the [nineteenth] century'. Drawing attention to the fact that studies to that point had overwhelmingly favoured the work of just three Irish women writers — Lady Morgan, Maria Edgeworth and Lady Gregory — MacCurtain, O'Dowd and Luddy noted that the work on female authors from Ireland had fallen well short of comprehensive; that there were, in fact, 'many other women who also made an impact on the Irish literary scene'.¹² The scarcity of women writers in the Irish literary canon was the instigation for the controversial fourth and fifth volumes of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, published in 2002. These two most recent volumes of *The Field Day Anthology* remain divisive in part because so little scholarly attention has been paid to a number of the writers whose work is featured therein that their inclusion has yet to be fully justified. Despite sporadic yet concerted efforts to reclaim the reputations and reassert the importance of Irish women's literary texts, relatively few in-depth studies of nineteenth-century Irish women's writing have been published, particularly when viewed in comparison to the extensive reclamation efforts that have been made on behalf of the works of American and British women of the same era. James H. Murphy's *Catholic Fiction and Social Reality in Ireland, 1873-1922* (1997) and *Irish Novelists and the Victorian Age* (2011), Lisbet Kickham's *Protestant Women Novelists and Irish Society 1879-1922* (2004) and John Wilson Foster's *Irish Novels 1890-1940: New Bearings in*

¹¹ See Loeber and Loeber, 'Literary Absentees', pp. 167-186.

¹² Margaret MacCurtain et al, 'An Agenda for Women's History in Ireland, 1500-1900', *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 28, no. 109 (May 1992), pp. 35-36.

Culture and Fiction (2008) all include a number of works by previously neglected women novelists and have provided useful surveys of the texts with which their studies are concerned, but the extensive scopes of each of these projects have meant that detail has necessarily been limited. Loeber and Loeber's directive for more meticulous research to be undertaken on nineteenth-century Irish women writers who lived and worked in England appeared in 2005. Since then, Heidi Hansson's *Emily Lawless 1845-1913: Writing the Interspace* (2007), which explores Lawless's works within a specific theoretical framework unrelated to and largely unconcerned with her status as an exile, remains the sole full-length text to have been produced on an Irish female writer of the nineteenth century who lived and worked in Britain. This critical neglect is almost certainly due to the difficulty that presents itself in accessing texts by, and compiling biographies for, writers whose works and lives have long lain dormant.

It is precisely the aim of this study to answer the calls for research by scholars such as the Loebers, MacCurtain, O'Dowd and Luddy, and to fill, at least in part, the critical gaps to which the debates surrounding the fourth and fifth volumes of *The Field Day Anthology* allude. This study focuses on Irish women writers who were living and working in Britain during the period 1890 to 1916, the closing years of Ireland's long nineteenth century. The project undertaken herein is threefold. Loeber and Loeber have noted that the 'relative obscurity of Irish women authors in England is partly due to insufficient historical excavation of their lives', and thus a significant part of the task has been to uncover as much biographical detail on these authors as possible.¹³ Secondly, the work here has been limited to the study of novels for the simple reason that the novel was by far the most popular format for literature at the turn of the twentieth century, and it has been the intention throughout the course of the research to access as many of the texts which fall

¹³ Loeber and Loeber, 'Literary Absentees', p. 168.

under its remit as possible. Those novels written about Ireland and the Irish have, however, been prioritized, with a view to understanding how the country, its people and, most importantly, its politics are portrayed by the native female writer viewing her homeland from a distance. Thirdly, it has been the focus of this project to place each of the works in its relevant historical context, using both archival and published information to locate the texts as closely as possible to the personal and public circumstances of the respective authors.

The scope of the project, and the sheer number of writers and novels which fall under its remit, has meant that it has necessarily taken the form of the representative, rather than the all-encompassing. It is intended not as an addition to the survey-type work which has preceded it, but as a detailed study of the lives of, and novels written by, a sample group of authors from various familial, political, religious and class-based backgrounds. In the pursuit of accuracy, it has been limited to those writers who could be placed, without doubt, in Ireland through most of their formative years and in England for the majority of the period between 1890 and 1916, at which time they must also have been publishing texts. Due to the established parameters of the study, it has necessarily been confined to writers for whom a substantial amount of biographical detail could be located. The act of placing these limiters on the research has meant the exclusion of authors whose work would otherwise have fallen under its scope, and for whom much time and effort was spent in attempting to locate biographical information, including, most notably, B. M. Croker (Bithia Mary Sheppard Croker) and Ella MacMahon. In some cases, an author has been chosen as the preeminent Irish example of a category or genre of authors — for instance, the New Woman writer George Egerton (Mary Chavelita Dunne) over other Irish exponents such as Sarah Grand (Francis Elizabeth Clarke McFall) and 'Iota' (Kathleen Mannington Caffyn). Despite the appeal of Grand's texts, she was deemed less

representative than Egerton due to the fact that she spent only the first seven years of her life in Ireland, was not of Irish parentage and does not appear to have considered herself to be Irish; Iota was set aside in favour of Egerton because her most influential text, *A Yellow Aster* (1894), was written during the period she was resident in Australia.

What remains is a cross-section of six high profile Irish writers who lived and worked in England through all or the greater portion of the period 1890 to 1916: Emily Lawless, George Egerton, Katherine Cecil Thurston, L. T. Meade (Elizabeth Thomasina Meade Toulmin Smith), M. E. Francis and Katharine Tynan. This list includes three Catholics, two Protestants and one writer born of mixed Protestant and Catholic parentage. There are three middle class women in the group, two from the landed class, and one whose family's upper middle class status was in rapid decline during the years of her upbringing. Taken together, they represent some of the most popular, prolific and critically-acclaimed authors of the period. Lawless was the daughter of Lord Cloncurry of Lyons House, Kildare, whose Irish novels sparked political debate and were read and discussed by, among many others, the Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone; Egerton, who was raised primarily in and around Dublin, was the author of a number of experimental, proto-feminist texts which earned her both notoriety and a place among the Decadents and New Woman writers of the *fin de siècle*; Thurston, from Cork, produced novels which enjoyed worldwide popularity on a scale which dwarfed the success of other Irish writers of the era; L. T. Meade, another County Cork native, was a literary innovator who wrote more than 250 novels and remained among the most admired authors of girls' fiction for decades; Francis, of County Laois, was one of the most well-respected Catholic writers of her day whose novels gained the admiration of both the reading public and literary critics; and Tynan, from Clondalkin in County Dublin, who managed to produce more than 100 novels alongside her copious journalistic work and numerous volumes of

poetry, memoir and short stories, was a co-founder of the Irish Literary Revival. Between them, this group of women wrote almost 500 novels. By the middle of the twentieth century, their works, almost without exception, had been forgotten.

The feminist critic Elaine Showalter referred to the similarly extensive and inexplicable abandonment of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century women's texts when she began her research into British women's writing in 1965. At that point, Showalter would note, 'Virginia Woolf's letters and diaries were scattered and unpublished. [...] No one edited women's studies journals, or compiled bibliographies of women's writing'.¹⁴ By the 1970s, this critical neglect was being overturned and the process of resurrecting the reputations of unjustly neglected American and British women writers set in motion by the new feminist critics. Among those that Showalter herself singled out for comment and commendation was George Egerton, who subsequently became the subject of various scholarly studies in which she was only very rarely identified as an Irish writer. Egerton's case is indicative of a practice that has been exercised repeatedly in relation to Irish women writers whose careers were forged in England. The 'insufficient historical excavation of their lives' to which Loeber and Loeber have referred has meant that there has been a tendency to define these women as natives of the nation in which they lived, rather than the nation from which they emerged.¹⁵ As a result, many Irish women writers, and most particularly those whose writing careers were forged prior to the founding of the Irish Free State in 1922, have for years been placed under the vague heading of 'British'.

Alongside these issues of misidentification, the recovery of Irish women's writing of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has not continued apace with that of their American and British counterparts. The situation which confronts the scholar researching

¹⁴ Elaine Showalter, 'Twenty Years On: A Literature of Their Own Revisited', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 31, no. 3 (Summer 1998), p. 399.

¹⁵ Loeber and Loeber, 'Literary Absentees', pp. 167-8.

such texts and their authors today is much the same as that which Showalter experienced during her research in the 1960s and 1970s. At the National Library of Scotland, Katherine Cecil Thurston's copious letters, personal papers, photographs, keepsakes and manuscripts — comprising thirteen boxes in total — continue to be unmediated and uncatalogued. Many of the pages of the copy of L. T. Meade's earliest novel, *Ashton-Morton* (1866), held at the Bodleian Library in Oxford remained uncut 150 years after it was printed. A First World War diary written by Katharine Tynan — as valuable in its way as are the six volumes of memoir she published during her lifetime — is held in the John Rylands library in Manchester, yet has never been made available in print and has continued to be uncommented upon since Tynan herself last closed its pages. M. E. Francis's personal papers — which include photographs, personal letters and an incomplete but important manuscript recounting her reminiscences of Catholic elite society in Brussels during the 1870s — are still held in the private collection of her great-grandson, who has received only two requests for access to them during his lifetime. Egerton herself left a large quantity of letters from and to some of the most famous personalities of her day — including George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, Charles Stewart Parnell, W. B. Yeats, Ellen Terry, Seumas O'Sullivan, Austin Clarke and W. Somerset Maugham. Although the bulk of these are held at Princeton University and the National Library of Ireland, and can, as such, be readily accessed, most are unpublished, unstudied and unremarked upon. In the cases of some of the writers in question, personal papers are virtually or wholly non-existent. Emily Lawless asked that her letters, papers and manuscripts be destroyed after her death, an act her brother faithfully but regrettably carried out. Very little of what must have been the active and abundant correspondence of L. T. Meade survives, despite the fact that she was not only an in-demand author working regularly with several publishing houses and contributing to various periodicals, but was also the editor of *Atalanta*

magazine and appears to have mentored and befriended many of its contributors, who included Tynan, Francis, H. Rider Haggard, Christina Rossetti, Grant Allen, Jack B. Yeats, Angela Brazil and the prominent suffragists Millicent Garrett Fawcett and Evelyn Sharp.

The period between 1890 and 1916 — the point at which one of the most critical political crossroads in Anglo-Irish relations was reached and also an imperative turning point for the women's rights movement — provides a particularly fruitful source for this study. For Ireland, the years surrounding the turn of the twentieth century marked an era of intense change — a point at which the progress of ordinary parliamentary politics appeared to have stalled and those political energies were being redirected into the burgeoning Gaelic Revivalist movement in sport, language and literature. Yeats famously referred to the downfall of the Irish Parliamentary Party leader Charles Stewart Parnell, which occurred in 1890, as the moment at which '[a] disillusioned and embittered Ireland turned from parliamentary politics' and began the 'long gestation' of an event — the Easter Rising of 1916 — which would lead to its political independence.¹⁶ Central to that gestation, Yeats was to assert, was the formation of a new type of movement intent on developing a 'modern literature of Ireland'.¹⁷ Such a view of the period was not, as has often been suggested, 'largely an invention of Yeats'.¹⁸

The idea of a sudden political stasis occurring with the fall of Parnell, and of a literary movement arising to fill its place, had become part of the common parlance almost immediately after Parnell's death in 1891. By 1894, Katharine Tynan was remarking in an interview that, '[f]or the first time Irish literature has a chance, owing to the present lull in politics. Political strife has strangled literature in Ireland. The Irish Literary Society

¹⁶Quoted in R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (London: Penguin, 1988), p. 431.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Sean McMahon, *A Short History of Ireland* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1996), p. 136.

started at a very fortunate time'.¹⁹ In the same year, William Patrick Ryan produced a study of the Irish Literary Revival in which he anticipated in that movement almost precisely the type of embryonic potential as would Yeats years later:

The Irish literary movement, of which so much has been heard of late, has now passed its decade. In the stress and tension of political interests it remained too long unnoted in the background. It is now of nationwide importance, great in its possibilities of good for Ireland, and, mayhap, not without promise of wider influence.²⁰

It is apparent from these comments that those involved in the Literary Revival — as Tynan, Ryan and Yeats were — had by the early 1890s already pre-defined the era ahead of them as one in which literature would act as an expedient tool to remedy Irish political inefficiencies. In many ways, they were not wrong in doing so. Cultural movements such as the Literary Revival did indeed do their part to redefine Irishness and invigorate the country's politics in the run-up to the Easter Rising. It is almost certainly no mere coincidence, for example, that both the founder of Sinn Féin, Arthur Griffith, and the leader of the Easter Rising, Patrick Pearse, were devoted to Revivalism and involved in literary pursuits of their own. Though it has often been dismissed as arrogance on the poet's part, Yeats's lyrical question, 'Did that play of mine send out/Certain men the English shot?' is a more logical one than is often supposed. It was indeed Yeats's (and, it must be remembered, Lady August Gregory's) play *Kathleen ní Houlihan* which was being revived at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin during Easter week, 1916. There is abundant evidence, in fact, which attests to a degree of truth in the assertion of political influence being exerted by a collective literary movement in Ireland. Likewise, it is undoubtedly true that parliamentary politics in the years surrounding the turn of the twentieth century

¹⁹ Percy L. Parker, 'Katharine Tynan at Home', *The Woman's Signal*, no. 2 (11 January 1894), p. 17.

²⁰ William Patrick Ryan, *The Irish Literary Revival* (New York: Lemma, 1970 [1894]), p. v.

lacked both the vigour and the minor successes that had marked the tenure of Parnell and his interventionist followers.

The idea that the 'long gestation' from 1890 to 1916 represented a form of political void for Ireland is, however, more problematic. In reality, this space of time was to be a significant and ultimately decisive period in Anglo-Irish relations which was only partially instigated by the arrival of a 'modern literature' to Ireland, and, as R. F. Foster has asserted, the wholesale adoption of a Yeatsian version of events and literature's import to them 'distorts the continuing power of the constitutional political movement, ignores the context of the First World War and the contingent nature of the 1916 rising'.²¹ In addition to the overarching contexts to which Foster refers, and contiguous with the advent of the Literary Revival, organisations had begun to spring up across the country which indicated a gradually intensifying sense of nationalist insularity and the emergence of a renewed and fortified strain of Celtic Irishness. Douglas Hyde, whose lecture 'On the Necessity for De-Anglicizing the Irish People' in 1892 in some regards heralded these types of ideological shifts, collaborated with Eoin MacNeill in the founding in 1893 of The Gaelic League, a 'unique pressure group' dedicated to the reinstatement of the Irish language to the Irish people.²²

In 1900, a new political organisation dubbed Cumann na nGaedheal ('Party of the Irish') would be established by Arthur Griffith, a former editor of the *United Irishman* and founder of the Celtic Literary Society. Originally intent on promoting pacifist principles, Cumann na nGaedheal sought to draw attention to Ireland's cultural, national and — by limiting its membership to 'persons of Irish birth or descent' — ethnic differences from

²¹ Foster, *Paddy and Mr Punch* (London: Allen Lane/Penguin, 1993), p. 229.

²² Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p. 447.

Britain.²³ Five years later, the party was undergoing a change in name to Sinn Féin ('Ourselves Alone') and a hardlining of its policy. Sinn Féin would increasingly advocate an Irish-Ireland ethos that sought to exclude any and all British trade, goods or influences — whether those were educational, cultural, financial or political — from Ireland. Substantiating this new stringency, at the first annual Sinn Féin Congress held in the Round Room of the Rotunda in Dublin on 28 November 1904, a speaker named John Sweetman — a cousin of the novelist M. E. Francis — 'proposed a resolution declaring that the people of Ireland were a free people, and that no law made without their authority was binding on their consciences'.²⁴ With Sweetman's speech — which was, in essence, an Irish Declaration of Independence — the rhetoric of a new type of rebellion was begun in earnest.

Meanwhile, Irish nationalists had found themselves with adequate reason, in the run-up to the Easter Rising, to lose faith in parliamentary politics. The first Home Rule Bill for Ireland had failed to pass Parliament in 1886; its second and third incarnations were introduced in the House of Commons in 1893 and 1912 respectively. The 1893 bill was defeated by a wide margin in the House of Lords. By 1913, the new bill, having twice been ratified in the House of Commons, was twice summarily thrown out by the Lords. New legislation meant, however, that the Lords could not quash the legislation if it continued to pass the Commons, and implementation of Home Rule thereby became inevitable. During the intervening period between the bill's introduction and the day on which it was finally carried, 25 May 1914, two militant organisations — the pro-union Ulster Volunteer Force and the pro-republican Irish Volunteers — were formed, raising the

²³ Ibid, p. 457.

²⁴ 'The National Council. Boycott of Non-Irish Goods', *Irish Independent* (29 November 1904), p. 5.

spectre of civil war in Ireland.²⁵ With the onset of the First World War in August of 1914, however, the implementation of Home Rule was shelved and the threat of internal Irish hostilities temporarily averted. While the preoccupations of Parliament turned from the situation in Ireland to the situation in Europe, it remained the case that nothing had been resolved in or for Ireland. The fate of Ulster still hung in the balance; Irish nationalists were left without their promised measure of self-government. Tensions in Ireland continued to simmer. A frustrated republican faction eventually staged the Easter Rising in 1916, and set Ireland on its violent path towards independence.

Over the course of the same period, female commentators on political issues and women's organizations with political motives emerged as ever more influential civic forces. Inghinidhe na hÉireann ('Daughters of Ireland'), Ireland's first 'autonomous all-female organisation', was formed in 1900.²⁶ Fuelled by anti-Boer War sentiment and faced with an impending official visit to Ireland by Queen Victoria, Maud Gonne and her INE followers joined forces to organize an overtly nationalist counter-celebration during the period of the Queen's visit to Dublin. Referred to as a 'National Children's Fete' or 'Patriotic Children's Treat', the INE's efforts drew the students and faculties of an estimated sixty 'Convent, Christian Brothers and National schools' to Dublin on 6 July 1900, and approximately 30,000 children attended the celebrations at Clonturk Park. Described by one newspaper as 'one of the most remarkable Nationalist demonstrations ever held in Dublin', it was an unmitigated success which served to raise Gonne's profile exponentially, launch her on her self-professed mission to become Ireland's Joan of Arc and lead the

²⁵ Hundreds of articles concerning the 'imminent' civil war were published in Ireland during 1913 and 1914. See, for instance, 'The Threatened Civil War', *Irish Independent* (20 January 1914), p. 6; 'Civil War Imminent', *Irish Independent* (21 March 1914), p. 5; and 'Mr. F. E. Smith & Civil War Cry', *Freeman's Journal* (2 May 1914), p. 9.

²⁶ Ann Matthews, *Renegades: Irish Republican Women 1900-1922* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2010), p. 9.

country to freedom from British rule.²⁷ The existence of Inghinidhe na hÉireann — which endured until 1914, when it was absorbed by another women's organization, Cumann na mBan — and the prominence of Gonne in the nationalist movement at large signalled a new form of emergent, politically active Irish womanhood whose revolutionary potential had been glimpsed very briefly two decades earlier in the successful but prematurely truncated political campaigns of the Ladies' Land League. The commitment of Sinn Féin to feminist ideals, also a founding principle of its forerunner Cumann na nGaedheal, was likewise evidenced by the presence of Jenny Wyse Power on its board of delegates at the Rotunda Congress in 1904.

As the emergence of Irish women onto the political scene suggests, the 'Irish Question', as the debate surrounding Ireland's movement towards political autonomy was popularly known, was not the only topic to be vehemently or even violently contested on an almost daily basis during this era. The same twenty-six year interval between 1890 and 1916 constituted a large portion of the pivotal period leading towards women's suffrage in Britain and Ireland, during which the roles of women were being debated in the vastly different arenas of politics, the popular press and literature. This was an era in which journals, periodicals and newspapers were saturated with articles concerned with the 'Woman Question', which focused on the rights of women and ran contiguous to disputes over Ireland and its fate. The roots of the Woman Question's genesis can be traced as far back as the 1840s, when it emerged as a notable topic of discussion in periodicals and newspapers. Issues surrounding it would become increasingly prominent during the 1870s, when the movement to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860s gained momentum and women's rights began to appear more regularly as a theme in popular

²⁷ 'Remarkable Demonstration in Dublin. English Rowdyism Smartly Punished', *Southern Star* (Cork) (7 July 1900), p. 3.

fiction.²⁸ That decade saw a limited number of periodicals publishing self-consciously political feminist fiction, among them *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*. Between January 1874 and December 1875, for example, *The Englishwoman's Domestic* serialized a novel, *Forgotten Lives*, by Francis Derrick (Frances E. M. Notley), which argued that

In no country in Europe are there so many poverty-stricken, helpless, unskilful, uncared-for women as in this great England. The reason is obvious. Men legislate selfishly, regarding all questions from only a masculine view, hence they have fallen into cruel blunders, not perceiving that, 'The woman question is the man's,' and injury to one is hurtful to the other.²⁹

Derrick's explicitly feminist themes were something of an anomaly in the 1870s, but from the time of the publication of Olive Schreiner's novel *The Story of an African Farm* in 1883 until the mid-1890s, fiction concerned with promoting the variety and spectrum of women's rights, eventually dubbed 'New Woman' literature, was increasingly popular.

As has been noted, three Irish women — George Egerton, Sarah Grand and 'Iota' — were among the most prominent of the New Woman writers, indicating a disproportionate degree of involvement on the part of an Irish female contingent in contemporary debates surrounding the rights and roles of women. Irish women were not, however, only making their mark on the suffragist and feminist side of these arguments. In June of 1889, the month in which Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* premiered on the London stage and in its wake the term 'New Woman' began to gain currency, an anti-suffrage lobby was organized by the novelist Mrs Humphry Ward and the names of its all-female adherents appended to

²⁸ Sally Ledger writes that the Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860s 'had been passed with the aim of curbing the transmission of venereal disease from prostitutes to men [...]; under the terms of the Acts, women suspected of prostitution could be forcibly detained and treated in a "Lock Hospital" for up to three months. The Acts of course failed to control the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, because whilst they sought to check and control diseased women, they left their (equally diseased) male clientele free to re-infect anyone with whom they came into contact'. Sally Ledger, 'The New Woman and feminist fictions', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, ed. Gail Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 158.

²⁹ Francis Derrick, 'Forgotten Lives', *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, no. 119 (1 November 1874), p. 229.

an article in *The Nineteenth Century* magazine.³⁰ Among the women who supported 'An Appeal Against Female Suffrage' were several whose names had been connected, in very public ways, to Ireland and its political struggles. These included the educational reformer Lady Frederick Cavendish, who had remained supportive of her husband's reformist politics for Ireland even after his assassination by radical Irish nationalists in the Phoenix Park in Dublin in 1882; Lady Randolph Churchill, who openly supported her Orange card-playing husband in his anti-Home Rule politics; and, most notably, the Irish author Emily Lawless, whose recent work of non-fiction, *Ireland: The Story of the Nations* (1887), had actively and with undisguised skepticism addressed the issue of Home Rule for Ireland.³¹ In 1911, Millicent Garrett Fawcett, the president of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies and co-founder (in 1871) of Newnham College Cambridge, would note the irony of such signatories to the appeal by stating that '[s]everal of the ladies who signed *The Nineteenth Century* protest were at that moment in 1889 taking an active part for or against the main political issue of the day, the granting of Home Rule to Ireland; and yet, they were saying at the same time that women had not the material to form a sound judgment in politics'.³² Not only the existence of such a list but the prominence of its positioning in one of the most widely read periodicals of the period is, as Fawcett indicates, deeply paradoxical, for it strongly indicates the degree to which disenfranchised women felt inclined and at liberty to exercise their political influence through unofficial channels. One of the most important of these outlets, it might be persuasively argued, was the novel. By 1893, what was viewed as a new generation of 'Wild Women' — or

³⁰ 'An Appeal Against Female Suffrage', *The Nineteenth Century*, vol. 25, no. 148 (June 1889), pp. 781-788.

³¹ Lucy Cavendish was also the Prime Minister W. E. Gladstone's niece. See also Emily Lawless, *Ireland: The Story of the Nations* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1887), pp. 413-414.

³² Millicent Garrett Fawcett, L. L. D., *Women's Suffrage: A Short History of a Great Movement* (New York: Dodge Publishing, 1911), p. 45.

'Shrieking Sisterhood' or 'Revolting Daughters', as they were alternately known — had been definitively re-christened with the 'New Woman' label by the popular press, and this terminology soon became shorthand not only for a 'type' of emancipated woman but also for the feminist fiction produced by such women and their supporters during the 1890s. For several years, this fictional genre exercised the imaginations of an extensive readership, and stimulated an unprecedented degree of debate concerning women's roles in society.

As with the Home Rule Bills for Ireland that had stalemated in the House of Lords in 1886 and 1893, bills intended to grant women the vote were repeatedly introduced in Parliament and just as frequently stymied by the 'inbuilt Tory majority in the Upper House' until the power of the Lords was eventually curtailed in the second decade of the twentieth century.³³ Parliamentary devotees of the Home Rule cause for Ireland also, however, played their part in hindering the movement for women's suffrage. From the 1880s, Irish nationalist members of Parliament, fearful of upsetting the balance in a House of Commons whose members were only then beginning to lean in favour of Home Rule by introducing an unknown quantity into the electorate, often actively sided against or abstained from taking part in balloting on measures which would have extended the franchise to women. Meanwhile, the New Woman writing in Britain would suffer its own form of Irish defeat when a newly conservative atmosphere befell the British publishing industry in the mid-1890s. Long associated with Oscar Wilde and his Decadent cohort, the New Women would share in Wilde's demise when he was convicted of eight Acts of Gross Indecency in the spring of 1895. Although this might have proved only a temporary setback for proto-feminist fiction, the onset of the Boer War in 1899 was to deal it a final deathblow.

³³ Les Garner, *Stepping Stones to Women's Liberty: Feminist Ideas in the Women's Suffrage Movement 1900-1918* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1984), p. 7.

The woman's movement, like the Irish Home Rule movement which was in many ways interconnected with it, reached a point of relative inertia in the decades which bookended the turn of the twentieth century. Whereas debates on the issue of women's suffrage had been a regular fixture in Parliament since 1869, and there had been thirteen such deliberations on the floor of the House of Commons between 1870 and 1890, the waning in political interest concerning the initiative is evidenced by the fact that only four such debates occurred between 1890 and 1908. The Boer War ended in 1902, but the movement for women's suffrage would not be substantially reenergized until the second decade of the twentieth century. As the progress of the women's suffrage initiative through Parliament slowed, the women's movement would gradually alter. The New Woman would be replaced by the figure of the militant suffragette, who was even more widely vilified than her 'revolting' precursor. Much like the Irish drive towards political autonomy, from 1910 onwards the woman's movement would rapidly shift away from the realms of the literary, the rhetorical and the parliamentary to become actively and violently oppositional.

Emigration to England in the decades leading to the Easter Rising often meant a head-on confrontation with what had become the prevailing debates of the period. Yet because the Irish and Woman questions were being asked *about*, rather than *of*, women and the Irish, they attempted to exclude Irish women from their solutions by the very terms in which they were posed. Due to their political disenfranchisement, Irish women, it might be said, were doubly debarred from engaging in the resolution to these professed 'problems'. As such, these remained, from a rhetorical standpoint, questions to be posed exclusively by British men, and for British men to answer. Each of the women writers to be examined in this study nonetheless managed to circumvent the terms of their exclusion

by engaging publicly in these debates, albeit to varying degrees and with what were at times widely divergent viewpoints.

In some respects, this tendency towards political commentary is hardly surprising. Once in England, an educated Irish woman seeking a literary career would have avoided these types of debates only with difficulty. If she lived in or spent large portions of time in London, she would quickly have become immersed in a world replete with women's clubs and debating societies, a place where social philanthropy was the order of the day. So ubiquitous was the women's club that nearly every professional author of the period could claim an allegiance to one or another of them: Thurston, Tynan and Francis attended the Lyceum Club, which invited women writers and illustrators into its membership, Egerton belonged to the Ladies' Athenaeum Club for professional women, and Meade was a member of the pro-suffrage Pioneer Club. Women writers often felt inclined to reveal their political opinions in interviews and discursive writings as well as through open activism, and it is relatively easy to locate evidence that, for instance, Meade and Tynan were dedicated suffragists, Lawless was at one point avowedly anti-suffrage, and that Tynan and Francis professed their allegiance to Revivalist pursuits by joining the Irish Literary Society in London. Several of the writers in this study signed political petitions; all made public speeches. Women were not, it seems, debaring themselves from debating politics in either their private or their public lives, and it only remains to be answered whether or not this trend towards political commentary and activism continued to be exercised when it came to the writing of their novels. The fact that these texts, published almost exclusively in England, Scotland and the United States, were intended for an English-speaking readership that included Britain, Ireland and an array of colonies current and former, meant that the degree of influence that might be exercised was potentially vast and wide-ranging.

In his own musings on the subject of literature and emigration, Daniel Corkery was moved to wonder whether 'national literature' — literature for the consumption and edification of the Irish people — could be produced from a space of expatriation.³⁴ The emphasis for Corkery was on the overtly political aspects of the work in question, and so too would it be for many earlier Irish commentators, particularly in those turbulent years immediately prior to Ireland's independence from Britain. In attempting to answer 'The Question of Irish Nationality' in 1912, the man who would four years later become the first comprehensive bibliographer of Irish fiction, Stephen J. Brown, had posited the Irish writer living in England as one of those best placed to view and convey the political differences between the two nations: 'anyone who has power to observe, and who has lived in both countries in more or less intimate relations with their peoples knows that a deep gulf still separates the two', he would assert. Brown proceeded in the same article to contend that the 'contrast has been best drawn in the form of fiction, in such books as [...] M. E. Francis's "Frieze and Fustian," and "North, South and Over the Sea," [and] Katherine [sic] Tynan's novels of English and Irish country life'.³⁵ Writing in *The Irish Monthly* eight years later, at a point in which Ireland's status as a nation hung delicately in the balance, Brown would identify the novel as one of the most potent political tools then available: 'I think it is pretty generally recognised to-day that one of the most effective, if not quite the most effective, vehicles for conveying ideas to the general public is the novel', Brown would assert, adding that '[f]ew, at all events, will deny that it may be a most powerful means of propaganda'.³⁶ After citing Charles Reade, Benjamin Disraeli, Charles Dickens and Harriet Beecher Stowe as evidence of those who had exercised such novelistic

³⁴ Daniel Corkery, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature*, p. 4.

³⁵ Stephen J. Brown, 'The Question of Irish Nationality', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, vol. 1, no. 4 (December 1912), p. 645.

³⁶ Stephen J. Brown, 'Novels of the National Idea', *The Irish Monthly*, vol. 48, no. 563 (May 1920), p. 254.

influence to great effect, Brown would contend that the 'contrast of temperaments' between the Irish and English had been best exemplified during his era by the novels of M. E. Francis, and that Francis's texts had the potential to prove more useful to the cause of nationalism than many other more overtly political Irish works, including those by William Carleton and Patrick Pearse.³⁷ In these articles, Brown draws consistent attention to novels written by Irish women domiciled and working in Britain, asserting that these authors could and did use their texts to exercise their political influence. The questions remain to be answered: for what probable reasons and to what extent did they actually do so?

³⁷ Ibid, p. 260.

I

'The Inalienable Heritage': The Novels of Emily Lawless and the Legacies of History

'The book is slanderous and lying from cover to cover, and it is slanderous and lying on a preconceived purpose so mean that only the daughter of an Irish landlord could pursue it.' — Review of Emily Lawless's *Hurrish*, *The Nation* (1886)³⁸

'Miss Lawless is the sister of Lord Cloncurry, a militant Irish landlord, but in the broad sense she can scarcely be anything but an Irish nationalist.' — Katharine Tynan Hinkson, Review of Emily Lawless's *Maelcho*, *Boston Literary World* (1894)³⁹

The titles of two of Emily Lawless's most important works offer clues to the degree to which her emigration from Ireland permeated both her consciousness and the themes of her literary output. In them, she places herself in exilic positions which act in opposition to one another: in her early historical novel about the Elizabethan campaign to halt the Tyrone rebellion, *With Essex in Ireland* (1890), she situates herself alongside an English interloper on Irish soil; in her later poetic volume, *With the Wild Geese* (1902), she aligns herself with Jacobite soldiers exiled from their Irish homeland to fight for continental armies in foreign wars. Both of these positions can be seen as accurate representations of Lawless's own relationship to Ireland. As an Anglo-Irish woman who was sympathetic to nationalist interests at the same time that she remained avowedly unionist, her position in relation to Ireland was similar to that which she asserted the Earl of Essex held: one of simultaneous insider and outsider status, from which it was possible to view 'both sides of a question'.⁴⁰ Like her imagined soldierly comrades in *With the Wild Geese*, she also found

³⁸ 'Hurrish', *The Nation* (20 February 1886), p. 3.

³⁹ Clipping from *Boston Literary World* (1 December 1894), n. p., Emily Lawless Papers, Marsh's Library (Dublin), Z2.1.15/27. Collection hereafter cited as 'Lawless Papers'.

⁴⁰ Emily Lawless, *Ireland: The Story of the Nations* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1887), p. 209. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *I*.

herself in exile from a country for which she held great affection, but to which she felt she could not return. The differences between these titles and their metaphorical locations illustrate the complexities of the personal and political positions Lawless occupied at various points in her life, and her titular shift from trespasser *in* Ireland to exile *from* Ireland suggests that, in the twelve years between the writing of *With Essex in Ireland* and *With the Wild Geese*, she moved ideologically nearer to a sense of her own Irish identity even as she was in the process of distancing herself geographically from her homeland.

As these titles further suggest, Lawless's texts are haunted by the remnants of an Irish past which is both communal and personal. Overtly preoccupied by the history of her homeland, the pathos of which can be seen to trouble and fascinate her in equal measure, her writings are also and similarly bound to her family's history, which was marked by its own forms of political dissension and emotional upheaval. Born in 1845 at Lyons House, near Hazelhatch, County Kildare, one of her family's two stately homes, Emily Lawless was the eldest daughter and fourth child of Edward Lawless, the third Lord Cloncurry, and his wife Elizabeth.⁴¹ On her mother's side, she was descended from a long and distinguished line of the Kirwan family, one of the fourteen ancient tribes of Galway. On her father's side, however, the family's fortunes and aristocratic status were more tenuous, having been acquired a mere three generations prior to her birth and in circumstances that remained highly contentious during Lawless's lifetime.

At the height of her literary fame in the 1890s, the Irish nationalist MP John Gordon Swift MacNeill would reignite a century-old controversy which surrounded the Lawless family's acquisition of the Cloncurry title in 1789. MacNeill's 1894 volume, *Titled Corruption*, was written as a means of questioning the legitimacy of certain members of the aristocracy — Lawless's brother, Valentine, the fourth Lord Cloncurry,

⁴¹ The Lawless's other home was Maretimo, Blackrock, County Dublin.

being one — who had voted against the second Home Rule Bill for Ireland in 1893. In his book, MacNeill used the writings and testimony of Henry Grattan, William Brabazon Ponsonby and John Philpot Curran as evidence that Lawless's great-grandfather, Nicholas Lawless — whose father had made the family's fortune by working his way up through the ranks of, and eventually marrying into, a woollen merchants' business — had converted to Protestantism on spurious terms and had bribed his way into the peerage. Condemning her family, MacNeill did not spare Lawless herself. Noting that, in the first of her Irish-set novels, *Hurrish* (1886), she had referred 'slightingly [to] the lowly antecedents of some Irish members' of Parliament, he called attention to the hypocrisy of Lawless's attitudes by reminding his readers that her own great-grandfather had been 'the son of [a] woollen-draper's errand-boy'.⁴²

As MacNeill's attack on the Lawless family suggests, the controversies and schisms that surrounded the Cloncurry title were more intricate than even the inherent duality of their Anglo-Irishness could convey. The first Lord Cloncurry was not only, as MacNeill asserted, widely believed to have purchased his peerage, but was generally regarded by his contemporaries to be a pro-Union sycophant who had converted to Protestantism solely for the purpose of furthering his own already substantial financial interests. In stark contrast, his son, Valentine Brown Lawless, would, upon assuming the Cloncurry title, become both a United Irishman and noted enemy of the Union who was twice imprisoned in the Tower of London for his political activism. Of the second Lord Cloncurry, Daniel O'Connell once wrote:

Ireland has not a better friend or one more devoted to her service than Lord Cloncurry. He sets a splendid example; possessing a munificent fortune, and expending every shilling in his native land. The poor man's justice of peace; the friend of reform; in private society — in the bosom of his family

⁴² J. G. Swift MacNeill, Q. C. M. P., *Titled Corruption* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1894), p. 67.

— the model of virtue; in public life worthy of the admiration and affection of the people.⁴³

Valentine Lawless's life was not, however, without its own scandals. In 1811 he divorced his first wife, Elizabeth Georgiana (née Morgan), after having successfully sued her lover for £20,000 in damages for adultery.

Edward Lawless, the eldest son of Valentine Brown Lawless's second marriage to Emily Douglas, assumed the title of third Lord Cloncurry upon his father's death in 1853. With his accession came a return to the devout unionism and the type of political indiscretion exemplified by his grandfather. The most infamous act of his political tenure came when he resigned his position as a deputy lieutenant of the city of Dublin in protest over the appointment to a counterpart post of William Lane Joynt, the serving Lord Mayor of Dublin, who, in Cloncurry's opinion, was an 'ultra-Radical electioneering agent'.⁴⁴ Newspapers throughout Great Britain and Ireland published reports on the incident, some of which referred derogatorily to Cloncurry as both an 'unsupported ultra-Tory' and 'the titled grandson of a Liberty tradesman'.⁴⁵ As these descriptions indicate, press opinion ran overwhelmingly in favour of Lane Joynt, who subsequently sued Edward Lawless for libel. Two years later, in April of 1869, Edward Lawless committed suicide by throwing himself from an upper storey window at Lyons House.

Emily Lawless was twenty-four years old at the time of her father's death. An inquest confirmed that it followed at least three years of severe mental illness, the symptoms of which indicate that he suffered from paranoid schizophrenia.⁴⁶ These findings might have exonerated the family from the legacies of Edward Lawless's recent

⁴³ Quoted in William John Fitzpatrick, *Life, Times, and Contemporaries of Lord Cloncurry* (Dublin: James Duffy, 1855), title page.

⁴⁴ 'The Right Hon. The Lord Mayor and Lord Cloncurry', *Freeman's Journal* (14 March 1867), p. 1.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ 'The Late Lord Cloncurry. The Inquest', *Freeman's Journal* (6 April 1869), p. 4.

political embarrassments had his son Valentine, the fourth Lord Cloncurry, not become in his wake one of the most infamous landowners of the Land War era. By 1881, the actions of the newest Lord Cloncurry had caused him to be so reviled that his tenants were burning him in effigy at Abingdon in County Limerick.⁴⁷ The following year, evictions on his lands in Murroe, County Limerick and at Kilmurray, near Clane in Kildare had left upwards of a thousand of his former tenants homeless.⁴⁸ He was, in fact, the type of landlord most abhorred in Ireland: one who raised his tenants' rents in line with increased valuations resulting from their own improvements to his property.⁴⁹ Consistently leasing his lands for sums twenty to fifty percent in excess of Poor Law Valuations, he was in court time and again during the 1880s and 1890s to defend his actions.⁵⁰ As late as 1892, the Evicted Tenants' Commission was moved to launch an inquest into his affairs. Although his stance would eventually alter with the changing times, and he would become a senator in the Irish Free State after its formation in 1922, Valentine Lawless remained one of Ireland's most detested landlords throughout the period of his sister's writing career.

It is therefore almost certainly no coincidence that it was in 1882, at the point of the mass evictions on her brother's estates, that Lawless left Ireland permanently, or that her first novel, *A Chelsea Householder*, was published in that same year. In the midst of eviction turmoil and Land League activity, distance would almost certainly have been preferable to proximity. The depletion of the family's income resulting from the reduction in rents which followed these evictions might also have instigated financial concerns for Lawless, an unmarried woman until then wholly supported by profits from the Cloncurry

⁴⁷ *Nenagh Guardian* (2 June 1880), p. 3 and *Nenagh Guardian* (4 June 1881), p. 4.

⁴⁸ See *Freeman's Journal* (27 May 1882), p. 6 and 'The Kilmurray Eviction', *Kildare Observer* (1 July 1882), p. 5.

⁴⁹ 'The Kilmurray Eviction', *Kildare Observer* (1 July 1882), p. 5.

⁵⁰ See *Nenagh Guardian* (4 July 1888), p. 4.

estates, and her new interest in writing popular fiction may well have been an attempt to achieve a modicum of financial independence. Yet if her emigration and literary pursuits represented her attempts to distance herself from the controversial Cloncurry legacy, subsequent and consistent references in the press to her status as 'the daughter of an Irish landlord' and sister of a 'militant Irish landlord' indicate that they were largely unsuccessful.

Despite her increasing physical distance from Ireland and financial independence from the Cloncurry estates, many of her family ties remained close. She would act as an almost constant companion to her mother — to whom, she confessed, she was deeply devoted — from the mid-1860s until the elder woman's death thirty years later. Lawless's close friend, the novelist Margaret Oliphant, once described Lawless's mother as 'the only true and perfect democrat' she had ever known, and suggested that, although Elizabeth Kirwan Lawless hailed from a family of 'high Tories', she was in fact a political dissenter among her relations: 'amid all her miscellaneous reading and enthusiasms', Oliphant asserted, Lawless's mother had 'left family politics far behind in the openness of her sympathies and her soul'.⁵¹ Yet she remained 'strongly opposed to Home Rule and all the follies connected with that conception', a stance which would later be reflected in her daughter's own opinions.⁵² Due to Emily's health, which was always delicate, Lawless and her mother would spend the majority of their time together in England and on the European continent until 1895 — when, Lawless admitted, her mother's death came as a 'crushing' blow.⁵³

⁵¹ M. A. Oliphant, 'A Noble Lady', *The New Review*, vol. 14, no. 82 (March 1896), p. 244.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 246.

⁵³ Letter from Emily Lawless to W. E. H. Lecky (13 May 1895), Lecky Correspondence, Trinity College Dublin, MSS 1827-36/2474.

Lawless would also share an intense bond with her brother, Frederick, who was two years her junior. The relationship between the two siblings would, over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, be made even more intimate by their mutual grief over the death of a favoured younger brother, Denis, and the suicides of two of their three sisters.⁵⁴ Frederick, for his part, would fill scrapbooks with the dozens of clippings about his sister and her work that he collected from newspapers and magazines, and also inserted his own affectionate comments and reminiscences into the margins of her books. On Lawless's death in 1913, he would add a poignant, handwritten note to his own copy of *With Essex in Ireland*, in which he wondered why 'the dear sister [should] be taken, and stupid me left lamenting?'⁵⁵ It would later be his fate to become the last of the Cloncurry Lords. After his elder brother Valentine died without a male heir in 1928, the unmarried Frederick assumed the title of fifth Baron Cloncurry. With his death a year later the title became obsolete. It had endured just over a century.

The intermingling of affection for and disaffection with her family and her home is apparent in the actions Lawless took and attitudes she expressed both personally and publicly. In a 1905 letter, for instance, she would reveal the degree of her attachment to her homeland by writing to a friend to suggest that a piece of poetry was flawed because it made the mistake of 'putting Heaven into the chief place instead of Ireland. That it may be the better place of the two I am willing to admit, but the latter has at present more of my affections, so I had to leave it the place of honour'.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, when she was eventually free after her mother's death to make her own living arrangements, she chose to

⁵⁴ The deaths of all of these siblings had occurred by the year 1906, when *Whitaker's Peerage* lists only five remaining Lawless brothers and sisters out of the original nine. See *Whitaker's Peerage, Baronetage, Knightage and Companionship for the Year 1906* (London: Whitaker's, 1907), p. 208.

⁵⁵ Held in the Lawless Papers.

⁵⁶ Edith Sichel, 'Emily Lawless', *The Nineteenth Century and After*, vol. 76, no. 449 (July 1914), pp. 87-88.

settle in England. She never married, but spent the final fifteen years of her life in Gomshall, Surrey, living in a house she and her long-term companion, Lady Sarah Spencer, had built to 'their own desires'.⁵⁷ Yet the name that Lawless chose for that home, 'Hazelhatch', paid conspicuous homage to the region of Kildare in which she was raised, and she would attempt to recreate the landscape of her mother's native west of Ireland by transplanting the flora she collected from the Burren and Connemara in her English garden. Her fiction would enact a similar process: at many points it engages in the act of imaginatively reclaiming and re-envisioning her homeland. Although in the earliest days of her career she would write three English-set novels — *A Chelsea Householder* (1882), *A Millionaire's Cousin* (1885) and *Major Lawrence, F. L. S.* (1887) — after 1890, Lawless never again turned to sources outside Ireland for the inspiration for her fictions.

She was an avowed unionist, yet her political opinions appear to have been as complex as was her family history, and there is abundant evidence in her writings to suggest that, like both her mother and her cousin and confidante Sir Horace Plunkett, she was sympathetic to the plight of the Irish peasantry and to the emotional appeal of Irish nationalism. She admitted to having been strongly influenced in early life by her grandfather's militant stance against the Union, and in 1901 wrote a thinly veiled account of her inordinate pride as a youth in the knowledge that he had been imprisoned in the Tower of London for his rebellions against the Crown.⁵⁸ Over time, however, she found it increasingly difficult to regard Britain as she had when she was young — as 'the Great Bully, the Supreme Tyrant, red with the blood of Ireland and Irish heroes'.⁵⁹ Much of her prose writing, whether fictional or discursive, reveals that she instead viewed her homeland

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 97.

⁵⁸ See Emily Lawless, 'Of the Personal Element in History', *The Nineteenth Century*, vol. 50, no. 297 (November 1901), p. 794.

⁵⁹ Emily Lawless, *A Garden Diary* (London: Methuen, 1901), p. 68.

largely through the lens of the committed historian, and came to believe that its current troubles were, as she deemed they had been throughout its turbulent past, as much due to internal strife as they were a result of external forces: 'she would have liked to be able to be a Home Ruler,' her friend Edith Sichel wrote, 'but she did not regard her countrymen as ripe for self-government'.⁶⁰ There is also an indication that she had in common with many unionists a fear that Home Rule would mean Rome Rule, and in the history of Ireland she came to write in 1887 she would express her objections to what she viewed as the increasing tendency to bring 'the priest into politics' (I 384). Doing so, Lawless believed, had the detrimental effect of 'accentuating the religious side of the contest' between unionists and nationalists (I 385).

At the same time, she did not hold herself apart from that movement which would become synonymous with the drive towards nationalism: the Irish Literary Revival. A friend of Lady Augusta Gregory, Lawless acted as one of the first guarantors of the Abbey Theatre alongside such disparate fellow patrons as John O'Leary, Timothy Healy, Douglas Hyde and John Dillon.⁶¹ On visits to Gregory's marital home, Coole Park, she also came in close contact with, and developed a far from cordial relationship to, W. B. Yeats. In her diaries, Gregory would recall that, during their mutual stays at Coole, Lawless repeatedly took the poet to task for his impracticality, not only as this trait manifested itself in his lack of knowledge on scientific and historical matters, but also with regard to his finances: 'The British, perhaps the commercial, side of the first holder of the [Cloncurry] title, the blanket manufacturer,' Gregory would suggest, 'made [Lawless] indignant that [Yeats] was not

⁶⁰ Sichel, 'Emily Lawless', p. 87.

⁶¹ Lady Augusta Persse Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre: A Chapter of Autobiography* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, The Knickerbocker Press, 1913), p. 17.

writing articles every week that would enable him to support his family'.⁶² The two 'always turned to a subject they could not agree on', Gregory claimed, and this despite the fact that he 'admired *Essex* and she his poems'.⁶³ Gregory herself was less appreciative of Lawless's literary output than was Yeats. Unlike him, she at first found little to admire in *With Essex in Ireland*, and maintained an active dislike for Lawless's oft-praised *Maelcho* (1894) throughout her lifetime. By 1929, however, she had come to believe that much of Lawless's writing was nationalist in tone, and that at least three of her poems — 'Munster Forest', 'The Clare Coast' and 'After Aughrim' — had 'given her a lasting place in the memory of the country'.⁶⁴

Lawless's fictional project, as she herself once described it, was to vivify history and make it relevant to the present: 'To induce history to live and move, to induce its men and women to walk and talk, to live, breathe, sigh, weep, and laugh for us, in their habit as they existed,' she asserted, 'is the aim of every good writer, and ought to be the aim of every good reader'.⁶⁵ She nonetheless comprehended the difficulty of such a project in terms of its accessibility to readers. A shared joke that spanned the generations, she believed, was among the most effective tools in uniting the readers of her day with the actors of history, but humour was not, she acknowledged, an instrument that lent itself well to the Irish historical subject matter with which she often dealt: 'the truth is, Irish history does not seem to be quite fair game for any little sport of the kind,' she wrote. 'Its record is too dark. [...] Men laugh who win, and the winning days for Irishmen have been a long

⁶² Lady Augusta Gregory, *Lady Gregory's Journals: Volume Two, Books 30-44, 21 February 1925 - 9 May 1932*, ed. Daniel J. Murphy (Gerrards Cross: Colin, Smythe, 1987), p. 424.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 386.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 541.

⁶⁵ Lawless, 'Of the Personal Element in History', p. 797.

time on the road'.⁶⁶ Realizing this, she would apologize to her readers for the excessive 'gloom' of her novel *Grania* (1892), and for the way in which *Maelcho*, originally conceived as a 'lively' adventure tale, grew 'grimmer' and 'more lugubrious' as it progressed.⁶⁷ Her novels are not, however, without that humour to which Lawless refers, although she is careful to achieve it largely at the expense of male characters who either are, or act as tropes for, English or Anglo-Irish men, including the bigoted Hal Harvey in *With Essex*, the indolent Murdough Blake in *Grania*, and the self-aggrandizing Hugh Gaynard of *Maelcho*.

Although *Hurrih* falls outside the remit of this study, as the earliest of Lawless's Irish novels and the work which evoked the most starkly varied responses among her readers, a brief discussion of it is necessary to gain an understanding of the climate into which her later novels were received. Although it was met with almost universal acclaim elsewhere, particularly in England, reviewers in Ireland were deeply divided as to its merits. Among its most vehement critics was a commentator in *The Nation*, who referred to it as 'slanderous and lying from cover to cover, and [...] slanderous and lying on a preconceived purpose so mean that only the daughter of an Irish landlord could pursue it'. Gregory disliked its 'patronizing tone' and Yeats, too, joined the dissenting side, later famously remarking that he believed Lawless's work overall to be 'in imperfect sympathy with the Celtic nature' and suggesting that her fiction was repeatedly marred by her tendency to accept

the commonplace conception of Irish character as a something charming, irresponsible, poetic, dreamy, untrustworthy, voluble, and rather despicable, and the commonplace conception of English character as a something

⁶⁶ Ibid, pp. 797-8.

⁶⁷ Emily Lawless, *Grania: The Story of an Island*, 2 vols (London: Smith, Elder, 1892), I, 'Dedication'. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *G*. And Emily Lawless, *Maelcho: A Sixteenth-Century Narrative*, 2 vols (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1894), I, 'Dedication'. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *M*.

prosaic, hard, trustworthy, silent, and altogether worshipful, and the result is a twofold slander.⁶⁸

The *Dublin Evening Mail*, in contrast, would assert that *Hurriah* was of nearly unprecedented political importance — 'as opportune to English politics of the day as the publication of Mrs. Stowe's famous novel was to the discussion of the American slavery question' — a review which indicates that, in line with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), *Hurriah* acted to expose injustices at the same time that it reinforced stereotypes of servility and impotence.⁶⁹

In portraying, in *Hurriah*, a struggling and largely ingenuous Irish peasantry with viable reasons for remaining distrustful of British law, Lawless was almost certainly intending her themes and characterizations to influence a British readership rather than an Irish one, and responses to the novel suggest that she not only hit this mark with accuracy, but influenced opinion in a way she almost certainly did not intend. Among those who were taken in by the message that *Hurriah* conveyed, and understood it as relevant to contemporary politics, was the Prime Minister William Gladstone. Gladstone in fact used the novel as part of his justification for advocating Home Rule, asserting that in it Lawless had 'been more successful in one matter of great importance than any writer of her class, or perhaps of any class. She has made present to her readers, not as an abstract proposition, but as a living reality, the estrangement of the people of Ireland from the law'. It was, he writes, quoting Lawless's narrative, the 'old long-repented sin of the stronger country [that was] the culprit'.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Lady Augusta Gregory, *Lady Gregory's Journals: Volume Two*, p. 416 and W. B. Yeats, *Uncollected Prose*, ed. John P. Frayne (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 369.

⁶⁹ Clipping from *Dublin Evening Mail* (1886), Lawless Papers.

⁷⁰ W. E. Gladstone, 'Notes and Queries on the Irish Demands', *Special Aspects of the Irish Question: A Series of Reflections in and since 1886. Collected from Various Sources and Reprinted* (London: J. Murray, 1892), p. 151.

Hurrish was followed four years later by Lawless's second Irish novel, *With Essex in Ireland*, a fictional treatment of the Tyrone rebellion and the campaign led in 1599 by Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex, to quell it. Three years earlier, she had titled the chapter in her history which dealt with Essex's time in Ireland 'The Essex Failure', and admits to having borrowed the term 'failure' from the majority of historians' assessments of the campaign. Her evaluations of both the man and his mission were, however, more favourable than those that preceded her, as the summation she offered in that chapter makes clear:

Essex's very virtues and better qualities, in fact, were all against him in this fatal service. His natural chivalrousness, his keen perception of injustice, a certain elevation of mind which debarred him from taking the stereotyped English official view of the intricate Irish problem; an independence of vulgar motives which made him prone to see two sides of a question — even where his own interests required that he should see but one — all these were against him; all tended to make him seem vacillating and ineffective; all helped to bring about that failure which has made his six months of command in Ireland the opprobrium ever since of historians. (I 209)

Expanding on these sentiments to construct a revisionist fictional history of Essex's campaign when she came to write *With Essex*, Lawless chose to concentrate on his 'virtues and better qualities' rather than his failings.

In a letter printed in the *Dublin Daily Express* on 27 February 1895, Yeats would include *With Essex in Ireland* in his list of the thirty most valuable books about Ireland, but with notable reservations: 'I have included, though with much doubt, "Essex in Ireland,"' Yeats wrote, 'because despite its lack of intensity, it helps one [...] to imagine Elizabethan Ireland, and certainly does contain one memorable scene in which the multitudes slain in the Irish war rise up complaining'.⁷¹ Yeats's qualms were almost certainly instigated by Lawless's tendency to sideline or stereotype her Irish peasant characters, but his reference to a 'lack of intensity' is an indication of his own Revivalist prejudices, and just as

⁷¹ John Kelly and Eric Domville (eds), *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats, Volume 1, 1865-1895* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 442.

importantly suggests the influence of Maud Gonne's militant strain of nationalism on his opinions at the time. Lady Gregory, for her own part, would note years later that, given a span of years for reflection, her impressions of *With Essex* had become more favourable: 'reading it afresh it seemed a terrible indictment,' she wrote in a journal entry in 1929, 'these armoured men with their cavalry and gunpowder hunting, killing, as if wild beasts, trying to exterminate the natives of the country, not theirs by right, at the bidding of Elizabeth'.⁷² Gladstone's enthusiastic reaction to the novel makes for two interesting footnotes. The former (and future) prime minister was convinced, upon first reading it, that it was an actual Elizabethan document and Lawless merely its editor, a mistake which was widely publicized, and roundly mocked, at the time, although Gladstone was far from the only person to be deceived as to the novel's source. Even after learning the truth of its origins, he was enthusiastic enough about *With Essex* that, upon learning that he and Lawless were visiting Cannes at the same time, he made his way to her hotel room and arrived unannounced to find her napping on the bed in her dressing gown. He stayed with her for two hours afterwards, Sichel later recalled, without ever recognizing 'the deficiencies of her dress'.⁷³ Despite the awkwardness of this first meeting and the evident disparities in their political opinions, Lawless and Gladstone would subsequently enjoy a sporadic but warm correspondence.

It is not difficult to conjecture the qualities in *With Essex* which would have appealed to a politician like Gladstone. In it, Lawless portrays Essex as a man who, much like Gladstone himself, endeavours to make his more lenient views of the Irish situation understood by his English contemporaries, alienates many in his own country by doing so, and labours under the watchful eye of a long-serving and popular Queen. His willingness

⁷² Lady Augusta Gregory, *Lady Gregory's Journals: Volume Two*, p. 220.

⁷³ Sichel, p. 86.

to compromise with the rebel Hugh O'Neill, the Earl of Tyrone, despite the latter's violent tactics, has obvious analogies to Gladstone's treatment of the Irish Parliamentary Party leader Charles Stewart Parnell, notwithstanding the Irishman's controversial political alliances and manoeuvrings which, at a number of key points, found little favour with the Gladstone's British compatriots. Although in ensuing decades the mythologizing of Parnell would tend to elide the darker aspects of his political associations and the more contentious episodes of his career, it must be remembered that by the apex of his political associations with Gladstone, Parnell had already been accused publicly of, among other things, supporting Fenianism and sanctioning the Phoenix Park murders.

Like the politics of its day, Lawless's work abounds with misunderstandings and conflicts between its Irish and English factions. Travel westward to and through Ireland, whether the traveller comes as friend or foe, becomes the modality, in all of her texts, by which English perceptions of the Irish are transformed. The alterations that occur in the character of Essex during his journey westward are unique in her oeuvre, however, in that they are demonstrated to be to a mind already malleable in its perceptions and to beliefs less blinkered by prejudice than are those of his fellow English people. In an early passage which asserts his affection for the country while also drawing on oft-repeated stereotypes of Ireland as a weak and feminized land, Essex arrives in Dublin viewing Ireland not as a traitorous territory to be conquered by force, but as a lover to be wooed back into the arms of 'her' protector.⁷⁴ Less contentiously, Lawless also portrays Essex acknowledging the culpability of English misrule in the alienation of Ireland from her English 'Mistress' (*WE* 9) when he states that O'Neill had once been a capable and faithful soldier to the Queen but has been estranged over time by 'those sent from England to bear rule' in Ireland (*WE* 41-2).

⁷⁴ Emily Lawless, *With Essex in Ireland* (London: Smith, Elder, 1890), p. 9. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *WE*.

In contrast, Essex's secretary Henry 'Hal' Harvey, the novel's unreliable narrator, is blinded by a misguided self-confidence and arrogance, traits first conveyed through his mistakenly optimistic attempts to win the affections of the Irishwoman Agatha Usher. He misreads his love interest much as he misinterprets Ireland more generally, and Harvey's consistent misjudgements permit Lawless to interrogate and confront the views he expresses. The text challenges, for instance, Harvey's assertion that the Irish are 'as inferior to us by nature as they are by birth and breeding' (*WE* 162-3), using Essex as the means by which his views are exposed as flawed and dogmatic: '[it is little] we know of such matters or can so much as guess at the thoughts of others, especially of those we despise', Essex states, 'contempt being as it were a natural veil or blinder of the eyes, hindering us from guessing how they whom we scorn do in their turn regard us' (*WE* 163). Initially likening the Irish to 'savage beasts' (*WE* 67), Harvey concludes that 'there is but one way of dealing with this country, and that [is] to slay without ruth or remorse' (*WE* 69), although he blanches when a subsidiary character, Colonel Sethcock, boasts of his part in a previous campaign of slaughter and devastation in the country. Captain Charles Warren is a liberal counterpart to both Harvey and Sethcock who recognizes the shared history of the two islands and suggests about the Irish that, 'if they are papists, marry, why so were our own fathers or grandfathers, so that seems scarce sufficient reason for treating them like beasts' (*WE* 69). In demonstrating a range of responses to the Irish situation which confronts her English characters, Lawless both conveys and interrogates stereotypes of Irish savagery which continued at the time of her writing to be deployed by commentators such as Sir Robert Peel, who as late as 1886 was suggesting that without British governance Ireland was doomed to become a 'savage wilderness'.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, no. 2274 (20 June 1886), p. 1.

Essex's journey is represented as both geographical and psychological, and his growing discontent and disorientation mirror images of the increasingly strange and inhospitable landscape through which he travels. Movement westward is demonstrated to lead metaphorically to both hell *and* Connaught, the latter a space where Essex finds himself at 'the very gates of Hell, if no i' th' inside of Hell itself' (*WE* 191). When he is forbidden by the Queen to return to England, his angry response reiterates and reinforces his figurative location: 'Keep Essex in Ireland! Keep him in prison! Keep him in Hell!' (*WE* 260). At the same time, the act of moving westward and the interaction with the Irish people it allows are transformative: whereas Harvey initially deems Essex's favourable opinions of the Irish 'fantastical' (*WE* 164), proximity forces him into grudging agreement with his leader. Witnessing Irish kernes demonstrating remarkable powers of perception, he acknowledges that they 'are in truth humans like ourselves', and this realization humbles him (*WE* 164-5).

Essex defies his orders from Elizabeth and leads his army on a route that takes them away from Tyrone and his rebel troops, yet the implication remains that he is powerless to chart a metaphorical new course in Ireland. While he often displays strong pro-Irish sentiments – conveying, for example, the opinion that Ireland needs to be healed, rather than brought to heel (*WE* 173) — these are just as consistently challenged by his inability to remedy the problems that confront him. The 'best way of dealing with this people has not been found', (*WE* 174) he asserts, although he is unable, himself, to think of any solution to the Irish problem which confronts him. Essex, as Lawless constructs him, is a man increasingly aware of his own impotence but motivated in his 'failure' by an affection for and burgeoning understanding of Ireland and the Irish; who says about the country that he 'would gladly serve it, were it for any time or in any office, if I could thereby hope to bring it peace and prosperity at the last' (*WE* 173).

In the passage of the novel which gained Yeats's most fervent endorsement, Essex, Harvey and Sethcock witness a gathering of the ghosts of those slain in the campaign against the Desmond rising twenty years earlier — the same slaughter about which Sethcock had earlier boasted.⁷⁶ Lawless's views of that massacre as she had expressed them in her Irish history conveyed a grudging acceptance of the destiny of the Desmonds despite the atrocities committed in the exacting of their fate: 'The tale of the great Desmond rebellion which ended only with the ruin of that house, and with the slaughter or starvation of thousands of its unhappy adherents, is one of those abortive tragedies of which the whole history of Ireland is full,' she asserted at that time. 'Our pity for the victims' doom, and our indignation for the cold-blooded cruelty with which that doom was carried out, is mingled with a reluctant realization that it had become an anomaly, and that as such it was bound either to change or to perish' (*I* 181). In *With Essex*, however, Lawless's attitude toward the massacre is far less complacent, and she effectively revises its history to allow the victims their retribution when Sethcock's confrontation with the ghosts of those he has murdered leaves him permanently 'shrunk and wasted' (*WE* 148).

Later, Essex's most sinister confrontation with his own murderous present occurs when his soldiers deposit the heads of slain rebels onto the ground in front of him. His disgust at the act leads him to wonder if his longing for leniency is 'some womanish weakness or folly that I carry from my mother' (*WE* 180), and he thereafter resolves to be more ruthless. The repercussions of his more aggressive stance are, however, swift and brutal. Sir Henry Harrington's troops are resoundingly defeated by the Irish almost immediately, and Essex learns that the surviving soldiers from Harrington's division have fled in terror. By presenting this as the most decisive defeat of Essex's campaign and the one which literally divides his army, Lawless demonstrates the deficiencies of a 'masculine'

⁷⁶ Sethcock relates that, during the Desmond rebellion, 130,000 'men, women, and children of all degrees [were] slain or died of famine' (*WE* 146).

approach to the Irish situation and thereby privileges, to borrow her own terminology, 'womanish' compassion in dealings with the Irish.

When, too late, Essex concedes that any Englishman who attempts to rule Ireland is doomed — stating that there 'breathes not, I believe, upon earth at this moment that man whose virtue or prudence could carry him in safety through [Ireland's] intricacies' (*WE* 235) — his words effectively justify the truce he has agreed with Tyrone. His most costly mistake is shown not to be the armistice, which Lawless notably demonstrates to be negotiated chivalrously on both sides, but his belief that he can remain loyal to the Queen and win the affections of the Irish at the same time. By choosing to enter into the intricacies of the Irish problem, recognizing the appeals of the 'other' island and dividing his allegiances between Ireland and England, Lawless suggests that he has tried and failed to woo two mistresses. In his eventual recognition of the futility of the task which he has been set, Essex expresses the difficulties he has faced in terms which assert the impossibility of serving England and Ireland simultaneously. Anyone who undertakes such a project, he claims,

must be pitiless as Nero, yet must no trace of blood be found on his hands. He must give ear to all petitioners, and promise to redress all wrongs, yet must he do nothing [...] He must know every wound and bleeding sore with which this wretched country bleeds to death, yet must be content to staunch none of them, for that were costly, and money is of all things that which her Majesty least loves to see shed in Ireland. (*WE* 236)

When Harvey soon afterwards glimpses an apparition of his leader's disembodied head being held aloft by a washerwoman at the ford of the Lagan river who is symbolically cleansing Ireland of its enemies, the vision is an explicit enactment of what is implicit in the novel's final pages: that Essex has immersed himself in the troubled waters of Ireland, and that it is there that his fate has been conjured.

Although Lawless avoids confronting the deaths of Essex and his ideals within the confines of her narrative, this apparition clearly foreshadows the revenge of Essex's other

'mistress' – England – and his literal demise. Rather than closing her text with scenes of his execution, however, Lawless chooses as the moment for her final image of Essex one in which he remains hopeful of appeasing the Crown, and thus reflects the optimism of the political moment at which she was writing: a time when there was still hope of non-violent conciliation between nationalists and unionists. The reader, however, recognizes that the prognosis is not good. In Harvey's last glimpse of his master standing on the deck of a ship as he sails towards England, his eyes are drawn to 'the very whiteness of [Essex's] neck where it rose above his armour', and to the man behind him who holds a sword aloft (*WE* 292). The reader is thereby offered a vision of a man who is both literally and metaphorically cast adrift between a country whose affections he has not been permitted to win but which he has no desire to master by force, and another whose people he can neither placate nor their opinions alter. More importantly, it is an image of Essex with the blade poised to fall, suggesting that he, like every other Englishman who attempted to situate himself in a position politically between England and Ireland — including, as time would prove, Gladstone himself — was doomed by a complex and brutal history to fail.

Lawless followed *With Essex with Grania: The Story of an Island* (1892), a novel which marked a substantial departure from her earlier Irish fiction by telling the tale of its eponymous heroine — the first and only time that Lawless's Irish work would feature a female protagonist. It was published at a point when the New Woman novelists were beginning to make their most notable impact on the British literary establishment, and when, despite the downfall and death of Parnell and the resultant disunity of the Irish Parliamentary Party, the vote on a re-drafted Home Rule Bill for Ireland was imminent. Considering these political contexts alongside Lawless's own anti-suffragist stance, unionist leanings and aristocratic connections, *Grania's* underlying message is surprising, coming down firmly on the side of the downtrodden and politically powerless by critiquing

limitations, injustices and prejudices in many forms and mutations. A glance towards her personal affiliations, however, renders her narrative preoccupations more understandable. Of these, two of the most important in terms of her political views were the historian W. E. H. Lecky and the politician Sir Horace Plunkett. The intimacy of her acquaintance with Lecky is evidenced by the fact that they were not only regular correspondents, but that he had also proofread both *Ireland* and *Maelcho* prior to their respective publications and had reviewed her work enthusiastically.⁷⁷ R. F. Foster describes Lecky as '[i]n Irish terms, always nationally minded, never nationalist; a liberal Unionist', a political stance Lawless appears to have found complementary to her own.⁷⁸ She was an unabashed admirer of Lecky's scholarship, and was particularly impressed by the final volume of his important work, *History of England in the Eighteenth Century* (1878-1890), a text generally acknowledged to be more sensitive to native Irish interests than antecedent histories. Writing enthusiastically to Lecky after her first reading of the book, Lawless hailed Lecky's ability to remain impartial on Irish issues, despite his challenging subject matter: 'wretched as the story is, and blackened as one supposed it to be'.⁷⁹ With Plunkett, she regularly debated Irish politics, and found such commonality with his viewpoints that she read, critiqued and even suggested the title for his *Ireland in the New Century* (1904), a volume he had originally intended to call *With the Tame Geese* in homage to her.⁸⁰ During their long association, Plunkett's political allegiances would undergo a dramatic and

⁷⁷ See letters from Emily Lawless to W. E. H. Lecky (24 August 1889) and (n.d.) Lecky Correspondence, Trinity College Dublin, MSS 1827-36/2476 and 2482, and W. E. H. Lecky, 'Noticeable Books: *With Essex in Ireland*', *The Nineteenth Century*, vol. 28, no. 162 (August 1890), pp. 236-251, in which Lecky praises both *Hurrish* and *With Essex*.

⁷⁸ R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (London: Penguin, 1988), p. 85.

⁷⁹ Letter from Emily Lawless to W. E. H. Lecky (30 December 1890), Lecky Correspondence, Trinity College Dublin, MSS 1827-36/639.

⁸⁰ Letter from Horace Plunkett to Lawless (3 October 1902), Lawless Papers.

significant modification: a Unionist MP for South Dublin from 1899-1900, by 1911 he regarded himself as a Home Ruler.⁸¹

Such affiliations suggest that Lawless's own version of unionism was, in common with Lecky's, of the liberal variety, and that, like Plunkett, she may have been in the process of undergoing a revision to her political stance. This latter idea is borne out in at least one regard: the alterations which occurred to her views on women's suffrage. Over the course of her writing career, Lawless would develop friendships with women whose working lives and personal circumstances were markedly dissimilar to her own and, through them, would gain a substantially different perspective on women's issues. These included, most notably, the historian, philanthropist and novelist Edith Sichel, whose many social projects included the establishment of a vocational training program for girls from the impoverished Whitechapel district of London, and Margaret Oliphant, an industrious author who, after several of her male relatives failed to provide for their families, acted as the primary breadwinner for a sizable contingent of her extended relations. As a result of her new familiarity with the alternative experiences of women such as Sichel and Oliphant, Lawless eventually came to support working women's right to vote, stating on the subject that, although she had 'no sympathy with the Suffragette methods' and had 'personally no wish for a vote', 'the helplessness of great bodies of women-workers even against *admitted* wrongs, simply because there is no one whose *interest* it is to speak for them' had convinced her that, for some women at least, suffrage was a necessity.⁸²

Although this alteration to her stance on suffrage would not come until a point significantly after *Grania* was written, narrative clues suggest that her ideas on the subject may have already been undergoing a transformation by the time of the novel's

⁸¹ Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p. 426.

⁸² Sichel, p. 98.

composition. Set in a wholly Irish-speaking community, *Grania* represented Lawless's acknowledged attempt to democratize Irish society by avoiding 'that brogue' which, she claimed, was 'a tiresome necessity always' in Irish fiction.⁸³ Yet despite her efforts to elide outward markers of difference between her characters, her narrative acts as confirmation that disparities will endure and social hierarchies emerge even in the most isolated and microcosmic of societies. In Lawless's text, Grania is a young native of the Aran Island of Inishmaan who is dissatisfied with the terms of her existence. Not only by titling her novel 'The Story of an Island' but also through textual evidence, Lawless demonstrates that woman and island are analogous in both position and predicament: they share a similar dislocation and disenfranchisement. Throughout the narrative, Lawless's characterizations act to disturb traditional notions of gender and to interrogate the placements of women in society. This is most notably evidenced by the ways in which she creates male characters who are uniformly weak and incompetent in comparison to their female counterparts: Grania's father, unable to overcome his heartbreak after his wife's death, is incapable of caring for his daughters; the indolent Shan Daly allows his wife and children to starve while he spends his days drinking at the ruined ancestral home ('the villa') long ago left empty by Inishmaan's landlord, Lynch Bodkin; and Bodkin himself is an absentee landowner whose financial imprudence suggests wider and ubiquitous patterns of patriarchal neglect. Yet, while Lawless demonstrates that Grania and her sister Honor are consistently able to fill the voids of responsibility left by these men, and that Grania is also physically stronger than the majority of men on the island, it is in fact Grania's fiancé Murdough Blake — a man who is averse to labour and, like many of his male counterparts, prone to drink to excess — who is repeatedly posited as the island's heir-apparent to the position abdicated by Bodkin.

⁸³ Emily Lawless, 'Dedication', *Grania*.

The notion that Lawless intended Grania's fiancé as a representative of a new and emerging form of social aristocracy on the island is emphasized by the connections she creates between him and the villa, a building to which he holds the keys and is said to have a 'prescriptive right' (G I 86). That Murdough is also doomed to re-enact a similar form of undeserved and misused power to that wielded by the Big House's previous inhabitant is reinforced by the obvious and highly specific parallels Lawless draws between the characters and settings of her novel and those in what is perhaps the most famous Big House tale in the Irish literary canon: Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (1800). Like Sir Patrick Rackrent — the character who in Edgeworth's novel starts Castle Rackrent on its road to ruin — Bodkin is said to have been a profligate, indebted drunkard who continues to be admired by his former tenantry for the very reasons that have led to his downfall: namely, his ability to ignore his financial troubles and inexhaustible appetite for alcohol. The heirloom cracked punch bowls which in both novels symbolize the damaged (and damaging) legacies of the Ascendancy provide a more specific link between Lawless's and Edgeworth's texts, while the crumbling structures of the buildings themselves indicate the diminishing fortunes and disintegrating authority of the class to which both Rackrent and Bodkin belong. Yet it is through her choice of 'Murdough' as the name of Bodkin's successor that Lawless draws the most readily recognizable correlation between the characterizations in *Grania* and those in *Castle Rackrent*, in which Sir Patrick's heir had been called 'Murtagh'.

Murdough's emergence as the island's new aristocracy may act to defy conventional notions of social class, but through him Lawless simultaneously suggests the persistence of property-based hierarchies even in societies where economic resources are standardized, and it is also imperative to note that gender and class remain just two forms of power structure among several to which Lawless draws attention in the novel. Religion —

specifically Catholicism — is another. Although Grania shuns any notion of religion to pursue worldly pleasures, her sister Honor invests both her faith and her passion solely in the Church to which she staunchly adheres. Religion acts in Lawless's text as a palliative to, and escape from, the meanness and hardness of Honor's existence. The mantra she repeats to herself, "Pains make saints," "Pains make saints" (*G I* 168), lends her suffering a distinct, result-oriented meaning, and allows her a glimpse of the heavenly compensation for what she has been forced to endure in her earthly life. The fact that her suffering only worsens over the course of the narrative indicates, however, that her version of religious belief — in its glorification of endurance and passivity — suppresses more active attempts to overcome injustice and facilitate healing. Catholicism is demonstrated to have a debilitating power over Honor, and to lead directly to an enfeebling fatalism.

Grania's resistance to religious authority acts in a measure as the antithesis of Honor's devoutness. She consistently reiterates her love of earthly pleasures, but such sentiments are also demonstrated to underlie her devotion to Murdough, which is as incapacitating as is Honor's religious faith and results in a position of subordination to which Grania just as readily assents: 'better be ill used by Murdough; beaten by Murdough; toil, drudge, be killed by Murdough,' she asserts, 'than live prosperously and comfortably with anyone else!' (*G II* 144) Through images of dependence such as these, Lawless sets up the novel's final, crucial set piece. This comes when Grania — preparing to make her way to the neighbouring island of Inishmore to summon a priest for Honor, whose death is imminent — arrives at the villa to plead with Murdough to accompany her on the journey. At the entrance to the Big House — a space from which she, as a woman, has always been debarred — Grania stands on the lowest stair and Murdough comes to occupy the position on the landing above her. Looking upwards, Grania experiences a

sudden and debilitating realization of her position in relation to him. She has, Lawless writes,

a feeling of being there a suppliant, a beggar — of being at a disadvantage, she could not tell how or why. Probably it was something in their mutual attitude which suggested it. She had never in her own person known the feeling of being a suppliant, for in her time there had never been any gentry on Inishmaan, and she and Honor stood quite on the summit of such social altitudes as she was acquainted with. All the same, she did know it instinctively, and it arose without any bidding now. This fine young man standing at rest upon the top of the steps — at his own hall door, as it were — the girl — herself — with her petticoat over her head, appealing from below. Where had she seen those two figures that they seemed so familiar?
(G II 226-7)

Here, Lawless indicates that Grania's familiarity with her position as suppliant, motivated by Murdough's stance above her and in front of the Big House, is a legacy of feudal fealty which inheres in her behaviour. Overtly represented as a feat which transgresses the boundaries of social propriety and gendered authority, Grania's subsequent act of climbing the stairs to stand equal with Murdough can, however, be interpreted as one in which she crosses the metaphorical boundaries which exist in a number of power structures of which his position is also reminiscent, and to which Lawless has repeatedly linked him through narrative imagery and textual clues. These include, most notably, conventional notions of class-based, religious and racial superiority. By consistently questioning and undermining Murdough's position of authority and control, Lawless demonstrates at the novel's close that Grania's enduring faith in him is illusive. Even more importantly, by portraying Grania being pulled to her death by a mass of seaweed she believes is Murdough come to save her, she suggests that Grania's inability to wrest herself from his metaphorical grasp — and all that his grasp has come to represent — is what brings about her heroine's demise. These closing images suggest that *Grania* is ultimately about the transience and endurance of power, and that the novel itself acts to interrogate what Lawless represents as the prevailing and misplaced reliance on those who hold it illegitimately.

Lawless would follow *Grania* closely with *Maelcho: A Sixteenth Century Narrative* (1894), a novel published at a point when the second Irish Home Rule Bill had recently and resoundingly been rejected by the Lords. In it, she would return to the subject of Irish history and rebellion, but with a substantially altered emphasis and perspective. With *Maelcho*, her focus turned to the Desmond Rising and the period in Ireland twenty years prior to the events fictionalized in *With Essex*, and through this new subject matter a distinctly more pessimistic vision of the fate of Celtic Ireland would emerge. At the same time, Lawless would offer her readers a view of the other side of the 'Irish Question' by choosing a succession of Irish characters as her focalizers. This shift in narrative focus from alien to native viewpoints almost certainly accounts for the fact that her fellow Irish author, Katharine Tynan, a confirmed Home Ruler, praised *Maelcho* unequivocally, in one publication referring to it as a 'great and noble book'; in another calling the novel 'the finest historical romance we have yet had'.⁸⁴ Yeats included it in an 1895 list of 'the best hundred books' in Irish literature, and this time did so without feeling the need to express his reservations.⁸⁵ The *Irish Daily Independent*, meanwhile, suggested that the book 'ought to make rebels' and wondered how 'the writer of this book can be anything but disaffected to the English rule in Ireland' — the reviewer's dismay evidencing, in the process, a foreknowledge of Lawless's familial and political affiliations.⁸⁶

Other reviews, however, would indicate the wider interpretive scope the novel afforded. 'While the narrative wrings the heart of the reader for the wrongs of Ireland,' a reviewer in London's *Daily News* would suggest without irony or objection, 'it brings home the difficulty the clear headed English find in understanding the dreamy Celt, with his

⁸⁴ Clipping of Katharine Tynan Hinkson letter printed in *The New Age* (29 November 1894), n. p. and clipping from *Boston Literary World* (1 December 1894), n. p., both Lawless Papers.

⁸⁵ Yeats, *Uncollected Prose*, p 386.

⁸⁶ Clipping from *Irish Daily Independent* (5 November 1894), n. p., Lawless Papers.

passionate loyalty to a leader, his inefficient grasp of worldly things, his lack of "saving common sense".⁸⁷ Dublin's *Evening Telegraph*, meanwhile, would indicate that, although 'Lawless spares the Englishman no tint in the picture of his wrongs to Ireland', there continued to be something in her work 'from which the Irishman recoils'. '[H]owever base the adventurers that are painted for us,' the *Telegraph's* reviewer asserted, the Irish themselves 'seem to be presented by Miss Lawless as mere dirt beneath the feet of "her grace's soldiers"'.⁸⁸ As with *Hurriah*, suggestions that her Irish characters were stereotypically simple and servile would surface; again, she would divide her readers.

Maelcho begins, as Lawless herself indicates in its dedication, as a picaresque adventure tale, but gradually mutates into a more serious study of Ireland and the various peoples who belong to it. Three characters, each simultaneously sympathetic and flawed, act in the novel as representatives of the different factions of the Irish population: Hugh Fitzwilliam Gaynard is the young heir to an Anglo-Irish landowning family, Maelcho an Irish peasant of Celtic extraction and Sir James Fitzmaurice an Irish aristocrat. As the novel opens, the fifteen-year-old Gaynard has just survived a raid on his uncle's castle by a rival Irish clan. Although this attack has resulted in the deaths of most of Gaynard's family and friends, Lawless complicates the parcelling out of blame by detailing the extent to which the murders are the products of a relentless vendetta culture within the Irish community which has been perpetuated by pride and bigotry on all sides. Gaynard is demonstrated to be a product of this culture, and his opinions of himself, and of others in relation to himself, are subtly but consistently mocked. Through Gaynard, Lawless chastises the Anglo-Irish, comparing his blind prejudices against the Connaught 'savages' — whom he wrongly presumes to be 'possibly cannibals; at all events pagans' — to his

⁸⁷ *Daily News* (London), no. 15179 (23 November 1894), p. 7.

⁸⁸ Clipping from *Evening Telegraph* (Dublin) (8 December 1894), n. p., Lawless Papers.

equally blinkered opinions of himself and his antecedents (*M I* 13-14). Gaynard is said to be 'upborne by the sense of his own importance [as] the representative of those far-away English Gaynards about whom he knew nothing, but as to whose importance he cherished the most fervent and intimate conviction' (*M I* 36). Through the unmistakable irony of this passage and the unfavourable comparisons Lawless draws between Gaynard's behaviour and that of an Irish peasant woman, Beara O'Flaherty, Gaynard's ideas of his innate Anglo-Irish superiority become the subject of narrative ridicule.

Beara finds the abandoned Gaynard wandering through O'Flaherty territory, takes him in, and eventually saves his life. As the daughter of the brehon (lawyer) to the leader of the O'Flaherty clan, Beara is, much like Grania before her, a peasant whose social status and variant gendered identity situate her above and apart from the remainder of the community: 'She was not a mere woman at all in tribal estimation,' Lawless writes, 'nay, in her father and brother's absence, was the virtual leader of the encampment' (*M I* 105). Under Beara's patronage, Gaynard gradually transforms both outwardly through his acts of adopting the clan's mode of dressing and growing a traditional glibbe, and inwardly, as the structure of the community to which he comes tenuously to belong challenges his Anglo-Irish and masculine perceptions of societal configuration. In describing these perceptions, Lawless's text also and none-too-subtly mocks him: 'a boy is an adaptable animal,' she explains, 'even a young Anglo-Irishman, brought up to regard himself as a sort of Heaven-descended being, lord of a whole world of serfs and inferiors. There were no serfs in Glen Corril, for all were equal under the strong hand of Cormac Cas' (*M I* 101).

Gaynard's experiences in Glen Corril eventually reinforce rather than subvert his sense of ethnic identity, an outcome which serves to affirm his own personal obduracy more than it does any notions of his racial superiority. His time among the tribes may serve to '*un-Celtif[y]* him' and harden 'the original, anti-Celtic qualities which were his by

nature' (*M I* 248), but by subsequently demonstrating that Gaynard's anti-Irish bias is subordinated when he becomes Sir James Fitzmaurice's aide during the Desmond rebellion, and then resurfaces as he makes his way through the ranks of the British army after the rebellion fails, Lawless consistently queries his allegiances. In portraying the easy shift of Gaynard's loyalties from one warring side to the other, Lawless effectively destabilizes any notion that he possesses a native or ordinary sense of racial identity.

As the action in the narrative switches to Kerry, the focus moves from Gaynard to Maelcho, and through him, to Fitzmaurice and the rebellion he is planning. Maelcho, the only peasant character other than Beara to be described at length, is a Celt of a very different nature to her. Although the two are aligned by their separate acts of saving Gaynard's life, where Beara is a masculinized female defined by her dignity and reserve, Maelcho is that Celtic stereotype — the feminized male — who acts as 'nursery-maid' (*M I* 185) to Fitzmaurice's children and the invalided Gaynard. In line with other Celticisms, Maelcho is also a mystic and a dreamer, is driven by passion rather than reason, and displays a canine-like loyalty to the Fitzmaurice family: his is a 'dog-fidelity, not man-fidelity — a fidelity which would have caused him to let himself be cut into pieces, not only without any adequate cause, but probably by preference for a cause that was not in the least adequate' (*M I* 251). Images of a child-like or dog-like loyalty recur in the narrative to trouble the disruption of class and race-based notions of superiority Lawless had previously achieved through her characterizations of Gaynard and Beara, and even as she uses Maelcho as a means of undermining other prevalent stereotypes — that of the violent, degenerate, 'Celtic Caliban' most prominent among them.

Yet it is the contrasts which are shown to exist between Gaynard, Maelcho and Fitzmaurice which become the most significant aspect of their characterizations, particularly as they exalt the latter, the character who is able to extract and assimilate his

most exemplary traits from the best attributes of the variety of cultures to which he has been exposed. His love of homeland is, in fact, presented as more profound because of two interrelated factors: his deeply ingrained Irishness, and his keenly felt period of exile. Thus, where Gaynard's character is driven and defined almost exclusively by a specifically Anglo-Irish form of bigotry, and he is 'ready to thank God in his prayers that he was not born a Celt' (*M I* 248), and Maelcho is the essentialized Celt, unable to moderate his actions or his passions by any recourse to reason, the traits that define Fitzmaurice are demonstrated to have been gleaned from a long line of native Irish surrogate mothers as well as from continental ancestors. As a result, he has enough Celtic imagination to dream of an altered Ireland and enough 'old Norman grip and tenacity' (*M I* 250) to make that dream a possibility. Ethnically positioned not above but rather somewhere between Gaynard and Maelcho, Fitzmaurice shares the logic of the former and the passion of the latter.

The collapse of his rebellion, as Lawless chooses to render it, is attributable to a catalogue of errors and misunderstandings by, among and between the Irish rather than any notion of defeat by the English. These include, in particular, the Earl of Desmond's failure to join Fitzmaurice in the rising. Desmond's reasons for withholding his support are complex, and include infighting with his stepson the Earl of Ormond, the timidity that is a legacy of years of persecution and punishment at the hands of the English, and jealousy of Fitzmaurice, who is both his cousin and a rival landowner. Desmond's brother, Sir John of Pikes, is equally but differently detrimental to Fitzmaurice's plans. An uncontrollable malefactor said to be doing his part for the rebellion by riding 'perpetually to and fro and up and down the country, harassing its inhabitants in all directions' (*M I* 224), Sir John enacts the novel's most heinous and unpardonable act when he and his men ambush and

kill Sir Henry Davells and Arthur Carter, representatives of the Queen sent to negotiate with the rebels. The consequences are shown to be devastating:

the murder of the two Englishmen, and the circumstances under which that murder had been committed, had precipitated matters by a leap. After this all idea of compromise, all suggestions of pity upon either side, became not so much impossible as ridiculous. Henry Davells was a man of exceptional qualities, a man liked by both sides and both creeds. (M I 257)

Correlations between the Davells murder in *Maelcho* and the Phoenix Park murders as they are presented in Lawless's history are readily recognizable. In the earlier text, the Phoenix Park atrocity is described as having been perpetrated by a group of 'miscreants' led by James Carey, a man who, like Sir John of Pikes, was 'of somewhat higher social standing than the rest' (I 411-12). One of the men murdered in the Park, Lord Frederick Cavendish, had been, in common with the fictional Davells, sent to Ireland 'upon a mission of conciliation', and is described as having been widely admired in both England and Ireland (I 411).

The same type of fusion of history with contemporary circumstances is apparent in the portrayal of Fitzmaurice's downfall and death, strikingly reminiscent as it is of Parnell's political demise. Significantly, Fitzmaurice's enthusiastic and, as Lawless represents them, impetuous efforts to lead Ireland towards autonomy are brought to a standstill by an indiscretion. While Desmond's act of horse-thieving outwardly bears scant resemblance to Parnell's adultery, it is apparent that Lawless was drawing at least some of her inspiration from more recent Irish political failures when she portrays internal Irish rivalries exacerbated by moral recklessness as the means by which 'the only Irishman whose name carried the slightest weight outside Ireland, the only man upon the rebel side with a head to plan, a hand to execute, had gone to his account' (M I 300). Through her portrayal of Fitzmaurice's senseless downfall and death, she demonstrates that it, like Parnell's, is the result of ongoing feuds and power struggles which are endemic within Ireland, rather than

the result of extrinsic forces. Fitzmaurice's death leaves his rising in disarray; the downfall and death of Parnell had the same detrimental effect on the Irish Parliamentary Party in the 1890s.

Maelcho's and Gaynard's paths, meanwhile, converge and separate several times over the remainder of the narrative, the experiences of each refracting and inverting those of the other. Both are able, for instance, to forget the atrocities they witness, yet where Gaynard simply chooses to banish these unpleasant thoughts — 'with his usual practical good sense' he resolves 'to think about them as little as possible' (*M II* 168-9) — Maelcho's forgetfulness is prompted neither by resolve or 'good sense', but rather by the lack of them. His experiences leave him directionless and with only 'the ghost of his mind' (*M II* 200), the latter an affliction Lawless portrays as a blessing: 'Heaven – merciful in this if in nothing else – had interposed a screen between him and [his past], and his own worst misfortune had become his best and his only friend' (*M II* 201). Likewise, whereas both characters witness the deaths of holy men, Gaynard comes to regard the brutal torture and execution of two priests with an equanimity that borders on indifference, while Maelcho, even in his diminished state, is profoundly affected by the (natural) death of a pious and brave monk, Michael Galbraith.

In the novel, Lawless consistently represents death as the Irish peasant's only chance of freedom. As Maelcho looks on the scene of a massacre, he is said to feel about 'all these dead creatures' that '*[t]hey were free; they were out of it; they had got into some country where nobody could do anything more against them; they had even triumphed over a fashion, the only fashion in which it was open to anyone to triumph in those days in Ireland'* (*M II* 309-10). This passage leaves little doubt that, in *Maelcho*, Lawless is painting a portrait of a native Ireland which is under threat, and is attempting to speak to both sides of the contemporary argument over Ireland's fate. Specifically, with phrases

such as 'in those days' she reminds those on the pro-Home Rule side of Irish politics of the progress that has been made since the time of the novel's setting by alluding to increased opportunities for political 'triumph', yet also warns her unionist compatriots, by choosing rebellion as her narrative focus, of the dangers inherent in oppressive tactics. Furthermore, the cynicism that she expresses concerning the possibility of liberation for the Irish under British rule, and more notably her inclusion of passages which portray the death of Irish characters as a preferable and expressly triumphant alternative to a life of subjection and victimization, suggest that she was able to anticipate the rhetoric of later rebel rallying calls. Irish insurgents, most notably Patrick Pearse, would argue in the years leading to the Rising of 1916 that death was both a release from suffering and a rebirth to freedom: that, in the words of Pearse, the Irish people themselves might become their country's 'own Messiah, the people labouring, scourged, crowned with thorns, agonising and dying, to rise again immortal and impassable'.⁸⁹ Through her narrative themes, Lawless implies that the journey from a Maelcho-like glorification of death to the exaltation of martyrdom and Pearse's view that the shedding of blood is a 'sanctifying thing' is neither a long nor an arduous one.⁹⁰

By the final pages of the novel, Maelcho has become a symbolic representation of Ireland, his bedraggled appearance, condition of homelessness and starvation, and complacent resignation to his fate all suggesting the state of his native land. As he is executed by a firing squad, Lawless draws attention to the tree to which he is bound — which, 'like the other trees around [...] was doomed, and would probably be cut down in the morning, for a couple of notches had been chopped in the bark, a little above the spot

⁸⁹ Quoted in A. C. Hepburn, *Ireland 1905-25: Volume 2, Documents and Analysis* (Newtownards: Colourpoint, 1998), p. 134.

⁹⁰ Peter Costello, *The Heart Grown Brutal: The Irish Revolution in Literature, from Parnell to the Death of Yeats, 1891-1939* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977), p. 76.

against which the prisoner's head rested' (*M II* 346). The image of Maelcho lashed to the tree, both he and it marked for death, suggests that their fates are intertwined – that the unnatural destruction of the indigenous flora can be linked to the unnatural demise of Ireland's indigenous people. Yet while Lawless suggests the inner conflict that the British soldiers experience as they prepare for his execution, she reveals them to be both reluctant to kill the innocent man, and anxious to be done with the task so that they may join the feast they know is waiting for them at camp. Her graphic depiction of two bullets penetrating Maelcho's heart, and of the soldiers' subsequent return to a 'rejoicing' camp and food 'enough for everybody, and to spare' (*M II* 351) – everybody except, of course, for the Irish we know to be starving around them on all sides – leaves little room to doubt that Lawless laments the fate of Maelcho, and through him, that of 'native' or 'Celtic' Ireland. At the same time, she conveys to the reader the sense that his demise is the result of a complex history of errors and misjudgements on both the Irish and English sides of the conflict.

The composition of *Maelcho* proved so bleak an exercise that Lawless would, shortly after its publication, write to Gladstone to assert that, if she were ever to attempt another work of historical fiction, she hoped to set it during a 'period that [would] not need quite so much undiluted lamp black!'⁹¹ On the surface this seems a strange declaration, considering that her novel *A Colonel of the Empire* (1895) was then being prepared for publication and had, in fact, already marked her first foray into a more light-hearted form of Irish historical fiction. She had referred in a previous letter to Gladstone to the imminent publication of this follow-up to *Maelcho*, notably indicating at that time her publishers' reservations concerning it: 'I have a book (laid in 1579) which I have been a little hopeful about,' she wrote in May of 1894, 'but alas! my publishers are so discouraging

⁹¹ Letter from Emily Lawless to W. E. H. Gladstone (22 October 1894), Gladstone Papers, British Library, vol. CCCCXXXIV, add. 44519/149.

about its lot + feel strongly inclined, though it has begun to get into proof, to give up publishing it altogether'.⁹² Considering these sentiments alongside the book's subsequent reception, her failure to mention the work in her follow-up letter to Gladstone is unsurprising. A slight, humorous work which incorporated the Wild Geese, Fenianism and marital abduction into its plot, *A Colonel of the Empire* was issued only in America, where it earned little favour with either reviewers or the reading public. Its disappointing reception would substantially alter Lawless's subsequent literary output. In the years that followed, she issued essay and short story collections such as *Traits and Confidences* (1898) and *A Garden Diary* (1901), wrote a biography of Maria Edgeworth (1904) and produced volumes of poetry including her enduringly popular *With the Wild Geese* (1902). She would not, however, publish another novel for more than a decade.

The Book of Gilly: Four Months Out of a Life (1906) marked Lawless's eventual return to novel writing. In it, she deals centrally with an exiled character who, in his own youthful way, attempts to unite the disparate sides of the Anglo-Irish divide. The recognizable brightening of narrative tone in comparison to Lawless's earlier texts is not only commensurate with her subject matter — *Gilly* is ostensibly a children's story — but also reflects the relative stability, for a pro-Union author such as herself, of the political climate in which she was writing. By 1906, Home Rule legislation had not come before Parliament for thirteen years. An Irish devolution 'scare' in 1904-5, and the return of a Liberal government to Westminster, had meant that the situation in Ireland continued to be a topic of debate, but the issue of Irish self-government that had most preoccupied the political discourse between the two nations was to remain effectively dormant during the period of *Gilly's* composition. A third Home Rule Bill for Ireland would not in fact emerge until after the passing of the Parliament Act in 1911.

⁹² Letter from Emily Lawless to W. E. H. Gladstone (5 May 1894), Gladstone Papers, British Library, vol. CCCCXXXIII, add. 44518/202.

Within Parliament, Irish Home Rulers were treading more carefully than they had under Parnell's leadership. An article published in *The Times* in February 1905, while suggesting the continued importance of debating the ever-present 'Irish Question', confirmed this more cautious stance by noting that the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, John Redmond, had taken the step in recently placing that question before Parliament of making certain that 'the uncomfortable reality of Home Rule [was] kept out of sight'.⁹³ Redmond's reluctance to foreground the Home Rule issue was understandable. Overwhelming British enthusiasm for colonialism had been the order of the day since the period of the Boer War (1899-1902), a conflict which had the ultimate effect of making 'Empire' a byword for British solvency. By the turn of the twentieth century, Empire as a financial necessity had gradually become the means by which the idea of centralized government was being sold to the British people, and Home Rule, by extension, was progressively figured as a serious threat to the stability of Imperial interests. As the new century lengthened, Parliamentary opponents of Home Rule — including the MP Joseph Chamberlain, who in 1905 asserted that 'Home Rule would bring about the disintegration of the Empire' and the former Prime Minister Lord Rosebery, who a month after Redmond's speech would assert 'that Home Rule would be the curse of dual government at the heart of Empire' — would display an increasing tendency to turn the issue of self-government for Ireland, the oldest and most important of Britain's colonial enterprises, into a signifier for the downfall of Britain's Imperial project.⁹⁴

The Book of Gilly immediately addresses such issues by referring to imperial ambitions and the impacts of capitalist enterprise. As the book opens, the aristocratic father and mother of eight-year-old Gilly are debating the terms on which their children's

⁹³ *The Times* (London), no. 37365 (20 February 1905), p. 7.

⁹⁴ *The Times* (London), no. 37680 (13 April 1905), p. 11 and *The Times* (London), no. 37657 (17 March 1905), p. 8.

next five years will be lived. During that time, Gilly's parents will be relocating to India on an imperial duty the reasons for which his father regards with undisguised derision: 'because I've got to go out to India, and make believe that I understand anything about governing natives'.⁹⁵ While these views indicate his scepticism about Empire and its validity, Gilly's father paradoxically regards Ireland with a marked sense of proprietorship: it is 'a playground' which he claims is 'his by rights' (*BG* 7). Although Gilly himself will subsequently adopt a similar attitude towards Ireland, it is the subtle differences between his viewpoints and his father's which are significant in Lawless's text. In Gilly's conception, Ireland not only comes to belong to him, but he also comes to belong to it, and this distinction is imperative to the author's vision of the correct and proper relationship between ownership, proximity and legitimacy as these issues concern her homeland.

In the novel, Lawless consistently portrays in a positive light those English characters who, like Gilly, cross the Irish Sea acknowledging or seeking an affinity with Ireland and the Irish, although there are recognizable variations in the degree of authorial approbation these characters receive. Sir Maurice O'Sullivan, for example, is Irish by ancestry, but his family have long ago ceased to live full-time in the country. While he has once formed a close and significant friendship with an Irish peasant woman and expresses his wish that he had been foster-mothered by the country and its people (*BG* 216-17), his absenteeism leads him to the same type of distorted view of Ireland that Gilly's father has taken. He views it as 'an agreeable variation of playground', a viewpoint which, Lawless asserts, is only achievable through a willing disregard of the 'grimmer aspects' of his surroundings (*BG* 46). Gilly's late grandmother, in contrast, is said to have felt more affection for her adopted home on the island of Inishbeg 'than anywhere' (*BG* 5), having spent her time there learning Irish history and becoming familiar with its people. Phil

⁹⁵ Emily Lawless, *The Book of Gilly: Four Months Out of a Life* (London: Smith, Elder, 1906), p. 8. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *BG*.

Acton, a fellow English traveller who befriends Gilly, follows closely in Gilly's grandmother's footsteps. Invalided by ill health, he passes his time on Inishbeg reading her books and nurturing her grandchildren. In the process, and '[w]ithout a drop of Irish, far less of Celtic, blood' in his veins, Acton develops an intense affection for Ireland, and the country eventually comes to mean to him 'what as a rule only one landscape, and that a native one, comes to mean to a man in the course of his lifetime' (*BG* 179).

Gilly undergoes a similar transformation through a different form of proximity to Ireland: one bound to notions of possession and accountability. After being referred to by an Irish servant as 'The King of Inishbeg', Gilly experiences a sudden 'rapture of ownership' which instigates his transition to manhood. This sense of the proprietary, described as the 'most ancient, most persistent of the varying joys of our ancient race', comes as an epiphany. 'The boy's whole standpoint had been altered by it – nay, reversed,' Lawless writes. 'Yesterday he was only a boy [...] To-day everything was changed. He had come into his inheritance; into his *kingdom*' (*BG* 67). Gilly's newly-realized sense of responsibility is confirmed when he gives up his bed to his frightened younger sister and through his persistent attempts to find monetary resources to aid Bride, the daughter of the indigent and dissolute Lanty Kelly. If, through images such as these, Lawless's text glorifies land ownership and feudalist notions about the responsibility it is supposed to foster, it is also suffused with indications that 'ancient' property rights will not necessarily continue to inhere in Ireland. The rise of bourgeois values on Inishbeg — signified by Babs Kennedy, a local land agent's daughter, and Mr Griggs, Gilly's Leeds-born and American-educated tutor, both of whom gain a measure of authority over upper class characters — mimics the prevalent and steadily increasing economic importance and financial viability of the middle class in late-Industrial Age Britain, and signals an attendant shift in the way that society was envisioned and organized, particularly in

Ireland. This societal revision, which was bound up with a series of land acts which had granted ever-increasing rights of tenure to the tenantry, meant that antediluvian notions that rights of ownership were available only to the upper class were gradually but steadily being replaced by the idea that such privileges must be available to, and could be earned, by all.

About this emerging class ethic, Lawless remains ambivalent. By the novel's close, she has shown the industrialized, Americanized Griggs undergoing a transformation which is achieved in much the same manner as is Gilly's. Realizing he has failed in his responsibilities to the boy when he allows Gilly to wander off and into the path of the murderous Lanty Kelly, Griggs is humbled and his demeanour softened by the knowledge that the boy's parents continue to place their trust in him. Babs Kennedy, meanwhile, acts as the nearest equivalent to a New Woman in Lawless's fiction. Babs's behaviour is not, however, attributable to any recent cultural phenomena but is drawn instead from the reserves of her mother's 'northern' tenacity. Babs remains distinctly at odds with the conduct of her land agent father and her brothers: of all the Kennedys, she is said to be 'unmistakably the man of the party' (*BG* 225). Energetic and self-assertive, she can 'ride, run, fish, sail a boat and swim' (*BG* 225), and it is to Babs that those seeking to do business with the Kennedy family must turn. 'That Babs Kennedy was not only mistress of the house and its ruler,' Lawless asserts, 'but further its capitalist, it was hardly possible to know the family five minutes without discovering' (*BG* 224). Unlike Griggs, Babs is driven by familial, rather than personal, ambitions, and over the course of the narrative never undergoes — nor does Lawless indicate that she *should* undergo — an alteration to her personality or priorities. One of the final images in the novel — of a car full of Kennedys with Babs at the wheel — confirms that the lone female member of the family remains resolute in her behaviour, and resolutely in charge.

Yet, while Lawless constructs prominent bourgeois characters in Babs and Griggs, by the end of *Gilly* she has excluded the middle class *en masse* from her vision of an ideal Irish community. Although her criticism of middle class values is never sustained or unmitigated, throughout the novel she consistently locates the most exemplary of her characters among the nobly savage peasantry or the dignified upper classes, but never in the in-between. If Mr Griggs and Babs represent the emerging lower middle class – and are shown to be the most likely to triumph according to the evolutionary doctrine Griggs espouses and the capitalist economic principles Babs has learned to exploit — then the far more likeable, but financially and physically far less viable, characters Phil Acton and Bride Kelly represent their antitheses. This antithetical relationship is most notably evidenced when Gilly, lamenting his mother's reserve and detachment, conjures a counter-evolutionary fantasy in which invalids like Acton and peasants like Bride act as the most desirable nurturers of his generation:

In order to discover people who really *did* let you spend a good time sitting comfortably beside them it seemed to be necessary — so Gilly's experience indicated — that they should be either inconveniently ill, or else very poor — "weally weally poor" — poor enough not to be sure of having always quite sufficient to eat. (*BG* 240)

This passage encapsulates the novel's most pervasive messages. Gilly's childish assertion that being grounded by illness or destitution is the only means by which his caretakers' attention will be returned to those it is their responsibility to care for conveys a sense of distrust of the turning of the gaze away from the interests of home, and indicates an implicit critique of the imperialist enterprise in which Gilly's parents are enmeshed. At the same time, it also posits a form of ideal Anglo-Irish union through the English Acton and Irish Bride, suggesting, by portraying the former's invalidism and the latter's poverty, the mutual dependence between the two nations/nationalities. Despite Gilly's contrivances, however, this union remains unachievable. As Acton returns to England and Bride

remains in Ireland, the novel ends on a note of compromise for Gilly, whom the reader recognizes will in the future split his time, and his allegiances, between his separate and disparate homelands.

Although disguised as a children's novel, *Gilly* was to tackle many of the same themes that Lawless had addressed in her work aimed at adult readers: those of responsibility, capability and legitimacy. Although Lawless may attempt to hide these themes in the background of novels such as *Grania* and *The Book of Gilly*, they are everywhere implicit in her subject matter and the values she attributes to her characters. The notion of legitimacy as it regards governance, however, only explicitly surfaces in her historical novels, all of which are set against the backdrop of insurgence in Ireland. By the time she came to write her final novel, *The Race of Castlebar* (1913), the subject of Irish rebellion, with which she had dealt so prominently in *With Essex in Ireland* and *Maelcho*, had lain dormant in her fiction for nearly twenty years. The contemporary significance of her themes of Irish revolt are illuminated, however, when considered in relation to the political moments in which each of these novels was composed. *With Essex* was written and published during the period 1889-90, at a point immediately prior to Parnell's downfall, when the Home Rule movement had reached a relative stasis under the Conservative government led by Robert Gascoyne-Cecil, Marquess of Salisbury. The conciliatory stance Lawless's main character is shown to take towards the Irish situation in that novel reflects the political context in which she was writing, a point at which the Union between Ireland and Britain was markedly more stable than it had been under the deposed Liberal government headed by the pro-Home Rule Gladstone. *Maelcho*, in contrast, was composed in 1893-4, a period when Gladstone had returned to the Prime Ministerial post and a second Home Rule Bill was being debated, voted on and (eventually) defeated in Parliament. Although on its surface a sympathetic portrayal of

Ireland in the midst of rebellion, *Maelcho* foregrounded characters whose disparate racial and religious backgrounds emphasized the multiplicity of Irish identities — a narrative tactic which cast doubt upon the notion that a consensus of thought and opinion might be reached in Ireland, and by extension implicitly queried the viability of Irish self government. It appears to be no coincidence that, while the issue of Home Rule was absent from Parliament, so too was the theme of Irish historical rebellion missing from Lawless's novels, nor is it likely that it was a mere accident that, just as a new crisis in Anglo-Irish relations loomed and the Home Rule Bill actively returned to Parliament (in 1912), so too did Lawless's fiction return to the subject of insurgence in Ireland.

The Race of Castlebar was written over an extended period due to Lawless's failing health, eventually in collaboration with Shan Bullock, a fellow Irish author and exile to England. Despite the novel's collaborative element, the study of Lawless's narrative input is simplified by her own introductory notes, which detail the points at which she took exclusive control of the tale at its beginning and end.⁹⁶ The novel's action revolves around an episode from the 1798 Irish rebellion in which the Irish fought alongside French troops to defeat British forces at Castlebar, County Mayo. This military victory — which was achieved in so resounding a manner that the British Army's hasty retreat from Castlebar was instantly likened to a race — reflects both the altered fortunes of the Home Rule initiative and the instability of British rule in Ireland at the time Lawless was writing. Although the Home Rule Bill would not be carried until May of 1914, six months after the novel's publication and seven months after Lawless's death, the diminished power of the Lords had rendered Home Rule for Ireland a foregone conclusion months prior to the bill's passing, and it is certain that the author realized, as she put the finishing touches to the novel, that a measure of self government would indeed be granted to her homeland.

⁹⁶ Emily Lawless and Shan F. Bullock, *The Race of Castlebar* (London: John Murray, 1913), vii-viii. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *RC*.

Meanwhile, the rise of the Catholic middle class and organizations such as the Gaelic League, Sinn Féin and the Irish Republican Brotherhood signalled an incipient insular Irish nationalism and an increasing tendency towards religious and racial separatism. This sense of class and religious volatility and political instability is reflected in Lawless's narrative preoccupations, which include Orangeist activity, militant volunteerism and political and religious disenfranchisement.

The central character and narrator of the novel, John Bunbury, is a young English man who, in the midst of the threat of rebellion, travels to the west of Ireland to ensure the safety of his sister, who lives in Mayo with her Protestant Irish husband. Structured as a series of letters written by Bunbury to his brother Theodore, the form of the novel allows Lawless, for the first time since *With Essex*, to represent the views of an unreliable first person English narrator as he journeys through Ireland. Its epistolary structure is commensurate with the literary conventions of the period in which it is set, and also places it within an Irish female literary heritage that can be traced to Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806). Set at a point when the Imperial supremacy of established European monarchies was consistently being assailed — most notably by the recent successful rebellions in France and America — the novel capably portrays the degree to which the threat of Irish rebellion results in a sense of paranoia and partisanship in Bunbury's English neighbours. Bunbury alone remains sceptical of the new jingoism he recognizes among his compatriots, asserting that

The most curious effect of the excitement to my mind was [that] the ordinary all-consuming terror of footpads and highwaymen appeared for the moment to have entirely disappeared. People who a few months ago would hardly venture to cross Fleet Street alone, now affected the courage of Spartans, offering themselves heroically to serve in the ranks and to brave death as members of the City Volunteers (RC 32).

By drawing attention to this rise in volunteerism at the close of the eighteenth century, Lawless highlights the correlations between history and contemporary circumstances. Not

only are these parallels exemplified by the existence of the Ulster Volunteer Force, recently formed (in January of 1913) at the time of Lawless's writing, but also by the conspicuously analogous motives for such militancy during the two periods. In 1912-13 political tensions between Britain and Germany — in particular a marked acceleration in the arms race — mimicked the threat presented by the escalation in hostile relations between Britain and France in the late eighteenth century. During both eras, the British had become concerned about the dangers presented to their own shores should a foreign power gain access to Ireland's coastline and port cities. The persistent fluctuation in the fortunes of the Home Rule initiative during the early twentieth century would also recall a similar rise and fall in the fortunes of Irish self government at the close of the 1790s, when the Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger, who had initially supported Irish Parliamentary reforms, retracted his advocacy to sanction the Act of Union, resulting in the dissolution of the Irish Parliament. The outcome, in each period, was increased militancy and protectionism on both sides of the political divide. In the midst of a period in which history was, in effect, repeating itself, Lawless would use her narrative to replicate history.

While his English compatriots display a tendency to demonize the Irish and French, exaggerating the threats posed by them, Bunbury remains both unconcerned by tales of Irish unrest and unconvinced by the anti-French and anti-Irish rhetoric of his companions. Lawless quickly demonstrates, however, that both those who hyperbolize and those who minimize the extent of the dangers are mistaken in their estimation of the Irish situation. Viewed from a geographical and psychological distance, the state of affairs in Ireland is consistently distorted. Bunbury's opinions are first challenged when, upon his arrival in Dublin, he is assailed by evidence of rampant sectarianism in Ireland, manifested most notably — and in Lawless's text repeatedly — by a proliferation of Orangeist activity. Descriptions of the boatman who rows Bunbury ashore — 'a huge, uncouth fellow in a pair

of patched breeches and with a filthy orange cockade stuck like a mustard poultice upon his ragged shirt' (*RC* 34) — set the precedent of anti-Orangeism which continues to inhere throughout the novel.

The consistent visibility of 'orange cockades' (*RC* 52) exposes the emergence of an insular Protestantism, and more specifically the rise in prominence of the Orange order, which at the time of the novel's setting was being encouraged in its development by members of the British government. In 1796, Thomas Knox, the British military commander in Ulster, suggested that Britain would find it necessary to side with the Orangemen: 'We must to a certain degree uphold them', Knox wrote to his Parliamentary colleagues, 'for with all their licentiousness, on them we must rely for the preservation of our lives and properties should critical times occur'.⁹⁷ Lawless's purpose in drawing attention to this eighteenth-century Orangeist fervour acts to highlight those parallels which existed between the era in which her novel is set and the period in which she was writing. Encouragement of sectarian separatism would be regularly deployed by the British government in their Irish policies from Knox's time onwards, Lord Randolph Churchill providing what is perhaps the most famous example of the tactic when in 1866 he suggested 'that if [Gladstone] went for Home Rule, the Orange card would be the one to play'.⁹⁸

More surprising perhaps than these manifest anti-Orangeist sentiments are the Catholic sympathies which surface alongside them, first evidenced in Lawless's portrayal of Bunbury's fellow traveller, Vansittart Nugent. Nugent, an Irish Catholic, is subjected to various forms of bigoted bullying on his route through Ireland, while Bunbury, forced to

⁹⁷ Quoted in Thomas Bartlett et al, *The 1798 Rebellion: An Illustrated History* (Boulder, Colorado: Roberts Rinehart, 1998), p. 44.

⁹⁸ Letter from Lord Randolph Churchill to Lord Justice Fitzgibbon dated 16 February 1866. Quoted in Sean McMahon, *A Short History of Ireland* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1996), p. 153.

play his own 'Orange card' by declaring his Protestantism openly, travels undisturbed and unharmed through the country (*RC* 59). Protestant proselytism likewise (and even more unexpectedly, considering her own family history) arouses Lawless's narrative censure through her depiction of the Byrne family, into which Bunbury's sister, Kate, has married. Owen Byrne, Kate's Protestant husband, is a man whose family has gained its status and lands through an act of religious conversion, and in the novel Lawless displays a distinct sense of scepticism about the legitimacy of the Byrne family's accession to the Castle Byrne estate. The narrative bias is, in fact, repeatedly placed on the side of the ancient, Catholic 'O'Byrnes', who have been usurped by the Protestant strain of the family. For Kate Byrne, the Englishwoman who sees the matter through foreign eyes, the situation is clear: it is the disinherited Henri O'Byrne who is the 'legitimate owner' of the castle. 'He knows by right he ought to be master here,' she tells her brother, 'So does everyone' (*RC* 113). The locals unsurprisingly also side with O'Byrne, their coreligionist, and privilege brehon-style credos over the decrees handed down by a British government: 'the law', it is asserted, is not in accordance with 'Irish ideas' (*RC* 113). In Lawless's text, it is only the Protestant strain of Byrnes who are able to view their acquisition of the land as legitimate, suggesting that their values are more British than Irish in nature.

The scenes of Bunbury's imprisonment at the home of the Bishop of Killala, which follows on from his accidental participation in the race out of Castlebar, constitutes Bullock's contribution to the narrative, the purpose of which is threefold: to demonstrate that the Catholic locals had been peaceable and largely contented before Protestant and French agitators interfered with them; to portray the process by which Bunbury learns that people of all nationalities and ethnicities are capable of good and evil behaviour; and to reiterate a sense of the increasing tensions between Catholics and Protestants. In Bullock's portrayals these latter concerns are more readily attributable to the Catholic population

than had been the case in the earlier, Lawless-authored passages, an alteration in narrative sentiment which is particularly in evidence during episodes in which Bunbury and his fellow Protestants find themselves isolated and endangered when Catholic violence erupts over the granting of arms to the town's Protestant citizens.

In the final chapters of the novel, which belong again to Lawless, Bunbury's own impressions of the Irish situation are increasingly sidelined as he acts as witness to the actions of the novel's central female characters, who take active control of the fates of their male counterparts by rescuing Bunbury and transporting Henri O'Byrne to safety. More important, however, are the points slightly later in the narrative at which Bunbury's viewpoints are wholly eclipsed by the words and opinions of O'Byrne, for whom he acts merely as observer and reporter. As an Irish Catholic exiled to England and disinherited of an estate that is 'rightfully' his, O'Byrne's position is both reminiscent of, and contrapuntal to, Lawless's own. In his extended closing monologue, which serves no narrative purpose other than to lend insight into the state of affairs in Ireland, with which the final pages of the narrative are saturated. In it, he expresses both his concerns for the future of his country and his disappointment in the failures of British rule in his homeland:

If I could see a few hopeful signs for this country in [the] coming years, I should die a very much happier man. Inveterate foe of British rule as I am, I could accept even that if I could see any promise for the future under it. But I cannot! [...] On the contrary, every succeeding decade seems to me to foreshadow a state of affairs ever worse and worse; greater and greater folly, grosser and grosser mismanagement. (RC 339-40)

This passage, specifically concerned with Ireland's future under British rule, transposes the discourse of 1913, in which the concerns were over Britain's future after Irish Home Rule. Simultaneously, it draws attention to Britain's wasted opportunity to govern Lawless's homeland with impunity. This sense of regret endures in subsequent references to Ireland's economic and geographical isolation, both of which have, O'Byrne asserts, acted as

detriments to its progress. Suggesting that exile and emigration result in privileged viewpoints and altered perspectives, he asserts about those who have left Ireland that:

when they returned they would at least know the world as it really is; not as fools, visionaries, and priests have pictured it to them. For them and their sons it would be impossible ever again to sink down into the old ruts. Their eyes would be open. They would no longer be dumb driven cattle, but *men* – men with all a man's heritage; his liberty, his knowledge, his magnificent and illimitable chances. (RC 341)

Through O'Byrne's commentary, Lawless's narrative gaze looks back on a time before the exodus from Ireland reached its apex in the nineteenth century, and forward to a point at which those mass migrations — and the new knowledge and perceptions gained through them — might aid and abet the spirit of popular revolt in Ireland. In doing so, the text also hints at the catalysts that might lead to Irish Civil War — a prevalent concern in 1913 just as it was in 1798.

O'Byrne's monologue can also be seen to raise questions concerning the viability and legitimacy of colonial rule. Although his ideas are conveyed in comments specifically aimed at the French Empire in the eighteenth century, his sentiments are recognizably and equally applicable to the British Imperial enterprise of a century later. Acknowledging that there is an existing and widespread 'belief in the permanent supremacy' of Empire, O'Byrne uses history as a means to comment on the transience and volubility of power:

To me I must confess that this seems to be a somewhat exaggerated belief, grown out of a success so astonishing, so unprecedented, that it might well induce a somewhat heady and intoxicating way of estimating the future. Looking along the course of history, so far as I have been able to do so, I seem to see that other countries, other races, have had the same conviction, yet that after a time circumstances have forced them to relinquish it, and to fall back within their old limits. Apparently Destiny, Fate – whatever we may agree to call it – does not intend that any such supreme dominion should be the lot – at all events permanently – of any one race or nation rather than another. (RC 343)

O'Byrne's comments act as much as forewarning of the inevitable decline of the British Empire as they do a reflection on the fortunes of France, and it is with these words that the

disenfranchised Catholic O'Byrne is sent 'on the road to Galway', the first leg of the journey into a permanent exile from the homeland which 'clutches, grips and draws [him], as a child is drawn to its mother' (*RC* 344).

The sentiments she attributes to the dying O'Byrne are the final thoughts Lawless would convey in her fiction, and it is significant that, in them, she concentrates on the feelings and opinions of an exile forced out of Ireland by political circumstances. Yet, if Henri O'Byrne expresses one set of Irish concerns about history and its legacies, Lawless attaches other ideas to his rival and antithesis, Owen Byrne, which linger as both counterpoint to and complement of O'Byrne's thoughts and feelings at the novel's close. Byrne's hard-won victory over the rebels and their French allies costs him his hubris and leads to a new and more complete understanding of the precariousness of his position within Irish society: 'To have to realize that to draw one's sword does not necessarily mean being victorious, even against a poor rabble of "foreigners" and "rebels,"' Lawless remarks about the altered Byrne, 'is an instructive, if somewhat startling little piece of experience, worth perhaps, in the long run, a good many cheap and easily-come-by victories' (*RC*, 316-7). Both O'Byrne, the dispossessed exile, and Byrne, the Anglo-Irish landowner whose family's act of religious conversion remains contentious decades after the fact, refract the author's own position in relation to her homeland. O'Byrne's words anticipate the fall of an Empire. *The Race of Castlebar* itself also indicates that historical trends may hold true in microcosm: that the dominance of Byrne's Anglo-Irish race will be transitory and that the tide of power and influence in Ireland may already be beginning to turn. The relationship between history and modernity is never more emphatically suggested than when, remarking on her family's perpetually assailed claims to Castle Byrne, Owen's wife Kate emphasizes the degree to which the past continues to haunt the Irish present: '[t]hey never forget; no one here ever forgets anything', she asserts (*RC* 116-117). The fates of Byrne

and O'Byrne — one the legitimate heir to Irish land according to the tenets of British law, the other in the eyes of the Irish people — may be intertwined with one another, but the land, we come to understand, cannot belong simultaneously to both.

Writing a review of *The Inalienable Heritage* (1914) — Lawless's final, posthumously-issued volume of poetry — a commentator in the *Irish Homestead*, the organ of Horace Plunkett's Irish Agricultural Organisation Society whose editor was A.E. (George William Russell), would write:

I cannot separate Emily Lawless in any of her work from that Ireland to which she was so loyal a daughter. I had read only her prose when I first stood on the Clare coast and looked across to Galway, but what I had read vitalised the traditions that came lap-lapping to my feet on the ample western tide. There was a surge in what she wrote about Ireland that recalls the big Atlantic wave; and when all is said and done, whatever the title [...], she wrote nothing that was not of Ireland.⁹⁹

A view such as this, expressed in a publication that boasted one of Ireland's most prominent Revivalists at its helm, suggests that a space of time had allowed at least some of her Irish readers to forget the elements of Lawless's own 'inalienable heritage' that had resulted in the censure of novels such as *Hurrish* and *With Essex*. If Ireland had gradually become more accepting of her, however, her relationship to it throughout her lifetime had remained as uncomfortable as it was affectionate. A sense of the uneasiness of Lawless's associations to, and her feelings of displacement from, her Irish homeland is reflected in the types of characters which recur in her novels — including Essex, Grania, Fitzmaurice, Gilly and O'Byrne — who consistently struggle to make a space for themselves in Ireland, and just as consistently fail to find one. Emily Lawless may have found abundant room in her fiction for Ireland. She could not, however, find abundant room in Ireland for those such as herself.

⁹⁹ Clipping, 'The Inalienable Heritage', *Irish Homestead* (25 July 1914), n. p., Lawless Papers.

II

L. T. Meade, 'The Queen of Girls' Book Makers'

'You are very exclusive in this fair land of Erin. [...] You can't have a big world if you only just know this part.' — L. T. Meade, *The Stormy Petrel* (1909)¹⁰⁰

Despite producing novels and stories in a variety of genres for adult readers and children of both sexes, in popular conception L. T. Meade (1844-1914) has always been a chronicler of and for English schoolgirls. This notion of Meade's work, limiting though it may be, was not forged without adequate reason. In a career that spanned the nearly fifty-year period between the appearance of her first novel in 1866 and her death in 1914, Meade produced at least 270 full-length volumes of fiction, of which approximately a third were written for girls. She is consistently credited with having introduced the girls' school tale to the British reading public with her novel *A World of Girls* in 1886, and during her lifetime regularly appeared on lists of schoolgirls' favourite authors. She received, for instance, the greatest number of votes in a competition sponsored by *The Girls' Realm* magazine in 1899 to find their readers' most popular living novelist, and two years later was the only extant writer to be named among the top five authors in another, more academic, survey of girls' reading preferences.¹⁰¹ On the latter list, only Louisa May Alcott, Shakespeare, Dickens and Tennyson outranked Meade in popularity. So resolutely was she linked to the literary subgenre she pioneered that the London periodical *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* in 1906 deemed her 'The Queen of

¹⁰⁰ L. T. Meade, *The Stormy Petrel* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1909), pp. 39-40. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *SP*.

¹⁰¹ 'Results of Prize Competitions: The Six Most Popular Living Writers for Girls', *The Girl's Realm*, vol. 1, no. 4 (February 1899), p. 431 and Alice Zimmern, 'Girls' Book Lists', *The Leisure Hour: An Illustrated Magazine for Home Reading* (February 1901), p. 336.

Girls' Book Makers'.¹⁰² More than half a century later, *The Times* (London), by referring to 'the child as conceived by L. T. Meade and E. Nesbit', was still crediting her with being the co-inventor of an implicitly feminized form of Victorian English childhood.¹⁰³

It is, as such, unsurprising that it is primarily as a writer for girls that Meade remains of interest to literary commentators today. Since the 1970s, when feminist critics began to embark upon the project of reassessing neglected texts by women, her work has received an increasing amount of critical attention, much of it focused on her children's stories. Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig were among the vanguard of academics to explore her texts when, in 1976, they discussed three of her novels in their analysis of feminist themes in girls' fiction of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁰⁴ Two decades later Sally Mitchell would devote much of the opening chapter of her study of 'the creation of girlhood — and the values, attitudes, and understandings this creation encoded' on Meade's fiction, using her texts as an 'instructive [...] first step' in chronicling and comprehending the alterations in attitudes towards young females and the redefinition of female adolescence at the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁰⁵

Yet the relationship between Meade's personal history and the type of fiction on which her literary reputation was founded remains little interrogated. It is rarely remarked upon, for instance, that not only had Meade never attended an English school of the type she consistently portrayed in her fiction, she had never attended a school of any kind and was not even English. She was born Elizabeth Thomasina Meade on 5 June 1844 in

¹⁰² 'The Queen of Girls'-Book Makers', *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, vol. 102, no. 2668 (15 December 1906), pp. 741-742.

¹⁰³ George Cloyne, 'Thursday's Child', *The Times* (London), vol. 54622 (19 November 1959), p. 15.

¹⁰⁴ See Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig, *You're a Brick, Angela: A New Look at Girls' Fiction from 1839 to 1975* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1976), pp. 50-51.

¹⁰⁵ Sally Mitchell, *The New Girl: Girls' Culture in England 1880-1915* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 10.

Ireland, at Bandon in County Cork, the eldest of seven children of a Church of Ireland minister, Richard Thomas Meade, rector of Killowen, and his wife Sarah (*née* Lane). As the daughter of a Protestant clergyman raised in the south of Ireland, she embodied a form of Anglo-Irishness as archetypal as was that of many of her more renowned literary compatriots, yet the distance she was perceived to have traveled from her Irish roots by the time of her greatest publishing success is evidenced by the fact that the Irish press and public appear to have viewed her work with an admixture of distrust and indifference. Despite her publishing success, her novels were never to garner even a modicum of the attention that the work of other Anglo-Irish women writers — including Jane Barlow, Ella MacMahon and Somerville and Ross — enjoyed with a faction of the Irish readership during the same era. Neither she nor any of her numerous novels were ever mentioned in *The Irish Monthly*, Ireland's most important literary journal throughout the period in which she was actively publishing her work, and the *Freeman's Journal*, normally comprehensive in its reviews of Irish fiction, would refer to her only once over the duration of her career. When it did, however, it was appreciative, asserting that her novel *The Fountain of Beauty* (1909) was a 'thrilling romance' and remarking positively on her portrayal of its half-Irish heroine.¹⁰⁶

One of the most popular newspapers in her native county of Cork, the *Southern Star*, would mention her work just twice during her lifetime: first in 1898, when it detailed the manner in which she was satirized at a council meeting in Bandon, the town of her birth; secondly in 1905 when it noted with accuracy that Meade's popularity in England had never translated itself to her native country:

Standish O'Grady is our greatest romanticist and Father Sheehan is another notable writer of fiction — perhaps the most popular of all living novelists with the Irish people. I do not say the most popular of all novelists. Mrs. L.

¹⁰⁶ 'The Fountain of Beauty. By L. T. Meade', *Freeman's Journal* (29 May 1909), p. 5.

T. Meade is, to judge by her amazing productiveness, in this happy position.¹⁰⁷

On only one occasion did she receive a prominent recognition in Ireland of the literary success she had achieved, when in 1910 she was invited — alongside Rosa Mulholland, Lady Gregory, Eva Gore Booth, Violet Martin, Edith Somerville and Katherine Cecil Thurston — to a gathering at the Gresham Hotel organized by the Corinthian Club to honour Irish female authors of note.¹⁰⁸

For ill or good, she was viewed by her Irish contemporaries as a chronicler of English life, and regarded as a writer who had been wholly subsumed by the culture of the city — London — in which she had come to reside in the thirty-second year of her life. It was in many regards an unfair assessment, for Meade produced a substantial body of Irish work and was seldom guilty of the practice, often ascribed to Irish writers of the period, of what Mulholland once referred to as 'hiding [her] shamrock in a field of common clover'.¹⁰⁹ In interviews and autobiographical essays she invariably referred to her Irishness and, as her career progressed, began to feature Irish characters and settings in her fiction with regularity. In 1891, the Irish newspaper *The Nation* would go so far as to suggest that the disregard of her work by the Irish press was a regrettable omission:

Mrs. L. T. Meade [...] has been publishing a good deal of matter of late, for the most part stories that are chiefly meant for young readers. Mrs. Meade has done excellent Irish work, which does not seem, however, to be well known in Ireland. One of her novels, 'The O'Donnells of Inchfawn,' met with warm approval for the insight it displayed into Irish country life, and for the fashion after which the knowledge was presented.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ 'In Fiction', *Southern Star* (Cork) (8 April 1905), p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ See the *Irish Independent* (18 April 1910), p. 4.

¹⁰⁹ R. M. [Rosa Mulholland], 'Wanted An Irish Novelist', *The Irish Monthly*, vol. 19, no. 217 (July 1891), p. 369.

¹¹⁰ 'Through Irish London', *The Nation* (2 May 1891), p. 4.

With hindsight, it appears incongruous that Meade's work should have been championed, however briefly, by *The Nation*, a publication known for its radically anti-British politics, at the same time that the only Irish newspaper to make consistent and overwhelmingly positive reference to her writing was the *Irish Independent*, a newspaper whose anti-Parnellite stance was increasingly viewed as pro-British by its predominantly nationalist readership during the rise of Sinn Féin and Irish Irelandism in the first and second decades of the twentieth century, when Meade was at her most prolific. The backing of such disparate publications is revealing, however, in that it is symptomatic of the degree to which her work remained largely inscrutable to Irish commentators and readers, particularly in terms of its political content.

Yet many of Meade's works, and particularly those which feature a 'Wild Irish Girl' among its characterizations, are readily traceable to her upbringing in the rural south of Ireland. Like many of these characters, she was raised in a remote, seaside region of her native country, cut off from her contemporaries. When she was twelve years of age, her family relocated from Bandon to 'a rather desolate part' of County Cork after her father took over the Templetrine parish at Nohoval, near Kinsale.¹¹¹ It was in this isolated district that Meade was to live the next twenty years of her life.¹¹² Although she would afterwards refer to her parents as 'kind and conscientious', she also indicated that her upbringing had been strict and largely devoid of small pleasures.¹¹³ She was educated by a series of governesses, at least one of whom inflicted regular beatings on her, and her favourite pastime, reading, was almost wholly forbidden in the household.¹¹⁴ Meade's own affection

¹¹¹ L. T. Meade, 'How I Began', *The Girl's Realm*, vol. 3 (November 1900), p. 57.

¹¹² L. T. Meade, 'Children Past and Present', *Parents' Review*, vol. 6, no. 12 (February 1896), p. 883.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

for all things literary was, she asserted, borne out of her early isolation, and it was in her childhood that she developed not only a love of reading stories, but of writing them. Although her childish literary endeavours would prove so distasteful in her household that she was forbidden any paper on which to write — undaunted, she continued to scribble stories in the margins of old newspapers — by the time she was fifteen, she was declaring her intention of making a career of writing, and subsequently dealing with the fallout of a pronouncement which was at first so unpalatable to her father that he refused to countenance it. 'I hope you will never say that sort of thing again', she would recall her father replying when the subject was first broached. 'There never yet has been a woman of our family who earned money'.¹¹⁵

The Reverend Meade nonetheless appears to have come to terms with his daughter's literary pursuits relatively quickly, for her first novel, *Ashton-Morton, or Memories of My Life* (1866) was published when Meade was just twenty-two years of age and still living at home. It was issued by subscription by Thomas Cautley Newby, the London house which had first published the work of two of the Brontë sisters, to whom Meade's Yorkshire stately home setting in the novel owes a discernible debt. Typical of Meade's earliest works, *Ashton-Morton* betrays little of its author's Irish roots in its narrative preoccupations, although it culminates in the death of a teenage girl, who, Meade claimed, was based on the real-life model of a childhood friend whose death at the age of fifteen had profoundly affected her.¹¹⁶ In deference to her father's wishes, the novel was published anonymously. Almost certainly for the same reason, Meade's first foray into publishing would not be succeeded by a second novel for nearly a decade.

¹¹⁵ L. T. Meade, 'How I Began', p. 58.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p 59.

Perhaps unsurprisingly considering her father's attitudes to her attempts to pursue a career, Meade would suggest that her upbringing was the impetus for the feminism and suffragism which would materialize later in her life, and asserted that she had become a nascent 'revolting daughter' while still living in her homeland:

A little pocket money was well enough, but the old-fashioned gentleman [her father] still held to his firm ideas that the women of the family should be kept by the men, and should not have to work for themselves. [...] The movement for the emancipation of women, it is true, was little more than in its infancy in those days, but even to the remote shores of the Atlantic-bound coast of Ireland, it penetrated by murmurs and whispers. Anyhow it disturbed the air, and there was one girl in an old rectory who was all too ready to take up what was in those days thought the spirit of revolt.¹¹⁷

Although her drive towards economic independence would intensify when, shortly after the death of her mother in 1874, she first visited London, she consistently depicts her own rebelliousness as the result of the strict limitations that her father placed upon her. That Meade viewed London as the de facto hub of the literary world is abundantly evident from her autobiographical writings, in which nearly all of her literary aspirations and activities are centred on and around it. It would only have validated such a view of the English capital that, in the midst of her earliest visit there, she received notice that her second novel, *Lettie's Last Home* (1875), had been accepted for publication by the publishers John F. Shaw on condition that she expand it by 4,000 words. By her own admission, she did so by using much of her time in London to research the work of the journalist James Greenwood, employing elements of his reportage in her plot enhancements. Greenwood's lurid and melodramatic exposés of the conditions in London's slums and workhouses were published in the mid-1860s in a series of articles in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the newspaper his brother, Frederick, edited. An 1869 collection of Greenwood's work, *The Seven Curses of London*, features among its litany of case histories several concerning baby farmers in

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 61.

the East End, one of whom is said by Greenwood to have 'got drunk, and left the poor little thing [a child under her care] exposed to the cold, so that it died'.¹¹⁸ The plot of *Lettie's Last Home* revolves around this same type of baby farmer, a woman who starves the children she is entrusted with and uses the money intended to pay for their upkeep to fuel her drinking habit. As the novel opens, one of these children has recently died of neglect. When a second child falls gravely ill, the woman's young daughter, Lettie, ventures into the streets of London to find the baby's mother and warn her of his miserable condition. Subsequently discovered in this act of 'betrayal', Lettie is severely beaten by her drunken mother. The baby survives; Lettie does not.

Meade makes no attempt to disguise her novel's status as political tract, directly reminding her readers of the narrative's accuracy and propinquity, and positing those same readers as potential agents for change in the novel's closing pages: 'These things happen every day,' she writes, 'and still, though loud the momentary indignation, no efficient steps have been taken to crush this great existing evil'.¹¹⁹ As such, *Lettie's Last Home* is, like much of Meade's work which immediately followed it, readily identifiable as a 'social problem novel' in which her narrative ire is directed at the inequities that existed in a mid-Victorian London with which she had only very recently become familiar. Her sudden advent into the realm of commentator on London social issues is recognizably derivative — her subjects and images perceptibly influenced by Greenwood's depictions of London's slums, her descriptive and discursive passages discernibly inflected by the same sort of reformist rhetoric he employed. Yet in her variations on Greenwood's themes can be glimpsed the true nature of Meade's literary genius: namely, her savvy ability to delineate and exploit popular preoccupations and mindsets. Realizing from her own personal

¹¹⁸ James Greenwood, *The Seven Curses of London* (Boston: Fields, Osgood, 1869), p. 26.

¹¹⁹ L. T. Meade, *Lettie's Last Home* (London: John F. Shaw, 1875), p. 110.

experience that the reading of novels was viewed by many as 'likely to lead to moral laxity', Meade was to take Greenwood's true-to-life tales and lend to his actors personalities, motivations and voices.¹²⁰ By so doing, she rendered them marketable to a readership that wanted not only to be entertained but also informed and morally-edified. It was a formula that worked to her advantage for many years. The byproduct was often socially corrective in intent, even more often Christian in message — and as such acceptable to a wide variety of readers across the social spectrum.

Shortly after Meade's return from London, her father remarried a much younger woman — the sister of his daughter-in-law — and, believing that her 'father's house was no longer essentially a home' to her thereafter, she decided to pursue her literary career full-time in London.¹²¹ Leaving Ireland in 1875 with the intention of boarding with a doctor and his wife she had befriended on her earlier visit to England, she was met by the couple upon her arrival at Paddington Station only to be told that their home had been destroyed by fire during her crossing. Her subsequent stay in a boarding house turned out to be 'the reverse of pleasant', and several of her ensuing novels — most notably *The Palace Beautiful* (1887), in which a landlord forces his way into the attic room of a young female lodger and coerces her into remaining silent about an unnamed act he commits — allude to the possibility that she may have been physically and/or sexually assaulted during this period.¹²² She was eventually able to take up rooms together with her married friends in Bishopsgate, and there began work on *Great St. Benedict's* (1876), her follow-up to *Lettie's Last Home*. The subject matter of this novel — a London hospital which serves patients

¹²⁰ Mary Hammond, 'Readers and Readerships', in Joanne Shattock (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature 1830-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 32.

¹²¹ L. T. Meade, 'How I Began', p. 61.

¹²² *Ibid*, p. 62. For a more detailed discussion of allusions to sexual abuse in Meade's novels, see also Mavis Barkman Reimer, *Tales Out of School: L. T. Meade and the School Story* (University of Calgary: Ph.D. Thesis, 1993), p. 24.

unable to meet the costs of treatment at conventional medical facilities — was suggested to her by the doctor with whom she lived; its title was proposed by Dr Richard Garnett, the superintendent of the Reading Room at the British Library, with whom Meade had become well acquainted during her earlier research. The real-life model for her fictional hospital, she would confirm, was St. Bartholomew's, founded in the 12th century in London's Smithfield district to care for the sick poor.

These early social problem novels were undeniably and increasingly popular, and *Great St. Benedict's* would earn Meade her first substantial degree of publishing success. *Scamp and I* (1877), its successor, would do much more: it would imbue her with what was for decades an indelible popularity with the reading public. Having sold the copyright to Shaw for £30, Meade was unable to capitalize financially on the novel's success. She nonetheless reaped its benefits in other ways, as she was to recall two decades later:

That was the book that really made my name. It has been translated into many languages, and has gone into numbers of editions. It sold well from the first day it came out, and must have been a very valuable property to the publishers. [...] from that hour to the present day I may truly affirm that I have always had slightly more work than I knew how to get through. From that day till now I have never been obliged to ask for orders — orders have come to me.¹²³

As the journalist Helen C. Black would note in 1896 — when, on her way to interview Meade, she purchased *Scamp and I* on a train platform — the novel was popular enough to be widely available even twenty years after its publication.¹²⁴ It would remain in print for more than sixty years.

The central characters of *Scamp and I* are the London street urchin Flo and her mongrel dog Scamp, who are mutually figured as the lovable, innocent and unselfish victims of a London society which cannot recognize their suffering because it refuses to

¹²³ L. T. Meade, 'How I Began', p. 64.

¹²⁴ See 'Mrs. L. T. Meade at Home', *The Sunday Magazine* (September 1894), p. 616 and Helen C. Black, *Pen, Pencil, Baton and Mask: Biographical Sketches* (London: Spotiswoode, 1896), p. 225.

acknowledge their existence. Published in the year in which Queen Victoria, backed by the newly-elected and avowedly Imperialist Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, solidified her colonial authority by proclaiming herself Empress of India, Meade's novel reveals its temporal position at the height of Imperialism through its nearly equivalent veneration of God and the Queen. Victoria herself is depicted twice in the novel, in the first instance when Flo glimpses the monarch in the grounds of Buckingham Palace and realizes her own status as common and unworthy in comparison to the 'great Queen of England', and again when the girl is dying in a hospital at the novel's close.¹²⁵ In depicting Flo's ingenuous near-deification of the monarch in the latter sequence — 'I shall see the Queen,' she states, 'and I shall get well' — Meade confirms that her text is not only loyalist, but royalist in the prevailing anti-republican sense of the term.¹²⁶

As the popularity of her novels increased, Meade began writing both fiction and journalism for a variety of periodicals, subsequently becoming well known to London's various literary coteries, the Irish contingent among them. Her professional relationship with the expatriate Irish novelist and poet Katharine Tynan — whose social circle included the Literary Revivalist cohort of W. B. Yeats, Douglas Hyde and George Russell (A.E.) — appears to have been particularly close and abiding. For many years Meade's and Tynan's stories would appear side by side in magazines such as *The Girl's Realm* and *The Young Woman*, and Tynan would note in an 1889 letter that Meade was 'a nice open-faced Irishwoman, who has taken me quite into her friendship'.¹²⁷ Tynan's poetry would also feature frequently in *Atalanta*, the magazine for girls that Meade edited from 1887 to 1892. Aimed at girls in their pre-teen and teenage years, *Atalanta* remains remarkable for the

¹²⁵ L. T. Meade, *Scamp and I* (London: John F. Shaw, 1877), p. 29.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 201.

¹²⁷ Letter from Katharine Tynan to Father Matthew Russell, S. J. (27 July 1889), papers of Matthew Russell, S. J., Jesuit Archive, Dublin, Folder J27/73.

degree to which it can be seen to promote alternatives to the Victorian model of housebound domesticity. As early as 1887, it was featuring monthly columns on 'Employment for Girls', which would include career options as diverse as 'Medicine', 'Chromo-Lithography' and 'The Civil Service'.¹²⁸ Sarah Tytler's 1889 article on 'Occupations' offers a further indication of the degree to which the magazine actively encouraged non-traditional roles for young women. Suggesting that, for many girls, the aftermath of their educational glory days often resulted in 'a gradual dis-illusion and a grievous, well-nigh appalling vacuum', Tytler recommended a remunerative career as one of the most admirable means for filling this void, setting very few limits on the aspirations of her readers. 'So unrestricted is the field of occupation for women to-day,' she would write, 'that we can number in it, among the dead and the living of the century, the names of women who have distinguished themselves — not merely as poets or artists, but by their attainments in the outlying regions of astronomy, geology, entomology'.¹²⁹ Other series on 'Girls Who Won Success', art schools in England and 'Oxford and Cambridge Colleges for Women' follow the same aspirational model, while the magazine's monthly 'Scholarship and Reading Union' acted as the impetus for an essay competition, winners of which were eligible for cash scholarships to be used towards the costs of further education. In 1887-1888, the examiner for the competition was The Rev. T. H. Stokoe, the headmaster at King's College School and Preacher to the Society of Gray's Inn, and the scholarship awarded was £30 per annum for the three-year duration of the winner's further education. Meade's influence was sufficient to attract not only a competition judge of this calibre, but also such high profile contributors as H. Rider Haggard, Mrs Molesworth, Christina

¹²⁸ See Miss Edith Huntley, M. D., 'Employment for Girls: Medicine', *Atalanta*, vol. 1, no. 11 (August 1888), p. 655; Clo. Graves, 'Employment for Girls: Chromo-Lithography', *Atalanta*, vol. 1, no. 8 (May 1888), p. 474; and Millicent Garrett Fawcett, 'Employment for Girls: The Civil Service', *Atalanta*, vol. 1, no. 3 (December 1887), pp. 174-176.

¹²⁹ Sarah Tytler, 'Occupations', *Atalanta*, vol. 3, no. 26 (December 1889), p. 114.

Rossetti and Grant Allen. She did not neglect to also and consistently feature the work of her fellow Irish authors and artists: in addition to Tynan's regular contributions, the work of Edward Dowden, M. E. Francis, Elinor Sweetman and Jack B. Yeats all featured in *Atalanta's* pages.¹³⁰

By 1889, Meade had become acquainted with the young Irish poet W. B. Yeats. Their introduction was almost certainly the result of their mutual acquaintance with Tynan, who refers to being in the company of both at a point in the mid to late 1880s: 'I see the Yeats' very often', Tynan would write in a letter to Father Matthew Russell, 'yesterday Willie Yeats and I had tea with Mrs Meade at *Atalanta*. She is a delightful woman'.¹³¹ It would in fact be to Meade that Yeats turned when, having failed in his attempts to market *The Wanderings of Oisín* (1889) to London publishers, he was considering other options for the publication of his inaugural volume of poetry. He would remark at that time in a letter to Tynan that he had spoken to Meade concerning her own experiences of publishing a novel by the method he was contemplating — subscription — and had been reassured by what he learned from her: 'Mrs. Mead[e] of *Atalanta* once did much the same, she says, which comforts me,' Yeats wrote, 'for I feared it somewhat unceremonious as well as a losing arrangement'.¹³² Once free of his anxieties, he appears to have followed Meade's example, for it was indeed by subscription that *Oisín* was first issued.

Meade's willingness to aid other Irish writers in London suggests that her early reluctance to address Irish topics in her fiction was not due to any sense of disaffection

¹³⁰ Francis contributes a poem, 'An Open Secret', under the initials 'M. E. B.', to the inaugural issue of *Atalanta*, vol. 1, no. 1 (October 1887), p. 41. Jack Yeats acted as illustrator to Meade's own novel *The Lady of the Forest*, which began its run in *Atalanta* in January of 1888. See *Atalanta*, vol. 1, no. 4 (January 1888), pp. 206-213.

¹³¹ Undated letter fragment from Katharine Tynan to Father Matthew Russell, S. J. (n. d.), papers of Matthew Russell, S. J., Jesuit Archive, Dublin, Folder J27/73. The letter can be dated to the period 1884-1889.

¹³² See Roger McHugh (ed.), *W. B. Yeats: Letters to Katharine Tynan* (Dublin: Clonmore and Reynolds, 1953), pp. 50-51.

with her homeland. It nonetheless remains curious that so many of her early works are exclusively concerned with English and urban social problems incongruous not only with her own personal history, but with the interests and preoccupations of the majority of her fellow Irish people. It must be noted, however, that to write about Ireland in the 1870s, the decade in which her career began in earnest, was to write in the midst of the Land Wars, and to construct Irish novels in the social reformist style she had so quickly adopted would thus necessarily have meant entering deep and disturbing political waters. Most importantly for Meade, it would also have entailed risking unpopularity on either or both sides of the Irish Question. Above all else, she needed her early novels to sell so that she could earn a living: 'if I could not add to my income,' she would comment, 'I could not stay in London, and to come home a failure was impossible!' ¹³³ Her early novels, by and large concerned with poor and downtrodden children in London, chose an alternative and undeniably lucrative route which tapped into a prevailing, communal social conscience in England. Throughout the 1870s and early 1880s, she would continue to construct narratives — including *Outcast Robin; Or, Your Brother and Mine* (1878), *A London Baby: The Story of King Roy* (1882) and *The Children's Pilgrimage* (1883) — which exploited the collective guilt of the most populous and profitable market available to her: that of middle and upper class Londoners.

In 1879, Meade married Alfred Toulmin Smith, a barrister five years her junior, at Christ Church, Cork, in a ceremony performed by her elder brother, Gerald de Courcy Meade, then Rector of Killarney. ¹³⁴ Toulmin Smith was the younger son of Joshua Toulmin Smith, a respected researcher and author of texts on topics ranging from phrenology to geology. Meade's new husband was also brother to the literary historian

¹³³ L. T. Meade, 'How I Began', p. 62.

¹³⁴ See 'Births, Marriages and Deaths', *Freeman's Journal* (25 September 1879), p. 1.

Lucy Toulmin Smith, who in 1894 would become the first librarian of Manchester College, Oxford, and who would remain until her death in 1911 Meade's close personal friend. Four children were born to Meade and her husband during the 1880s: their son Alfred in 1880, and daughters Faith, Hope and Lucy Lilian Joy in 1882, 1883 and 1886 respectively. Three of the children survived to adulthood; Hope would live only fourteen hours.¹³⁵ Although Meade's output remained steady despite the demands of a young family, and she published at least forty-three novels between 1875 and 1890, this early period was the least productive of her career.

With the advent of a family to Meade's life, her literary preoccupations discernibly altered. By the mid-1880s, she was turning to her own home rather than to the streets of London for the inspiration for her writing, and began during that same period to issue lighthearted children's stories such as *The Autocrat of the Nursery* (1884) and *Daddy's Boy* (1887), the latter based on the model of her own son. These types of tales would appear thereafter with increasing regularity. It was not until 1890, however, that Meade would begin to devote the greatest portion of her time to writing children's books. In that year, she wrote six novels, of which four were intended for young readers. In the year that followed, all of her published novels were written for children.

Simultaneous with this alteration to Meade's literary focus came a change to the manner in which girls' education was being carried out in England. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, girls' schools began to grow apace in size and quantity, and the surge in student numbers coincided with a change in the approach to the education of females. While in the first half of the century the emphasis in girls' education was on the attainment of various 'accomplishments' — including music, art and embroidery — which were designed to transform girls into more marriageable women, in the latter half of the century

¹³⁵ See 'Births, Deaths, Marriages and Obituaries', *Standard* (London), no. 18027 (28 April 1882), p. 1.

girls' schools had adopted, almost wholesale, academic curricula to rival those of boys' educational establishments. By the 1870s 'the real proliferation of secondary schools for girls, mainly due to the efforts and example of the Girls' Public Day School Company' — an organization founded for the purpose of establishing schools designed to train girls for the public examinations — had begun.¹³⁶ Meade did not fail to notice and utilize these new trends in girls' education to her own professional advantage. Having already achieved success in writing for children, and recognizing a gap in the market, Meade struck upon the idea of adapting for a readership of girls the type of story popular with boy readers since Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, the first schoolboy novel, was published in 1857. The result, *A World of Girls*, would alter the course of Meade's publishing career. From that point forward, for better or worse, she would be known primarily as a writer for schoolgirls.

Like her social problem novels before it, *A World of Girls* was the product of Meade's uncanny knack for jumping early onto a bandwagon and appearing for all intents and purposes to be both its initiating and its motivating force, and this act of 'inventing' the schoolgirl novel was not to mark the end of her literary innovations. In the early 1890s, she would again use an existing literary model — this time, Arthur Conan Doyle's stories about a detective named Sherlock Holmes — to pioneer the subgenre of medical detective fiction. By collaborating with a medical practitioner, Dr Edgar Beaumont — who wrote under the pseudonym 'Clifford Halifax' — Meade ensured the scientific accuracy of her 'Stories from the Diary of a Doctor', which ran side by side with Conan Doyle's tales in the *Strand* magazine from 1893.¹³⁷ These remain highly readable tales recognizable in format

¹³⁶ Ellen Jordan, "'Making Good Wives and Mothers'?: The Transformation of Middle-Class Girls' Education in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *History of Education Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 4 (Winter 1991), p. 441.

¹³⁷ See L. T. Meade and Clifford Halifax, 'Stories from the Diary of a Doctor', *Strand Magazine*, vol. 6 (July 1893), pp. 91-102.

and content as the forerunners of contemporary medical detective drama. Beginning in the 1880s, she would write across an ever-increasing number of literary genres, which would eventually include romance, thriller, detective fiction, schoolboy fiction, children's literature, war stories and adventure stories in addition to her social problem and schoolgirl novels, which she continued to generate with regularity to the end of her life.

Due to failing eyesight, Meade was forced to dictate all her work from the early 1880s onwards, and employed two secretaries to keep pace with her copious output, which by 1894 was in excess of 5,000 words per day.¹³⁸ In 1898, the number of her annual published works, which until then had averaged four full-length volumes per year, would increase appreciably. At least one commentator has conjectured that the reasons for this sudden upswing in production were financial and may have been caused by her husband's lack of professional success and penchant for business and stock market speculation, an idea lent credence by extant evidence of Toulmin Smith's dubious business exploits and the recurring plot device of stock market-induced poverty in Meade's fiction.¹³⁹ Between 1898 and 1912, the year in which she exhibited the first symptoms of the illness which would lead to her death, Meade wrote at least 168 full-length volumes of work, or an average of twelve volumes per year.¹⁴⁰ In her most productive year, 1904, at least seventeen titles were published under her name.

Meade's publishing history substantiates the notion that, not only was she a popular writer, she was also a populist one. She was unquestionably a meticulous delineator of trends and an ambitious self-promoter, yet to assert this fact is not to suggest that the social

¹³⁸ 'Mrs. L. T Meade at Home', *The Sunday Magazine* (September 1894), p. 616.

¹³⁹ See Jean Barbara Garriock, *Late Victorian and Edwardian Images of Women and their Education in the Popular Press with Particular Reference to the Work of L. T. Meade* (University of Liverpool: Ph.D. Thesis, 1997), p. 148 and 'To Investors - Wanted', *The Morning Post* (London), no. 34968 (19 July 1884), p. 8.

¹⁴⁰ 'Social and Personal', *Irish Independent* (29 February 1912), p. 4. Article refers to the 'quiet' wedding of Meade's daughter Lucy Lilian Joy due to Meade's 'severe illness'.

conscience revealed in her novels is insincere. Evidence in fact suggests otherwise. In her daily life, she was an indefatigable proponent of various political and social causes. She was groundbreaking in her advocacy of further education for girls, a task she undertook not only in the pages of *Atalanta*, but also in her outspoken work on the topic in copious other publications. In an 1895 article on girls' education Meade contributed to the *Strand*, for instance, she would write:

In these days when the 'Woman's Question' is discussed on all sides, and when even the most prejudiced of the opposite sex are forced to admit that women are their competitors in almost every walk of life, it is interesting to trace the fact to its primary source. In this last decade of the century, women are being thoroughly educated in the broadest and fullest sense of the term. Their brains are being developed, their bodies stimulated to grow to their full dimensions — in consequence, weakness, timidity, nerves, mental cowardice, are gradually, but surely, creeping into the background, and the girls of the present day are able to hold their own with their brothers.¹⁴¹

She was among those publicly recognized for upholding the 'Steadfast Blue Line' in support of women's suffrage in *Shafts* magazine, and was active in the Pioneer Club, the controversial organization founded by Emily Massingberd whose members were denounced by their detractors as 'of all the new women and shrieking sisters, the newest and the loudest; man-hating, but mannish in their dress; and woman's-righters, without a single right notion in their heads'.¹⁴² Years after becoming involved in the Pioneers, Meade was to pen a novel, *The Cleverest Woman in England* (1898), whose central character, Dagmar Olloffson, is the founder of the 'Forward Club'. Portraying her death at the end of the narrative, Meade remarks upon the devastating effect the loss of Dagmar has on her followers:

¹⁴¹ L. T. Meade, 'Girls' Schools of To-day: I.-Cheltenham College', *Strand Magazine*, vol. 9 (January 1895), p. 457.

¹⁴² See Mavis Barkman Reimer, *Tales Out of School*, p. 34 and Hulda Friedrichs, 'A Peep at the Pioneer Club', *The Young Woman*, vol. 4 (June 1896), p. 302.

She was one of the pioneers in a great movement; and although her life ceased when her work was hardly begun, there are still some women in London who remember her, and can never forget her [...] who but for her would not have dared to break through the thralldom of the narrow walls of old prejudice, and those women still in memory hear her voice, and touch her hand.¹⁴³

Written in the wake of Massingberd's untimely death in 1898, *The Cleverest Woman in England* is not, as some commentators have suggested, Meade's uncharacteristically late entry to the New Woman literary movement of the early 1890s, but rather a tribute to the founder of the Pioneer Club which indicates the degree of Meade's commitment both to Massingberd and her project.¹⁴⁴

Also among Meade's most important and influential personal connections was Benjamin Waugh, the editor of the evangelical periodical the *Sunday Magazine*, whom she would identify as the person most instrumental in aiding her literary career: 'Mr. Waugh asked me to write for the SUNDAY MAGAZINE,' she noted in an interview in 1894, 'and to him I am indebted for my real start'.¹⁴⁵ Yet there is a subsidiary and more charitably motivated point of connection between the pair. At about the same period in the mid-1870s that Meade was beginning to construct her social problem novels about London's impoverished East End, Waugh was witnessing at first hand the deprivation in the slums of Greenwich and embarking on his own project to become a social reformer. When Waugh went on to found the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Meade agreed to act as president of its Dulwich branch. The two were to remain close friends until his death in 1908.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ L. T. Meade, *The Cleverest Woman in England* (London: James Nisbet, 1898), pp. 340-341.

¹⁴⁴ See James H. Murphy, *Irish Novelists and the Victorian Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 208.

¹⁴⁵ 'Mrs. L. T. Meade at Home', *The Sunday Magazine* (September 1894), p. 617.

¹⁴⁶ See L. T. Meade, 'Appreciation of the late Rev. Benjamin Waugh', *The Times* (London), vol. 38594 (14 March 1908), p. 7.

For all her activism on women's and children's issues, and despite the apparent ease with which she was to deal with political issues from the first, it was only gradually that her native country, its inhabitants and upheavals were to be introduced into Meade's fiction, and then only at a point in her career when these diversions into Irish literary territory were likely to be indulged by a readership already well acquainted with her work. The genesis of the 'Wild Irish Girl' in her schoolgirl novels is indicative of this prevailing reluctance on Meade's part to deal with specifically Irish themes. The student set apart from her fellows due to her unruliness and outspokenness had been a feature of Meade's schoolgirl novels from the first, when the English Annie Forest in *A World of Girls* was shown speaking and behaving in a manner shocking to her more refined and inhibited schoolmates. By the early 1890s, Meade had begun to experiment with variations on this theme by introducing characters from other countries to her fictional schools — American, Spanish, Tasmanian and especially Irish girls among them. The advent of a foreign element to her English settings allowed more scope for her characters' rebellions — their national differences went far in explaining the reasons they were permitted to exhibit behaviours outside of English norms — and her 'Wild Irish Girl' in particular would become a recurring motif from the point at which she was first introduced in *Bashful Fifteen* in 1892. Not only in her school stories, but in her other girls' tales as well, the introduction of an Irish girl to an English locale — and the clash of cultures, rules, attitudes and behaviours which results — often acts as a catalyst for the action of Meade's novels.

In her renditions of the Irish girl, certain traits reappear consistently. She frequently arrives in England with an inherent inability to understand its codes of behaviour, often due to the fact that she has been raised, like Meade herself, in a remote region of her native country, with the extreme south and west being recurring points of origin. By and large willful and undisciplined, she is also invariably freer, more physically capable and more

ingenuous than her English counterparts. As such, she chafes under the restrictions that her initiation to England places upon her and finds herself easily duped by her more unprincipled and malicious English counterparts. She is regularly, though not always, a rich girl whose home is a castle on or near the Irish coast, with a father or father figure who adores and supports her.

The first of these Irish girls to appear in Meade's fiction is Bridget ('Biddy') O'Hara in *Bashful Fifteen*, the daughter of the well-to-do landlord of Castle Mahun, Cork. Her Irish upbringing has rendered her expert at secreting valuables away from the marauding Land League, firing a gun and landing a salmon — skills which are shown to be imperative in Ireland — and, once in England, fails to understand the need for an education which she (and the reader) recognize will be useless to her in her native country. Her rebellion against her new English school's authority is thereby made comprehensible, and her existence at the school is compared to that of 'a wild bird who had just been caught and put into a cage'.¹⁴⁷ It is nonetheless apparent that her enforced captivity and training, in the unlikely event that she should submit to it, will be beneficial to her: 'the poor bird would be taught to develop his notes into something richer and rarer than Nature had made them, but the process would be painful'.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, because she is unwilling to learn the rules by which the society she has come to inhabit is governed, she leaves herself vulnerable to exploitation by Janet, one of the school's less scrupulous students. Once back on her native soil, however, Biddy deftly manages the situations around her and is exemplary in her handling of a crisis. Within the course of the narrative, she repents for the mistakes she has made while at school in England, but her education there has had little impact and has

¹⁴⁷ L. T. Meade, *Bashful Fifteen* (London: Cassell, 1892), p. 55.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 55.

been of no import to her when she returns, permanently, to her homeland. She remains effectively untamed and unconverted at the novel's close.

Kitty Malone, the newly-arrived student at the Middleton day school in *Wild Kitty* (1897), is depicted as a curiosity to the other schoolgirls — a 'real aborigine' who hails from 'an old castle on the coast of Donegal'.¹⁴⁹ More headstrong than Bidy O'Hara before her, she falls into many of the same errors as her precursor when she comes under the influence of Elma, one of the school's working class and less conscientious students. Elma convinces Kitty to lend her money — an act expressly forbidden by the authorities at Middleton School in their attempts to avoid any class or wealth-based hierarchies among the students — and this act leads to a series of problematic situations for both girls. Elma, though demonstrated throughout to be debilitated by her own lack of 'proper' training and the poverty of her household, is eventually expelled from the school for her contravention of its rules. Kitty is deemed at the end of the novel to be 'too wild for England', and willingly leaves the school forever to return to Ireland unchanged and unrepentant.¹⁵⁰ In both *Bashful Fifteen* and *Wild Kitty*, an upper class English standard of behaviour is challenged by the eccentricities and anomalies presented by both Irish and working class characters, whose conduct and attitudes are misinterpreted and mishandled by school authorities and remain uncontrolled at the end of the narrative.

Two years after the publication of *Wild Kitty*, however, Meade was moved to create an altogether more capable and self-disciplined Irish girl. In *Light o' the Morning: The Story of An Irish Girl* (1899), Nora O'Shanaghan lives in a crumbling castle in the southwest of Ireland with her Irish father, English mother and older brother. As the novel opens, the family estate is on the brink of collapse due to issues largely beyond its owner's

¹⁴⁹ L. T. Meade, *Wild Kitty* (London: Chambers, 1897), pp. 9-10.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 364.

control: a mortgage Squire O'Shanaghan has taken years before has been sold out of financial necessity and without the Squire's knowledge to malicious English interests. Unable to meet the latest demands for repayment and facing foreclosure, O'Shanaghan is forced to become more stringent in the collection of his tenants' rents. This has a subsidiary effect on the estate's tenantry, one of whom, faced with eviction for non-payment of his own debts, goes on to seriously wound Nora's father in an act of agrarian outrage.

The mother and brother of the O'Shanaghan family represent its English element. Their inherent selfishness, coldness and superficiality are contrasted sharply with the kindness of the Squire and Nora, the resolutely Irish members of the family. Yet the Squire is not without his own, uniquely Irish faults. He is constrained by notions of tradition and pride, and therefore remains unable to countenance what are presented as the valid complaints of his tenants — all of whom, including the man who injures the Squire, are sympathetically drawn. Nora, hereditarily a mixture of both English shrewdness and Irish sentiment, exists somewhere between her parents' respective and more clearly defined national identities, and is as a result better able both to empathize with the peasantry and to seek new solutions to the estate's problems.

During her sojourn in England, Nora's restraint is contrasted with the undisciplined actions of two characters: her English cousin Molly Hartrick, whose frustrations with the enforced cultural propriety of her household are enacted in a series of rebellions against her mother, and the American Stephanotie Miller, whose unbridled appetite for sweets and freedom with money evidences a similar lack of self-control. Combined with Meade's meticulous detailing of the sources of current Irish afflictions — which she traces to the Famine, absenteeism and English moneylenders — such inversions of previous portrayals identify this as a text more reformist in tone than her earlier girls' stories. The notion of

Britain's cultural supremacy is, in fact, repeatedly undermined in the narrative, most effectively at the point at which the English 'rescue' of Castle O'Shanaghan is achieved. Though Nora's uncle is able to save the estate from financial ruin, his English-style 'improvements' amount to a culturally enfeebling de-Celticization of the home.¹⁵¹ In advocating a girl of mixed parentage as the person most capable of envisaging the means for rejuvenating Ireland, Meade indicates that the solution to Irish problems rests not with 'old' or 'traditional' resources — whether those are Irish or English in origin — but rather with new modes of thinking and multicultural perspectives. By the end of the novel and counter to these ideas, however, both Nora and the Squire are shown complying with the revised rules that govern their Irish home. 'I will own to it now, I'm a happy man,' Squire O'Shanaghan states in the novel's closing lines, 'there are more things in the world than we Irish people know of.'¹⁵² Meade's final comments make clear that Nora's most significant accomplishment is her act of achieving her father's acquiescence to this new, and essentially English, lifestyle.

Evidencing her increasing estrangement from the values of her homeland as her tenure in England approached its third decade, from the turn of the century onwards Meade's English characters would have progressively more authority and influence over their Irish counterparts. This tendency is first exemplified in her 1902 novel, *The Rebel of the School* in which the Great Shirley School and English town of Merrifield are places where social hierarchies are firmly established. Kathleen O'Hara, in an attempt by her father to render her 'civilised', is transferred to England from her family's remote castle in the extreme southwest of Ireland to attend the school.¹⁵³ Once in England, she finds both

¹⁵¹ L. T. Meade, *Light o' the Morning: The Story of An Irish Girl* (London: Chambers, 1899), p. 191.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, p. 252.

¹⁵³ L. T. Meade, *The Rebel of the School* (London: Chambers, 1902), p. 22. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *RS*.

at the school and in the home in which she boards a more rigid social structure than she has experienced in her native country: fee-paying girls shun the 'foundation' students who are attending the school on scholarship and servants in Merrifield's homes are segregated and silenced. Though financially privileged herself, Kathleen recognizes the inequities of such societal formations, and soon establishes a secret society to combat them. She and the foundation students who make up 'The Wild Irish Girls' hold secret late night meetings to plot various nonviolent schemes for disrupting the established order at the school. As such, the fictional society acts as a form of juvenile counterpart to Inghinidhe na hÉireann, which two years prior to the publication of Meade's novel had been founded in Ireland by Maud Gonne. Like Gonne, who was English and upper class by birth, Kathleen's national and class-based identities are at variance with the majority of the members of the society for which she acts as both founder and president. Said by her followers to be 'graceful, and with such a power of eloquence [...] that I could die for [her]' (138), Kathleen evokes the type of idolatry often bestowed on Gonne by her devotees.

Such equivalences render it tempting to interpret Kathleen's eventual admonishment by the school's headmistress as Meade's own surreptitious reproach to a wider contingent of Irish and upper class rebel leaders:

The girls who have joined your society and are putting themselves under your influence are the sort of girls who in a school like this get most injured by such proceedings. They have never been accustomed to self-restraint; they have not been guided to control themselves. [...] They look up to you as above them by birth; your very way, your words, can influence them. Wrong from your lips will appear right, and right will appear wrong. You yourself are an ignorant and unlearned child, and yet you attempt to guide others. This society must be broken up immediately. (RS 237)

Lending credence to the idea that the author is for the first time on the side of her English characters rather than her Irish one, Kathleen's fate is very different to those of the fictional Irish girls who have preceded her. Forced to stand before a school tribunal, she is accused of forming an organization in which students 'preach[ed] rebellion each to the other [and]

dared publicly to break the laws' (RS 363). While the school authorities remain unrepentant for the exclusions and ill-treatment that have been shown to be endemic within it, Kathleen is disciplined, repents, and is effectively converted to English modes of behaviour. In the novel's final chapter the reader learns that in later years this particular Irish girl has gone on to become the most exemplary and popular student at the Great Shirley School.

In *A Wild Irish Girl* (1910), Patricia Redgold, from Carrigraun in the southwest of Ireland, is the orphaned daughter of a soldier killed in the Boer War. Raised by her grandfather, Patricia is a 'wild young savage' whose father's dying wish is that she be sent to England to be tamed.¹⁵⁴ At first enacting small rebellions, purely for her own enjoyment, against the staid London household she comes to inhabit, Patricia grows increasingly unhappy when she is repeatedly misunderstood by the English family with whom she lives. By consistently failing to recognize her need for freedom and love of the outdoors, the Lovel family drives Pat to a more serious form of revolt, enacted in clandestine and dangerous adventures on the streets of London. Symbolic of wider national issues, and indicating Meade's own interpretation of the relationship between England and Ireland, these rebellions are all ill fated, leading Pat to a fuller appreciation of the safety and comfort provided by her English benefactors, whose kindnesses extend to the act of rescuing her beloved Irish home from penury. The Lovels, in their turn, learn from the Irish girl to be both more empathetic and less bound by notions of tradition and orthodoxy than was previously the case, with significant benefits, especially for the two young daughters of the family.

Despite the reciprocity of the relationship between the novel's English and Irish characters, it is both apparent and notable that Patricia, as one of Meade's few

¹⁵⁴ L. T. Meade, *A Wild Irish Girl* (London: Chambers, 1910), p. 68. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *WIG*.

impoverished Irish characters, is equated more literally with the idea of wildness than are her rich and upper class 'wild Irish girls'. Images of Pat's 'savagery' recur throughout the narrative, and there are troubling yet consistent parallels drawn between the Irish girl's behaviours and those of the dog she adopts. Pat's opinions are demonstrated to be not only wrong-minded but at times highly contentious, as when she declares her admiration for the ancient Greek lawmaker Lycurgus: 'What a splendid man he was! He used to have all the weakly babies killed. That was the way to bring up a strong race' (*WIG* 346). As such, the English characters' continued desire for her wildness to be tamed — '[w]e want it to be directed, to be disciplined' — is rendered understandable (*WIG* 412). Pat's sense of defiance is allowed, nonetheless, to endure at the novel's close, having by that time been redirected down the (implicitly more acceptable) route of feminism, as Pat is shown declaring her intentions both to preserve 'some of my savage nature' (*WIG* 417) and to become, not a 'lady', but a 'woman, and, I hope, of a right good sort' (*WIG* 413).

Another poor Irish girl acts as the protagonist of *Peggy from Kerry* (1912), in which the fifteen-year-old Peggy Desmond, the orphaned daughter of an upper class English man and an Irish peasant mother, is relocated to England. Much of the tension in the novel's opening chapters is created by the advent of Peggy, who has been raised amidst the Irish peasantry, to an aristocratic household. Yet evidencing the illness which Meade succumbed to in the year it was written, the novel lacks the narrative tension and consistency of her earlier efforts: characters' back stories change, details alter, and Peggy remains both exaggeratedly stereotypical and largely unsympathetic throughout. Although Meade's main character and the novel itself are partially redeemed by moving descriptions of her recitation of James Clarence Mangan's 'The Fairies' Passage' in the prize competition that forms the story's dénouement, her characterizations are repeatedly tainted by a more

pronounced bigotry than has been the case in her previous efforts.¹⁵⁵ These are largely directed against Peggy's status as an Irish 'girl of the people' (*PK* 66), which is deemed not only objectionable but shameful, and towards the '*nouveaux riches*' (*PK* 160) students at the boarding school she attends, whose social and financial statuses are demonstrated to be the root causes of their licentious conduct.

In the same year, however, Meade was to pen *Kitty O'Donovan* (1912), and therein to offer radically different characterizations to those in *Peggy from Kerry*. Kitty, the only Irish student and most popular girl at the Merton Gables School in England, is as the novel opens about to be crowned Queen of the May. Much reference is made to Kitty's Irishness, which is always demonstrated to be an advantage: 'She will be that most lovely creature on earth, a gloriously beautiful Irishwoman', a schoolmate suggests,¹⁵⁶ while the narratorial comments assert that she is

a true child of her country [...] absolutely without self-consciousness. She was altogether and completely without a trace of selfishness. She never thought of herself. Her joys consisted in making other people happy (*KO* 10).

Meade's stock character, the poverty-stricken English schoolgirl driven by both need and greed to immoral deeds — in this case, a student named Mary Cupp — is given more valid reasons than previously for her actions, and the author devotes lengthy passages to the sources of such misbehaviour: 'There was that about her which indicated the all too patent fact that she had been underfed, undernourished, under-clothed all her days,' Meade writes of Mary. 'Her need was extreme' (*KO* 42). In the end, the true villain of the piece is not Mary but the beautiful and wealthy Henrietta Vermont. Here, for the first time in Meade's

¹⁵⁵ L. T. Meade, *Peggy from Kerry* (London: Chambers, 1912), p. 307. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *PK*.

¹⁵⁶ L. T. Meade, *Kitty O'Donovan* (London: Chambers, 1912), p. 61. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *KO*.

novels, wealth is presented as a detriment, a potential corruptor: 'there is a fatal power in wealth. It appeals to some natures. It appeals sordidly' (KO 18).

Ireland, meanwhile, is a dying country whose children are only able to thrive once they are outside it. Kitty's success at Merton Gables is mirrored by the stories of young Irish emigrants scattered elsewhere around the world, which arrive through the medium of letters to be opened by 'the anxious fathers and mothers' left behind in Ireland, a wasting older generation. These missives contain tales of 'how the "childer" were getting on in those far-away places where they had taken themselves to: how Mary Jane was prospering in New York; how Pat asthore was doing in Sydney; how that wild colleen, Mary of the Glen, was disporting herself in Johannesburg' (KO 90). Even those younger Irish people who would like to remain, such as Kitty's cousin Jack, are shown in Meade's text to be left with no option but to abandon their native land. Emigration is represented not as a choice, but as a necessity.

Both Kitty and Jack are thus sent to England for their schooling, a tradition and process presented as crucial but not altogether palatable to either the children or their mutual guardian, Kitty's father. Mr O'Donovan is shown to bristle at the notion that being Irish and a member of his old and distinguished family is in any regard substandard to its English equivalents, yet Meade also portrays Jack begrudgingly acknowledging the benefits of an English education in terms that posit her Irish characters as inferior: 'I hate Winchester, but it does me a lot of good, all the same,' Jack asserts, 'It knocks the false pride out of me' (KO 90). Meanwhile, the complex nature of class-based and ethnic behaviours is more rigorously explored than in her previous novels. Kitty, wrongly accused of subterfuge at her own school, couches her entreaties for understanding to her superiors in terms of her racial and behavioural differences to them:

You must not treat me, all of you, as though I were a prisoner — I, one of the O'Donovans of The Peaks. I inherit the blood of my ancestors; it flows in

my veins. I can stand a certain amount, but not too much. Don't let them behave *too* harshly to me; for, if they do — [...] I can show the dark side of my nature. (KO 199-200)

This passage makes apparent the savagery of Kitty's Irish 'nature', while acting simultaneously as an explanation — 'our people were kings' — for her innate nobility of character. The most commendable of Meade's Irish heroines thus far, Kitty is also the most wronged, and teeters throughout the latter part of the novel on the brink of a rebellion which is never enacted, although it is repeatedly justified through the distrust of her English caretakers and victimization by her English peers. Mary Cupp, meanwhile, makes attempts at reform, but is consistently thwarted in these efforts by the richer and more influential Henrietta, whose ambitions to usurp Kitty's May Queen title are abetted by Mary's talent for forgery. All is resolved in the end when the school officials learn of Henrietta's plot, and it is her, and not Mary, who is expelled from the school. Kitty O'Donovan remains blameless throughout, and is able to continue her tenure as May Queen, becoming the finest ever to reign at the school. Not despite, but rather because of, her Irish heritage, she displays an intrinsic nobility of character which facilitates an easy assimilation into her role as ruler of the school.

To this point in her career, it is notable that Meade makes no reference in her girls' stories to the sectarian divisions within Ireland, and never overtly identifies her Irish girl characters as Catholic, Protestant or otherwise. This trend is, however, broken in the last of her Irish girls' tales, *The Daughter of a Soldier*, in which the main character is identified as the niece of a Church of Ireland rector. Published posthumously in 1915, its heroine, Maureen O'Brien, also for the first time bears marked similarities in background to Meade herself, and simultaneously acts as the repository for the author's most positive images of Irishness. Left an orphan at the age of six after her soldier father is killed in battle, Maureen is sent to live with her uncle, the Reverend Patrick O'Brien, in County Cork.

Like Meade's own childhood home of 'Templetrine', Maureen's new residence, 'Templemore', is located in an isolated position near the sea: 'five miles away from the charming, little town of Kingsala' — readily identifiable as Kinsale not only through similarities in name and location but also in detailed descriptions of its 'World's End' district.¹⁵⁷ Maureen also and notably has in common with her creator the gift of being 'a born storyteller' whose 'undoubted talent might be turned to account for her benefit later on' (*DS* 25).

The novel opens when Maureen is fourteen, at a point after her widowed uncle has remarried. Just as Meade would suggest that the advent of a second wife to her father's home had caused that household to become uninhabitable for her, so too does the introduction of a second Mrs O'Brien to Templemore render Maureen 'miserable' (*DS* 4). A selfish, jealous and vain woman, the rector's new wife is quickly dispatched in a gruesomely-depicted riding accident — '[h]er head was doubled under her very queerly, so that it did not seem to belong to her body' (*DS* 57) — yet she remains central to the novel's action, her death leading as it does to a crisis of both health and faith in Meade's protagonist. In a lengthy and intensely religious passage, Maureen subsequently achieves a powerful spiritual awakening at the Gap of Dunloe. The religious tenor of the text is pervasive to the point that even the act of attending school in England is represented as a spiritually motivated endeavour on Maureen's part. Initially unwilling to leave her beloved Irish home, Maureen accedes to the requests of the school's headmistress that she act in the capacity of moral compass to Daisy and Henrietta, the wayward orphaned daughters of the second Mrs O'Brien who have been exiled to the English school, once again, to be civilized.

¹⁵⁷ L. T. Meade, *The Daughter of a Soldier* (London: Chambers, 1915), p. 1. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *DS*.

Maureen's is said to be 'a specially fine character' attributed to her dual ancestry: 'for she belongs to mixed races, being French on her mother's side and Irish on her father's' (DS 253). The blending of Irish Protestant with French — and therefore traditionally Catholic — heritages, combined with overt references to the Celtic and Catholic origins of her given name, indicate that Maureen is intended not only as an ethnic, but also as a religious, hybrid. She increasingly acts allegorically as the embodiment of a spiritualism which transcends conventional sectarian divides, and is aligned repeatedly with her namesake, the Virgin Mary. In the most notable instances in which such parallels are drawn, Maureen becomes the means by which Daisy and Henrietta achieve their respective spiritual salvations, and ultimately is equated, through imagery and italicization, with the notion of deity: she is the 'white angel' (DS 260, 331) Daisy glimpses on her deathbed, at which point the dying girl is described as passing 'into *His* arms, breathing out her great and exceeding love for *Maureen O'Brien*' (DS 296, emphasis Meade's).

Created in the last year of Meade's life, Maureen is the most intensely and affectionately Irish of all her girl characters. She consistently refers to her homeland and its emotional grip on her, and is repeatedly depicted singing songs — 'The Dark Rosaleen', 'The Wearing o' the Green', 'When Malachy Wore His Collar of Gold', 'The Vale of Avoca', 'Rich and Rare Were the Gems She Wore' and 'The Harp that Once Through Tara's Halls' are all referenced — which mark her out as a national patriot. Although by the novel's close she has relocated permanently to England, Maureen's emigration is demonstrated to be an act of self-sacrifice to which she has agreed only reluctantly for the sake of her uncle's health. While the novel remains one of Meade's most cloyingly sentimental in a corpus in which mawkishness is rife, it is notable for its portrayal of an Irish girl devoid of the type of stereotypical savagery and rebelliousness that often inflected her earlier depictions, and for the fact that this rendering of Ireland is an

unequivocally affectionate one. Meade is careful to note at the end of the narrative that the only one of her Irish girls to be recognizably self-derived 'loved her country and people beyond words' (*DS* 328).

Studies of Meade's work have tended to generalize when discussing her Irish girls' stories and their characterizations. Mitchell suggests, for example, that the recurring wild Irish girl of Meade's novels 'has to be broken in to an English school and manages to teach the English girls something about emotions and frankness while she's at it'.¹⁵⁸ Although Meade does occasionally employ what John Wilson Foster refers to as the 'horsey metaphor' of being 'broken in' when referring to her Irish girls in England — the phrase occurs in *Bashful Fifteen* and recurs in *A Wild Irish Girl* — her characterizations in fact vary widely.¹⁵⁹ Her Irish girls as often as not remain unchanged by their English experiences, are not invariably 'wild', and their introduction to an English locale often serves to justify rather than condemn the differences which existed between acceptable codes of behaviour in Ireland and England. Mitchell is accurate in pointing out the parallels between Meade's more unruly Irish schoolgirl characters and those 'wild' and foreign elements introduced into the novels from other regions, most notably America, who are demonstrated to be equally unrefined by prevailing English standards. It is also the case that some of Meade's most rebellious characters are not, in fact, foreigners to England. In *The Rebellion of Lil Carrington* (1898), for instance, the plot revolves around the uncivilized behaviour of an upper class English girl. As Meade's career progressed, her fictional Irish girls in fact can be seen to grow both more caricatured and, paradoxically, more nuanced and admirable. Such contradictory representations evidence Meade's long absence from Ireland, and indicate that, by the time her final works were being composed,

¹⁵⁸ Mitchell, *The New Girl*, p. 16.

¹⁵⁹ John Wilson Foster, *Irish Novels 1890-1940: New Bearings in Culture and Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 233-234.

her native country had become in her imagination not a living, breathing space, but rather a site either of gross misrepresentation (*Peggy from Kerry*) or of extreme nostalgia and exaggerated sentiment (*The Daughter of a Soldier*).

Meade's Irish novels for adults are very different creations altogether, and are unique among her body of work for remaining untraceable to any trend in fiction or the attendant probability of deep interest among the reading public. Rather, they appear to have been constructed solely as a means to relate views of and on Ireland and the Irish. Again evidencing her reluctance to write on Irish topics, the first of her novels whose action is wholly located in Ireland, *The O'Donnells of Inchfawn* (1887), would not be published until thirteen years after her literary career began in earnest. Set in Donegal in 1877, *The O'Donnells of Inchfawn* is steeped in the images and concerns of the Land War era, its portrayals of two very different secret societies — one committed to agrarian agitation, the other formed to combat it — indicating two alternative approaches to Irish land reform. The 'Red Glen Men' who are headed by Geoffrey O'Donnell are set up to enforce changes to the agrarian system through a type of violence which is presented as both gratuitous and inevitable — 'there is no necessity for all this [...] but then the Irish must be melodramatic'.¹⁶⁰ The 'Good-will society', in contrast, is founded and run by Geoffrey's sister, Ellen, on the premise that nothing good can be gained from evil. Ellen's is an organization devoted to relieving the suffering of the poor and sponsoring emigration. The contrast between the two organizations evidences the differences in attitudes and actions not only within Irish society, but also within the same Irish family.

That the need for land reform exists remains unquestioned in the narrative. In Meade's evocation of Ireland, lands are consistently being mismanaged and tenants habitually mistreated. The Catholic O'Donnells may be 'good' landlords, but they have lost

¹⁶⁰ L. T. Meade, *The O'Donnells of Inchfawn* (London: Hatchard, 1887), p. 56.

ownership of Inchfawn due to financial difficulties caused by what Meade represents as their inherent and flawed indulgence of the tenantry. The Brownlow family, who subsequently take over the estate, manage it with more pecuniary efficiency yet their miserliness and mistreatment of the peasantry fuel a revolt that threatens, yet again, to bring Inchfawn to the brink of ruin. Only Ellen, the product of a culturally mixed and inter-religious marriage, manages to escape the legacies of the past by inheriting both the generosity of her Catholic father and the business acumen of her Protestant and English-blooded mother. If in Ellen the best of both Irish Catholic and English Protestant commingle, however, the outcome of her attempts at improvements and restructuring nonetheless indicate Meade's doubts concerning the prospects for Ireland's future. Although the feudalistic system of land management in Ireland is represented as defective, it is also, in Meade's version of it, intractable. Reform of Inchfawn is impossible, and Ellen and her tenants are shown at the end of the narrative making plans for a new life in the Americas.

The Home of Silence (1890) marks Meade's effort to directly address issues of racial prejudice among both the English and Irish. At the centre of the narrative's action is Nigel Dering, the product of a mixed marriage between a violent and profligate Irish father who has died of alcoholism, and an English mother who in consequence of her marital experience 'hate[s] the Irish as a nation'.¹⁶¹ As with Ellen O'Donnell's before him, Nigel's combined Irish and English heritage has yielded beneficial results: 'He possessed at once his father's charm and his mother's common-sense' (*HS* 7). Knowing little of his father's personal or familial history, Nigel travels to Cork to make the acquaintance of his Irish relatives, and promptly falls in love with his first cousin, Molly Dering, a devout Irish patriot.

¹⁶¹ L. T. Meade, *The Home of Silence* (London: Sisley's, 1890), p. 6. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *HS*.

Although in the novel Meade employs a hackneyed stereotype, the dissipated Irishman, as the impetus for her narrative tension, she also utilizes her text to reinforce the notion that Nigel's father was not only an anomaly among his Irish peers, but that the unhappiness of his marriage to a 'proud English wife' — 'a cold-blooded creature' — may in fact have been a prime motivating force in his subsequent acts of debauchery (*HS* 40). Mrs Dering's own prejudices are mirrored by the anti-English bigotry of her husband's brother, Meade thereby demonstrating that such attitudes run simultaneously and counter to one another. If the narrative is not entirely devoid of its own prejudices against both the Irish and English, Meade makes discernable attempts throughout to confront racial stereotypes, and takes aim in particular at prevailing notions of hereditary character defects. She challenges, for example, the existing belief in the inherent slovenliness of the Irish by describing the cleanliness of the Dering family's ancestral home with a regularity that borders on tedium. More importantly to the machinations of her plot, she also makes clear that the personal history of Nigel's father, which has been kept a secret for decades and includes a heinous murder, is immaterial to the character of his son. By the close of the novel, the secret of the murder has been drowned in an Irish bog — 'The Home of Silence' of the title — along with the murder victim's brother, whose drive towards vengeance has by then already ruined both his health and his mind. Transcending the legacies of the past is shown to be a prerequisite for survival, and becomes over the course of the narrative the means by which the unification of its Irish and English elements is achieved as Nigel and Molly are married in its final pages.

The Stormy Petrel (1909), the most complex and successful of Meade's Irish creations, is a self-consciously political novel constructed against the backdrop of the Great Famine. Set in 1846, the novel opens in a space of relative contentment, yet proceeds to locate the sources of contemporary Irish privation in its Famine moment.

'Such was the state of things just before the terrible famine which reached its culmination in 1847. Until then,' Meade writes in its opening chapter, 'the country was fairly prosperous' (*SP* 6). The novel is largely concerned with the tale of two siblings, Kathleen and Patrick O'Hara, who are products, yet again, of a mixed marriage between an English mother and an Anglo-Irish father. Left motherless at an early age, the brother and sister experience a more liberal upbringing than many of their Irish neighbours, which manifests itself in anti-English sentiments and tendencies towards rebelliousness. Also central to the novel's action is a family story concerning an American ship wrecked decades before off the coast of the O'Hara's native village, Courtnamara, in Cork. The lone survivor of the accident is a man known only as 'The Stormy Petrel' who, having lost all his worldly possessions in the wreck, was nursed to health and given generous financial assistance by the O'Haras and their neighbours. The O'Hara family have learned nothing of him in the intervening years. The mystery of his identity looms large over the narrative, and is recalled in the form of the enigmatic foreigner, Fergus O'Flynn, who arrives in town as the novel opens.

As in *The Home of Silence* before it, *The Stormy Petrel* repeatedly reveals the prejudices which run concurrently and conversely to one another through the local Irish community. Meade lends more than a hint of Irish-Irelandism to the town's attitudes towards O'Flynn, whose accent is untraceable. Regarded with suspicion by the natives, O'Flynn is a rich man whose fortune might be used to revive the local economy, yet Kathleen in particular is unable to countenance the idea of financial assistance from any source which is not demonstrably Irish in origin. O'Flynn, in his turn, takes voluble exception to Kathleen's prejudices, pointing out that she has lived an insular and isolated Irish existence and would benefit unequivocally from greater cultural awareness. People are 'very exclusive in this fair land of Erin', he tells her. 'You can't have a big world if you

only just know this part' (*SP* 39-40). Kathleen's father, meanwhile, believes that the priesthood is responsible for 'the ignorance and superstition and rebellion' which stagnates the local peasantry, while the neighbouring landowner General Seeley asserts that it is in fact O'Hara's own and specifically Protestant prejudices, and his resultant segregation from the peasantry, which have resulted in this paralysis (*SP* 50). While upper class Catholic neighbours like Seeley himself know of the spreading potato blight and threat of rebellion in the area, O'Hara remains oblivious to these imminent dangers. 'Your eyes need opening, O'Hara,' Seeley tells him. 'If you were a Catholic, you'd have found out the truth by now' (*SP* 52).

Kathleen's brother Patrick, who founds a secret society intent on violently opposing the English elements in Ireland, regards himself as the true patriot and revolutionary of the family. Yet Meade demonstrates that it is in fact Kathleen who enacts the more useful insurrections against local atrocities. As the famine escalates around them, Patrick and his 'Ribbon Men' are involved in the murder of a local land agent, Conway — a senseless act that does nothing to alleviate the country's suffering. Kathleen, meanwhile, travels to England to object in person to the policies of the absentee landlord, Lord Kirkdale, for whom Conway worked. Meade's indictment of absenteeism is evident in her censure of Kirkdale, whose extensive and mismanaged lands are shown to be largely responsible for the rapid spread of the blight. Kathleen conveys to Kirkdale that it is only through firsthand experience of Ireland, and the personal affection for and from the Irish which will result, that he will be able to manage his land and his tenants properly. 'You and your children should spend the next winter and spring and the beginning of summer until the harvest, at Ardnacarrick', she argues. 'Ah, sir! then you would certainly know what love means, what it is to have gained the hearts of the warmest, the bravest, the noblest people in the world' (*SP* 223).

Among the novel's most effective passages are those which detail the futile but strenuous attempts to thwart the spread of the blight, the pervasive deprivation and death which follows in its wake, and the attendant and unnecessary delays in receiving assistance — both physical and financial — from England. In the end, Meade gives sole credit for the cessation of the Famine to Irish-American benefactors, foremost among them O'Flynn and his father, who is revealed in the novel's closing pages to be the Stormy Petrel of O'Hara family legend. The most anti-English of all her novels, *The Stormy Petrel* repeatedly asserts that English attitudes and behaviour during the Famine were the antithesis of those of 'willing and active and healthy Americans [...] who knew what they were about' (SP 388).

Meade's final novel about Ireland to be written for an adult readership, *The Passion of Kathleen Duveen* (1913), rewrites the tale of true-life murder which acted as inspiration for both Gerald Griffin's novel *The Collegians* (1828) and Dion Boucicault's play *The Colleen Bawn, or The Brides of Garryowen* (1859). All three works are based on the story of a fifteen-year-old Limerick girl named Ellen Hanley who, in late June of 1819, secretly married John Scanlan, a member of the landed gentry. Scanlan appears to have quickly tired of his new bride and, in consequence, engaged one of his servants, Stephen Sullivan, to murder her on 14 July 1819. Two months later, her badly decayed body washed up on the banks of the Shannon near Money Point in County Clare. Gerald Griffin happened to be the court reporter at the Limerick Assizes when Scanlan was brought to trial there in 1820, and the Liberator himself, Daniel O'Connell, acted as attorney for the defence. O'Connell would afterwards admit that he did 'not feel the most slight regret at [Scanlan's] conviction', and referred to his client as 'a horrid villain'.¹⁶² Scanlan was hanged at

¹⁶² Daniel Griffin, *The life of Gerald Griffin, by his brother* (Dublin, 1872), p. 206. Quoted in Dominick Tracy, 'Squatting the Deserted Village: Idyllic Resistance in Griffin's *The Collegians*', in Belanger (ed.), *The Irish Novel in the Nineteenth Century: Facts and Fictions* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), p. 94.

Gallows Green in March of 1820, proclaiming his innocence to the end. Later in that same year, Sullivan was also apprehended, tried, found guilty and executed. He admitted immediately prior to his death that he had killed Ellen Hanley on Scanlan's command.

Griffin's fictional rendition of this story centres around the parallel tales of two college friends, Hardress Cregan and Kyrle Daly. As the novel opens, Cregan is married in secret to the beautiful fifteen-year-old peasant girl Eily O'Connor. Like his real-life counterpart, he soon realizes his error in binding himself to a girl of a lower social standing than his own — Eily's brogue, in particular, becomes a marker of her difference and fuels his increasing aversion to her — and, gradually turning his attentions to Daly's love interest, Anne Chute, contrives to remove his new bride from the local area and pretend the marriage never occurred. To achieve his purposes he employs his faithful servant, the hunchbacked Danny Mann, who, misconstruing Cregan's intentions, murders Eily and disposes of the body in much the same manner as did the real-life Stephen Sullivan. In Griffin's text, Cregan is realistically portrayed as a man conflicted by his simultaneous attraction and revulsion to the peasant to whom he finds himself unalterably allied. As a member of the landed gentry, he is also endowed with a moral rectitude which the peasant Mann lacks. Therefore, and despite the fact that he did not sanction it, Cregan ultimately confesses to Eily's murder, and this act, along with his subsequent death in the midst of his transportation for the crime, effectively restores Cregan to the realms of the morally righteous. Griffin does not permit the long-suffering Danny Mann, however, any such redemption.

Boucicault, whose play utilizes the same characters that populate Griffin's tale, strays from real-life events more widely — contriving, in the process, a happy ending for most of the actors in his drama. In *The Colleen Bawn*, Danny Mann is killed in the midst of his attempts to drown Eily, who is rescued from the water by an Irish peasant character,

Myles Na Coppaleen. Boucicault adds the new dimension of financial motivation, rather than personal affection, to Cregan's pursuit of Anne Chute, who for her part has been separated from her true love, Kyrle Daly, by an act of misrecognition. In preparation for her marriage to Cregan, Anne rescues the family estate from bankruptcy, so that by the time Eily reappears in the play's final scene, all impediments have been removed and both couples — Anne and Kyrle, Eily and Cregan — can be reunited. In both Griffin's and Boucicault's renditions of the tale, the upper class is exonerated of any criminal intent and the full burden of guilt placed on a member of the peasantry.

Although Meade borrows some of the financial motivations which appear in Boucicault's play and retains the tragic ending of Griffin's novel, her narrative notably diverges from both precursors by restoring to her peasant characters a measure of dignity and self-discipline. Like the real-life Ellen Hanley — who, although of peasant origin, was described in contemporary accounts as 'genteel' — Meade endows her peasant character Kathleen Duveen with a demeanour and mode of speaking which are above reproach.¹⁶³ Rather than becoming a passive murder victim, Kathleen is permitted to choose her own fate, willingly sacrificing herself so that the social and financial status of her aristocratic husband, Dominic O'Ferrel, might be saved. Ellen Hanley's murderer, Stephen Sullivan, becomes in Meade's novel the similarly named Terence Sullivan, whose actions are repeatedly imbued with an affection and intelligence denied to Danny Mann in Griffin's and Boucicault's versions of the tale. Sullivan's attachment to Kathleen, the woman he recognizes as both his moral superior and true mistress, is shown to be even more intense than that he has forged with his long-term master, and this new fidelity leads him to question and rebuff the commands he is subsequently given by O'Ferrel. Once having deduced his master's treachery, he renounces his former servitude to him, and these added

¹⁶³ 'Ireland, Limerick City Assizes, July 25: Horrible Murder', *The Times* (London), no. 11003 (4 August 1820), p. 3.

emotional dimensions and informed responses render Sullivan judicious rather than merely ignorantly servile. Important, too, is the fact that he is never connected with Kathleen's death, and not only actively opposes the murderous plans that O'Ferrel has made, but also and ultimately becomes the agent by which his former master is apprehended by the law. Endowed with an agency denied to their forerunners, Meade's peasant characters are no longer the passive victims of, or minions to, the whims of their social superiors.

The contrasts Meade creates between her rivals for Dominic's affections, meanwhile, resonate in terms of the women's respective class-based and national identities. Both are potential saviors of the Anglo-Irishman, but the means by which that salvation might be achieved are couched in very different terms. The *nouveau riche* Englishwoman, Mary Lindsay, has the monetary resources and the physical strength to achieve his financial and bodily rescue; the Irish peasant Kathleen Duveen holds the only key to his moral salvation. Choosing one, O'Ferrel must renounce the other. In first planning to murder Kathleen and then by failing to save Kathleen's life when he has the opportunity, he becomes guilty not only of forsaking his legally and religiously binding union with her, but also of privileging financial necessity over moral responsibility. Equally importantly in terms of Meade's vision, O'Ferrel's deeds are shown to be largely the result of his debilitating inaction. More conflicted than equivalent characters in the works of Griffin and Boucicault, O'Ferrel displays an inertia unique among the characters in the novel — one which harks back to the behaviour of the English in *The Stormy Petrel*. By also and repeatedly detailing the O'Ferrel family's financial carelessness, and stealthily criticizing the tradition of absentee landlordism through repeated references to the supernatural curse that has befallen the estate due to the O'Ferrels' extended absences from it, Meade's text indicates that the failings of the O'Ferrel family are emblematic of wider Anglo-Irish Ascendancy failures. This idea is reinforced by the final images of the novel, in which

Terence Sullivan, while remaining true to his memories of Kathleen Duveen, transfers his allegiances from the O'Ferrel family to the far more capable Mary Lindsay, and willingly leaves Ireland for England.

As it is conveyed in her Irish narratives, Meade's vision of Ireland's political situation is inconsistent and occasionally contradictory. At times she appears to place the blame for her native country's ills on its English rulers, at others on its Anglo-Irish landowners. Less than exemplary peasant characters appear throughout the novels, and the subject of religious-based fatalism is addressed, most vividly in the character of a woman in *The Stormy Petrel* so eager to surrender to 'God's will' that she lies down on her heap of rotted potatoes and waits to die (*SP* 70). Each of these factions, in other instances, is portrayed positively. Most often, and indicative of her own status as an Irish expatriate and therefore as a person who exists between traditional cultural identities and who has assimilated the ideas of a foreign culture, Meade finds her solutions in the combination of new, multi-cultural alliances and the death of old animosities. She nonetheless demonstrates repeatedly that Ireland is a resolutely stratified and fatally misgoverned society whose citizens are limited in a manner that the English are not. In her English-set novels such as *A Son of Ishmael* (1896), *That Brilliant Peggy* (1903) and *Castle Poverty* (1904) — which deal with some of the same themes of murder and misalliance which appear in her Irish-set works — Meade grants her characters greater social mobility and capacity for change. Ireland always remains, in her evocations of it, a space hindered by the legacies of its past and the irreconcilability of its factions.

Meade's work, having never gained widespread approval in Ireland, would eventually fall foul of critics in England and America. By 1906, the *Saturday Review*, while acknowledging Meade as 'The Queen of Girls' Book Makers', was moved to

speculate on the reasons for her popularity and launched a scathing attack not only on the subject matter and literary merit of her work, but also on Meade's own morality:

How is Mrs. Meade possible? Here is a person who year after year plants her stories on the public with as much regularity and in about the same bulk as an army contractor supplying shoddy shoes to the Government [...] The explanation apparently is this. Parents do not care what books they buy; girls do not care what they read; so Mrs. Meade is able to slip in between, and need not care what she writes. Very evidently she does not care.¹⁶⁴

After going on to assert that 'it would be too much to expect us often to undergo the torture of dwelling on Mrs. Meade's work', *The Saturday Review* proceeds to discuss four of her recent novels, taking Meade to task for producing what it incorrectly assumes are texts for girls which explore adult themes and are marked by an 'insinuation of more terrible things' than those to which she overtly refers.¹⁶⁵ The article spawned a series of letters from a number of Meade's supporters and a rebuttal from the author herself, but the magazine remained decisively vitriolic towards her and her work nonetheless. By 1929, her reputation had declined to the point that all of her texts were placed on a list of books 'Not to Be Circulated' by libraries because they lacked literary or moral merit.¹⁶⁶

Throughout the course of her career, Meade remained unwilling to speak publicly on the political situation in her homeland, and her novels appear to place equal amounts of blame and praise on every side of the arguments that surrounded the Irish Question, giving few indications of her own political sympathies or sectarian allegiances as these concerned her homeland. An action she was to take in the early months of 1914, however, gives some clue as to where those sympathies may have been placed. In the spring of that year, women living in Britain were invited for the first time to sign the English equivalent of the

¹⁶⁴ 'The Queen of Girls'-Book Makers', *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, vol. 102, no. 2668 (15 December 1906), p. 741.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ See Mitchell p. 14 and Mark I. West, 'Not to Be Circulated: The Response of Children's Librarians to Dime Novels and Series Books', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, vol. 10, no. 3 (Fall 1985), pp. 138-139.

'Solemn League and Covenant for Ulster', an anti-Home Rule tract which had been drafted by Sir Edward Carson and his Unionist followers in 1912. Among the first female signatories of the 'British Covenant for Ulster' to be publicly acknowledged, in March of 1914, was 'Mrs. L. T. Meade'.¹⁶⁷ Meade's act of signing the Covenant in the post-1913 political climate would have been highly controversial to many of her Irish compatriots, for it strongly indicated not only her approval of Carson's radical Unionist policies, but also of the strategies he initiated for resistance to Home Rule, most prominent among them the Ulster Volunteer Force. To categorize her politics solely on the evidence of a single action she took late in life, however, would almost certainly do her a disservice by acting as an oversimplification of the complexities of political thought and the variety of allegiances and sympathies (and prejudices and animosities) Meade's novels reveal. What is perhaps most telling about her fiction is the degree to which her Irish characters differ in their actions and attitudes, and the number among them who are, in fact, the product of both Irish and English parentage. While such characterizations hint at the inextricable relationship between the two nations through their microcosmic reenactment of the 'Union of Hearts', they also act to query ideas associated with religious and racial separatism on both sides of the Anglo-Irish divide.

Meade died at her home in Oxford on 27 October 1914, leaving a number of unpublished manuscripts behind. At least thirteen of these would be published posthumously, including *The Maid Indomitable*, which would first appear in the early months of 1916. The only text among her body of work to be issued in Ireland prior to its English publication, *The Maid Indomitable* was serialized in the *Irish Independent's* Sunday edition from January to July of that all-important year. It was, therefore, the name of 'Mrs. L. T. Meade' — printed in an oversized, highly decorative font above each week's

¹⁶⁷ See 'The British Covenant for Ulster: Women's Signatures', *The Times* (London), no. 40467 (10 March 1914), p. 8.

installment — which was most prominently displayed on the pages of the *Independent* in the immediate aftermath of the Easter Rising. At the same time, that newspaper's editor, William Martin Murphy, was using its pages to denounce the leaders of the Rising, including his old Dublin Lock-Out foe, James Connolly. Murphy would close his notorious editorial of 4 May 1916 by referring to the Rising as 'a miserable fiasco' and calling on the British Government to 'see that no such deplorable occurrences shall ever again blot the fair fame of this country'.¹⁶⁸ Eight days later, Connolly's would be the final and, in the imagination of much of the Irish public, most heinous of all the executions which followed in the wake of the Easter Rising — the point at which popular opinion in Ireland began to turn from dismay at the actions of the Rising's participants towards anti-English hostility and the tendency to view Connolly, Patrick Pearse and the remainder of the executed men as martyrs to the cause of Ireland's freedom.

A week after it began its run in January of 1916, the *Independent* reported that *The Maid Indomitable* had 'achieved an instant success, and bids fair to exceed in popularity the many great novels which have already appeared'.¹⁶⁹ In a body of work constituted primarily of texts intended as fleeting entertainments, *The Maid Indomitable* is more ephemeral than most. As such, it is a novel which might have offered its Irish readers the perfect antidote to the litany of First World War tragedies that came to them daily in the pages of the *Independent*, had those tragedies not subsequently been multiplied and brought closer to home by the events of April and May, 1916. While it cannot be counted among Meade's more important works, *The Maid Indomitable* remains significant for its depictions of a modern Antigone who must go into exile to free herself from an oppressive father figure, and who subsequently is torn between devotion to the alluring island nation

¹⁶⁸ 'Criminal Madness', *Irish Independent* (4 May 1916), p. 2.

¹⁶⁹ 'The Serial Story of the Year', *Irish Independent* (12 January 1916), p. 4.

of her birth and affection for her adoptive home, England. In its heroine, a woman whose cultural identity exists somewhere between two homelands, *The Maid Indomitable* indicates its author's own complex relationship to Ireland, and the push-pull struggle that emigration engenders.

III

'No Country' for Old Maids: Escaping Ireland in the Novels of George Egerton and Katherine Cecil Thurston

'In no country in the world does the feminine mind shrink more sensitively from the stigma of old maid than in Ireland, where the woman-worker – the woman of broad interests – exists only as a rare type.' — Katherine Cecil Thurston, *The Fly on the Wheel* (1908)¹⁷⁰

On 10 November 1896, the author George Egerton (1859-1945), in straitened financial circumstances following the birth of her only child the year before, wrote a letter to John Lane, her publisher at the Bodley Head, agreeing to make the changes that he required to the manuscript of her third volume of short stories, *Symphonies*. At the same time, she strongly voiced her objections to the modifications and asserted that they were diluting and damaging her creation. Referring to the process as an act of turning *Symphonies* into a 'milk and water' book, Egerton wrote:

If I had only my own husband & self to consider I would not bowdlerize my poor "Symphonies" because I would fall back on bread & tea and waiting, as I have been forced to do before now when sticking to an ideal. — As I have the unfortunate little child to consider, and not a shilling in my purse I must make a sacrifice however resentfully I do it.

I have had to change a good deal, out of concession to the new Bodley Head policy and this has necessitated much rewriting and rearrangement — as merely erasing would not do.¹⁷¹

In drawing attention to her publishers' change of policy, Egerton alludes to a new trend of moral stringency adopted by the British publishing industry in general, and the Bodley Head in particular, after the spring of 1895. The 'new Bodley Head policy' reflected the decline in fortunes and popularity not only of feminist fiction of the type that Egerton was

¹⁷⁰ Katherine Cecil Thurston, *The Fly on the Wheel* (London: Virago, 1987 [1908]), p. 224. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *FW*.

¹⁷¹ Letter from George Egerton to John Lane (10 November 1896), Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University, Selected Papers of Mary Chavelita Bright, Box 2, Folder 17. Collection hereafter cited as 'Bright Papers, Princeton'.

producing at the *fin de siècle*, but also of all those like her who had been associated with the Decadent movement in art and literature. By May of 1895, the reactions against the Decadents had become so pronounced that one London periodical, *The Woman's Signal*, was moved to exultantly announce 'The Death of the Decadent'.¹⁷²

Egerton's abortive attempts to defy these new policies suggest that her texts had recently become the subject of controversy. In fact, they had been branded sexually licentious and degenerate from the first, for reasons that are relatively straightforward to fathom. In 'A Cross Line', the opening entry from *Keynotes* (1893), her first volume of short stories, Egerton had promptly asserted her support of greater sexual freedom for women by conjuring a scene in which her heroine envisions herself dancing before an audience of men, over whom she exerts a mesmerizing form of sexual control. This passage reaches an orgasmic crescendo in which the woman is pictured 'with parted lips and panting, rounded breasts, and a dancing devil in each glowing eye', as she 'sway[s] voluptuously to the wild music that rises [...] seductive, intoxicating'.¹⁷³ An 1894 short story, 'Virgin Soil' — taking its rebellious cue from Ivan Turgenev's novel of the same title — dwelt on issues of women's sexual subservience and suggested that 'marriage becomes for many women a legal prostitution, a nightly degradation, a hateful yoke under which they age, mere bearers of children' (*KD* 155). Sexual freedom was only one of many contentious issues Egerton addressed in her texts, and her consistent promotion of the rights of working women, support of options for women other than marriage and motherhood, and advocacy of single parenthood and alternative parenting partnerships throughout her career would not be out of place among much later feminist assertions.

¹⁷² 'The Death of the Decadent', *The Woman's Signal*, no. 71 (9 May 1895), p. 1.

¹⁷³ Egerton, 'A Cross Line', *Keynotes and Discords* (London: Virago, 1993 [1893/1894]), p. 20. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *KD*.

The controversial nature of her writing was evidenced by the number and vehemence of attacks it instigated. *Punch* would satirize her first book of short stories in 1894 with a pair of articles, complete with Aubrey Beardsley-esque illustrations, entitled 'She-Notes by Borgia Smudgiton'.¹⁷⁴ A more serious assault on her literary integrity came from Hugh E. M. Stutfield, who, in an article written for *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1895, asserted that Egerton's fiction was the 'offspring of hysteria and foreign "degenerate" influence' and 'a fairtype of English neurotic fiction, which some critics are trying to make us believe is very high-class literature'. Stutfield was also the first to link her theories with those of a then-unknown author and philosopher to whom Egerton was the first writer in the English language to refer – a man Stutfield described as 'a German imbecile who, after several temporary detentions, was permanently confined in a lunatic asylum'.¹⁷⁵ While Stutfield was correct in tracing Friedrich Nietzsche to an asylum, he was mistaken on another count: Egerton was not creating any type of 'English fiction'. As her second cousin Terence De Vere White pointed out, the vernacular in which she wrote was purposefully and unmistakably linked to her homeland: 'Anyone alive to the niceties of syntax,' De Vere White asserted, 'might have recognised that the author [of *Keynotes*] was Irish'.¹⁷⁶

If the candour Egerton exhibited when dealing with women's issues appears progressive to the modern reader, however, it must be noted that these types of literary preoccupations were not uncommon among women writers of the late-nineteenth century, even (or, some might argue, especially) if those writers happened to be Irish: May Laffan

¹⁷⁴ 'She-Notes by Borgia Smudgiton', *Punch* (10 March 1894), p. 109 and *Punch* (17 March 1894), p. 130.

¹⁷⁵ Hugh E. M. Stutfield, 'Tommyrotics', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, vol. 157, no. 956 (June 1895), p. 835.

¹⁷⁶ Terence De Vere White, *A Leaf from the Yellow Book: The Correspondence of George Egerton* (London: The Richards Press, 1958), p. 9.

had written forthrightly opinionated feminist novels decades prior to Egerton; the works of 'Iota' and Sarah Grand would query different, but equally contentious, aspects of the 'Woman Question' alongside her; all were Irish or had connections to Ireland. Yet it is her literary compatriot Katherine Cecil Thurston (1875-1911), who emerged onto the publishing scene in the first years of the twentieth century at almost precisely the point that Egerton faded from it, with whom the most notable parallels to her background and fictional themes can be drawn. In the cases of both writers, their literary fixation on women's issues and the subject of personal and professional autonomy can be traced to their Irish upbringings, atypical romantic alliances which were marked by scandal, and emigrations to England.

To understand the different publishing climates into which the works of each of these women emerged, however, it is first necessary to contemplate the events that, by the mid-point of the 1890s, served to alter the industry so markedly and changed Egerton's texts from merely divisive to wholly unacceptable, even to a publisher like Lane who was no stranger to controversy. From the 1880s onwards, the term 'Decadent' had been used to refer to a group of writers and artists who cultivated a form of extreme aestheticism in their artistic endeavors. Also important to the movement's philosophy were the notion of 'art for art's sake', anti-industrial precepts and, much like the Romantics and their quest for the sublime, a desire for intensity of experience. Inspired by French predecessors from the 1850s and 1860s including Baudelaire, Gautier and Flaubert, the British Decadent movement was energized by the publication in 1884 of J.-K. Huysmans' novel *À rebours* (*Against Nature*) and essays by writers such as George Moore, Richard LeGallienne and Arthur Symons written with Huysmans' work in mind. The term 'Decadent' originated in the press, which was largely antagonistic to the creative tenets to which the movement's adherents subscribed, and was invoked to depict this new artistic philosophy in

recognizably pejorative terms. Those who subsequently found themselves thus labeled, however, often adopted the sobriquet willingly.

While the Decadents had always had their detractors, the new vehemence of media critique that began in mid-1895 can be traced to a single source: the central figure in the British Decadent movement, Oscar Wilde. The conviction of Wilde on charges of Gross Indecency had wide-ranging repercussions. As the *Woman's Signal* expressed it:

The fall of Oscar Wilde and the disgrace of the malodorous decadents whose folly finds its climax in that fall, are different acts in the same drama. [...] Henceforth the decadent philosophy, if not dead, is damned. [...] The stigma that has been placed upon his record makes every home more safe, and must hearten every mother who, in the love of God, is training her sons to habits of purity and manliness.¹⁷⁷

The renunciation of the Decadents by the public at large after the Wilde trials was almost wholesale. Even the publishers Wilde had shared with Egerton refused to stand by him through his ordeal. Six weeks prior to Wilde's conviction, Elkin Mathews, John Lane's former business partner, published a letter in *The Times* (London) in which he asserted, 'I know nothing of Mr. Oscar Wilde except in a business capacity by publishing "Lady Windermere's Fan," &c. [...] I may mention that for several months I have ceased to be the publisher of any of Mr. Oscar Wilde's books'.¹⁷⁸ Almost simultaneously, Lane was referring in the *New York Times* to the 'absurdities and morbid fantasies of Oscar Wilde and his adherents' and relaying the information that steps had been taken by the Bodley Head to 'discredit [Wilde and his associates] and to minimize their influence'.¹⁷⁹ In so doing, Lane and Mathews were pre-empting speculation by denying that any personal or professional relationships they had forged with Wilde would continue, and thereby attempting to limit the damage to their business prospects.

¹⁷⁷ 'The Death of the Decadent', *The Woman's Signal*, no. 71 (9 May 1895), p. 1.

¹⁷⁸ *The Times*, no. 34545 (8 April 1895), p. 13.

¹⁷⁹ *The New York Times* (12 April 1895), p. 2.

Recalling Wilde's defence of her colleagues at a meeting of the Ladies' National Association for Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts in Dublin during the 1870s, a more sympathetic commentator saw the matter of his fall from grace as no less devastating to the man and those associated with him than did *The Woman's Signal*. In an article published in *The Dawn*, the anonymous author states about Wilde, 'I feel the same profound compassion for a fallen man, wrecked, lost, scorned, and execrated by the whole world, as I do for a fallen woman thus circumstanced'.¹⁸⁰ The juxtaposition of this particular fallen man with the overarching notion of the fallen woman is appropriate for a number of reasons. The term 'New Woman' had, by the 1890s, become ubiquitous, and those so labelled were, like the Decadents, associated by many in the popular press with that other *fin de siècle* *bête noir*, degeneration. As such, the New Woman's fortunes were to be closely connected to Wilde and his downfall, and its adherents to arouse a similar degree of disapprobation as did his Decadent cohorts. As the writer in *The Dawn* indicates, both fallen man and fallen woman were thereafter to be regarded either with pity or scorn, but were too tainted by scandal to continue to be the subject of literary or artistic enthusiasm. It is therefore no mere coincidence that in December of 1895 *Punch* followed *The Woman's Signal's* lead with the triumphant proclamation of 'THE END OF THE NEW WOMAN'.¹⁸¹

Egerton had appeared on the London publishing scene at the height of the New Woman phenomenon in the early 1890s, and *Keynotes* immediately evidenced the public's fascination with feminist literary topics. While not the type of work to appeal to a wide readership in that it was issued by the Bodley Head – a house known for publishing niche, experimental, 'high art' works whose sales figures were typically modest – *Keynotes* sold

¹⁸⁰ 'A Recollection', *The Dawn*, no. 27 (1 May 1895), p.14.

¹⁸¹ *Punch* (21 December 1895), p. 297.

more than 6,000 copies for the firm over a short period. In comparison, it would take Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), issued by the same publisher, more than five years to sell its first thousand copies, despite the attention the novel received from critics when it was originally serialized in *Lippincott's Magazine*.¹⁸² Like most of the writers assembled under the New Woman banner, Egerton never sought inclusion in that group. Her labeling as a 'New Woman' came about in much the same manner as did the alignment of authors and artists with the term 'Decadent'. It sprang from the imaginations and the pens of those mainly hostile critics who were writing for the popular press in the early 1890s, and who often made generalizations about authors and artists more remarkable for their disparities than their similarities. There are, for example, major differences between the social purity campaigns propounded by a New Woman writer such as Grand, who argued that men's bodies and behaviours should be policed as rigorously as were the prostitutes whom they patronized, and Egerton's arguments on behalf of greater sexual freedoms for women. Nonetheless, the label adhered to Grand, 'Iota', Egerton and others, and had the effect of stereotyping the majority of New Woman writers to the detriment of their careers and, for many years, their literary reputations.

Even among the New Women, Egerton was the one most likely to be 'considered part of the Decadent coterie', and the changes demanded of her by Lane in 1896 were undoubtedly a result of her guilt by association with Wilde, a connection that went much deeper than the fact that the pair had shared a publisher.¹⁸³ Egerton and Wilde were also linked by their respective collaborations with Aubrey Beardsley, a controversial figure in his own right who had acted as illustrator on both Wilde's 1894 edition of *Salomé* and Egerton's *Keynotes*. Her work had, furthermore, originally been discovered by

¹⁸² On sales figures for the works of both Egerton and Wilde, see Kirsten MacLeod, *Fictions of British Decadence* (Houndmills Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 46.

¹⁸³ MacLeod, p. 6.

LeGalliene, the Bodley Head's reader, one of the first in Britain to champion Huysmans' texts, and her short story 'A Lost Masterpiece' appeared in the inaugural issue of the *Yellow Book*, a magazine connected from its inception (in 1894) with the Decadents. Even more conspicuously, her publishing success had inspired Lane to issue a 'Keynotes' series of books, which had quickly become 'the most famous venue of British Decadent fiction'.¹⁸⁴

Yet what might have proved the closest link between Egerton and Wilde — the fact that both were Irish — was rarely remarked upon. At the height of her literary career, few if any publications would, in fact, refer to Egerton's Irishness in their mentions of her work, and it is doubtful that many of her contemporaries were aware of the details of her personal history. *The Irish Times*, for instance, referred to her as 'the brilliant author of "Keynotes"', but unusually for that publication never drew attention to her Irish background.¹⁸⁵ It is, at first glance, a peculiar oversight considering that 'A Cross Line' immediately introduces that text as one which is written from the 'shade of Irish hills' by an author who has a close affinity with her setting (*KD* 19-20). Irish locations and characters occur in her fiction only infrequently, but are her choice of backdrop often enough and rendered in such detail as to make her Irish identity a probability. In her stories set elsewhere, typically Norway and England, her characters are almost invariably strangers to their location.

There is no firm indication that Egerton actively sought to disguise her Irish identity from the public, and privately she asserted her Irishness vehemently. Writing to De Vere White's mother, she once explained that she was different than a younger sister, who preferred 'Protestant friends and Protestant ways of life', precisely because she linked herself so strongly to Ireland: 'I feel blood ties more. I was older and I am intensely

¹⁸⁴ MacLeod, p. 115.

¹⁸⁵ 'The Yellow Book', *The Irish Times* (28 April 1894), p. 4.

Irish'.¹⁸⁶ There nonetheless remain compelling reasons why Egerton may have been attempting to hide her personal history from the public. One of these was the fact that she was the eldest child of Captain John J. Dunne, a man who — although he was descended from a long line of distinguished Dunes, Perrys, Powers and Kellys who had made their homes near Mountmellick in current County Laois for centuries — had managed to achieve a notable degree of infamy during the period of his daughter's upbringing. Dunne's relative financial privilege in his youth is evidenced by the fact that he was educated at the prestigious Clongowes Wood College and, after leaving school, gained a commission in the British Army. By the time Egerton was born in Australia in 1859, however, he had already been cashiered from the military and was reduced to serving as a volunteer in the Maori War.¹⁸⁷ He would later spend several months in Dublin's Marshalsea Prison for debt, and by the end of the 1880s had been dismissed from the prison service, for which he had worked as governor of both Nenagh and Castlebar prisons, for misconduct.¹⁸⁸ Consistently unemployed and perpetually in debt throughout his life, Dunne was said to exist primarily 'on air and other people'.¹⁸⁹

The most notable scandal of Egerton's early life was, however, entirely of her own making: her elopement in the autumn of 1887, at the age of 28, with the Reverend Henry Peter Higginson Whyte-Melville. Whyte-Melville was, at the time of the elopement, 51 years old and married to his second wife, Charlotte Whyte-Melville, the woman for whom Egerton had been acting as a paid companion. Through this act of running away with a

¹⁸⁶ Letter from George Egerton to Ethel De Vere White (27 March 1926), quoted in De Vere White, *A Leaf from the Yellow Book*, p. 14.

¹⁸⁷ William J. Linn, 'George Egerton', in Robert Hogan (ed.), *Dictionary of Irish Literature*, (London: Aldwych Press, 1996), p. 404.

¹⁸⁸ Letter from G. O. Trevelyan to John J. Dunne (2 June 1884), John Dunne/George Egerton Papers, National Library of Ireland, P9022, MS 10946. Collection hereafter cited as 'Dunne/Egerton Papers, NLI'.

¹⁸⁹ Terence De Vere White, 'A Strange Lady', *Irish Times* (26 February 1983), p. 12.

married man, Egerton (then known simply as 'Mary Dunne') became embroiled in what one contemporary account termed 'as choice a sensation as has agitated London and Dublin Church and Court circles in a good while'.¹⁹⁰ Whyte-Melville (known prior to his second marriage as 'Henry Peter Higginson') had inherited not only his second wife's surname but also a large sum of her money when the pair married in 1866. His marriage to Charlotte Whyte-Melville was to generate its own form of retrospective notoriety in the wake of the elopement — for, although Whyte-Melville had divorced his first wife in the United States prior to his second marriage, the British authorities had taken some time to recognize the legality of the American divorce decree and, when in the autumn of 1887 her husband absconded with both her young companion and £20,000 of her money, Charlotte sought retribution by publicly contending that her second marriage had been bigamous.¹⁹¹ To render the situation even more scandalous, in December of 1887 Egerton's father fired a pistol at Whyte-Melville as 'they were being driven through the streets [of Dublin] in a hansom', an altercation that was reported at length in leading newspapers.¹⁹² Dunne was arrested and released, while Whyte-Melville and Egerton escaped Ireland, travelled widely in Europe, married in Detroit in the summer of 1888 (after the groom's second marriage had been formally dissolved), and eventually settled in Norway at a farm in Langesund near Christiania, where they lived until Whyte-Melville's death in June of 1889.¹⁹³

In 1890, Egerton had a brief, ill-fated romance with the Norwegian author and future Nobel Prize winner Knut Hamsun; by 1891 she was living in England, where she

¹⁹⁰ 'Ireland', *The Times* (London), no. 32476 (28 August 1888), p. 6.

¹⁹¹ See 'Ireland', *The Times* (London), no. 32290 (24 January 1888), p. 10. The claim of bigamy was unfounded, for Charlotte Whyte-Melville was required to legally divorce her second husband. See also Divorce Certificate dated 6 March 1886 declaring Whyte-Melville's first marriage legally dissolved, Dunne/Egerton Papers, NLI, P9022/MS10946.

¹⁹² 'Ireland', *The Times* (London), no. 32476 (28 August 1888), p. 6.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

met and married Egerton Tertius Clairmonte, a Canadian who had recently attempted, and failed, to earn his fortunes in South Africa.¹⁹⁴ She returned with Clairmonte to Ireland in 1892, and appears only then to have realized the degree to which the controversy that surrounded her first marriage had distanced her from her Irish Catholic friends and relations. This sense of alienation almost certainly helps to account for the fact that, when she began her attempts to forge a writing career from a rented cottage in Millstreet, County Cork shortly after her homecoming to Ireland, she assumed the pseudonym by which she is now known, a name which was unlikely to be traced to her homeland. It may also be the reason that, when her true identity as 'Mrs. Clairmonte' was uncovered in the year after her writing career began, newspapers and magazines published accounts of her which queried her ethnic identity without resolving it.¹⁹⁵

She followed her writing career to England in 1893 and gave birth to a son, George Egerton Clairmonte, in 1895. Her marriage to the child's father, however, did not last. Egerton and Clairmonte were divorced in 1900 following his dalliance with an underage girl who gave birth to his daughter. Remaining in London after the divorce while Clairmonte returned to South Africa, Egerton married her third husband, Reginald Golding Bright, a theatrical agent fifteen years her junior, in 1901. Although this third union would last until Golding Bright's death in 1941 and appears to have been, at least at first, a love match — he referred to her, during their courtship, as 'my inspiration, my life' — marriage to a Protestant Englishman did nothing to close the divide between Egerton and her extended Irish family.¹⁹⁶ Irish Catholic opinion more generally concerning her fiction was

¹⁹⁴ See E. Clairmonte, *The Africander: A Plain Tale of Colonial Life* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1896).

¹⁹⁵ See, for instance, a report which speculates that Egerton may be Jewish in 'People, Places and Things', *Hearth and Home*, no. 150 (29 March 1894), p. 649.

¹⁹⁶ Letter from Reginald Golding Bright to George Egerton (10 March 1901), Bright Papers, Princeton, Box 1, Folder 12.

also to remain far from favourable. The Jesuit publication *The Irish Monthly* would suggest about her works that they dealt 'too much with the bold, bad world which conscientious people ought to shun, even in books'.¹⁹⁷ It would not in fact be until the first decade of the twentieth century that Ireland began to be mentioned in relation to Egerton in the press, although one commentator, the Latvian author Laura Marholm Hansson, identified her in 1896 as a 'Celtic woman'.¹⁹⁸ Egerton's was to be a near-complete break with Ireland: she would return to her homeland only once after she retreated from Millstreet in 1893.¹⁹⁹

It is also almost certainly because of this estrangement that Egerton never shied away from relating her work to 'foreign' influences, nor did she object to the 'Ibsenite' label often applied to her.²⁰⁰ In more than one of her texts, she expressly refers to Henrik Ibsen and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, and her personal letters confirm that she looked to foreign writers including not only Ibsen, Bjørnson, Hamsun and Nietzsche, but also August Strindberg and Ola Hansson, as sources of inspiration for her writing: 'I shall find it hard to keep up the modern touch necessary to my work,' she wrote to her father in 1893, 'if I don't get current foreign literature'.²⁰¹ So drawn was she to the type of experimental writing to which she had first been exposed during her sojourn in Norway that she was disinclined, even after the Wilde debacle, to alter her literary output substantially enough

¹⁹⁷ 'Notes on New Books', *The Irish Monthly*, vol. 22, no. 250 (April 1894), p. 221.

¹⁹⁸ 'New Hats and Frocks', *The New York Times* (20 November 1904), p. SMA7, which refers to Egerton as an 'English writer' who is the daughter of an Irish army officer, appears to be the first newspaper account to mention her Irish background. Laura Marholm Hansson, *Six Modern Women: Psychological Sketches*, trans. Hermione Ramsden (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1896), p. 91.

¹⁹⁹ See letter from George Egerton to John J. Dunne (23 September 1908), Bright Papers, Princeton, Box 2, Folder 17.

²⁰⁰ See, for instance, A. S. Pearson, 'Henrik Ibsen's Heroines', *The Woman's Signal*, no. 33 (16 August 1894), p.100.

²⁰¹ Letter from George Egerton to John J. Dunne (19 October 1893), Bright Papers, Princeton, Box 2, Folder 17.

to transcend the public's perceptions of her as a writer of 'foreign "degenerate"' literature. Unwilling to compromise her literary standards yet again after her experiences during the writing of *Symphonies*, Egerton turned from John Lane to Grant Richards for the publication of her final work of fiction from the 1890s, *The Wheel of God* (1898). Although critics noted that Egerton's tone in this novel was less confrontational than in her previous efforts – *The Graphic* referred to it as her attempt to represent 'a New Woman, not of the "revolting" type' – it almost certainly did not stray far enough from the themes of her earlier work to appease a newly-conservative British reading public.²⁰² While the novelist and dramatist Israel Zangwill would write to Egerton to say that his friends were 'sing[ing] Hosannas' to the novel, and it was more often than not well reviewed in the press, it was not well received by the public at large.²⁰³ She would, as a result of diminished sales, publish only two volumes of work after the turn of the century. Neither of these would be popular successes. By 1899, the most fruitful portion of her writing life had passed; by the end of 1905, her publishing career had ended entirely.

Thurston, younger by almost a generation than Egerton, would enter onto the publishing scene in 1902 already able to envision, in embryonic form at least, a fresh type of 'New Woman' more palatable to a twentieth-century readership. She was not only more adaptable in literary matters than Egerton, she was also more forthcoming about her Irish identity. In accounts of her life which appeared over the period of her publishing career her Irishness is always prominently in evidence: 'she was born in the South of Ireland, and in the South of Ireland spent most of her life,' *The Bookman* would note about Thurston in 1903, just a year after her first novel, *The Circle* (1902), was published.²⁰⁴ Yet Thurston's

²⁰² 'New Novels', *The Graphic*, no. 1493 (9 July 1898), p. 64.

²⁰³ Letter from Israel Zangwill to George Egerton (27 July 1901), Bright Papers, Princeton, Box 2, Folder 16.

²⁰⁴ 'New Writers', *The Bookman*, vol. 23, no. 138 (March 1903), p. 227.

relationship to Ireland, like Egerton's, would grow increasingly more troubled over time — a fact which, although the reasons for it remained hidden from the public throughout most of her writing life, can be seen to inform her textual themes and the steadily escalating rebellions her heroines would enact as her career progressed.

The similarities between Egerton's and Thurston's respective personal histories are at times striking. Both were raised Catholic in middle class households in Ireland; both were the eldest — in Thurston's case the only — children of Irish fathers who were fervent nationalists and Home Rulers. John Dunne was described as an 'ardent Nationalist, [who] was nursed by O'Connell and lived to be intimate with Parnell'.²⁰⁵ He served as secretary to Isaac Butt in the Home Government Association throughout the 1870s and went on, after Butt's death in 1879, to support Parnell. Dunne would contend that his relationship to the Irish Parliamentary Party leader was intimate to the point that, '[a]fter the publication by the *Times* of the forged letter' which implicated Parnell in the Phoenix Park murders, it was he who 'was the first to convey to Parnell the idea that Pigott was its writer'.²⁰⁶ Thurston's father, Paul J. Madden, was a director of the Munster and Leinster Bank and served as mayor of Cork on more than one occasion in the 1880s. Like Egerton's father, Madden was also prominent in nationalist circles and a noted ally to Parnell. A number of newspaper reports published during Thurston's lifetime give a similar account of him: 'Paul Madden, for many years Mayor of Cork, [was] a trusted friend and supporter of Charles Stewart Parnell. During the Land League days Mr. Madden sacrificed much time and money to his country's cause. He was a devout Catholic, highly respected in commercial circles, and very charitable'.²⁰⁷ From 1889, Madden also acted as Treasurer of

²⁰⁵ 'Obituary: Captain J. J. Dunne', *The Times*, no. 39190 (8 February 1910), p. 11.

²⁰⁶ H-R-N [John J. Dunne], *Here and There Memories* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1896), p. 21.

²⁰⁷ Clipping from the Buffalo (NY) *Courier* (19 November 1905), n.p., Katherine Cecil Thurston Papers, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 11378, Box 10. Collection hereafter cited as 'Thurston Papers, NLS'.

the Tenants' Defence Fund, which would suffer a loss of subscriptions as a result of his refusal to back the deposal of Parnell after the O'Shea divorce scandal and the party split.²⁰⁸

Egerton's and Thurston's mothers, meanwhile, are notable for their absences not only from contemporary records but also from the writing — both public and personal — of their daughters. Egerton was sixteen when her mother, Isabel George Bynon Dunne, died, and, although she remained deeply devoted to her mother's memory, would later indicate that her mother had been an essentially ephemeral and ineffectual presence during her upbringing; 'a child amongst her children'.²⁰⁹ References to Thurston's mother, Catherine Barry Madden, are wholly absent from the many newspaper and magazine articles about Thurston — an absence made more notable by the fact that nearly all make mention of her father — and the sole reference to her mother in Thurston's personal papers occurs in a letter from 1911, in which she briefly mentions that her mother's furniture 'was sold here in Cork when she died'.²¹⁰ If the lives of both women were, as a result, more shaped by their relationships to their male parents, there were mediating matrilineal factors that left them with more ambivalent views of issues on which their fathers demonstrated little or no equivocation: namely, religion and nation. Egerton was raised in the Roman Catholic faith, yet her mother was of Welsh and Protestant descent and Egerton would frequently refer to the inner conflict that the Catholic-Protestant divide she knew to exist in her heritage aroused in her. She also did not fail to assert the degree to which such conflicts were exacerbated by the religiously-motivated bigotry of her Irish relatives — who, she claimed, 'confessed and communicated and were good Catholics but did not come

²⁰⁸ See 'The Irish Crisis', *The Times* (London), no. 33195 (15 December 1890), p. 6.

²⁰⁹ George Egerton, *Rosa Amorosa* (London: Grant Richards, 1901), p. 35.

²¹⁰ Letter from Katherine Cecil Thurston to Alfred Bulkeley Gavin (4 September 1911), Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 12.

near' her family — and indicated that this ostracization fueled her own feelings of estrangement from Ireland.²¹¹ Thurston's parents were both Irish and Catholic, yet she confessed to having felt a similar conflict in her own nature, in part due to a Protestant grandmother, to whom, she avowed, she was 'a sort of spiritual "throw back"'.²¹²

Egerton published just seven volumes of work over the course of her career, Thurston only six, and neither would use Irish characters or settings extensively in their fiction. 'A Cross Line' is set in Ireland, as is the first segment of Egerton's tripartite short story from *Discords* (1894), 'A Psychological Moment at Three Periods', but these offer only cursory glances of, and fleeting commentaries upon, Ireland and the Irish. She only began to deal at length with Irish themes after she had gained the confidence of her audience with two successful volumes of work. Thurston's output was similar, with her Irish-themed novels *The Gambler* (1906) and *The Fly on the Wheel* (1908) following two phenomenally successful early efforts, *The Circle* and *John Chilcote, M.P.* (1904), which had been set in England.

Because their heroines suffer under the weight of societal restraints, the spectre of suffragism seems to loom large behind these texts. Neither author, however, was willing to take a firm stance publicly on the suffrage issue. When pressed in interviews to reveal her political opinions, Egerton often affected a demure public persona that was distinctly at odds with her outspokenness in her private life. Her statement in the gentleman's magazine *The Idler* in 1894 is typical of this tactic: 'the fact of my having written a little book, for the love of writing it, not with a view to usher in revolt or preach a propaganda, merely to strike a few notes on the phases of the female character I knew to exist,' Egerton was to assert at that time, 'hardly qualifies me to have an opinion, or present it to the

²¹¹ Letter from Egerton to Ethel De Vere White, quoted in De Vere White, *A Leaf from the Yellow Book*, p. 13.

²¹² Letter from Thurston to Gavin (30 August 1911), Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 12.

average young man'.²¹³ Privately, however, Egerton's opinions on suffrage were clearly formed and emphatically stated by 1908, when in a letter she attacked the anti-suffrage stance of Herbert Gladstone (W. E. Gladstone's son), who was then home secretary in Campbell-Bannermann's Liberal government:

H. Gladstone that mediocre son of an overrated father is a feeble thing at the head of any department. The women won't be beaten in the long run. — In every class they have a greater average of intelligence than the men [...] It isn't a question of Rights. It is a question of *Economic change*. A Surplus population of women who must *work, outside home* life [...] means: if *I* pay the tax — *I* must get the vote.²¹⁴

Thurston gives no opinion on the subject in her surviving correspondence. A biographical sketch of her published in 1904 indicates that she was not, at that time, sympathetic to the cause of extending the franchise to women: 'It is a truism to assert that every Irish man or woman is a born politician, and Mrs. Thurston confesses that from her childhood she has been interested in politics', the writer of that article was to report, 'but at the same time she is of the opinion that a woman ought not to take the prominent place in party politics which some members of the gentler sex at times arrogate to themselves'.²¹⁵ Thurston's female characters, however, invariably chafe under the restrictions placed upon them due to their gender. Eve Chilcote in *John Chilcote, M. P.* is the first of a number of highly capable women Thurston conjures who are eager to escape the limitations placed on them as females, and Eve is given valid reasons for both her dissatisfaction and for desiring the agency to act: as Thurston creates her, she is far more skilled at complex political thought than is her MP husband. To Thurston, sex was 'only an accident', and a recurrent motif in

²¹³ Quoted in Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 188.

²¹⁴ Letter from George Egerton to John J. Dunne (29 February 1908), Bright Papers, Princeton, Box 2, Folder 17.

²¹⁵ 'The Making of a Novelist', *The Ladies' Realm*, vol. 17 (1904-05), p. 658.

her fiction is the capable woman unfairly confined to a supporting role in public life.²¹⁶ Likewise, a persistent refrain of her female characters is a variation on the opinion first expressed by Anna Solny in *The Circle*: 'I wish I were a man!'²¹⁷ Woman's envy of the influence that man is able to wield, and the freedoms he is able to enjoy, is a consistent theme in each of Thurston's works, and became increasingly central to her texts as her writing career progressed. By the time she came to write her final novel, *Max*, in 1910, she was moved to focus her narrative on a female character who lives independently in the guise of a man. Max/Maxine's validations for attempting to live such a life are succinctly stated: 'Mentally', she asserts to a male friend, 'I am as good a man as you are' (*MX* 325).

While the earliest biographical sketches of Thurston invariably mention her father's involvement with Parnell and the Land League, her altering relationship to Ireland would be evidenced by the manner in which these would gradually be overshadowed, and eventually wholly eclipsed, by reference to his business achievements. The reasons for this change of tactic on Thurston's part are readily conjectured. She had almost certainly learned from her publishing experiences that a nationalist stance on Irish political issues and a Catholic background were not necessarily beneficial to an author who enjoyed a substantial English readership. An indicator of anti-Catholic attitudes among the British reading public was provided to her when she submitted a short story to the *Windsor Magazine* in 1909: 'If you do not object to finding a title that is less Roman Catholic,' the *Windsor's* representative wrote to Thurston with no attempt to disguise the magazine's

²¹⁶ Katherine Cecil Thurston, *Max* (London: Hutchinson, 1910), p. 325. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *MX*.

²¹⁷ Katherine Cecil Thurston, *The Circle* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood, 1903), p. 3. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *C*.

prejudices, 'we shall be pleased to keep your story at present entitled "The Six Candles of the Blessed Virgin"'.²¹⁸

There were, however, additional and even more significant factors which may have contributed to her decision to distance herself from her Irish past. Like Egerton, she would become one of the main actors in a marital scandal which was widely reported in the press. Thurston had married her first husband, the English novelist and journalist Ernest Temple Thurston, in 1901, the year of her father's death. The pair immediately left Ireland to set up home in the Kensington area of London for purposes of Temple Thurston's career and, once settled there, Temple Thurston actively encouraged his new wife to pursue a writing career alongside his own — so enthusiastically so that he took on the role of her first literary agent.²¹⁹ Her publishing success, however, quickly outstripped his and a rift in the marriage ensued. The pair separated, at Temple Thurston's instigation and after several extramarital affairs on his part, in 1907. It was not until April of 1910 that Katherine Cecil Thurston brought a divorce action against her husband, but when she did so, the details were widely and often sensationally reported in the press:

Mrs. Katherine Cecil Thurston was granted a decree nisi yesterday on the ground of the misconduct and desertion of her husband. [...] they lived happily down to 1907, [at which time he] told his wife that it was necessary for him to lead his own life, and that it was necessary, for the purpose of his literary work, that he should go down into the very depths of society [...] [He] complained that she was making more money than he was. Later, he gave another reason. He said that her personality dominated him, and he must get away from her.²²⁰

²¹⁸ Letter from Arthur Hutchinson to Katherine Cecil Thurston (1 January 1909), Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 1.

²¹⁹ See letters from William Blackwood to Ernest Temple Thurston dated 1905 and 1906, Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 1.

²²⁰ Clipping from the *Westminster Gazette* (8 April 1910), n.p., Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 10.

Although the divorce action was uncontested and Temple Thurston was not present at the hearing to rebut these contentions, it is doubtful he would have done so. The 'vagaries of the man' appear by then to have become common knowledge.²²¹

Unknown at the time to even the closest of her family and friends, however, was the fact that since the autumn of 1908 Thurston had been involved in a love affair with Alfred Bulkeley Gavin, a Protestant doctor of Scottish heritage whose practice was in London. When, a year after her divorce was finalized, she was making plans to wed, she also kept secret from most of her acquaintances the fact that she had, at Gavin's request, converted to Anglicanism and had her first marriage annulled in Rome. By August of 1911, a month prior to the date she had set for their wedding ceremony, Thurston was fielding further demands from Gavin that she break her ties with her Irish family, several of whom were then relying on her for financial support: 'I insist upon you washing your hands of such an ungrateful and unchivalrous crowd,' he wrote to her at that time, 'they all must for all time be self supporting'.²²² She duly severed these relations, eventually prompted in the action not only by her fiancé's financial worries but also due to her anger at learning that a cousin had leaked the news of her annulment and impending remarriage to the American press.²²³ When Thurston and Gavin came to draft a marriage announcement to be printed in newspapers on the day of their wedding, 12 September 1911, references to her religious background and her father's former political activities

²²¹ Letter from J. T. Grein, Consul of Liberia, to Katherine Cecil Thurston (10 April 1910). See also letters to Thurston from Abie Perrin (7 April 1910), Bram and Florence Stoker (7 April 1910), Mary Bisland (9 April 1910) and Gerard Villiers Stuart (13 April 1910). All Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 1.

²²² Letter from Gavin to Thurston (16 August 1911), Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 11.

²²³ Letters from Thurston to Gavin (10 and 19 August 1911) refer to the newspaper article which confirms that the news has been leaked and by whom; letter (22 August 1911) refers to her break with her family. Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 12.

were conspicuously absent, suggesting that Thurston was attempting to distance herself not only from her Irish family, but also from almost all aspects of her Irish past.²²⁴

Effectively, both Egerton's and Thurston's relationships to Ireland were altered by marital scandal. Both would explore, in their fiction, the shifting relationship to their homeland that resulted. For Egerton, Ireland became a place in which 'censorship and cramped conduct' made her position untenable.²²⁵ Although English people and society were alien and often unfathomable to her, London was a place where one could exist anonymously, to both good and ill effect. There, in the modern metropolis, scandals were common and less likely to attract attention, people and relationships tended to be superficial, and simple things like a 'well fitting frock, and an utter indifference' could 'carry the day' for a woman with a disreputable past.²²⁶ Thurston found Ireland similarly limiting, and by 1908 was moved to assert that '[i]n no country in the world does the feminine mind shrink more sensitively from the stigma of old maid than in Ireland, where the woman-worker – the woman of broad interests – exists only as a rare type' (*FW* 224). For Thurston's heroines, travel abroad becomes the means by which they are irretrievably altered and therefore unable to return – psychologically – to the place from which they came. It was not, however, the act of entering England or elsewhere that proved liberating. Rather, as Thurston would contend, it was the act of escaping Ireland by which transformation was achieved: in becoming an exile, a woman simultaneously became a person who 'belonged to no country, to no sex'; she was, instead, a 'citizen of a free world' (*MX* 64, 68).

²²⁴ Undated letter fragment, ca. August 1911, Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 12.

²²⁵ Letter from George Egerton to Terence De Vere White (23 January 1944), quoted in De Vere White, *A Leaf from the Yellow Book*. p. 175.

²²⁶ Letter from George Egerton to John J. Dunne (15 March 1891), quoted in De Vere White, *A Leaf from the Yellow Book*, p. 11.

The attempt to belong 'to no country' was one of Egerton's own most frequent literary projects. Of her works which deal with Ireland, short stories such as 'Oony', from *Symphonies* (1897), and 'Mammy', from *Flies in Amber* (1905), indicate that her literary preoccupation with expatriation was attributable to the fact that she viewed her homeland as a place in which those who strayed outside the bounds of conformity were consistently mistreated by those who were perceived, frequently undeservedly, to exist within the realms of respectability. In the earlier story, the Protestant Oony, an outsider in a predominantly Catholic community, moves through a series of abuses and rejections at the hands of her more fortunate neighbours: she is left orphaned after her parents are murdered by men who see only her father's act of contravening a boycott and not the desperate financial need that has driven it; the woman who subsequently adopts her willfully misinterprets her own Catholicism as a means of excusing the abuse she inflicts on her young charge; the man Oony loves shuns her in order to retain his social status; and, ultimately, even the woman who acts as Oony's would-be saviour fails to live up to expectations when her Gaelic Revivalist pursuits distract her from noticing the girl's increasing emotional and physical distress. The critique of Revivalism implicit in this latter characterization is repeated in the manner of Oony's death, the circumstances of which draw attention to the more shadowy aspects of a continued belief in, or reliance on, Celtic mythological precepts: when the brokenhearted Oony withdraws into a 'fairy fort' with a fellow outsider to the community — a man the locals believe to be a fairy changeling — her soul is 'stolen' by the 'fairy man' as she sleeps.²²⁷

The events of 'Mammy' — a story Austin Clarke credited with offering the first glimpse of Dublin's Night-Town in Irish fiction — revolve around the tale of a dying

²²⁷ George Egerton, 'Oony', *Symphonies* (London and New York: John Lane/The Bodley Head, 1897), p. 159.

young prostitute.²²⁸ The story opens shortly after a priest has been apprehended in the red light district of Dublin, an event which leaves the city's remaining Catholic clergy fearful of risking their reputations by venturing into Night-Town. On the night of a raging distillery fire, Mammy, the matriarch of a brothel, is forced to carry a dying girl through the streets of Dublin so that she can be administered the last rites by the priests who refuse to come to her. Through her subject matter and imagery, Egerton reverses the traditional realms of good and evil in the story: Dublin is rendered hellish by the whiskey that runs in rivers of flames through its streets, the priests become cowardly, 'respectable' Dubliners turn hypocritical, and the fallen woman is raised to near-deific status. It will take 'the Christ', Egerton writes in the story's closing line, 'to balance accounts with Mammy'.²²⁹

In tales such as these, Egerton takes aim at moral posturing and religious exclusionism, and in so doing addresses the key issues that had impacted on and damaged her own sense of belonging in Ireland. These ideas also permeate her only novel, *The Wheel of God*, a work which crystallizes her troubled and irretrievably fractured relationship to her homeland. Like James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* after it, it is a *Künstlerroman* whose events closely parallel those of Egerton's early life. The opening chapter locates the young protagonist, Mary Desmond, in 'her father's home' – literally the house in which her father was raised, but understandable as Ireland itself (*WG* 3). The nursery in which she spends her days is suffused with Irish nationalist and Catholic religious iconography, and her feelings towards nation and religion are reflected in her attitudes to the room's decorations. An early devotion to the political precepts of nationalism is evidenced by her reactions to the room's 'wonderful' (*WG* 4) pictures of O'Connell, Emmet and Grattan, while the makeshift altar to the Virgin Mary, which

²²⁸ Austin Clarke, *A Penny in the Clouds* (Dublin: Moytura Press, 1990), p. 175.

²²⁹ George Egerton, 'Mammy', *Flies in Amber* (London: Hutchinson, 1905), p. 51.

instigates in her a sense of '*mea culpa*, for [her] daring skeptical fantasies' (*WG* 7), suggests a more troubled relationship to Catholicism. A static and claustrophobic room with 'worm-eaten wainscotting' (*WG* 4) and iron-barred windows, it is also an explicitly female space – the nursery is aligned not only with Mary but also with the 'dead aunts' whose 'forgotten treasures' it holds (*WG* 6). It attracts and imprisons the young girl just as Ireland and Catholicism will compel and repel her throughout the narrative.

Images of Catholicism as guilt-inducing, inflexible and stifling recur as Mary consistently searches for comfort in 'the faith of her childhood' and just as consistently finds only 'the granite wall of ecclesiastical authority' (*WG* 91). The daughter of an Irish Catholic father and mother of English descent, her religious doubts are said to be 'inherent in her blood from maternal Protestant forebears' (*WG* 20-21). So, too, is her sense of difference from, and superiority to, the Irish people by whom she is surrounded: for, while she takes a dim view of the intolerant attitudes of her relatives — 'her father's women-folk' are said to be 'bigoted, with shrines for little conventional gods erected in their souls (and in no place are the little gods of baser metal than in snobbish Ireland)' (*WG* 25) — she inverts and reapplies these same types of prejudices herself. She admits to disliking Ireland because her mother 'isn't of it' (*WG* 18), expresses shame 'because she was dressed as a little lady, her mother's daughter' (*WG* 45) at being seen with a less fortunate Irish friend and fosters an English accent 'for the sake of the mother' (*WG* 62). Her father, meanwhile, is but one exemplar of the many boyishly reckless Irish men she knows, whose actions she views with both affection and condescension, as 'a mother might [...] the vagaries of her children' (*WG* 26).

The types of social hierarchies on which Mary's arrogance depend are, however, demonstrated to be under threat. That a rising bourgeoisie in Ireland is usurping the status of old and once-respectable families such as hers is made manifest upon her mother's

death, when 'coarse' middle class women descend on the household for the auction of the family's goods (*WG* 33). Within Mary, and between her and Ireland as she perceives it, there has always existed a tension of difference, and the sense that she has somehow been disinherited of a legitimate Irishness by the either-or restrictions of Protestant and Catholic, English and Irish, endures. Yet her mother's death and the social decline which accompanies it dispel a portion of this conflict as Mary's 'English' arrogance gradually fades, and with her newfound humility comes an intensified sense of her Irish identity. She begins to feel 'small and ashamed of herself' (*WG* 45) for her former behaviour, and the streets of Dublin – previously reviled, alien spaces – soon become locations where she communes with the ghosts of historical figures such as Jonathan Swift, 'silken Thomas' and Lord Edward Fitzgerald (*WG* 48-9) who, like her, gradually grew more sympathetic to the Irish side of their ancestry over time. After her mother dies, her father's friends become her own, she refers to the English as 'Sassenach' (*WG* 43) and comfort comes in the form of a brogue (*WG* 62).

Mary's reasons for emigrating to New York, considering her embryonic sense of belonging in Ireland, are more implicit than explicit in the text. That she has no recourse to money other than to beg an advance from the North of Ireland man for whom her father has failed to complete an artistic commission, and the fact that her days are spent idly in the library of the Royal Dublin Society, indicate that there are few or no sources of employment available to women in Ireland. Escape therefore becomes a financial necessity for her as a female and, in accordance with this, Egerton demonstrates that those preparing to emigrate from the docks at Queenstown are predominantly young women: 'shy-eyed, tearful colleens' (*WG* 59), 'the flower of Irish girlhood' (*WG* 60) and 'steerage girls' (*WG* 63). Yet, although there are more diverse opportunities for females who want or need to work in New York, America is not the 'land of the free' (*WG* 72). It is, rather, a

place where the names Mary encounters – 'Jones, Robinsons, Gomex and Menozas, Mullers and Gruners' (*WG* 75) – attest to the sheer scale of working class emigration from Europe and the failure of the 'old world' to provide for its own. This idea is reinforced by the fact that, as a member of what was once a socially privileged family, Mary has received a traditional elite education which proves wholly inadequate to the requirements of the modern world which exists beyond Ireland's borders. Useless to her in practical terms and alienating in a social context, her education thwarts rather than aids her attempts to achieve financial success and personal fulfillment in New York.

When she does eventually find the means to go 'home', however, it is to England that she returns. London is, like New York, a place of greater opportunity for women; it is also just as equally a 'foreign' (*WG* 111) space where Mary feels 'the racial difference keenly' (*WG* 127) and where, ultimately, she comes to hear 'the words of the Irish clan cry' ring in her (*WG* 215). While her experiences serve to accentuate her feelings of foreignness outside of Ireland, they also indicate the degree to which her opportunities have been hampered by the tendency, explicitly linked to Ireland and Irishness, to adhere to 'old' patterns of behaviour. Mary's emigration leads her ever further away from notions of convention which are bound up with her ethnic identity; at the same time, her sense of belonging becomes increasingly linked to her gender. As she moves through New York and London, she finds her closest affinities not with other Irish people, but with other working women — and, more specifically, with those women whose experiences act as correlatives to Egerton's own. There are readily recognizable parallels between Egerton's own experiences and those of both the art student Mary meets in London and her closest friend in New York — a woman who is artistically enlightened, has a large family headed by an irresponsible father and becomes romantically involved with a married man with whom she hopes to elope to Europe. Less obvious is her kinship to the bow-maker

recovering from the after-effects of an ill-fated relationship with an idealistic foreign 'genius', who more subtly mimics, through her experiences and the terminology she employs to describe them, Egerton's accounts of her relationship with Knut Hamsun.²³⁰ A self-sufficient female journalist of Celtic descent likewise bears a passing resemblance to Egerton as she was during her early working life in London, and bridges the gap between Mary and a pseudonymous author of feminist fiction with whom she ultimately aligns herself. The trajectory of *The Wheel of God* is, therefore, one in which Mary, a facsimile of Egerton's younger self, finds sympathies with a variety of characters who imitate the author's own progressive incarnations, eventually reaching the fully-formed alter-ego of Egerton at her most successful and enlightened: the writer 'John Morton', who is witty, philosophical and controversial.

Egerton's male characters, in contrast, repeatedly serve to reinforce the sense that a chasm exists between women's opportunities, experiences and behaviours and those of men. Mary's related contention, brought to mind by a glimpse of Dublin's Golden Lane and thoughts of James Clarence Mangan, that 'all the nicest men she had known' were tainted by moral weakness, also sites her sympathies on the side of the ethically flawed (*WG* 43). This idea is continued and expanded upon in references to Mary's 'singular devotion for Parnell that would have made her put her left hand in the fire to have served him' (*WG* 181), and it will ultimately be Parnell's fall from both moral and political favour which forms the core of the novel and the crux on which Mary's permanent break with her homeland turns:

So confused are the issues of life it would have seemed almost impossible to Mary Desmond to realise that the fate of this great Irish leader, without whose name the history of England in this century can never be written, could have had any influence on her own life as an insignificant woman.

²³⁰ See letter from Egerton quoted in De Vere White, *A Leaf from the Yellow Book*, p. 19 and letter from Egerton to John J. Dunne (26 February 1891), Bright Papers, Princeton, Box 2, Folder 17.

Yet it had; for, when they forgot all he had done for them, and sacrificed him in obedience to bigotry and the moral fetich, it robbed her of the last shred of allegiance to the old religion in the old country. (*WG* 181)

Proceeding to assert that, 'if the women of Ireland had been [Parnell's] followers' instead of the men, they 'would have stuck to him in the teeth of excommunication' (*WG* 181), Egerton places the blame for Parnell's fall exclusively and imperatively on Irish men and the Catholic religious morality 'they' espouse. In Mary Desmond's view, Parnell has been forsaken by Irish Catholic men for their allegiances to the 'old' religion and the 'old' country — outmoded ways of thinking, obsolete traditions which act as the enemies not only of Parnell, but of all those perceived to be immoral, unconventional or associated with the 'new'.

Ireland as it is evoked in Egerton's text is an anti-pluralist, anti-secularist and morally intransigent space. It is also, literally, a fatherland. Mary's decision at the close of the novel to live a communal existence with "'John Morton", the journalist, and two other women' (*WG* 320) follows on directly from the overtly masculine Irish society Egerton creates, and her related sentiments, spoken by John Morton, that 'the men we women of to-day need, or who need us, are not of our time — it lies in the mothers to rear them for the women who follow us' (*WG* 320-1). Ireland, Egerton suggests, is no country for women, and when Mary finally and fully leaves it behind she does so not to forge the 'uncreated conscience of her race', as Stephen Dedalus sets out to do in Joyce's *A Portrait*, but rather to step 'into the inheritance of her self' (*WG* 321) and to construct the uncreated conscience of her sex.²³¹

Like Egerton's, Thurston's texts would consistently privilege gendered perspectives over national (or nationalist) views and evidence her interest in issues related to what

²³¹ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London: Penguin, 1965 [1916]), p. 276.

Egerton termed the 'moral fetich'. A regular preoccupation of her work is the individual struggling against both physical and moral confinement to maintain a façade of respectability against the overwhelming pull of untraditional or even illicit personal desires. Gone, however, are the overt didacticism and confrontational tone of Egerton's texts, to be replaced by dissatisfied, 'revolting' women woven into deftly suspenseful plots. Her first novel, *The Circle* (1903), sets the tone for what will follow. In it, Thurston creates two characters whose actions are misconstrued to the detriment of their reputations and personal relationships. The novel focuses on the stories of Johann, a man compelled by circumstance to lie about his personal history in order to avoid being imprisoned for a crime he did not commit, and Anna, whose attempts to aid Johann lead to her own castigation by those who know her actions but not their contexts. Both are eventually exonerated from blame, but before that is allowed to happen Thurston successfully manipulates the reader into condoning subterfuge by demonstrating that both Anna and Johann are forced to conceal truths which should, in a just world, have been the means of setting them free. She also manages to demonstrate that Anna, after escaping her constrained existence working for her father in his curio shop, achieves through her career as an actress a degree of fulfillment wholly unimaginable in her former, and far less controversial, life.

The Circle was a prodigious debut for the 28-year-old first-time novelist, earning her good notices from reviewers, substantial sales and a degree of literary fame. Her second novel, *John Chilcote, M.P.* (1904), published in America as *The Masquerader*, proved an even greater commercial triumph. The Newark (New Jersey) *Call* was not alone in proclaiming it 'the success of the season', while *Harper's Bazaar* reported that, during the Christmas period of 1904, 'one bookseller, who has ordered a thousand copies every day during December, estimates that the book is now selling at the rate of one volume a

minute'.²³² By the end of 1906, the novel had sold in excess of a million copies and had earned for Thurston the modern equivalent of more than £1.3 million.²³³

In *John Chilcote, M. P.*, Thurston employs similar tactics to those she used to great effect in *The Circle*, gradually manoeuvring the reader over the course of the narrative into a position in which his or her sympathies rest on the side of a character who is involved in the most deceitful of exploits. The titular character is an unwilling Member of Parliament, a man who feels he has been forced, by a sense of both duty and guilt, into the seat once occupied by his father. Unhappy in his career and marriage, John Chilcote has, during his tenure as MP, been leading an ulterior life as an adulterer and morphine addict. Plagued by nerves, he longs to give himself up to dissipation while allowing his reputation to remain intact: 'to keep my place in the world's eyes and yet be free', he asserts.²³⁴ The novel opens on a scene in which he is attempting to make his way home from Westminster through a dense fog. Disoriented, he stumbles upon John Loder, a man who is revealed as the fog lifts to be his *doppelgänger*. Through the conversation that ensues, Loder demonstrates that he is knowledgeable on political topics, and Chilcote recognizes the means to achieve his ends.

Loder agrees to assume Chilcote's identity for an indefinite period, acting on an impulse instigated by his sense that in doing so, he is taking up the rightful place denied to him when an improvident relative squandered his inheritance. Upon entering this new life, Loder promptly demonstrates that he is, unlike Chilcote, an asset to both class and country.

²³² Clipping from the Newark (NJ) *Call* (5 November 1904), n.p., and clipping from *Harper's Bazaar* (8 December 1904), n.p., both Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 2.

²³³ Clipping from the *Liverpool Daily Post & Mercury* (7 March 1906), n.p., Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 10. Earnings figures are from Caroline Copeland, 'An Oasis in the Desert: The Transatlantic Publishing Success of Katherine Cecil Thurston', *Edinburgh Bibliographical Society*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2007), p. 33.

²³⁴ Katherine Cecil Thurston, *John Chilcote, M. P.* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood, 1904), p. 54. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *JC*.

Ambitious and capable of empathy and sacrifice, he is also emotionally equipped to deal with the stresses of political life in a way that Chilcote is not. The question of whether he also assumes an unambiguously honorable moral position remains more difficult to solve, despite the deception, precisely because Loder is so eminently suited to the life he adopts. Over the course of the narrative he engineers a political coup which, although the tactics he employs are dubious, is the means to an end that proves beneficial not only to his party's interests and his own career, but to the country at large. He also begins to covet and in due course falls in love with Chilcote's wife, Eve. Although Thurston makes clear that Chilcote has long mistreated and often abandoned his wife, the ethical dilemmas surrounding Loder's behaviour in both his actions in Parliament and his relationship to Eve are apparent.

The nearly simultaneous ousting of the rival political party from power and Chilcote's accidental death from a morphine overdose bring Loder to a point of crisis near the end of the novel, but Thurston makes the unconventional authorial choice to leave his moral dilemmas largely unresolved, and wholly unpunished, at the novel's close. Learning that Eve has known about his deception for some time, Loder expresses his wish to leave the country so that her reputation might be spared should his true identity be revealed. Eventually, however, he allows Eve – who admits to having fallen in love with him when she believed him to be an altered, better version of her husband – to convince him that his charade must be maintained. Having demonstrated not only her capabilities by acting as Loder's most trusted political advisor, but also her frustration at not being able to make full use of them by referring to how 'splendid it must be to be a man' (*JC* 203), Eve is the person to whom Loder defers all of his most important decisions. His continued deception is imperative, she argues, because it will be beneficial not only to him, but also to her and

to the nation. He should not, she asserts, be tempted to throw away 'the substance for the shadow' (*JC* 368).

The interplay between substance and shadow is central to the novel, with Loder at one point suggesting about the underbelly of his existence that the 'the details are horrible; but there are times when we must look at the horrible sides of life – because life is incomplete without them' (*JC* 364). This and a number of other passages suggest that a similar interchange is being enacted with regard to the novel's main characters — that, while it is overtly the story of two men, *John Chilcote* also functions as an allegory for a lone man whose inner conflicts and divided allegiances lead him to live a double life, separated between his public and private personas. Thus, when Chilcote and Loder happen upon one another in the fog, each man feels that he is looking, 'not at the face of another, but at his own face reflected in a flawless looking-glass' (*JC* 11). Likewise, Chilcote disbelieves that Loder is 'substantial' (*JC* 11) while concurrently not only imagining his own oblivion, but longing for it. The two men's unlikely romantic attachments to the same women – Eve Chilcote and Lillian Astrupp, the former a 'wife' to both, the latter Loder's one-time and Chilcote's current mistress – support the reading of Loder and Chilcote as a single entity with dual desires, moral on one side and illicit on the other. The novel ultimately reads as a fantasy in which the politician's shameful private life eventually dies quietly and completely away, while the public man and the woman he loves (who happens to be another man's wife) are able to step forward into the limelight together, undetected in, and unsullied by, their transgressions. The possibility that the novel may have been intended as an elaborate Parnellite parable did not remain unremarked upon by readers or reviewers, and speculation was rife that Loder was, in fact, Parnell in fictional form.²³⁵

Parnell may indeed be one potential real-life model for Thurston's characters; but so, too, it

²³⁵ See, for instance, clipping from the Newark (NJ) *Call* (5 November 1904), n.p., Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 2.

must be noted, is Ernest Temple Thurston. That Thurston had both men in mind at the time of writing is more likely than not, but, these questions aside, it is the fact that she used her narrative as a means of questioning existing marital and political ethics which remains both incontrovertible and of primary interest in the text.

Thurston may culminate *John Chilcote* with Loder's assertion that his ultimate fate 'lies with — my wife' (*JC* 370) and show Eve proclaiming, 'now it's my turn [...] [t]o-day is mine' (*JC* 318), but the novel remains unique in her oeuvre by relegating its females to the sidelines of the action. Concentrating her authorial attention on the masculine world was not a technique she would repeat. From the point of her next novel onwards, she would consistently feature female protagonists and explore subjectivities and situations which moved gradually nearer to her own. Although the opening chapters of *The Gambler* (1906) focus on the conduct of Denis Asshlin, an Anglo-Irish aristocrat whose gambling addiction accelerates his family's decline into poverty, it is Asshlin's daughter Clodagh who acts as the text's protagonist.²³⁶

In its earliest passages, *The Gambler* explores Asshlin's troubled relationship to an old school ally, the Englishman James Milbanke, whose well-intentioned but misguided attempts to aid his Irish friend have disastrous consequences. After Asshlin loses badly in a game of cards, Milbanke's efforts to rectify the situation by returning his winnings evoke only anger in his friend, the reasons for which are demonstrated to be overtly cultural: 'You don't understand — you never did understand', Asshlin explains to Milbanke, 'It's the cursed pride of a cursed country. The less we have to be proud of, the more damned proud we are'.²³⁷ The tragedy of Anglo-Irish existence is shown to be partially a result of this pride, as Asshlin, unable due to a distorted sense of honour to alter the behaviours he has

²³⁶ 1906 is the UK publication date. *The Gambler* was first published in the US in 1905.

²³⁷ Katherine Cecil Thurston, *The Gambler* (London: Hutchinson, 1906), p. 34. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *TG*.

learned from his forebears, continues to pay gambling debts even as he moves ever closer to financial ruin.

Estranged as a result of this misunderstanding, Milbanke and Asshlin are reconciled only when the latter is on his deathbed. Possessing the riches that Asshlin has always lacked but devoid of the compassion and diplomacy necessary to negotiate his way safely through his Irish counterparts' sense of ethnic dignity, Milbanke soon repeats his earlier mistakes. Believing himself, after his friend's death, to be responsible for Asshlin's estate and two children, he pays the family's debts and offers to marry the older daughter, eighteen-year-old Clodagh, failing in the process to recognize either her unwillingness or the means by which his proposal might be misinterpreted as financial coercion under the circumstances. While this is a love match on Milbanke's part, for Clodagh it amounts to the repayment of a 'debt of honour' (*TG* 99). The resultant marriage between Clodagh and Milbanke, a significantly older man who is consumed by his antiquarian hobbies and devoid of any emotional intelligence, may be distinctly reminiscent of Dorothea Brooke's to Edward Casaubon in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871), but there are imperative ethnic differences between Thurston's heroine and Eliot's. Having been raised without nurturers and exemplars in a country in which her family's position has diminished to the point that she effectively sells herself into a loveless marriage, Clodagh enters adulthood wholly incapable of romanticizing her situation or her role within it. She is a different configuration of the novelistic heroine altogether – one who, feeling increasingly ineffectual, isolated and ignored, begins to assert her independence by pursuing illicit desires, including gambling and flirtations with other men.

In portraying Clodagh's travels on the European Continent and her movement among and between a group of wealthy tourists, Thurston highlights the inequities of her heroine's position in relation to her financially privileged British counterparts. Throughout

her own descent into gambling addiction, Clodagh is shown to struggle, however fruitlessly, against temptation and vice, and to worry about the effect of her actions on other people. In contrast, the English people with whom she associates — Lord Deerehurst, Serracauld and Lady Frances (whose characterizations also suggest the influence of Henry James's novels on Thurston's text) — goad one another into various attempts to corrupt the impressionable Irishwoman while pursuing without compunction vices from which Clodagh recoils. If their efforts at seduction are ultimately only partially successful — Clodagh falls rapidly under the spell of roulette and euchre but resists Lord Deerehurst's sexual advances — Thurston nonetheless demonstrates that, having been denied any opportunity for individual progress, she has become easy prey to those who are positioned (socially, financially and racially) 'above' her. The lure of company, ease and plenty proves too strong for the young woman who has experienced only the isolation, powerlessness and increasing impoverishment of an Anglo-Irish upbringing.

Although racial and gendered differences are often highlighted in the text, Thurston's characters are rarely stereotypical. That Clodagh falls as easily into gambling addiction as did her father before her negates any speculation that this particular weakness is a specifically gendered one. Likewise, a number of the novel's characters, regardless of national identity, indulge in the same habit. Yet, although each of the characters who demonstrates a propensity to gamble to excess — Asshlin, his nephew Larry and Clodagh on the Irish side; Lord Deerehurst, Lady Frances and Serracauld on the English — are driven by a lack of purposeful pursuits, what contributes to their moral decline is a dividing factor between her characters in terms of ethnicity. For the English, who are freed by their riches to lead lives of leisure, gambling is just one pastime among many. Aimlessness is, for them, a choice. About the Eton-educated Serracauld, Thurston writes that his 'sufficiency of money had rendered work unnecessary'; he is, she asserts, 'a fashionable

young aristocrat, whose only business in life [is] the absorbing pursuit of killing time' (*TG* 130). The Irish characters' positions are, however, the inverse. In the case of Denis and Larry Asshlin, it is almost wholly their extant poverty that brings about their respective demises. The possibility of winning at the gaming tables is too compelling a lure for those like the Asshlins who lack any prospect of earning money by more acceptable means, yet their penury renders them ever more destitute as they borrow against and sell off belongings and property to meet the debts they incur.

Effectively, Thurston constructs a narrative in which her English characters remain unrepentant and unpunished, while her Irish characters, despite the fact that she allows them more compelling reasons to be led down ethically less-than-exemplary paths, are severely penalized. Again confronting the notions of ethical conventions and facile moral judgments, Thurston does so for the first time within a framework that is recognizably racial, and the idea that ethical standards are arbitrarily applied and enforced is carried through to the end of the novel. The ultimate point of crisis comes only when Clodagh, now widowed, has gambled away the last of her money and resorts to using her younger sister's trust fund to pay off her debts. In the midst of her worst troubles, and among the multitudes of dishonest people by which Clodagh finds herself surrounded, her sister Nance comes to personify one conscientious voice. The other belongs to her new fiancé, the English Walter Gore, a man deemed so morally pure that he has been dubbed 'Sir Galahad' (*TG* 150). Ultimately, however, Gore's moral standards are shown to be too stringent: he breaks off his engagement to Clodagh after learning the details, but not the circumstances, of her actions. Nance, having witnessed the events of her sister's upbringing and knowing fully the reasons that her sister has strayed from the path of conventional morality, confronts Gore, and it is through her perspective that he is first able to perceive Clodagh not as a paragon of her sex, but as a victim of the unrealistic

expectations placed on her as both woman and Irish person. Converting Gore to her own beliefs that it is a wonder, 'considering everything, that [Clodagh] hasn't done really wrong things, instead of just terribly foolish ones' (TG 344), it is the Irish and female Nance who saves Clodagh from suicide by negotiating Gore's clemency at the end of the novel. Again, the woman's perspective is privileged in Thurston's text; again, her character is pulled back from the brink of moral collapse and absolved of guilt.

Forgiveness is a central theme in all Thurston's texts, including several unpublished and unperformed plays she would write around the theme of marital adultery at the midpoint of her career. At the close of one of these dramas, *The Day After*, the play's priest-like character, Charvier, pardons an adulterous woman for her transgressions:

You have sinned. Blot out your sin in strength and silence. Be your own judge: mete out your own punishment. Be your own pardoner, when the time comes! [...] Thousands have lived what the world calls a lie — and raised noble structures on the foundation.²³⁸

Although playwriting was a new pursuit for Thurston, the idea of noble structures being raised from the ruins of a dishonest past was not — *The Circle*, *John Chilcote* and *The Gambler* all have it in common. In *The Fly on the Wheel* (1908), her penultimate and most accomplished work, Thurston dares to render her female protagonist as an at times unambiguously unlikable character, but her message of absolution, while it remains central, is more cynically envisioned than has been the case in her previous texts. The first of Thurston's novels in which all of the characters share her Irish Catholic middle class background, *The Fly on the Wheel* demonstrates the path towards forgiveness to be a sullied one. Distinctly more pessimistic than its predecessors, it explores the relationship between the individual and extremely localized configurations of society and morality which are being challenged by an encroaching modernity. Of all Thurston's novels, it is

²³⁸ Katherine Cecil Thurston, undated typewritten manuscript of *The Day After*, Ep. III, p. 21, Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 10.

the most in tune with its moment, for its preoccupations demonstrate it to balance precariously but appropriately on the cusp between two centuries and two eras: the nineteenth and the twentieth; the Victorian and the Modern.

This liminality is most apparent in the manner in which it draws on the themes of earlier fiction while foreshadowing the work of the Irish female authors who were to follow. Like Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) before it and Kate O'Brien's *The Anteroom* (1934) after, Thurston's text is an examination of an illicit love affair set against the backdrop of a claustrophobic society. Unlike Eliot's work and in common with O'Brien's, the tension of Thurston's novel is heightened by the fact that it is set at or near the *fin de siècle* and its action is located in a genteel but stifled Irish Catholic community struggling to maintain its customs and ideals against the incipient threat of change. On one side of the divide between tradition and modernity is the novel's main male character, the 38-year-old Stephen Carey. A native of Waterford, Stephen is, like the city to which he belongs, 'dedicated to business' (*FW* 1). Initially an unquestioning upholder of the tenets of his society, which is 'virile in its ambition, tyrannical in its moral code, jealous of its hard-won supremacy', he is described in terms which establish him as a necessary but dehumanized part of the apparatus of middle class and industrial progress in Ireland: he is one of many 'men of steel' who are 'drawn from the great workshops, tempered, filed, polished to fit the appropriate place; helping to move the mighty engine of which they are the atoms, useless if cast out from its mechanism' (*FW* 2-3).

Like Thurston's characters John Loder and Clodagh Asshlin before him, Stephen is also the victim of the errors and expectations of a previous generation. His inheritance, like theirs, has been squandered by the carelessness of a relative. Stephen's father, having been during his lifetime 'too proud to go into debt' (*FW* 7), speculated with, rather than borrowed to supplement, his remaining assets when his business began to fail, and thereby

lost his fortune. Left to care for his six younger brothers after his father's death and determined to see his father's dreams for the family fulfilled, Stephen has in the ensuing years deprived himself 'to the point of penury that his brothers might not turn back from their allotted paths' (*FW* 7). As his father wished, Stephen has become a lawyer, and ensures that his younger brothers in turn become a priest, an architect, a civil engineer, a banker and a sailor. He is also dutifully married to Daisy, a woman 'content to shape the future on the pattern of the past' (*FW* 9) who has been chosen in a business-like manner befitting the Waterford society in which Stephen lives and moves and according to his patronizing views of her sex: he has considered his prospective brides, we are told, 'much as the Eastern might have studied the slave-market' (*FW* 12). As the novel opens, he has three young sons of his own to support and is on the brink of releasing himself from the responsibilities defined for him by his father. Only Frank, the youngest of his brothers, remains under his care, studying medicine in Paris.

As Stephen stands thus on the threshold of what amounts to a moment of liberation, into his life to symbolize his newfound opportunity for emancipation comes Isabel Costello. She is Frank's young fiancée, the relatively poor daughter of a deceased banker from Wexford newly returned to Ireland from a Parisian convent school to live with a maiden aunt in Waterford. Isabel enters Waterford society and is openly welcomed as a curiosity, but secretly vilified as an interloper, particularly by the women of the community. Not only is she a non-native, she is also perceived to be an *arriviste* – a woman who, through her impending marriage, is attempting to surpass what bourgeois Irish society have deigned her inherent and proper social station beneath them. Thurston makes apparent, however, that despite its own attempts to maintain 'the impregnable barriers of position' (*FW* 223), the middle class is gradually mutating and expanding. The 'naturally indolent' bourgeois community can, she asserts, be entered 'through a gate that

stands barely ajar', and aspirations to gain entry are not only rampant, but conspicuously linked to prevailing Irish notions of English and Continental social superiority: 'for this, the successful doctor sends his boys to an English university; for this, the mother of a large family stints and saves to educate her daughters abroad' (*FW* 3-4). Carey acts in the opening chapters as the defender of his class's supposed impregnability; the upholder of tradition. Angered that his brother has willfully controverted the business-like terms on which marriages are arranged in his class and community by choosing a wife who can bring nothing of monetary value to the family, he determines to persuade Isabel to abandon Frank.

Yet in Isabel he meets a type of woman theretofore non-existent in Waterford: educated, orphaned and essentially rootless, with a hint of the blood of Spanish ancestors in her appearance and attitudes, Isabel is not constrained by local opinion and disbelieves in the ethics of a society which would define her by its terms, rather than her own. Provoked into anger by Stephen's demand that she terminate her relationship with Frank, she reiterates the idea that marriage in middle-class Ireland is a form of financial transaction, but reinterprets the terms on which it is negotiated as both insular and driven by fear:

I think it's much more to be despised to sell yourself as if you were a sheep or a horse than to marry because you care. [...] You hate me to marry Frank because I have no money; but if I was rich you'd let us get married tomorrow, even if I was lame or blind. You think of nothing but money – money and position. You live in a little, little world, where if people ever do feel anything, they're afraid to say so! (*FW* 81)

Eventually, however, Isabel ends her relationship of her own accord after realizing the extent of Frank's weaknesses, which are placed in relief by her recognition of her own, and Stephen's, strengths. The plot thereafter revolves around Isabel and Stephen's growing affections for one another, and Stephen's burgeoning awareness that he, like Isabel, is dissatisfied with a life lived within the constraints of Waterford society.

Among the novel's prominent and recurring themes is the narrowness of opportunity in Irish society. For Isabel and the remainder of Irish women, the convent is one of the few options available to them should they choose or be forced by circumstances into the stigmatized life of an 'old maid' (FW 224). Not being of the type who might find contentment in the 'placid grey monotony' (FW 224) of a cloistered life, however, nor capable of subduing her 'pride to the petty difficulties, the slow drudgery, that in Ireland spells self-support' (FW 224), Isabel is left with only two choices: 'Such women either marry or they do not marry; and in that simple statement is comprised the tragedy of existence' (FW 224). If the middle class is expanding, however unwillingly, to accommodate those men like Stephen's father, a builder who used ingenuity and relentless endeavour as a means to achieve a tenuous bourgeois status for his family, for women there is only one route to that destination, and it is marriage.

Isabel is often portrayed unsympathetically, particularly in her callousness to Frank and her maiden aunt. Yet references to the cramped and airless spaces she is forced to occupy, the oppressive heat and the choking dust of the streets of Waterford lend a sense of claustrophobia and suffering to existence and permit her reasons for agitation and rebellion. Isabel's bedroom in her aunt's home is, like Mary Desmond's in *The Wheel of God*, a shabby space filled with 'ugly Victorian furniture' (FW 55) and thus patterned, like much of the rest of Waterford, on the past. Isabel, Daisy, and Daisy's sister Mary Norris's combined attempts to occupy themselves while left alone together in the Careys' country home on a rainy day after the men have gone to work amplifies the sense of women's entrapment. It is, however, Isabel alone who is tempted to transgress the boundaries placed on her as a female. Venturing outside to smoke cigarettes, flirt with men or ride unchaperoned in a 'motor car' (FW 175), Isabel – the only one among Thurston's female characters who is not native to the community – remains the lone dissenter among her

female contemporaries; a 'new' woman amongst the old. Through her, Thurston also and notably indicates that outsiderhood and estrangement lend a more nuanced view of behavioural mores and ethical codes than rootedness can provide.

Though limitations on behaviour and opportunities are far from equal between the sexes, they are to varying degrees shared. The suggestion about Stephen that 'if only he was in England or America, what a great man he might have been' (*FW* 230), attests to the narrowness of prospects, even for men, in Ireland. Stephen, realizing through Isabel the extent to which the options for his existence have been truncated, begins to echo her rebellious voice, but only feebly in comparison to the woman who strains and chafes at every restriction. By highlighting the discrepancies in the extent to which they pursue their respective rebellions, Thurston consistently suggests the degree to which Stephen remains complicit with tradition. She also compares Stephen's attitudes, to his disadvantage, to those of the Gaelic Leaguer Tom Norris and his ally Father Cunningham. Tom is, like Isabel, twenty years old; Father Cunningham is the young assistant to Father James Baron, the esteemed local priest. All are, as such, among the members of a new and emerging generation, and indicate an as yet only vaguely realized form of threat to the established order. Tom's political nationalism and Father Cunningham's espousal of Tom's ideas identify them as proponents for change. The act of embracing an embryonic struggle for Irish independence is both complementary and correlative to Isabel's own acts of resistance, and the correspondences between the two movements — towards female autonomy on one side and political independence on the other — are emphasized when Tom is shown to be, like Isabel, the object of ridicule in the community. Stephen, although he is an avowed former Land Leaguer, suggests the futility of Tom's efforts: 'You'll always have young men, you know', he informs Tom in a statement which can only, with hindsight, be read with a sense of irony, 'but Ireland won't be changed by that' (*FW* 103).

Isabel, however, is not among Tom's detractors. Rather, she empathizes with his position, and it is to her that Tom turns when mocked by the elder members of his social circle. 'Don't listen to them, Miss Costello', he tells her, 'It's people like them that have kept Ireland where she is. We'd have been a nation long ago – a nation in the commercial and intellectual sense – only for the poisonous spirit of depreciation that's spread over every honest effort to raise the country' (*FW* 103). In subsequently comparing the country's stasis to Stephen's own inaction, Thurston suggests the degree to which man and nation are similarly constrained, and inextricably intertwined.

Stephen's late night drive with Isabel, witnessed by Mary Norris and eventually made known to his wife, is his one notable act of transgression. Ultimately, however, it proves abortive, and in drawing attention to the point just short of the Cork border at which Stephen ends his journey Thurston suggests that there are certain boundaries that he is unwilling or unable to cross. When he later attempts to leave Daisy for Isabel, it is with Father James Baron – a representative of Catholicism, of the old order, of tradition – that the true power over Stephen's fate finally rests. Father James is described in terms that leave no doubt as to his authority. He is 'a tower in the silent room' who has 'grandeur in his rugged face' and 'power in his rough voice' (*FW* 287). More important than his physical superiority, however, is his religious authority and supremacy: in his efforts to dissuade Stephen from the path he has chosen, Father James has recourse to 'weapons' that are 'eternal', and draws on his intimate knowledge of Stephen's past to fight for the 'soul he loved' (*FW* 287). Thinking back to the time when it looked as though the Carey family would be ruined by their father's actions, he dissuades Stephen from abandoning Daisy by repeating the younger man's own earlier pledge to himself: 'I'll live it down, Father James! [...] I'll live it down; but, by God, if ever I have sons of my own, they'll never have a hell of their father's making' (*FW* 288). If Stephen's subsequent choice to forsake Isabel

initially reads as an unequivocal admission of defeat, and his 'broken' and 'tortured' (*FW* 326) demeanor emphasizes his submission, it is nonetheless apparent that at the moment the priest reiterates his earlier promise the decision he has to make is partially redefined. It becomes not only a choice between Daisy as representative of the traditional and Isabel as representative of the new, but also between following the patterns of the past by burdening his sons with a shame which by rights should be solely his own or breaking away from those habits of irresponsibility.

Stephen's choice at the end of the novel foreshadows and inverts the one Agnes Mulqueen would later make in *The Ante-Room*, just as Isabel's act of ending her own life anticipates Vincent's fate in O'Brien's novel. That in Thurston's text it is the man who complies with the limitations placed on him while the woman rebels against them makes it appear to be the more radically realized of the two. A study of the details that lead to those choices renders comparisons between Thurston's and O'Brien's characters more problematic, however. In O'Brien's novel, Vincent's suicide is represented as a regression – a retreat into boyhood and the comfort of his mother, a childish act born out of a despair he cannot surmount. Although Agnes contemplates the same act herself, the consequences of suicide for her as a Catholic loom too large for death by her own hand to be considered. She wishes, rather, to annihilate the feelings she has for the married Vincent and thus to destroy her sin and achieve absolution. What she finds instead is that the act of killing her love for Vincent is a form of living death in itself: 'They are alive', Agnes says of those around her, who include her terminally ill mother, '[b]ut I'm dying'.²³⁹ For Isabel as Thurston constructs her, faith is a different but no less devout matter. If she has long queried the ethics of her community, she never questions those of her faith. She is said to accept '[e]very tenet of the Roman Catholic Church [...] with unquestioning belief,

²³⁹ Kate O'Brien, *The Ante-Room* (London: Virago, 1988 [1934]), p. 261.

because to her imagination those tenets were as fixed as the stars in heaven' (*FW* 64). As a believer in Catholicism, Isabel is interpretable as a character fully aware of the consequences, as those consequences are defined by her faith, of the deed she will later contemplate. The act she premeditates is not, however, wholly compatible with the idea of suicide. Rather, distraught at being abandoned, Isabel determines to murder Stephen, but before her plan can be carried out Father James again steps in as counselor. Isabel, recognizing the truth in the priest's assertion that Stephen is devastated by his decision to forsake her, seizes the wine that she has poisoned before Stephen can reach it and drinks it herself. Her action, never calculated, is made nobler by its overt connections to rescue, selflessness and love: by choosing to end her own life, Isabel saves Stephen Carey's. For Isabel, then, death is both a sacrifice and a triumph, and the final line of the novel indicates as much: 'looking down into the wine,' her eyes catch 'the warmth, the redness, the glory of the sun' (*FW* 327).

The novel's ending often disappointed English commentators, one of whom suggested that Isabel's 'convenient suicide' was 'wildly unconvincing' and that '[o]ne might have swallowed it better from the stupid wife'.²⁴⁰ The verdict from Irish publications was consistently more positive. The *Waterford Herald* reviewed it at length and judged it a superlative effort, and the *Derry Standard* suggested that 'the story ends in a denouement the most dramatic and at the same time the most natural to be conceived'.²⁴¹ Even the *Catholic Herald*, after briefly expressing its reservations about an author who believed her characters to be 'mere helpless straw[s] of the strong waters of the current of fatalism, driven in spite of all effort of will towards the maelstrom of the illicit', found more in Thurston's work to praise than to blame: 'The presiding powers in Irish literature, such as

²⁴⁰ Clipping from *Hearth and Home* (25 April 1908), n.p., Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 10.

²⁴¹ Clipping from the *Waterford Herald* (26 March 1908), n.p., and clipping from the *Derry Standard* (20 March 1908), n.p., both Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 10.

Father Russell, of Dublin, have long sighed for an Irish story reproducing the middle-class life of the Irish provincial town. Here it is at last, fully, adequately'.²⁴² The enthusiasm for the novel from Irish sources is both surprising and illuminating considering that Thurston, in what would turn out to be the only of her novels to be wholly set in Ireland and entirely populated by Irish characters, is also and undoubtedly openly pessimistic about the state of middle class society in Ireland and the immediate prospects for change. Tom Norris's nationalist arguments continue to be ridiculed, Stephen Carey's marriage remains an unsatisfactory and unhappy union, and Isabel Costello's rebellions have achieved nothing but her own annihilation by the close of the novel. Considering the novel's defeatist ending, it is relevant to speculate that Thurston intended the 'glory' that Isabel glimpses at the moment of her death to indicate not only the knowledge that her act is a noble one, but also her recognition that death is an escape from the thwarted existence she has been forced to live. In Father James's words, '[t]is easier to bridge hell than to bridge life' (*FW* 282) in a community such as the Waterford Thurston depicts in *The Fly on the Wheel*. Having manipulated her readers, yet again, into caring for and siding with characters whose actions raise complex moral questions, Thurston breaks with her own earlier models and composes an unhappy ending. The implication may well be that, within an Irish and turn-of-the-century setting, liberation is unimaginable. Read more closely, however, the prospects for the next generation of Irish *men*, fleetingly commented upon in Tom Norris's attitudes and vaguely glimpsed in Stephen's change of heart, offer a glimmer of optimism about Ireland's future.

George Egerton offered a similar vision of Ireland. In her Irish work, it is by escaping their homeland that her female characters achieve a form of independence. Like Thurston's evocation in *The Fly on the Wheel* of a woman more openly rebellious than are

²⁴² Clipping from the *Catholic Herald* (16 May 1908), n.p., Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 10.

the majority of men with whom she comes into contact, Egerton could often, though not unfaithfully, be seen to offer alternatives to essentialism, particularly when confronted with sexual stereotypes. Egerton's are rarely the self-effacing, self-immolating heroines that so often populated the fiction of her contemporaries, and she would assert, in one of her earliest works, that she believed women to be '[h]ermaphrodite by force of circumstances. Deformed results of a fight of centuries between physical suppression and natural impulse to fulfil our destiny' (*KD* 41). The sentiments of these 'half creatures' (*KD* 41) are evoked in the words of Thurston's female characters who consistently wish to live life in the same manner and governed by the same rules as men. Thurston's resolve, in her final novel, *Max*, to create a female character able to live successfully as a man, and in the process to pursue the freedoms of a masculine existence, represents the apotheosis of the feminist idea envisioned by many of the New Woman writers, Egerton prominent among them. While the central device of the novel is the heroine's transcendence of her sexual identity, it is equally important to Thurston's fictional purposes that her character belongs to no particular nation – that Max/Maxine lives as a 'citizen of a free world' (*MX* 68).

In *Max*, a young Russian princess escapes her homeland and impending marriage to an abusive man and travels to Paris disguised in men's clothing. On board the train taking her to France, she meets an Irishman, Ned Blake, who becomes her closest ally in her new life. Her true gender is unknown to anyone, including Blake, and she determines to live her life in Paris wholly as a man, in order that she may be permitted to pursue a career as an artist. Within days of arriving at her destination, the princess, now known as 'Max', has settled in an apartment of her own to live among the bohemians and free spirits of Montmartre. Blake provides her with a comprehensive introduction to Parisian life, and through him she experiences both the high and low cultures of the city.

Although Max's exploits on the seamier side of Paris are among the most skilfully evoked passages in the novel, Thurston's publisher William Blackwood's doubts about the inclusion of them suggest that her subject matter was venturing into fictional territory more controversial than was that of her earlier novels. About one of these passages, Blackwood complained to Thurston:

[t]he atmosphere of the whole Chapter was more or less objectionable to me. I admit the necessity for the touch of realism if your story is to have a convincing background. Unfortunately it is just this essential which raises a doubt in my mind, and obliges me to postpone a decision regarding its serial issue.²⁴³

Blackwood would eventually decide that the novel's subject matter was too contentious, stating to Thurston that it 'is evolved on lines, and is of a nature, which does not enable me to use it in my magazine'.²⁴⁴ The rejection from Blackwood, long Thurston's principal publisher in Britain, must have come as a blow, but could hardly have been surprising. *Blackwood's* was a magazine with a largely middle class and conservative readership, and an avowedly Tory political agenda. As Egerton had done with Lane more than a decade earlier, Thurston consistently argued with Blackwood over the course of the novel's genesis about its scenes and characterizations, and was determined to write it according to her own principles. Indeed, so resolute was she to render her portrait of belle époque Paris convincingly that, for the purpose of research, she had undertaken to visit many of the 'objectionable' establishments she depicts, including the cabaret Le Bal Tabarin and the lesbian nightclub Café du Rat Mort.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ Letter from William Blackwood to Katherine Cecil Thurston (20 January 1909), Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 1.

²⁴⁴ Letter from William Blackwood to Katherine Cecil Thurston (24 July 1909), Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 1.

²⁴⁵ Souvenirs and programmes from Le Bal Tabarin and Café du Rat Mort, Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 1.

Thurston had not only researched her setting thoroughly, but had also studied her subject matter, and throughout 1909 and 1910 amassed a collection of documents about women who had lived successfully as men. Among the stories she accumulated were articles about the practice in France of licensing women to dress as men and various newspaper pieces and commemorative postcards concerned with successful tales of male impersonation.²⁴⁶ The premise of the novel, therefore, was one that Thurston knew to be within the realm of possibility. The manner in which Thurston develops the story, however, places it outside the realms of probability. Although we learn of the princess's escape from Russia through newspaper reports that Max reads on board the train to Paris, the reader is offered only a vision of a Max who is fully realized in his masculine disguise as the novel opens, and Thurston does not choose to reveal Max's real identity until the second half of the narrative. Blake, meanwhile, is supposed to remain unaware that Max is actually female until the novel's closing pages. Yet Max's true gender is discernible from the first. It may have been Thurston's intention, as one reviewer suggested, to demonstrate through Max 'the temperament of a woman showing through the raiment of a man', but the degree to which that temperament is exposed renders Max an unconvincing impersonator of masculinity from the novel's opening sequence, and to its severe detriment.²⁴⁷ A reviewer in the *New York Post* offered a cynical but fundamentally accurate summation of the novel's failings:

a girl who passes herself off as her own twin brother is a new engine of mystification [...] it is her ambition to "possess herself," to remain independent of authority [...] Of course, there is a man in Paris who is destined to wreck this ambition: an Irishman of the world, nearly middle-aged, who has never really loved. A quick intimacy springs up between this

²⁴⁶ See clipping 'Licensed to Dress as Men', unidentified newspaper, n.p., n.d., clipping from the Otago (New Zealand) *Witness* (28 April 1909), n.p., and postcards of 'Amy Bock, The Female Bridegroom', Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 2.

²⁴⁷ Clipping from the *Philadelphia Inquirer* (17 October 1910), n.p., Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 10.

gentleman and the so-called "Max." If that young person's speech and action are correctly reported, it is hard to see how any man of ordinary intelligence could have failed to see through the disguise.²⁴⁸

Thurston's Max is a character who careers wildly from assertions of independence and the espousal of unconventional philosophies about gender relations to the most stereotypically feminine of behaviours. Max's typical response to Blake's disapproval is to seek reassurances in language that lends an almost certainly unintentional homoerotic undertone to the narrative: 'Oh, *mon cher!*,' Max implores Blake on one occasion, 'Forgive me! Forgive me! Say I am still your boy!' (MX 226) When, towards the end of the text, Blake becomes romantically obsessed with a self-portrait of Maxine, 'Max' is moved to confront him in a manner which reveals an overtly sexual jealousy: 'I have given you my friendship — my heart and my mind, but I am not sufficient to you? Something more is required — something else — something different! [...] Why? Because I am a boy — she a woman!' (MX 223) These types of passages undermine the reader's faith not only in the feasibility of Max's impersonation, but also in the truth of 'his' assertions of independence. If at the same time they represent Thurston's attempts to remove issues of sex from the relationship between the genders, they are efforts which systematically meet with failure.

Thurston admitted in her personal letters that the book was intended as a tribute to her fiancé, Alfred Bulkeley Gavin, and that the burgeoning affections between the artistic Max and the more prosaic Blake, from friendship to romantic love, was an evocation of their relationship. 'If ever book belonged to human being this book is yours', she wrote to Gavin in August of 1910, 'undecided though it will be, every word, every thought in it is of you, inspired by you and yours absolutely'.²⁴⁹ If its failings in characterization arise from this very personal point of genesis, there are also among *Max's* pages repeated and

²⁴⁸ See clipping from the *New York Post* (26 November 1910), n.p., Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 10.

²⁴⁹ Letter from Thurston to Gavin (31 August 1910), Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 12.

significant aphorisms, predominantly voiced by Max, which suggest that Thurston had as much of a public as a personal agenda in writing it. Throughout, the importance of liberation from the limitations of both country and sex are conveyed in references to the ways in which 'the individuality of the boy was submerged in his ambition; he belonged to no country, to no sex' (*MX* 64) and Max's assertions, which echo those of Egerton's Mary Desmond, that she 'will belong to no one. I must possess myself' (*MX* 324). Although by the end of the novel Max – now Maxine – admits to being in love with Blake, she continues to resist his romantic overtures because she fears that choosing a life with him will mean forsaking her life as an artist, and, more importantly, her freedom as a female to live independently and unconventionally: 'I refuse to be entrapped!' she tells Blake, 'I know love — I know all the specious things that love can say; the talk of independence, the talk of equality! But I know the reality, too. The reality is the absolute annihilation of the woman — the absolute merging of her identity' (*MX* 326). Most importantly, Max exposes as social constructs the restrictions placed on her because of her sex, and refutes their validity: 'I made myself a man, not for a whim, but as a symbol. Sex is only an accident, but the world has made man the independent creature — and I desired independence' (*MX* 325). Yet the fact that these messages are consistently diluted by Max's professions of dependence on Blake acts as an indication that Thurston herself may have been constrained by her own society and the rigid definition of gender roles therein: such a narrative deficiency almost certainly reveals the degree to which the author continued to be unable to accurately envision female independence, within *or* without Ireland.

Despite the litany of challenges it presented to gendered norms and regardless of William Blackwood's attendant reservations, *Max* largely avoided controversy. Few

reviewers on either side of the Atlantic deemed its subject matter objectionable.²⁵⁰ This is almost certainly due to the fact that, by the close of the narrative, Maxine has succumbed to the lure of the traditional fairy tale ending through her act of entreating Blake to '[t]ake me away to your castle, like the princess of old' (MX 338). Through Maxine's acquiescence to a feminine paradigm and reversion to her previous identity – the 'princess' she once was – Thurston constructs a conclusion that reads as an uneasy compromise between the society she is able to imagine and the society which exists. Like its predecessor, *Max* represents the struggle to achieve personal freedom against the overwhelming pull of, and need for, communal acceptance. Unlike *The Fly on the Wheel*, *Max's* sympathies ultimately come down firmly on the side of the conventionally acceptable.

George Egerton and Katherine Cecil Thurston shared a vision of repressed female existence which was intensified within Ireland. Egerton clung to the subject of women, despite the detriment doing so posed to her career, because it was through altered concepts of womanhood and the power inherent in maternity that she believed society might be restructured along the lines she imagined. Her critique of the existing social order and a striving towards the 'new' in the form of altered ideas not only of women, but also of men, lingered on in her fiction after the downfall of the Decadents and New Women. Her reluctance to publish any of her work after 1905 resulted from growing critical and public antipathy to her chosen themes, and she would write only a handful of plays — staged but for the most part commercially unsuccessful — after her publishing career was over. She attributed her retreat from public life and the abandonment of her writing career altogether to the death of her son in World War I in 1915.

²⁵⁰ See, for example, clippings from the *Philadelphia Inquirer* (17 October 1910), n.p.; the *Boston Herald* (24 September 1910), n.p.; and the *Chicago Journal* (25 November 1910), n.p. For an overview of responses to the novel in the English press, see clipping from the *New York Herald* (22 October 1910), n.p. All Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 10.

Thurston's career was cut short by her premature death, at the age of 36, on 5 September 1911 at Moore's Hotel in Cork. Her final letter to Gavin, written the day before she died and only a week prior to their planned marriage, appears with hindsight to be curiously anticipatory of her fate:

I have been put to the test many times in this last month by feeling badly – and also by hearing my illness [epilepsy] discussed in others in a way – I mean with a frequency – that was extraordinary. [...] One case was truly dreadful, and happened in Ardmore the day before I left – A poor wretched boy, left alone in a cottage, got ill, fell into one of those open fires, and was found some long time afterwards with his whole face – eyes, nose and ears – burnt beyond hope of cure – (*I beg you not to let this conjure up fear for me*). These things give me no sense of fear. I feel that everything in the world is meant.²⁵¹

The official verdict was death due to asphyxiation caused by an epileptic seizure, yet scandal continued to plague her even posthumously. Almost immediately, the opinions of the coroner were discounted and the possibility of suicide raised, a rumour which still circulates in, among other places, the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, in which the entry on Thurston states that 'the circumstances of the death suggested the possibility of suicide'.²⁵² The *Irish Independent* has suggested a different scenario, reporting that stories handed down through Thurston's family indicate 'that she was poisoned, or at least medically overdosed, by the English doctor to whom she was engaged'.²⁵³

Her personal papers only add to the mystery. Deeply moved by her first reading of Wilde's *De Profundis* (1905) in the weeks before she died, Thurston was increasingly preoccupied by the idea of her own death. In response to concerns she expressed at that time, Basil Wilberforce, the Archdeacon of Westminster, forwarded her two printed copies

²⁵¹ Letter from Thurston to Gavin (4 September 1911), Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 12.

²⁵² G. S. Woods, 'Thurston, Katherine Cecil (1875–1911)', rev. Sayoni Basu, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36521>, accessed 11 Aug 2011].

²⁵³ Declan McCormack, 'The Butterfly on the Wheel', *Irish Independent Online* (24 September 2000), <http://www.independent.ie/unsorted/features/the-butterfly-on-the-wheel-516190.htm>.

of the poem 'Wishes About Death' by F. W. Faber which included the lines: 'Lord, I have a death to die,/And not a death to choose'.²⁵⁴ Her planned remarriage had resulted, meanwhile, not only in her estrangement from her Irish family, but also from her trusted long-term housekeeper, 'Nelson', who had recently left her employ after learning the nature of her relationship with Gavin.²⁵⁵ Although she considered Nelson's indignant response to learning of their affair to be a form of reverse class snobbery, and initially convinced herself that 'the questions of scandal must be only in the servant world', rumours that her liaison had predated her divorce quickly spread among her Irish friends, and their reactions soon proved all too similar to her housekeeper's.²⁵⁶ Even more intriguingly, her correspondence confirms that, in 1909, she had believed so strongly that Gavin was homosexual and infatuated with one of his patients that she attempted to end their relationship. Her fiancé responded to her concerns with a nine-page letter in which he asserted his devotion in terms that are at times less than reassuring: 'in defence or in explanation,' Gavin wrote, '[the patient in question] makes no pretence of being anything else than the most ardent "Homo" —, having passed through in his short life the most flagrantly "Kampy" life, and possessing a nature which he specifically states could never be faithful so that even were I the creature you fear I should find no consolation in that quarter'.²⁵⁷ Although she was appeased by his subsequent (and effusive) protestations of love for her, she would afterwards refer to their relationship in terms that suggest it was based on a form of gendered role reversal. During the composition of her final novel she bestowed on him the telling nickname of 'my little Max' and in the following year would

²⁵⁴ Professionally printed copies of poem on white cardstock contained in envelope postmarked August 1911 (day indecipherable), Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 11.

²⁵⁵ Letter from Thurston to Gavin (10 August 1911), Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 12.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ Letter from Gavin to Thurston (13 September 1909), Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 11.

suggest in a cryptic missive that she had met someone who would interest him: 'a boy from Glengarriff, who is, I am sure, of the other persuasion'.²⁵⁸ On the day that she died, she was unaccompanied in her hotel room in Cork, having for the first time declined to hire a personal maid as a means of economizing at Gavin's request. She felt ashamed, she wrote him, at having so little of value to bring into their marriage, yet the financial problems appear to have been predominantly his. Alone, worried about her health, her reputation, their finances and perhaps still harbouring misgivings about Gavin's sexual orientation, Thurston may well have been driven to suicide.

The possibility that Gavin may have taken actions that led to her death is also almost impossible to rule out. He had been in the habit of prescribing medications to her, and at the coroner's inquest, Dr P. T. O'Sullivan, a long-term friend of Thurston's family and the first physician to examine her body, noted that medicine had been found in her hotel room.²⁵⁹ Gavin's consistent entreaties that she minimize her household staff and sever ties with family had undoubtedly left her, as an epileptic, in a dangerous position. As a friend was to note in a letter of condolence, it was inexplicable that, knowing her medical history, she was allowed to remain so completely alone in the last weeks of her life.²⁶⁰ Thurston left an estate of nearly £15,000 and as beneficiary of her will and inheritor of her copyrights Gavin stood to benefit financially from her death.²⁶¹ As late as 1921, he continued to profit from her works, in that year negotiating the sale of the American film

²⁵⁸ See letters from Thurston to Gavin (April /May 1910 and 16 May 1911), Thurston Papers, Acc. 11378, Box 12.

²⁵⁹ 'Irish Writer: Mrs. Katherine Cecil Thurston Dies', *Sunday Independent* (10 September 1911), p. 8.

²⁶⁰ Letter from Jane Mackinnon to Alexander Gavin (22 September 1911), Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 12.

²⁶¹ G. S. Woods, 'Thurston, Katherine Cecil (1875–1911)', rev. Sayoni Basu, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36521>, accessed 11 Aug 2011].

rights to *The Masquerader* for \$50,000 and a percentage of earnings.²⁶² Said to be heartbroken over Thurston's death, he remained a bachelor until the age of 83, at which point he married the 86-year-old Charlotte Tilke McAdam, a widowed Scottish landowner and successful businesswoman.²⁶³ Upon his wife's death three years later in 1959, he inherited her property, the vast Craigenkillan estate in Ayrshire, Scotland.

Whatever the circumstances of her death, and despite the fact that Thurston willfully chose to live her life away from the country of her birth, her actions in the last month of her life appear out of character for a woman who had, during all the years she lived in England, looked to her Irish family for camaraderie and her summer sojourn in Ardmore for solace. Yet distance from Ireland was to yield its rewards, and the risks she had felt able to take with her final novel soon paid their dividends: *Max* would be her greatest commercial success since *John Chilcote*. In an article written two weeks after her death, one of the earliest proponents of her work, Nano Harris Walker, was moved to wonder whether Thurston might have gone on to become one of her country's most notable chroniclers: 'Can Ireland, in the death of Mrs. Thurston,' Walker queried, 'have lost a novelist who, in process of evolution, would have devoted her talents to stories of the life and circumstances of its people? The reality, the interest, and the almost Balzacian atmosphere of "The Fly on the Wheel" makes one ask the question'.²⁶⁴ Clodagh Asshlin waiting on an Irish hillside for her English deliverer in the closing passages of *The Gambler* and Isabel Costello drinking the poisoned wine rather than agreeing to live by Waterford's standards reinforce the notion that, for Thurston, Ireland was a place to be transcended rather than yielded to; that her outlook was internationalist rather than

²⁶² See various letters and contracts dated April and May, 1921, Thurston Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 13.

²⁶³ See 'Deaths: Alfred Bulkeley Gavin', *The Times* (London), no. 57019 (14 August 1967), p. 14.

²⁶⁴ Nano Harris Walker, *T. P.'s Weekly*, vol. 18, no. 463 (22 September 1911), p. 356.

nationalist. Her novels also suggest, however, that the more she distanced herself from Ireland, the more she imaginatively returned to it. Her final novel may be devoid of any Irish settings, yet Ireland hovers over the narrative as a promise of ease and fulfillment: it is, it must be remembered, into an Irishman's arms that her heroine retreats, and to a castle in Ireland that she wishes to be taken, at the close of *Max*.

Years after Egerton's career had ended, she would discover her own closest allies among the new generation of Irish literary men, including Austin Clarke and Seumas O'Sullivan, who were to become her regular correspondents. Late in her life she would also return to writing, choosing Irish topics for a series of short stories that Clarke praised and O'Sullivan viewed with what bordered on reverence: 'I cannot pay any higher compliment to the author of "the Two Dans" than to say that I found the reading of the latter portion extremely painful,' he wrote to Egerton in 1938 about a story she had set during the Easter Rising, '[y]ou have with a skill little short of miraculous re-created the atmosphere of the places you describe and (this, I think is still more wonderful) reproduced the reactions of the crowd with a fidelity and accuracy which are beyond praise'.²⁶⁵ Yet even in her twilight years, De Vere White suggests, Egerton could not help but court controversy:

The London hotels and boarding-houses in which she took up residence found her a difficult guest. She could not refrain from lecturing her elderly and duller-witted companions. They did not always appreciate her dialectical manner: they may have resented her combativeness, the incessant flow of querulous monologue, her unconcealed contempt for the commonplace intellects of English, middle-class females.²⁶⁶

Egerton's correspondence confirms that, to the end of her life, her reading consisted largely of Irish authors and her political interest was almost solely in Irish topics. She would

²⁶⁵ See Clarke, *A Penny in the Clouds*, p. 178 and letter from Seumas O'Sullivan to George Egerton (14 July 1938), Bright Papers, Princeton, Box 1, Folder 51.

²⁶⁶ De Vere White, *A Leaf from the Yellow Book*, p. 176.

nevertheless refuse O'Sullivan's requests to publish her recollections of Ireland and any of her late-life Irish stories, a type of protest she maintained against the publishing industry, De Vere White indicates, because she felt she had been judged more harshly than Ireland's male writers: 'she was, I think, jealous of the success of certain Irish writers whom she had not been impressed by as men'.²⁶⁷ Egerton died in Ifield, Sussex in 1945, having published no new work for the last four decades of her life.

By the time they came to write their Irish novels, both Egerton and Thurston had already enacted their own escapes from Ireland. Both subsequently demonstrated a tendency towards the unconventional and the controversial in their fictions; each would envision heroines who strayed outside the realms of conformity and the morally acceptable. Would Thurston, had she continued publishing her work, have gone on to become one of the most notable of Irish female authors? The question remains both valid and intriguing. What is indisputable is that, as Ireland became in the years after the forming of the Free State a nation which was newly conservative to a degree which mimicked the stultified Britain of the late-1890s, and, as James H. Murphy suggests, it was during that period also 'a society in which for the most part women were denied independence and articulation', the absence of Egerton's and Thurston's alternative and often rebellious voices was a more profound loss than most.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 178.

²⁶⁸ James H. Murphy, "'Things Which Seem to You Unfeminine': Gender and Nationalism in the Fiction of Some Upper Middle Class Catholic Women Novelists, 1880-1910', in *Border Crossings: Irish Women Writers and National Identities*, ed. Kathryn Kirkpatrick (Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 2000), p. 77.

IV

M. E. Francis and the Irish Catholic Literary Establishment

'With all their love for Ireland, they do not seem to us to give to their readers a sufficiently bright and amiable idea of our dear country, and our dear people. They exaggerate, and, therefore, deform. As a matter of fact, we are very like other people, only nicer.' — Father Matthew Russell, 'Notes on New Books', *The Irish Monthly* (1890)²⁶⁹

'All these vague, poetical, romantic ideas go for nothing — your dream-Ireland does not exist' — M. E. Francis, *Miss Erin* (1898)²⁷⁰

Thirty-five years into the lengthy publishing career of M. E. Francis (Mary Sweetman Blundell, 1859-1930), a commentator in the *Athenaeum* would note that the author had 'her special themes, which reappear, with more or less regularity, in each successive novel, notably dialect (of one sort or another) and the Roman Catholic religion.'²⁷¹ It is a comment resolutely in keeping with the reputation that Francis had forged over the course of her writing life. She first came to prominence as a chronicler of rural Lancashire, the home she had adopted after her marriage. Her name would subsequently become synonymous with Dorset, where she had come to live in the middle of her life and in which many of her most popular novels were set. So much so was she identified with the latter that in 1918 the Society of Dorset Men in London named her as one of only two sanctioned 'Dorset novelists'. The other was Thomas Hardy.²⁷² Like Hardy, whose work she greatly

²⁶⁹ Father Matthew Russell, 'Notes on New Books', *The Irish Monthly*, vol. 18, no. 209 (November 1890), p. 614.

²⁷⁰ M. E. Francis, *Miss Erin* (New York, Cincinnati, Chicago: Benziger Brothers, 1898), pp. 69-70. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *ME*.

²⁷¹ 'Novels in Brief', *Athenaeum*, no. 4706 (9 July 1920), p. 52.

²⁷² *The Dorset Year-Book* (1919), pamphlet published by The Society of Dorset-Men in London, n. p., Held in the private collection of Mark Blundell, Crosby Hall Estate, Little Crosby.

admired, Francis could be an exceptional chronicler of a specific place and time.²⁷³ Unlike him, she often wrote lighthearted tales with predominantly contemporary settings in many and varied locales. Not only Lancashire and Dorset, but also Wales, Belgium, Switzerland and Hungary would figure as locations for her fiction, and she knew each of these by residence. Often and aptly compared in her day to writers such as Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot for her intuitive evocations of character, Francis also had a distinct capacity for inserting a moral message into her tales with little or no reversion to the overt didacticism that infected the works of many of her contemporaries in Britain. Her native land was not England, however, but Ireland, and although she would write at least five novels and countless short stories with Irish characters, settings and themes, she would never be linked to Irish literature as she had been to that of Dorset and Lancashire, nor would she achieve the degree of prominence with the Irish reading public that she enjoyed in her adoptive homeland.

Yet her novels — at times replete with Catholic characters, always infused with Catholic values — held particular interest for several high profile commentators, particularly in her native country, who shared her faith. Throughout her writing life, she would receive significant advocacy from Catholic quarters, and counted two of the period's foremost analysts of Irish literature — Father Matthew Russell and Father Stephen J. Brown, both Jesuits — among the earliest and staunchest promoters of her work. In articles they were to write concerning Francis's texts in the first decades of the twentieth century, both Russell and Brown would lament the tendency among the Irish literary establishment to overlook her work in preference for that produced by the (predominantly Protestant) Revivalists. Whether or not, in doing so, they were suggesting that the overtly

²⁷³ Francis referred to the 'essential quality which marks out Mr. Hardy's work from that of all other writers, which is unattainable, unapproachable, by any of his host of followers'. See M. E. Francis, 'Flowers in Fiction', *The Academy*, no. 1717 (1 April 1905), p. 362.

Catholic themes in Francis's fiction were the reason for this neglect, the implication was unequivocally that the work of Irish Protestant writers was being favoured over the work of Irish Catholics.

It was in 1910 that Russell, the editor of *The Irish Monthly*, a literary magazine owned and run by the Society of Jesus, was moved to write an article objecting to the consistent and, in his view, lamentable exclusion of Catholic women from the Irish Literary Society's roster of notable authors. With little introduction or explanation, in 'The Literary Output of Three Irish-Women' Russell offered his readers an extensive list of works by Rosa Mulholland (Lady Gilbert), Katharine Tynan and M. E. Francis, the writers he felt most ably justified his indignation, before summing up his argument thus:

In none of these three instances have I furnished an exhaustive catalogue up to date. Is it not a splendid record of work? Yet these three Irishwomen were never named by the Rev. J. O. Hannah ("George Bermingham") in a lecture on Irish Novelists in the Irish Literary Society, 6 Stephen's Green, Dublin, and the omission provoked no protest from Mr. John Dillon, M.P., and the other speakers who thanked the Lecturer.²⁷⁴

The fact that Russell felt it incumbent upon himself to include the full address of the Irish Literary Society's Dublin headquarters and to mention two of its speakers by name suggests that he himself was attempting to provoke a protest.

Two years later, Brown was inspired to pen 'The Question of Irish Nationality' for a fellow Jesuit publication, *Studies*, just as the idea of a third Home Rule Bill for Ireland was being mooted in Parliament. Brown's 1912 article was unambiguously nationalist in its sympathies and pro-Home Rule in its mission, for in it he asserted not only that Ireland had always been its own nation, separate and distinct from England, but also that this tacit fact should be made legally and politically binding. A well known nationalist, Brown's views would hardly have come as a surprise to *Studies'* preponderantly Catholic and Irish

²⁷⁴ Father Matthew Russell, 'The Literary Output of Three Irish-Women', *The Irish Monthly*, vol. 38, no. 442 (April 1910), p. 202.

readership, but his purpose in writing it — in preaching to the converted, so to speak — is less than transparent until he turns to the topic of literature, at which point his argument becomes an exercise in promoting novels by Irish expatriates in England as the most effective forms of political propaganda: 'Anyone who has power to observe, and who has lived in both countries in more or less intimate relations with their peoples knows that a deep gulf still separates the two', Brown would assert, adding that the contrast between the two nations had 'been best drawn in the form of fiction' by 'writers [who] know both countries by long residence'.²⁷⁵ Proceeding to offer a brief list of those works which best exemplified his contentions, he included in his list books by two of the authors, Tynan and Francis, who had earned Russell's earlier advocacy. In doing so, he specifically set Catholic authors — who, he was careful to mention, shared 'the religion which three-fourths of the Irish people of to-day profess' — in opposition to the Revivalists. While undoubtedly Irish and nationalist in their sympathies, and despite the fact that they had produced 'much beautiful literature', the Revivalists had not, Brown would claim, 'mirrored in their writings the actual Ireland of to-day'.²⁷⁶

In many ways the Catholic themes in Francis's fiction and the sponsorship she earned from these particular analysts of literature are unsurprising, for her identity, even more so than resolutely Catholic contemporaries such as Mulholland and Tynan, had been dictated and defined by her religion. Born Mary Sweetman in Dublin in 1859, the second daughter and third child of Michael James and Margaret Powell Sweetman, hers was a large and prominent Irish Catholic family whose fortunes on both her paternal and maternal sides had long before been made in the brewing industry. Also notable was the family's latent strain of militant nationalists: her father's great uncle was John Sweetman, a

²⁷⁵ Stephen J. Brown, 'The Question of Irish Nationality', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, vol. 1, no. 4 (December 1912), p. 645.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 651-2.

radical campaigner for Catholic Emancipation in the 1790s who was accused of Defenderism and later exiled to the Netherlands for his activities with the United Irishmen; and her numerous cousins included another John Sweetman, of Drumbaragh, Meath, one of the founders and earliest presidents of Sinn Féin.²⁷⁷ It was through the earlier John Sweetman that Francis's grandfather, Michael Joseph Sweetman, inherited the Francis Street Brewery in Dublin, which was in time passed on to her father's eldest half-brother, Patrick Sweetman, who at the same time came into the ownership of the family's estate, Longtown House, near Clane in County Kildare.

Her father, the third son in his family and born of his father's second marriage, was not in the direct line of inheritance. Francis's mother Margaret, however, was the heiress of the Powell brewing family, and it would be her fortune that enabled Francis's parents to purchase a 500-acre estate — Lamberton Park, near Maryborough (Portlaoise) in current County Laois — shortly after their marriage in 1849. Lamberton was the lone Big House in what was at the time a predominantly poor Catholic district, and the Sweetman family would soon make it even larger by adding two wings and a marble staircase to the home. Francis was raised at Lamberton, with a bevy of servants, in what she presents in her 1918 memoir, *The Things of a Child*, as a form of happy seclusion. After her father died in 1864 at the age of forty-five, she and her three sisters — Gertrude, Elinor and Agnes — remained at home with their mother, where they were initially schooled by governesses.²⁷⁸ Her two brothers were raised largely apart from the girls: 'We were really six in number,' Francis explained, 'but one was a brother so much older that he was sent to school while

²⁷⁷ Francis's grandfather was Michael Joseph Sweetman of Longtown, Kildare. Michael Joseph and his first wife, Alicia Taaffe, had several children, one of whom was John Sweetman, later of Merrion Square, Dublin. John Sweetman of Merrion Square was the father of John Sweetman of Drumbaragh, one of the founders of Sinn Féin and the party's president in 1908. Francis's father, Michael James Sweetman, was the first son of Michael Joseph Sweetman's second marriage to Margaret Blackney, and thus a half uncle to John Sweetman of Drumbaragh.

²⁷⁸ Michael James Sweetman's age at the time of his death is disputed. My information is based on a contemporary source, the death announcement published in the *Freeman's Journal* (5 August 1864), p. 3.

we girls were still in socks and pinafores, and the other, also a brother, was the baby of the family, and had a nurse and a nursery all to himself.²⁷⁹ Until she was twelve years of age, therefore, Francis would spend by far the greatest portion of her time at home exclusively among females, having little contact with other Irish people of similar social and financial status to her.

Like many solitary children, she and her sisters were avid readers, and some of the most vivid passages of her memoir are devoted to her childhood love of books. She fondly recalls the quaint, old-fashioned novels of Maria Edgeworth, whose *Patronage* (1814) and its tales of 'Fair Rosamond' she often read as a child, but it was Charles Dickens' and Sir Walter Scott's works which delighted her most. She also indulged in less highbrow reading endeavours, finding the sensationalist novels that a nanny brought to the nursery too much of a temptation to be avoided, and admits to having been particularly drawn to 'the thrilling adventures of some of Miss [Mary Elizabeth] Braddon's heroines' (TC 110).

At the age of ten, Francis was sent with her sisters Gertrude and Elinor to board at a convent school near Dublin, where their health suffered under a more severe regimen than that to which they had been accustomed at Lamberton. Their physical condition stunned their mother when she made an impromptu visit to the school some weeks into their first term, and, Francis would write, she 'told us afterwards that we all seemed to her as if we had just come out of hospital' (TC 288). More shocking still to Francis's mother was her daughters' newly acquired mode of speaking. Having spent their first significant period of time away from home in the company of what were almost exclusively middle class Catholic girls, the 'flat brogue' with which they had come to speak at the convent turned out to be 'the last straw' for Mrs Sweetman, who immediately summoned her daughters home (TC 289). Francis and her sisters would never return to the school. Their mother,

²⁷⁹ M. E. Francis, *The Things of a Child* (London: Collins, 1918), p. 3. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as TC.

Francis recollected, confessed that she 'had never been so much disappointed in her life' (TC 291).

An Irish commentator, appraising *The Things of a Child* in 1918 for the *Saturday Review*, would note the distinctiveness of Francis's upbringing, first drawing attention to her mother's broadminded approach to the reading of novels and referring to her 'wise liberality in gratifying [Francis and her sisters' passion for reading] by free indulgence in Dickens and Scott and many an author of inferior merit [which] would have been, we think, a little rarer in Ireland even than here [in England]'.²⁸⁰ The same reviewer would also note the incongruity of their (albeit brief) convent schooling to their position in society, asserting that this was 'perhaps the most remarkable incident of their education, unique, we should imagine, for girls of their class and nationality. [...] As might have been foreseen, they developed a vigorous brogue, the Irish parent's standing terror, and were promptly removed'.²⁸¹ As this review indicates, the prevailing wisdom among upper class Catholics in Ireland was that native convent schools were substandard to those on the Continent. The value of an Irish convent education would remain a heated topic of debate for decades, and by 1883 the subject would be taken up publicly in the pages of the *Freeman's Journal*. In that year, the lacklustre performance of Irish Catholic girls in the same set of intermediate examinations at which Irish Catholic boys and English girls had excelled prompted the newspaper to speculate on the reasons for such a discrepancy. 'We must acknowledge that Catholic girls have not — taken all round — reached the standard of educational progress which we think Catholic parents have a right to expect,' the *Freeman's Journal* would suggest, and appended these concerns with the assertion that a

²⁸⁰ 'A Mid-Victorian Home in Ireland', *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature and Art*, vol. 125, no. 3268 (15 June 1918), p. 535. The anonymous reviewer states over the course of the article that he or she is an Irish Protestant. Both George Moore and George Bernard Shaw were contributors to the magazine at the time.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

'girl turned out from an Irish convent school of the highest class is modest and religious, but she is very often awkward and gauche'.²⁸² In part due to this editorial and the admixture of rebuttals and endorsements which promptly ensued, a rigorous change in the education offered at convent schools in Ireland was begun. By the time of the founding of the Free State, the convents had become far more acceptable means of education for upper class girls. In the 1860s and 1870s, however, they remained a haven for the daughters of the middle class. Francis's brush with convent education in Ireland was indeed an anomaly, and it is an indication of the degree to which the family were isolated from members of their own rank in society that her mother appears not to have realized that the unwritten rule of the Catholic landowning class was that their daughters were either to be educated solely at home or sent to Europe for their schooling.

The remainder of Francis's education was, as a result of her experiences in the convent, carried out on the European continent. Once relocated to Brussels, where the Catholic elite of Europe converged in great numbers, the Sweetman sisters' social circle widened markedly. 'After the solitude of our Irish home,' Francis would write in a reminiscence of her time in Belgium, 'it was delightful to us to make friends of our own age, [...] to rejoice in the brightness and novelty of it all'.²⁸³ There the family became closely acquainted with many prominent Catholics, among them the gifted pianist and composer Jan Ignacy Paderewski. Paderewski would later become Prime Minister of Poland, but at the time of his first acquaintance with the Sweetman family was the matinee idol of his day, and appears to have shared an intimate friendship, perhaps a romance, with

²⁸² Leading article, *Freeman's Journal* (17 September 1883), p. 1. See also the 'Our Girls' series of articles and letters which ran in the *Freeman's Journal* from 18 to 27 September 1883.

²⁸³ M. E. Francis, unpublished memoir, p. 21, private collection of Mark Blundell.

Francis's older sister, Gertrude.²⁸⁴ He would remain a close friend of the family for decades.²⁸⁵ Among Francis's own social circle was Sophie Chotek von Chotkova — 'the heroine of the tragedy of Sarajevo' — who would go on to marry the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and whose fate was to be assassinated at his side in 1914 at the end of the series of events which led to the First World War.²⁸⁶ There, too, Francis became friends with an English schoolgirl named Josephine Blundell, whose Catholic family owned the estate of Crosby Hall at Little Crosby, in what was then Lancashire. Josephine would turn out to be a lifelong friend, but it was her brother, Francis 'Tansy' Blundell, who proved the most important acquaintance Francis was to make during her sojourn in Brussels.

Though the Sweetman family had begun spending the majority of their time in Brussels in 1871, Francis and Tansy Blundell would not come to know each other well until 1876, when he made a visit to Lamberton Park during his summer holidays. Their relationship steadily grew more intimate over the course of the following autumn and winter, during which time Francis was also presented as a debutante before the Belgian Royal Family at the annual Court Ball. She and Blundell were formally engaged in 1877, but as the second son of a family whose financial means were already far beneath those of the Sweetmans, Blundell stood to inherit nothing and had only a small annuity from his father. He therefore could not afford to keep Francis in the manner to which she had been accustomed, and Francis's mother surmised that, as a result, the marriage could never be a success. Deeming Francis's feelings for Blundell to be little more than a schoolgirl crush,

²⁸⁴ A picture of Paderewski held in the private collection of Mark Blundell is signed 'Miss Gertrude Sweetman, respectueusement, affectueusement, J. I. Paderewski'. See also dedication to Paderewski, M. E. Francis, *The Duenna of a Genius* (London: Harper, 1898).

²⁸⁵ Paderewski sent flowers to Margaret Powell Sweetman's funeral in 1912. See 'Funerals', *The Times* (London), no. 40024 (12 October 1912), p. 9.

²⁸⁶ M. E. Francis, unpublished memoir, pp. 20-21.

her mother called off the engagement in the belief that her daughter's affections could and would be readily transferred.

In this, Mrs Sweetman seriously underestimated the nature and depth of the devotion between Francis and Blundell. By the time their engagement was broken, Francis had already found her most significant spiritual mentor in a Belgian Carmelite Prior, Père François. With his assistance, she was to attain a new degree of piety that lasted throughout her lifetime, and used this newfound religiosity as a means of enduring the two-year-long period she spent apart from Blundell. The enforced separation nonetheless took its toll on her physically — so dramatically so that her younger sister Elinor would eventually go down on her knees before their mother to plead that the relationship be allowed to continue. Mrs Sweetman was persuaded, and Francis and Blundell were married on 18 November 1879 at the parish church in Maryborough.

On that same day, Francis's work would first appear in print. Although in later years she would come to believe that her first published story was called 'Dame Grump and the Fairy Spectacles' and had run in *The Irish Monthly*, it was in fact 'Dame Grump and the Tea Party', published in the *Catholic Children's Magazine*, that marked her introduction to the reading public. Written when Francis was just fourteen, its delayed appearance was prefaced by a note that read: 'This little tale is guaranteed to us by our contributor, Father Matt, as being the unaided and unaltered work of a mere child. It is printed from the original manuscript'.²⁸⁷ 'Father Matt' was, of course, Matthew Russell, and only a month later he himself deigned to print a story of Francis's, 'Through the Bars', in *The Irish Monthly*.²⁸⁸ With this, her first mature work, her life as a professional writer began.

²⁸⁷ R. W. Taylor, 'M. E. Francis: An Appreciation', in *In a North Country Village* (Wigan: Northwest Catholic History Society, 2008), pp. xvi-xvii.

²⁸⁸ M. B. [Mary Blundell], 'Through the Bars', *The Irish Monthly*, vol. 7 (1879 Annual), pp. 639-649.

The most formative experiences in terms of that literary career had, however, come years before, back on the grounds of Lamberton Park. There, Francis's first novel, *True Joy*, had been written when she was eight years old. There, too, she and her sisters Elinor and Agnes had produced their own childish version of a literary magazine, *The Ivy Home Journal*, whose offices were in a nut tree in the grounds of the family's estate. They found a proponent for these endeavours in one of their governesses, Miss Ellen Jennings, who was a friend to both the novelist Rosa Mulholland and Father Matthew Russell, and it was through Miss Jennings that Francis's work first came to the attention of the editor of *The Irish Monthly*.

Francis's family would eventually become a clan of authors. Elinor would go on to publish three well-received volumes of poetry; Agnes, under her married surname, would enjoy a long career as a novelist and memoirist who wrote dozens of books, almost all in collaboration with her husband, Egerton Castle; and Francis's daughters Margaret and Agnes Blundell would both become novelists in their own right.²⁸⁹ Her son Francis Nicholas Blundell's writing career was confined to books on agricultural policy, of which he produced at least three, his time having been more notably spent as an officer in World War I and as a Conservative Minister of Parliament for Ormskirk (1922 to 1929). In an undertaking reminiscent of his ancestor John Sweetman, Francis's son was also the sponsor of the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1926, 'which abolished almost all the obsolete laws affecting Catholics' in the United Kingdom.²⁹⁰ It was Francis herself, however, who was the family's greatest literary and public success. Although her publishing career had

²⁸⁹ The British Library holds at least eighty volumes of Agnes and Egerton Castle's work, of which there are at least forty unique titles; holdings at the New York Public Library and the US Library of Congress are similar.

²⁹⁰ Brian Whitlock Blundell, 'Blundell, Francis Nicholas Joseph (1880–1936)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/65565>, accessed 18 Jan 2011].

something of a halting start, from 1886 — the year in which she issued her first full-length work, a devotional volume called *The Little Rosary of the Sacred Heart* — it continued apace. By the time of her death in 1930, she had authored countless short stories and nearly sixty volumes of prose.²⁹¹

In the years between the publication of her earliest stories and the appearance of her first full-length work, she was preoccupied by domestic duties. She and her husband returned to England to live in the environs of his childhood home at Little Crosby, a town which had been populated wholly and exclusively by Catholics since the Reformation. The Blundells themselves were recusants who had fought long and hard to retain both their religion and their property. Thus becoming, upon her marriage, a member of one of the few landed Catholic families remaining in England, Francis again found herself occupying an isolated space, and was once more living in the midst of a community populated largely by people who shared her religion but not her social standing. Her seclusion was increased by a series of pregnancies, confinements and spells of nursing her husband through illness. A son was born in the autumn of 1880, followed by two daughters in 1882 and 1884. Shortly after their second child was born, Blundell became ill with what was diagnosed as diphtheria.²⁹² Unbeknownst to anyone, the illness permanently damaged his heart.

On the evening of 27 April 1884, while on a visit with Francis to her relatives in Longtown, Kildare, Blundell walked alone to a Benediction service and failed to return. A search party was quickly dispatched but could not locate him. Francis would later learn that two boys had seen him vault a wall and collapse, but the locals were unable to identify him and there was a resultant delay in the notification of his family. Francis endured a sleepless night only to be told early the next morning that her husband was dead. She was

²⁹¹ I have identified sixty volumes of short stories and/or novels written by Francis. Of these, two were written in collaboration with her daughter Margaret Blundell and two with her daughter Agnes Blundell.

²⁹² See R. W. Taylor, 'M. E. Francis: An Appreciation', p. xiii.

heavily pregnant with their third child at the time; they had been married less than five years. She never remarried and wore mourning for the remaining forty-six years of her life.

Subsequently finding herself with three young children to support and little or no income, financial need was to become the prime motivating factor in her decision to pursue her career as an author more vigorously from the late 1880s. She and her children took up residence with her father-in-law and the rest of the Blundell family at Crosby Hall, yet she craved financial independence, and it was through her writing and with Father Russell's assistance that she was eventually able to achieve it. In late 1888, he wrote to tell her that a serial was required for *The Irish Monthly* and asked if she might be willing to take on the task. Though she had only a few weeks to produce her first installment, she agreed to Russell's proposal.

In what now reads as an affirmation of the sentiments that Virginia Woolf was to express decades later, Francis endured a series of hardships in the months that followed when she lacked both 'money and a room of her own'.²⁹³ Crosby Hall was a vast stately home, yet despite its abundance of space she was forced to write the first segments of her novel in a room crowded with family members and pets. Due to economies necessitated by the profligacy of William Blundell, her brother-in-law and the heir to the estate, the home was largely unheated, causing the family to congregate in the few rooms in which fires were permitted. The incessant noise and frequent interruptions meant that her progress was at first slow and laboured. It was also little valued by the Blundell clan, whose own energies were most often expended in charitable and religious works. Francis would note the difficulties inherent in undertaking her task amidst both the noise engendered by, and the guilt inspired by, the constant whirring of a sewing machine

²⁹³ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own/Three Guineas* (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 3.

employed in the making of garments for the parish poor.²⁹⁴ Her letters also make apparent that writing was a pursuit for which she felt she had little support or outward justification:

I was young enough at that time to desire intensely to be taken seriously: Father Russell's cheque [a £15 advance for *Molly's Fortunes*] seemed to indicate that my "scribblings" were really worth something, that I was doing actual *work*. [But] in spite of the hints which I dropped with a solemn face about the important nature of my new undertaking, and the inconvenience and confusion which must ensue if I did not deliver my copy in time, nobody would take me very seriously after all.²⁹⁵

There were other, more personal factors which tended to deter her from writing, as well. She admitted to Russell that 'the real true reason I do not like writing under my own name is that my dear husband did not fancy it' and turned to her editor for guidance in dealing with the spiritually-motivated guilt she felt concerning her literary pursuits:

What is a constant drawback to my pleasure is the feeling that I am *too* much taken up with my work. [...] I constantly remember that *no man can serve God & Mammon*, perhaps *this* is Mammon? What I want you to tell me is — and I know you will not mind some time sending me just a line one way or the other — might I make the effort to keep my *literary aspirations* for certain set times? [...] if God asks it of me I might make the sacrifice, and sometimes I feel as if He did.²⁹⁶

Out of this combination of necessity and shame, she soon began composing the monthly chapters of *Molly's Fortunes* in an isolated room in Crosby Hall which was employed as a store for mattresses. Nestled in among the bedding, she was able to make better progress, though her hands went numb with cold and were soon covered in chilblains. Having a private space in which to write, however inadequate it may have been, meant that she was able to submit each of her installments to Russell on time. In turn, his support, both professional and personal in nature, was imperative to her early success.

²⁹⁴ M. E. Francis, 'Foreword', *Molly's Fortunes* (London: Sands, 1913), p. xii.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. x-xi.

²⁹⁶ Letters from M. E. Francis to Father Matthew Russell (16 November 1887 and 12 July n.y.), Papers of Father Matthew Russell, Jesuit Archive (Dublin), Folder J27/19. Collection hereafter cited as 'Russell Papers'.

Molly's Fortunes ran in *The Irish Monthly* from February of 1889 to January of 1890. Almost certainly inspired in part by the tale of her ancestor, the United Irishman John Sweetman, its plot revolves around Molly Mackenzie, a young working class Irish woman who is a lady by nature if not by position, and the only traceable descendant of Hugh O'Neill, a younger member of a landed family disowned for his participation in the 1798 Rebellion. Upon discovering her progeniture, Molly is thrown together with the elderly owner of Castle O'Neill and finds her to be a politically-minded, reforming landlord. Miss O'Neill is also, and far more disturbingly for Molly, irremediably eccentric in her opinions, which Francis often deploys for comic effect.²⁹⁷

So radical did she believe those opinions to be that she wrote to Russell on two occasions during the composition of the novel to divorce herself from them. 'I hope you will not object to Miss O'Neill's politics', she explained in January of 1889 as the novel was beginning its run, 'I am only the dispassionate chronicler, & am by no means responsible for them'.²⁹⁸ Two months later she was again expressing the hope that 'my old lady's political views have not given offense in any quarter' and admitting to being 'alarmed' that her character's opinions had been mistaken by some commentators for her own.²⁹⁹ Francis's dismay is in itself curious, for Miss O'Neill's arguments are at times the most lucidly and persuasively defended in the text. She shows the character asserting, for instance, that the current strain of Irish nationalism has been tainted by its own democratic

²⁹⁷ Evidence in Francis's memoir suggests that her characterization of Miss O'Neill is closely based on a Sweetman cousin who lived at Longtown House — a woman who was almost identically altruistic and eccentric, and whose behaviour Francis describes with evident approval. She was, Francis writes, 'a Lady Bountiful who ruled, firmly, but most kindly, over a host of dependants. She helped indeed, all who were in need, she gave abundantly and generously in cases where her proteges were absolutely destitute, but she did not pauperise'. Francis's cousin is said to have managed the tenantry on the Longtown estate so closely that she investigated their purchases and vetoed those she deemed to be extravagant. She also set up a shop in her sitting room where goods which would normally have been provided free of charge were sold for a nominal fee 'with the design of encouraging thrift and carefulness'. M. E. Francis, unpublished memoir, p. 27.

²⁹⁸ Letter from M. E. Francis to Father Matthew Russell (30 January 1889), Russell Papers, J27/19.

²⁹⁹ Letter from M. E. Francis to Father Matthew Russell (8 March 1889), Russell Papers, J27/19.

principles — 'the scum is too likely to come to the surface — in former days the cream used to rise to the top' — and not only supports these sentiments with a litany of historical evidence, but allows them to remain among the few of Miss O'Neill's opinions which are unchallenged in the narrative.³⁰⁰

If Francis subsequently manages to foster uncertainty as to whether her protagonist condones or condemns such ideas by demonstrating Molly to recognize an 'under current of truth' in some of Miss O'Neill's theories while finding others 'palpably untenable', she also fails to elucidate precisely which theories she deems accurate, which flawed (*MF* 35). In doing so, she constructs a literary manoeuvre of avoidance; for, while the reader may be able to surmise that when some of Miss O'Neill's harshest criticisms are leveled at Ireland's 'mushroom aristocracy' who have 'earned their fortunes from the beer-vat or the whiskey-still', Francis's own position as a member of the Sweetman brewing family renders these sentiments antagonistic to the author's own, elsewhere it is not as straightforward a task to extract her own biases from the narratological evidence (*MF* 32). Furthermore, for her larger audience of readers, Francis was known only by the pseudonym which rendered her family history opaque, and certain of her allegiances with it.

At other points in the novel, and in contravention of Miss O'Neill's anti-nationalist sentiments, Francis reflects the Irish *zeitgeist* by portraying and appearing to condone a form of Irish exclusivism that borders on Irish-Irelandism. When Miss O'Neill remarks to Molly that the branch of the family 'to which *you* belong' has managed to remain more cohesive than the elder line of O'Neills and accuses Molly's ancestors of conforming, for example, Molly's 'indignant' refutation gives the impression of having been measured to reassure the *Monthly's* predominantly Irish Catholic readership of her characters', and by extension her own, religious allegiances (*MF* 8-9). The near complete absence of

³⁰⁰ M. E. Francis, *Molly's Fortunes* (London: Sands, 1913), p. 31. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *MF*.

Protestant and English characters from the novel, meanwhile, and the fact that the resolution of Irish problems by English sources is never mooted in the text, reinforce a notion of Irish self-reliance. England and the English are, in fact, mentioned only as a means of revealing prejudices against them. When, for instance, Miss O'Neill learns that one of her former tenants is now working in Britain, she derides his mother for allowing him to leave Ireland in terms that defy conventional expectations by reversing the English civility/Irish savagery diametric stereotype. 'He will be picking up all sorts of strange customs, or marrying some low English girl,' Miss O'Neill asserts, 'and, mark my words, if he does that, you may say good-bye to him. I'll have no English settlers in *my* village' (*MF* 42). When at a later stage in the story's development an Irish-American man turns up to claim Castle O'Neill, Molly, characterized throughout the novel as its voice of reason, promptly rejects his offers of both marriage and financial assistance, and this and the American's subsequent ruinous management of the estate reasserts a skepticism, evident until the novel's final pages, concerning the introduction of outside influences to Ireland. Considering that more conservative contemporary commentators often promoted English and American sources as means of achieving pecuniary and political stability for Ireland, the fact that Francis ignores the former and effectively disparages the latter suggests that her text is advocating an independent, autonomous Ireland.

Francis's first novel is typical of her Irish works in portraying Irish problems without envisioning their solutions. Yet of all her Irish novels, *Molly's Fortunes* comes closest to suggesting that Ireland's woes are remediable, and that at least part of the cure may lie within its own borders. The character of Molly herself — working class by birth and aristocratic by nature — acts as a model for a unified Ireland, a space in which traditional social distinctions can be transcended. Occupying a position in which she often feels she has 'fall[en] between two stools', Molly is the instrument by which Francis

exposes the eccentricities of both the class from which she is descended and the class in which she was raised, yet she remains distinct from, and superior to, members of both (*MF* 58). In line with this, after the American 'heir' to Castle O'Neill is discovered to be illegitimate, and entirely by her own efforts, Molly is able to return the estate to its former glory.

Considering what has gone before, Francis's decision to end the novel by marrying Molly to a penniless French nobleman descended from the elder line of the O'Neill family appears to backtrack on an early revisionary promise. It is as though the author herself could not sustain her vision of a classless Irishwoman running a large domain legitimately without the introduction of masculine, aristocratic and foreign support. Molly's management of the property is, in the end, only marginally more egalitarian than that of her predecessor, in whose image Molly is shown to willingly cast herself. If Castle O'Neill's hierarchy is no less feudalistic under the new order than it was under the old, however, the fact that its governance has been rendered stable by the union of aristocratic authority and democratic justice, as they are personified by the Baron de Sauvigny and Molly, strikes a note of subversion. In the novel's final pages, furthermore, Francis is careful to emphasize that it is Molly's contribution which is most imperative to the estate's success.

Following the run of *Molly's Fortunes* in *The Irish Monthly*, Francis immediately returned to Irish themes for her novelistic inspiration, and her correspondence written between 1890 and 1892 indicates that she began writing two additional Irish novels — *The Story of Dan* (1894) and *Miss Erin* (1898) — during that period. Her intent from the first appears to have been to write widely on Irish topics, a tendency further evidenced by her

early involvement with the Irish Literary Society in London.³⁰¹ Yet to Russell she would complain that publishers consistently objected 'to the Irish & Catholic elements in the books', and speculated in March of 1893 'that just at this moment anything dealing with Ireland is rather unpopular'.³⁰² Her inference is that the second Home Rule Bill — which had only a month before been introduced in Parliament by Gladstone — was to blame for the reluctance by publishers to consider Irish-themed works.

While her Irish stories languished, Francis mined the rich vein of inspiration around her at Crosby Hall and in the environs of Little Crosby — a tiny village where, the locals averred, 'there [was] not a Protestant, a public house, or a policeman'.³⁰³ 'At present I am studying Lancashire dialect & character which I find more satisfactory [than their Irish equivalents] in every way,' she wrote to Russell in 1892. 'There is no bias for or against either, & one's literary wares have a chance of being judged on their own merits'.³⁰⁴ Yet *Whither?* (1892), the first of her full-length creations to be set in the Lancashire landscape she had come to know and love, would nonetheless initially be met with the same sort of skepticism that had greeted her Irish productions. Rejected by the publishers Griffith and Farran because they believed her fictional setting to be 'untrue to nature', Francis urged a meeting and, once in their offices, was able to confess that her imaginary village, populated entirely by Roman Catholics and untouched by the Reformation, was in fact a very thinly concealed portrait of her adoptive hometown. Afterwards, she wrote excitedly to Russell to say that this meeting had resulted in the publishers' having agreed to

³⁰¹ William Patrick Ryan would later refer to her as one of the Literary Society's 'able Lady members who are apart from its actual sphere of work'. William Patrick Ryan, *The Irish Literary Revival* (New York: Lemma, 1970 [1894]), p. 117.

³⁰² Letter from M. E. Francis to Father Matthew Russell (13 March 1893), Russell Papers, J27/19.

³⁰³ G. M. S. [Gertrude Sweetman], 'M. E. Francis', *The Irish Monthly*, vol. 8, no. 683 (May 1930), p. 235.

³⁰⁴ Letter from Francis to Father Matthew Russell (26 July 1892), Russell Papers, J27/19.

reconsider the novel: 'the Catholicity, which I thought would be so strongly objected to,' Francis confided, 'had become the chief attraction of the book'.³⁰⁵

Whither? was issued shortly thereafter and was widely and well reviewed. Even William Patrick Ryan referred to it, in his otherwise dismissive account of Francis's contribution to the early Literary Renaissance, as a novel which had 'made a stir of no transient kind'.³⁰⁶ It was closely followed by another and even more recognizable portrait of Little Crosby and its inhabitants, *In a North Country Village* (1893), destined to become her most enduringly popular work. Like Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (1851) before it, this was a collection of tales of rural community life told with unmistakable affection and subtle humour, for which Francis had a true gift, and only occasionally touched by pathos. The reviews were overwhelmingly positive and Thomas Hardy — who had published his own most recent novel, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), with the same publishing house that brought out *In a North Country Village* — was among its professed admirers.³⁰⁷

The earliest of Francis's Lancashire-set stories go far in revealing the discrepancies that would come to mark her fiction, a disparity in narrative tone and fictional preoccupation which was to be firmly demarcated along ethnic and national lines. Her Irish stories are, in fact, often unique among her body of work for their depictions of suffering and the extent of their politicization, and her difficulty in finding a market for them was almost certainly exacerbated as much by what was intrinsic to them as by extrinsic political upheavals. If Francis was occasionally able to make witty and cheerful forays into the Irish past in her memoir *The Things of a Child* (1918) and in some of the

³⁰⁵ Letter from M. E. Francis to Father Matthew Russell (29 April 1892), Russell Papers, J27/19.

³⁰⁶ William Patrick Ryan, *The Irish Literary Revival*, p. 117.

³⁰⁷ In a letter to Father Matthew Russell (24 March 1893), Francis relates that she has been told by her publishers, Macmillan, that 'Mr Thomas Hardy (whose last work is published by them) is "delighted with the North Country Village"'. Russell Papers, J27/19.

short fiction she produced about Ireland, when composing her Irish novels she invariably turned to darker themes. *Molly's Fortunes* is easily the least bleak of these productions, yet in its pages she deals with issues of poverty, profligacy, illness and prejudice. *The Story of Dan* (1894) is a much more pessimistic creation altogether and, despite her longstanding friendship with Russell, it was promptly rejected when she sent the manuscript to *The Irish Monthly*.

There is no question that Russell's advocacy was the primary factor in her literary success to that point in her career. It was also, however, double-edged. To his correspondents and *The Irish Monthly's* contributors, he made no secret of the fact that he believed Irish novelists, and Irish Catholic novelists in particular, should contribute only positive pictures of Ireland to the national literature and, more importantly, to their English neighbours. The majority of Irish writers, Russell would admit, therefore did not meet with his approval: 'With all their love for Ireland, they do not seem to us to give to their readers a sufficiently bright and amiable idea of our dear country, and our dear people. They exaggerate, and, therefore, deform. As a matter of fact, we are very like other people, only nicer'.³⁰⁸ Russell objected to Francis's portrait of rural Ireland and the peasantry in *The Story of Dan*, and was disappointed by the novel's overwhelming bleakness. The author would in turn protest that, bar one, every character in the novel was based closely on real-life models from the Sweetman family's estate, and contended that the protagonist himself was 'in real life married to a woman years older than himself whom he adores, and little knows the tragedy he is at present marching — on paper'.³⁰⁹ Yet Russell remained unconvinced, and debated with Francis over what he perceived to be her distorted depictions of her countrymen, some of which he found blatantly stereotypical.

³⁰⁸ Father Matthew Russell, 'Notes on New Books', *The Irish Monthly*, vol. 18, no. 209 (November 1890), p. 614.

³⁰⁹ Letter from Francis to Father Matthew Russell (14 August 1893), Russell Papers, J27/19.

One of his severest criticisms was leveled at her representation of the Irish brogue, which he compared to that in Emily Lawless's notorious *Hurrish* (1886). *Hurrish* had for years been vilified in Ireland for what many viewed as its unfavorable and inaccurate depictions of the peasantry, and Russell's accusation stung Francis deeply.³¹⁰ 'I *am* a little horrified at being considered an imitator of *Hurrish*', she would respond to his accusations, asserting in the process that Lawless's novel was her 'pet abomination!'³¹¹

Although she was said to be 'one of those rare beings who never had an enemy and never lost a friend', Francis nonetheless could be seen to fight her corner when pressed, and did so repeatedly with Russell.³¹² So strongly did she feel that her portrayals of Ireland and the Irish were defensible, and more particularly that the artistry and accuracy of her novels should not be sacrificed to sociological principles, that she would firmly voice her exceptions to his opinions concerning Irish literature: 'I do not at all agree with you in your theory that the *best* only should be put forward', she would argue in an 1893 letter to Russell. 'I — in all humility — cannot see any advantage in a one-sided view, either of an individual, or a race. You must have shade as well as light in a picture, and literature will not be artistic without either'.³¹³ While Francis at times used her texts as Russell wished her to do — as a means of portraying Ireland for an edifying, reformatory purpose — she was never to oversimplify the complexities of Irish history, Irish politics or the Irish people, even in her earliest literary efforts. Rather than alter her creation to comply with Russell's demands, therefore, she began to market *Dan* elsewhere, eventually securing its

³¹⁰ *The Nation* (20 February 1886), n.p. Clipping held in Emily Lawless Papers, Marsh's Library, Dublin, vol. Z2.1.15, no. 27.

³¹¹ Letter from Francis to Father Matthew Russell (25 October 1893), Russell Papers, J27/19.

³¹² Clipping 'A Gifted Authoress, Mrs. Francis Blundell (M. E. Francis): A Memory and an Appreciation', *Western Gazette*, Yeovil (21 March 1930), n. p., private Collection of Mark Blundell.

³¹³ Letter from Francis to Father Matthew Russell (7 November 1893), Russell Papers, J27/19.

publication with Osgood McIlvaine, a London house. From that point forward, all her full-length works, Irish or otherwise, would be issued first in England.

She would admit to Russell afterwards that his criticism of her novel had marked something of a parting of the literary ways between them: 'I tell you the truth,' she wrote in 1894, 'I had privately resolved never to send you anything Irish again after your reception of "Dan"'. Francis had realized that, in her friend and editor's eyes, "'Paddy" apparently in any shape can do no wrong'.³¹⁴ Although she would renege on her own promise not to send Irish stories to Russell, she continued to express her chagrin when he censored their content or excised characters he deemed disagreeable, at various points arguing that he would not have objected to her characters as portrayed had they 'been English or Scotch'.³¹⁵ These exchanges evidence the degree to which Russell — who counted many of the period's prominent Irish authors among his protégés and was one of the first editors to publish works by Oscar Wilde, W. B. Yeats, Rosa Mulholland, Katharine Tynan and Douglas Hyde — was using his authority to manage the image of Ireland presented to the reading public.

If Russell's attitudes to Francis's novel can be seen to prefigure those that J. M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) would later so famously instigate, *The Story of Dan*, plotted around a murder which ultimately pits the Irish peasantry against a devious and authoritarian 'law', also anticipates many of the themes in Synge's play. Like Synge's Pegeen Mike, Francis's central female character, Esther Daly, is a woman of changeable affections and dubious morality who discards Dan, her fiancé, for a less trustworthy man only recently arrived in their rural Irish village. When the peasant inhabitants of the community later become convinced that Dan is guilty of a murder he did

³¹⁴Letter from Francis to Father Matthew Russell (4 July 1894), Russell Papers, J27/19.

³¹⁵Ibid.

not commit, Francis shows that the town's collective instinct is, much as in *Playboy*, to shelter him rather than cooperate with the investigating authorities. Dan's own 'dread of the law' reverberates through the community as a whole, the members of which are 'likely to share that clannish feeling which made them hang so closely together, and shrink with so much horror from the very notion of turning "informer"'.³¹⁶ Throughout, the overarching notion of 'the law' looms as a menacing outsider to the community; a malevolent and foreign force.

There, however, the similarities between Francis's and Synge's texts end, as Francis chooses to concentrate on themes of Irish ingenuousness rather than subterfuge. Dan's innocence of the crime he has been accused of committing, his lack of worldly knowledge, and his willingness to trust those closest to him are figured as quintessentially Irish traits, and it is this 'unsophisticated, unreasoning Irish point of view' which in fact acts to exacerbate his appearance of guilt (*SD* 281-2). Esther — with her grandiose delusions, selfish ambitions and failure to recognize that Dan is not only blameless of murdering her suitor Cassidy, but is concealing her brother's guilt to protect her — is the calculating antithesis to Francis's protagonist. The only Irish member of the district to break ranks and testify willingly against him at his trial, Esther is consistently figured as an anomaly and an aberration in the local Irish community. Her testimony, replete with exaggerations and untruths, is acceptable and even laudable in the eyes of the authorities, but in Francis's evocation becomes the novel's most heinous type of crime — one committed against a local, and implicitly Catholic, version of morality.

The novel ends with a guilty verdict and Dan's death, the tragedy of this injustice heightened by Esther's betrayal and the fact that her actions remain unrecognized and unpunished at the close of the novel. The idea that earthly, human judgments are

³¹⁶ M. E. Francis, *The Story of Dan* (Boston and New York: Houghton and Mifflin, 1894), pp. 246 and 255. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *SD*.

fundamentally flawed is central to Francis's narrative vision, and this message is reiterated in the novel's closing lines, spoken by the Catholic priest Father Michael Duffy, which confirm the infallibility of divine justice. At the end of her tale, as the innocent are punished and the guilty remain free, Francis reaffirms that 'the law' is the true villain in the story. As she chooses to evoke it, it is also an anti-Irish, autocratic and tacitly English menace.

The Story of Dan was well reviewed by the press, but its tragic elements meant that it was destined to remain less successful with the reading public than its more lighthearted predecessors: *The Saturday Review* noted, for instance, that, while it was written with the 'skill and sympathy which we expect to find, and do find, in Mrs. Francis's writing', it was also 'painful reading, and whoever shall read it after this warning his, or her, tears be of their own shedding'.³¹⁷ She would return, as a result, to her more popular English settings, but a year after *Dan* appeared, her career was dealt a different and more serious form of setback when her eyesight deteriorated to the point that reading and writing became impossible. She was forced thereafter to do all her work by dictation. Yet 1895 would also be the year in which she received what was to be the most significant validation of her career when her novel *A Daughter of the Soil* was selected as the first full-length work of fiction ever to be serialized in *The Times* (London). This accolade appears to have offered her both a justification and an instigation to make novel-writing a more serious pursuit.³¹⁸ From that point forward, and despite ongoing health and vision problems, Francis would average two volumes per year up to and including the year of her death. *A Daughter of the Soil*, in its turn, was to have a reciprocally beneficial effect for the newspaper. *The Times'*

³¹⁷ 'Review. *The Story of Dan*. By M. E. Francis.' *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, vol. 78, no. 2038 (17 November 1894), p. 543.

³¹⁸ From 1895, Francis's output increased. Although she had published only seven works between 1886 and 1895, in the remaining years of her career, 1896-1930, she would publish 53 full-length volumes.

editor, Charles Frederic Moberley Bell, noted to Francis 'that the weekly edition touched its highest circulation 35000 odd on the 15th Feb [1895]. When you began writing [the first installment of *A Daughter of the Soil*] it was under 20,000'.³¹⁹

Popular as it seems to have been, Francis's novel was not, however, without its detractors, and Moberley Bell would also forward to her the correspondence he received in response to *A Daughter of the Soil* in which his readers expressed their indignation at 'the Times being used for the promulgation of Popery'.³²⁰ Ludicrous as these charges appeared to Francis at the time, it is not difficult to locate the passages on which those complainants might have founded their claims. Many of the conflicts in the novel are instigated by a clash of values between those embodied by its heroine — Ruth Sefton, a Lancashire farmer's daughter and Roman Catholic who has been refined by her education at a convent school — and the man she loves, Anthony Clifton, the profligate and atheistic heir to the local estate. Throughout the novel, it is Ruth's fondest wish that Clifton convert to Catholicism. Figured specifically as a 'Judas' whose transgressions also include bigamy, Clifton achieves a metaphorical conversion at the novel's close, after an epiphany of self-loathing in which 'he could even believe that there *was* a God, and that he had betrayed Him'.³²¹ Repenting on Ruth's doorstep, he is promptly forgiven and allowed to re-enter both her house and their marriage, which can only at this point be made legitimate.

In many respects the most religious in tone of all her novels, *A Daughter of the Soil* is not, however, an Irish story. Francis would in fact wait four years before writing a follow-up to *Dan* with a novel about women and revolution in Ireland, *Miss Erin*. Of her output between 1894 and 1898, the most notable of her Irish-themed literary endeavours

³¹⁹ Letter from C. F. Moberley Bell to M. E. Francis (27 March 1901), private collection of Mark Blundell.

³²⁰ Letter from M. E. Francis to Father Matthew Russell (3 February 1895), Russell Papers, J27/19.

³²¹ M. E. Francis, *A Daughter of the Soil* (London and New York: Harper, 1900), p. 262.

were those tales that made up half her collection *Frieze and Fustian* (1896). This volume, which contrasted Irish ('Frieze') and English ('Fustian') subjects, repeated Francis's novelistic tendencies to dwell on darker themes when Ireland was her setting, here starkly in evidence due to the comparative project the volume was written to achieve. *Miss Erin*, concerned as it was with notions of ambition and compromise, was differently pitched to *Frieze and Fustian*, yet was similarly constructed in a manner that allowed her readers to compare and contrast its portrayals of English and Irish attitudes and opinions.

When she was composing *Miss Erin*, Francis was excited by the 'vista of infinite interests' her vision of a revolutionary Irishwoman afforded. 'I have begun an Irish story "Miss Erin" which I have had in my thoughts a long time,' she wrote to Russell in 1897. 'It deals in a dispassionate & impartial way with life, manners & policies in Ireland & England as may strike an unbiased observer'.³²² She spent months researching her topic and used the text of the eight-day speech Russell's brother, Sir Charles Russell, had made on behalf of the defence at the close of the Parnell Commission hearings in 1888-1889 as one of her main templates for the nationalist opinions of her heroine, Erin Fitzgerald.³²³

Like Molly Mackenzie and Ruth Sefton before her, Erin is born into one class yet shaped by another, allowing her to exist in a position between traditional social and political distinctions. In *Miss Erin*, however, Francis for the first time chose to portray a character descended from the landowning class being raised, and her opinions formed, by the Irish peasantry. Legally, Erin may be the ward of her anti-reformist, landowning uncle, but she is more akin to the father she never knew — an 1848 rebel who died in exile from the homeland he loved — and the Nolans, her adoptive family, whose religious and

³²² Letter from M. E. Francis to Father Matthew Russell (5 September 1897), Russell Papers, J27/19.

³²³ Ibid. In the same letter, Francis writes, 'it behooves "Miss Erin's" chronicler to have as much knowledge as she can of what she is writing about & to assimilate as many Irish views & opinions of all degrees as she can get hold of. Therefore dear Fr Russell if you have a copy of Sir Charles Russell's famous speech do you mind letting me read it [...] I know it puts the case for Irish Nationalism in a nutshell'.

ideological values she assimilates during her early upbringing and then distils when the family is evicted by her uncle for non-payment of rent. To all intents and purposes orphaned by this eviction and the Nolans' subsequent emigration to America, Erin turns disadvantage to advantage. From the point of the Nolans' departure, she deftly manages her own educational development, manipulating her uncle's familial pride into tutoring in the untraditional (for females) subjects of Greek and Latin, while at the same time using her closest confidante and advocate, the Catholic priest Father Lalor, as a means to learn 'the past history of her country; of "plantations" and "penal laws," and the sufferings of Irish Catholics in those bygone terrible times' (ME 69-70). She then embarks on a self-proclaimed mission to become the 'Irish Joan of Arc' (ME 88).

Erin's undertakings in Ireland suggests that she is in no small measure based on the real-life model of Maud Gonne, who a decade before the publication of Francis's novel had commenced a project — inspired, she was to claim, by her lover Lucien Millevoye — to 'free Ireland as Joan of Arc freed France'.³²⁴ Her career as an Irish revolutionary had become progressively more prominent over the course of the 1890s, and it was in 1897, the year Francis began writing *Miss Erin*, that Gonne first achieved widespread notoriety for organizing protests and making speeches at Westminster against the celebrations of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in Ireland.³²⁵ Nonetheless, the fictional Erin is no straightforward rendition of Gonne. Rather, she is a portrait of a similarly radicalized Irishwoman given additional impetus and sympathy by a personal history that lends her revolutionary fervour a reason Gonne herself lacked. Unlike the resolutely Irish and well-

³²⁴ Maud Gonne MacBride, *A Servant of the Queen: Her Own Story* (Dublin: Golden Eagle, 1938), p. 61.

³²⁵ J. J. Tighe, in an article for *The Irish Times*, reported that both Gonne and John Daly spoke at Westminster concerning the protest over the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations. J. J. Tighe, 'God Save the Queen', *The Irish Times* (29 June 1897), p. 6. On the day of the festivities, Gonne rode through Dublin 'in a horse-drawn carriage, dressed in widow's weeds, mourning the liberty of Ireland'. 'London Letter', *The Irish Times* (7 April 1962), p. 7.

versed Erin, Gonne had spent only two years of her life in Ireland and had little understanding of either the country's people or its politics when she first announced her mission to become the figurehead of its political revolution. She would subsequently invent an Irish heritage to lend her ambitions credibility. Likewise, where Gonne's real-life politicization was fired by love and, perhaps, a desire to impress the object of her affections, Erin's love affair with an English man acts as a hindrance to her revolutionary ambitions, and her ambitions in turn as impediments to that love affair.

Viewed in this context, it is perhaps Francis's most damning indictment of Ireland's foremost female revolutionary that her heroine, given more valid reasons for her radicalism than Gonne, is ultimately forced to confront the error of her ways. Yet it is equally imperative to recognize that the novel never acts as an outright denunciation of Irish radicalism itself. Francis's daughter, Margaret, would note in a memoir that her mother 'was deeply sensible of the hardships and wrongs suffered by the peasant tenants of absentee landlords', and her son, Francis Nicholas, would assert that she 'hated the evictions'.³²⁶ In keeping with these sentiments, when in the novel Erin asks her love interest, the anti-Home Rule politician Mark Wimbourne, what he intends to do about the 'Irish Question', his blunt and condescending response reads as an indictment of his principles: 'I should serve out Maxim guns gratis to both sides of the National party, and let the Parnellites and Anti-Parnellites mow each other down at their leisure. In course of time the Unionists would have it all to themselves, and we should have a nice, loyal, peacable little Ireland' (*ME* 154). With such passages, the text points directly to Francis's sympathies with the anti-eviction cause, and her consistent and severe condemnation of English indifference, iterated first in *Molly's Fortunes* and here repeated in the

³²⁶ Margaret Blundell, unpublished biography of M. E. Francis, p. 25, and Letter from Francis Nicholas Blundell to Margaret Blundell (28 June 1931), both held in the private collection of Mark Blundell.

exaggeratedly arrogant actions of Erin's uncle and opinions of Wimbourne, lends weight to the idea that her novel is a pro-Ireland treatise, if not a pro-Revolution one.

Frequent references to Erin's affection for 'The Antigone' meanwhile serve a number of purposes, acting first as an instigation to Erin and lending 'a depth and a precedence to [her] actions and choices' for the reader.³²⁷ Classical heroine and modern revolutionary become confused when, unable to learn her name, Wimbourne refers to Erin first as 'Antigone', and then as 'Dark Rosaleen' (*ME* 130). Like Antigone, Erin perceives injustices in her homeland and determines, despite her youth and discouragement from all sides, to confront them violently and passionately. Though she ultimately fails in her project, she remains, as Antigone does, pure in her intentions and on the side of moral rectitude throughout. Francis's decision to identify Erin so closely with Sophocles' play and its central, rebellious female character hints that her intended message in *Miss Erin* is of a similar affirmation of divine justice and retribution to that in *Antigone*. The conflation of Antigone, Dark Rosaleen and Erin meanwhile acts as a method of drawing the reader's attention to the parallels that exist not only between play and novel, but also between ancient and modern contexts.

Wimbourne, in contrast, is given few validations for his opinions. Francis's text nonetheless reveals her efforts to balance the scales evenly on both sides of the argument between her English and Irish central characters. In line with Celticist stereotypes, the English Wimbourne remains a calm and often rational voice speaking out against the din of Erin's impulsiveness and emotional excesses. If he is also, in at least one important sense, proved to be very wrong, so too is Erin. Having formed his judgments at a position of remove, Wimbourne's opinions are eventually altered when he witnesses proceedings in

³²⁷ Heidi Hansson, 'Patriot's Daughter, Politician's Wife: Gender and Nation in M. E. Francis's *Miss Erin*' in *New Contexts: Re-Framing Nineteenth-Century Irish Women's Prose*, ed. Heidi Hansson (Cork: Cork University Press, 2008), p. 117.

Ireland at first hand. At the culmination of the novel, as an eviction Erin is protesting against turns violent and the British authorities behave in a manner that undermines Wimbourne's faith in his countrymen, Erin's belief in her own righteousness is dismantled when events escalate beyond her control. While admitting defeat, Erin does not yield to Wimbourne's principles, nor does the text suggest that she should. Francis thus renders his final act of meeting her on her home territory interpretable as a retreat from his former hard line policy towards Ireland. Not only through her name but also via her upbringing — which allows her to assimilate various attitudes and occupy divergent positions in Irish society — Erin is posited as a personification of all Ireland; that Wimbourne, inflexible and wrong-minded but simultaneously dignified and primarily well-intentioned, is also emblematic of his nation becomes increasingly clear as the narrative unfolds. If her central Irish character remains more sympathetic than her English one, Francis's vision in *Miss Erin* is ultimately of an English-Irish relationship stalled at an impasse because the participants on both sides are misguided: on the English component in motive, on the Irish in method.

Miss Erin was the first of Francis's Irish novels to be written after her relocation to Dorset, where she had leased the Manor House at Blandford St. Mary with her unmarried sister-in-law, Josephine Blundell. She had moved from Lancashire in 1895, following the death of her father-in-law and the succession of her husband's older brother, William, to the ownership of the Crosby Hall Estate. Dorset was to prove as fruitful an inspiration for her fiction as Lancashire had been, and the titles of many of her subsequent novels — including *Pastorals of Dorset* (1901), *Wild Wheat: A Dorset Romance* (1905), *Dorset Dear* (1905) and *A Maid o' Dorset* (1917) — make it blatantly obvious that this shift was one both in physical location and literary focus. So strongly did her readers come to identify her as a chronicler of Dorset that her novels set elsewhere repeatedly met with

failure, and she once lamented to the actor and theatre manager Sir George Alexander 'that her public would not then *allow* her to write about any other subject than Dorset folk'.³²⁸ Among the most popular of her Dorset novels was *Fiander's Widow* (1901), which Francis would eventually adapt, in collaboration with the actor Sydney Valentine, for London's West End stage. It premiered at the Garrick Theatre on Charing Cross Road in August of 1907 but, despite the novel's success, was not the hit that Francis, who had worked closely and arduously with Valentine on its dramatization and staging, had hoped.³²⁹ Earlier endeavours, including *The Third Time of Asking* and particularly *The Widow Woos*, which was presented in a Royal Command performance at Windsor on 18 November 1905, had proved moderately more successful.

In *A Study of Prose Fiction* (1902), Bliss Perry would state that, in the earliest years of the twentieth century, there was 'far more pecuniary profit to the author from a successful play than from the average successful novel'.³³⁰ Yet Perry would also suggest that popularity in the theatrical world was a far more rare thing than it was in the novel-writing sphere, and that 'most authors choose, or are forced to follow, the easier path'.³³¹ Francis's theatrical ambitions were almost certainly instigated by her altered financial status following 1895 and the necessity thereafter of pursuing the most lucrative literary path available to her. No longer living under the grace and favour of her husband's family at Crosby Hall, by 1903, the year in which she decided to devote much of her attention to the writing of plays, Francis had been her household's primary source of income for nearly

³²⁸ Margaret Blundell, unpublished biography of M. E. Francis, p. 36, private collection of Mark Blundell.

³²⁹ Playbill for the premiere of *Fiander's Widow* at the Garrick Theatre, dated 28 August 1907. Francis and Valentine, in undated letters, discussed aspects of the staging at length. Francis took it upon herself, for instance, to provide an authentic trough and milk cans for the set. Playbill and all letters held in private collection of Mark Blundell.

³³⁰ Bliss Perry, *A Study of Prose Fiction* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1902), p. 65.

³³¹ *Ibid.*

a decade. Finding her path as a playwright a difficult one, however, her detour into the realm of theatre ended in 1908, when she would once again refocus her attentions solely on writing fiction for publication.

The switch to Dorset settings and light-hearted, often comic, storylines is also attributable to this new degree of financial necessity, for during the fourteen-year period between Francis's move to Dorset and her return to Crosby Hall in 1909, when her son Francis Nicholas Blundell succeeded to the ownership of the estate after his uncle died heirless, she could be seen increasingly to construct novels with a view to popularity. She learned what was required for commercial success most emphatically during her experience with the publisher C. F. Longman over the publication of her novel *Christian Thal* (1902), which was set in Austria. The story had been researched during a visit to Wiesbaden and Vienna in 1900, at which time she visited the studio of the piano master Theodor Leschetizky, accounts of whom served as her inspiration in writing the novel.³³² After reading the original manuscript, however, Longman was to remark:

The end came upon me like a thunderclap. I have but little hope of being able to work on your feelings, but I feel certain that the end will be a serious blow to the popularity of the book and artistically. [...] I remember making a similar appeal to my friend Rider Haggard about his fine Icelandic story *Eric Bright Eyes*. [...] *Christian Thal* no doubt had his vein of weakness but preserving, as he did, his love for Juliet, he would surely not have been so weak as that. Even if it is necessary to your plan that he should fall a prey to Annola why not relieve him (& Juliet) from the consequences of his weakness by killing Annola before he meets Juliet again? (She richly deserves it.)³³³

Francis was indeed prevailed upon to alter her ending, and tragic storylines thereafter ceased to feature centrally in her fiction for some time.³³⁴ Almost certainly for the same

³³² Leschetizky was a teacher of Jan Paderewski.

³³³ Letter from C. F. Longman to M. E. Francis (6 June 1902), private collection of Mark Blundell.

³³⁴ Francis's daughter Margaret Blundell would remark that the altered ending was not a success with critics: 'when the book was published in volume form, reviewer after reviewer pointed to the last chapter as

reasons, so too did frequent or explicit references to Ireland and the Irish. It was not until 1912, and only with the persistent encouragement of both Catholic Archbishop Thomas Whiteside and Protestant Bishop Francis James Chevasse, the two most senior ranking religious officials in Liverpool, that Francis was once again persuaded to focus on Irish themes.

Whiteside and Chevasse were among those who organized a meeting, held in Liverpool in the autumn of 1912, to publicize and garner support for a Criminal Law Amendment Act intended to curb the trade in women for the purpose of prostitution, then commonly referred to as the 'White Slave' trade. Francis, who was at that time the president of the Liverpool branch of the Catholic Women's League, was invited to the gathering as a special guest and appeared on the platform with dignitaries including the two bishops, the Lord Mayor of Liverpool and the MP Arthur Lee, the sponsor of the bill. She had previously considered writing something in favour of the act, but demurred due to the difficult subject matter and a pledge to herself 'never to write any book which her daughters might not read'.³³⁵ Over the course of that evening, however, and after listening to a joint entreaty from Whiteside and Chevasse, Francis became convinced that she must do everything that 'lay within [...] her power to rouse the public conscience'.³³⁶ The result was her finest novel, *The Story of Mary Dunne* (1913).

Closely based on the real-life fates of Irish emigrants who sailed aboard the ship *City of Mobile* in 1857, the plot of *The Story of Mary Dunne* evidences Francis's meticulous research into her subject matter, although the resultant delay in publication meant that the novel was not issued until after the Criminal Amendment Act had been

unconvincing'. Margaret Blundell, unpublished biography of M. E. Francis, pp. 34-35, private collection of Mark Blundell.

³³⁵ G. M. S. (Gertrude M. Sweetman), 'M. E. Francis', p. 236.

³³⁶ Margaret Blundell, unpublished biography of M. E. Francis, p. 5, private collection of Mark Blundell.

made law. The City of Mobile had sailed from Liverpool in June of 1857 with 120 charitably-sponsored Irish female emigrants on board, about a dozen of whom went missing upon the ship's embarkation in New York. One of these women, Susan Smith, was rescued several weeks later by a passerby on Broadway, who was struck by her 'wretched' appearance.³³⁷ At first 'suffering much in mind and in body', Smith was later able to testify at length before an American court, giving the details of her kidnapping onboard ship and her experiences of being forced into prostitution in one of the Bowery's most notorious brothels.³³⁸ The City of Mobile story, and Susan Smith's tale with it, was widely reported in newspapers, particularly the *Freeman's Journal*, and added impetus to an ongoing debate about female emigration and the dangers of the 'White Slave' trade which would eventually culminate in Arthur Lee's bill.³³⁹

Until the City of Mobile incident, the term 'White Slave' had most often been used to describe those almost exclusively male labourers working under indenture or at inordinately low wages. What happened to the group of Irish women on the City of Mobile, however, was instrumental in turning a spotlight on the trade in women for prostitution, and the cause that was afterward to be referred to by the term 'White Slavery' therefore could be seen to have specifically Irish origins. As such, it is unsurprising that Francis returned to the subject of Ireland when constructing her novel, or that her character's victimization closely follows the path of a real-life Irish prototype. Like Susan Smith, Francis's fictional Mary Dunne is a young Catholic woman who chooses to emigrate from Ireland, is kidnapped aboard ship, forced into prostitution and, after

³³⁷ 'A Sad Story', *Freeman's Journal* (5 September 1857), p. 1.

³³⁸ *Ibid.* The brothel in question was run by Kit Burns at 32 Water Street in the Bowery. Burns was an Irish-American Catholic gang leader, sportsman and saloon keeper whose Sportsmen's Hall was known for its 'rat pit' and dog fights. See 'America', *Daily News* (London), no. 6999 (7 October 1868), p. 5.

³³⁹ See also, for instance, Frederick Foster, 'The City of Mobile Passengers', *Freeman's Journal* (9 September 1857), p. 1; Vere Foster, 'Morality on Shipboard: To the Editor of the New York Tribune', *Freeman's Journal* (9 October 1857), p. 1; and 'Emigrants-Beware!', *Freeman's Journal* (5 December 1857), p. 1.

escaping her captors, is found in a desperate condition on the streets of a large city — in the case of Francis's novel, Liverpool.

Although the narrative is primarily concerned with Mary Dunne and her fate, and in this regard performs the persuasive task Francis had set out to accomplish, it is also notable for the stark disparities that exist between its depictions of England and Ireland. England, filled as it is with 'many wicked people', is a place where the type of abuse Mary experiences is represented as both common and 'easy'.³⁴⁰ Kilmachree, the rural Irish village from which Mary Dunne comes, remains idyllic in comparison, troubled as it is only by endemic prejudices against education and the tendency by the locals to gossip. Francis's propensity to interlace her text with tacitly critical metaphors of Empire and conquest, such as occur in the lawyer's closing arguments at the murder trial which culminates the novel, meanwhile emphasizes the barbarism of England's colonial policy and its unheeding complicity in the victimization of its own citizens:

here, now, in the twentieth century, in civilised England, the uplifting of whose flag is supposed to ensure enlightenment and freedom to the most distant parts of the Empire, here and now, thousands of helpless creatures are lured to a state of slavery equal to, if not worse than, any practised in bygone ages or in savage realms. (SMD 280-1)

At the same time, by evoking the Kilmachree priest's testimony on the witness stand in a manner reminiscent of the words spoken by a naïve and disillusioned boy to his father — 'Sir, if I had had any notion that such things could be, I would have warned her; but how was I to warn her about a state of things which I never could have dreamt possible in a country like England?' (SMD 303) — and in depicting Mary's restoration, despite her ill-treatment, to the type of 'shining innocence which adorns the souls of newly-christened babes' (SMD 312) at the end of the narrative, Francis ultimately posits her Irish Catholic

³⁴⁰ M. E. Francis, *The Story of Mary Dunne* (London: John Murray, 1913), pp. 102 and 93. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *SMD*.

characters in *The Story of Mary Dunne* as the blameless children of a 'parent country' which has failed to defend and protect its own.

It was in 1913, the year that *The Story of Mary Dunne* was published, that Francis finally found a publisher willing to take on *Molly's Fortunes*, which she had been struggling to place since its serialization. In that year, too, she embarked upon the research for a further Irish novel, *Dark Rosaleen* (1915). The proximity of these texts points to a renewed interest in Irish themes both for Francis and within the publishing industry, and notably coincides with the point at which the issue of Irish self governance had once again entered the public consciousness. The formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force in 1913 and the passing of the third Home Rule Bill in Parliament in 1914 had deepened sectarian tensions within Ireland. Although the implementation of Home Rule would subsequently be delayed by the onset of World War I, the interest in Irish-themed fiction in the immediate wake of the renewed threat of hostilities in Ireland signals a fascination with, and uneasiness about, the prospects for Ireland's future. For Francis, it also points to a skepticism concerning the ability of the Irish to govern themselves.

According to her daughter, Francis 'was not convinced that Home Rule would solve Ireland's difficulties and give her peace and prosperity', and it is in *Dark Rosaleen* that she most ably documents 'the spirit of unrest' she believed had long reigned in her native land.³⁴¹ She traveled to Ireland in late 1913 in preparation for the writing of the novel, an experience she would expand upon in the 'Foreword' to its 1917 edition:

Before writing this book, though my memories of my native land were strong and living, I made a special pilgrimage to Ireland to study conditions of life both in the West and in the North. In the following pages I have endeavoured to present faithfully and impartially the state of affairs which immediately preceded the war. The times were indeed heavy with menace, yet even then, amidst the lowering clouds the eternal hope prevailed, the

³⁴¹ Margaret Blundell, unpublished biography of M. E. Francis, p. 25, private collection of Mark Blundell. Also M. E. Francis, 'Foreword', *Dark Rosaleen* (New York: P. J. Kennedy, 1917), p. ii. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *DR*.

hope of that "New Ireland which might achieve great things though it were the child of blood and tears." (DR iii)

Published seven months before the Easter Rising, *Dark Rosaleen* illuminates the tensions between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland, and does so through characterizations which act as metaphors for the various political and religious divisions within her native country.

The novel charts the life of Hector McTavish, a young man who, in common with Francis's Irish protagonists before him, is born into one social sphere, yet spends his formative years in another. His family having been transplanted from Belfast to Connemara some time before his birth, Hector lives out the early years of his life as the sole Protestant child among the Catholic peasantry in the extreme west of Ireland. There he is fostered by Honor Burke, a Catholic woman with an infant son of her own. In one of the novel's earliest images, Honor is seen to nurse both her own child, Patsy, and the infant Hector simultaneously at her breast, in the process becoming 'emblematic of Ireland herself [...] the very type of bountiful motherhood, nourishing at the same bosom the child of her own flesh and the stranger within her gates' (DR 11). Hector's biological mother, Rose, meanwhile, acts as a metaphorical representation of England. This is at first only hinted through the symbolism associated with her given name, but is made increasingly apparent as the narrative progresses, most particularly in Honor's eventual figuring of her as the enfeebled parent unable to nurture its Northern Irish child:

Isn't it me that's been the right mother to your child? Where would he be if it wasn't for me? Ye know very well ye couldn't have r'ared him. You was that weakly ye couldn't give the child his rights — ye know well ye couldn't. And many a time I made an excuse of one kind or another to keep him up above with myself and let him share with Patsy. (DR 48)

Equally symbolic are the two small boys — one a northerner, the other a southerner; one Protestant, the other Catholic — raised side-by-side and uniformly cared for and loved by their shared Irish 'mother'.

The Orangeist element in the novel is introduced in the form of Alexander McTavish, Hector's father. What is at first presented as McTavish's reluctant tolerance of the friendly Connaught natives, among whom 'the Protestant' is said to be 'rather popular than otherwise', gradually gives way to aversion and eventually to hatred (*DR* 15). This culminates in an episode in which — after seeing his son riding on horseback with Honor's brother, a priest — McTavish reveals the depth of his bigotry and fear: 'Tisn't for good he'd be wantin' ye,' Alexander tells his son after pulling him violently from the saddle. 'It 'ud be to carry off and make a Catholic of ye. [...] Doesn't the Pope o' Rome pay out money for every man that turns?' (*DR* 34) His situation in Cloon-na-hinch thereafter becoming untenable, McTavish forces his family to return to Belfast. In the years that follow, his anti-Catholic prejudices fester.

The resultant tragedy — instigated when Hector returns as an adult to Connemara and, through a carefully contrived series of circumstances, finds himself in a position where he must marry Honor's daughter, Norah — is primarily played out against the backdrop of a Derry riven by suspicion, violence and prejudice on both sides of the sectarian divide. Events inside Hector and Norah's marital home increasingly mirror those exterior to it as the symbolism of both the wife's and husband's respective beliefs — Norah's makeshift bedside altar to the Virgin Mary; Hector's portrait of William of Orange — evoke upset and anger through an iconography that is misunderstood, each by the other. The rituals Norah enacts are shown to be spiritual and edifying to her yet foreign and primitive to Hector. At first largely devoid of prejudice, Hector soon begins to distrust his wife and fear her religion, viewing it simultaneously as a threat to his own Protestantism and an embarrassment to him in social terms, and as a result begins to enact a dual subterfuge. Not only does he deceive the outside world about the Catholic wife he harbours within his home, but he also deceives Norah about his role in the public life of

Derry, hiding his increasingly radical Orangeist activity from her like the shameful secret he seems, at times, to recognize it to be.

Throughout the narrative, Francis demonstrates that there are errors in judgment on both sides of the sectarian divide. Patsy Burke, having become in adulthood the priest 'Father Pat', laments the irreconcilable differences between Protestants and Catholics in the country, yet expressly names Home Rule 'as the bone between them' and suggests that Ireland would be better off without such political upheavals. 'It's a terrible thing,' he suggests about the Home Rule initiative, 'to have stirred up all this religious hatred again that was dead and buried so many years' (*DR* 332). His words simultaneously indicate the reasons Home Rule has become probable by revealing his own aversion to corrupt English practices which have served to keep the Irish poverty-stricken and artificially dependent on the ruling country. Remarking upon the measures his Irish neighbours have been forced by the British government to take to stop the spread of foot-and-mouth disease, for instance, he wonders whether the whole business is not yet another English ploy to reduce the Irish to privation: 'it wouldn't be the first time England put a spoke in Ireland's wheel,' he claims. 'Didn't they destroy her cattle-raising industry? Didn't they pull down her woollen industries and pass laws against it?' (*DR* 334)

Matters culminate when a son is born to Hector and Norah and a metaphorical battle for the baby's soul quickly becomes literal. Hector's belated fears that his marriage, solemnized by a priest in a Roman Catholic church and therefore entailing the promise that all children born to the union be raised in Norah's faith rather than his own, will result in the annihilation of his family's Protestant heritage echo prevailing fears in the north of Ireland that Home Rule would result in a southern- and Catholic-dominated governance and an obliteration of the North's religious and cultural legacy. The same types of concerns drive Hector to violence, as he travels to Connemara to prevent the christening of

his son. In the battle that ensues, Father Pat is chased down at gunpoint, but just before he is dealt the injury that will prove fatal, is able to baptize the child. Hector, too, is badly wounded in the fight. At the end of the novel he and Patsy lay together, their heads resting side by side in Honor's lap, and are reconciled in the moments immediately prior to their deaths. In demonstrating that this reconciliation is achieved through repentance on Hector's part and absolution on Patsy's, Francis makes clear that it is the Protestant and northerner who shoulders most of the blame for the tragedy. So, too, in her final description of the newly-baptized baby as 'typical of Ireland — a new Ireland that might achieve great things, though it was the child of blood and tears' does she declare her own bias (*DR* 372). For in her vision of the child, she also asserts the religious identity that a reborn Ireland must have, and it has indeed been christened Catholic.

The allegorical implications of *Dark Rosaleen* are abundantly in evidence, yet few of Francis's contemporaries would note this symbolism or its import. The rare reviews that did appear tended rather to willingly sidestep, or simply fail to notice, the book's underlying message. They nonetheless had the tendency to curiously echo, in their opinions, the conspicuous differences between 'Anglo' and 'Irish' which suffuse the novel itself: the *Irish Independent*, for example, found its characterizations 'intensely touching and realistic', while the English literary magazine *The Bookman* drew prominent attention to their strangeness and impenetrability.³⁴² 'It introduces us to a people whose habits and thoughts and passions seem as strange to us as those of some altogether alien race,' *The Bookman* review was to state, '[t]hey are a more primitive people'.³⁴³ Both, however, were

³⁴² 'Orange and Green: A Mixed Marriage Tragedy', *Irish Independent* (23 August 1915), p. 3.

³⁴³ Edwin Pugh, 'Four Novels', *The Bookman*, vol. 49, no. 289 (October 1915), pp. 24-25.

united in praise of the volume, which *The Bookman* referred to as 'emphatically a book that should be read'.³⁴⁴

The Irish Monthly conspicuously neglected to review or mention it — the first time any of Francis's Irish novels had failed to be appraised in that publication, and despite the fact that a novel by her daughter, Margaret, was being serialized in the magazine at the time of *Dark Rosaleen's* publication. Even Stephen J. Brown, in his seminal bibliography of Irish works published in 1916, failed to remark upon *Dark Rosaleen's* allegorical status, and the comments he included in the volume, reprinted from *The Times Literary Supplement*, were distinctly muted:

The story of a "mixed marriage" between Norah, a Connemara peasant girl, and Hector, a young engineer of Belfast origin. They go to live at Derry. Bitterness and misunderstanding come to blight their love, and the end is tragedy. The two points of view, Protestant and Catholic, are put with impartiality.³⁴⁵

It was destined to be ignored by the public, for reasons which the *Irish Independent* could only hint at: 'In other times and under other conditions "Dark Rosaleen" must have created a considerable stir amongst Irish readers. As it is, it is by far the most interesting novel we have read for a long time'.³⁴⁶ The implication of such comments is that, in the midst of war and at a time when reminders of the delayed implementation of Home Rule could only exacerbate tensions in Ireland, novels that dealt with issues of internal dissension in Ireland were best overlooked. Although these ideas would be forced back into the public consciousness the following year, and the novel would be reissued in the wake of the Easter Rising, its subject matter was simply too raw for an English reading public already long immured in a reality of war and violence, and its vision too pessimistic for an Irish

³⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 25.

³⁴⁵ Stephen J. Brown, *Ireland in Fiction: A Guide to Irish Novels, Tales, Romances, and Folk-Lore* (Dublin and London: Maunsel, 1916), p. 92.

³⁴⁶ 'Orange and Green: A Mixed Marriage Tragedy', p. 3.

readership at first mired in a stagnant political cause, and then in the throes of a movement whose ethos was very different from the one Francis's novel presented. It was destined to remain neglected.

In return, Francis neglected Ireland. She would revisit the subject of her homeland only rarely in her works published after 1916, but these were often cursory or tangential representations. Her memoir of her childhood in Queen's County, *The Things of a Child*, appeared in 1918; the novel *Napoleon of the Looms* (1925) would feature an Irishwoman as a character but had its setting in Lancashire; and *Cousin Christopher* (1925) would tell the story of two Irish characters displaced to a Lancashire estate. This tendency to avoid the subject of her homeland post-1915 is in part attributable to the reception that *Dark Rosaleen* received, yet is also almost certainly the product of her disappointment in her Irish compatriots on another level. Her son was to recall that 'when the Easter Rebellion broke out in 1916 she said, "If there were any method of doing so open to me, I would abjure my Irish nationality"³⁴⁷. In letters written to his mother from the front in World War I, the ease with which he discusses his anger at the Irish rebels in the wake of the Easter Rising likewise suggest that Francis to some degree empathized with her son's opinions. In April and May of 1916, for instance, Francis Nicholas Blundell would convey in letters to his mother his hope that the authorities would 'hang the traitor Casement', lamented the 'disgraceful behaviour' in Ireland and expressed his satisfaction that Home Rule might have been dealt a serious blow by the Dublin rebels, recounting in the process the vehemence of critique that the Rising's participants had evoked among his Irish troops:

It ought to put a big spoke in the wheels of Home Rule. All our Irishmen are furious & would love to have a go at the rebels. [...] We have a man who is a tremendous Home Ruler & is a Nationalist Borough Councillor — he declares that he will always vote Conservative henceforth, & won't have

³⁴⁷ Letter from Francis Nicholas Blundell to Margaret Blundell (28 June 1931), private collection of Mark Blundell.

anything to do with the Nationalists again. I am really inclined to agree with Frank & don't think that the Nationalists are to be trusted at all.³⁴⁸

Francis's return letters do not survive, yet with her only son in the midst of the fighting in France and her youngest and much-beloved brother, Michael James 'Hamish' Sweetman, having been killed at Ctesiphon only months before, it is not difficult to surmise that her sympathies would lie more with the troops fighting abroad than with the rebels in Dublin.³⁴⁹ Though Francis's fiction confirms that her support is overwhelmingly on the side of Catholic interests in Ireland, and both the 1917 foreword to *Dark Rosaleen* and the narrative of the novel itself envision Ireland's future as a specifically Catholic one, it does not necessarily follow that she held nationalist political beliefs, and her personal letters confirm that she at the very least was more aware of 'the tenets' of unionism than she was of those of nationalism.³⁵⁰

The period during which Francis produced all her Irish novels, 1889 to 1915, was one of extreme political instability in Ireland, stretching from the aftermath of the Land Wars to the brink of the Easter Rising. Although female personifications of Ireland had long existed in the figuring of the country as Erin, Dark Rosaleen, Cathleen ní Houlihan, Hibernia and the Sean-Bhean Bhocht, this was also the era in which feminized and romanticized imagery intensified with the advent of movements such as the Gaelic League and the Literary Revival. It is at these kinds of idealistic imagery that Francis was to direct one of her most revealing novelistic comments, couched in the words of Mark Wimbourne

³⁴⁸ Letters from Francis Nicholas Blundell to M. E. Francis (27 April, 28 April and 3 May 1916), private collection of Mark Blundell.

³⁴⁹ Francis's affection for her youngest brother is much in evidence in her published and unpublished memoirs, where he is often referred to as 'Baby'. 'Hamish' Sweetman died as a result of wounds sustained at Ctesiphon some time between 22 and 24 November 1915. A career officer who earlier had retired from the military, Sweetman re-enlisted at the onset of fighting in 1914. He was 51 at the time of his death.

³⁵⁰ In preparation for the writing of *Miss Erin*, Francis wrote to Father Matthew Russell to ask if he could recommend any documents which might aid her in understanding nationalist politics and asserted, 'I know the tenets of the other, pretty well!!!' Letter from Francis to Father Matthew Russell (5 September 1897), Russell Papers, J27/19.

in *Miss Erin*. Separated from the text, this passage can be interpreted as Francis's own call to her native country to deal in authenticities rather than metaphors:

Erin, Erin, this is folly! cruel and perverse folly! Child, open your eyes, and see things as they are. You are deluding yourself, making a kind of fetish of this imaginary personification of Ireland. All these vague, poetical, romantic ideas go for nothing — your dream-Ireland does not exist — as for the real Ireland, I will learn to know and love it in your company. I can see for myself that it is beautiful. (*ME* 285)

Seeming to speak directly to the literary and political movements of the day, this extract evidences much of what was mistaken about Francis's texts in the estimation of the Irish public. In it, she emphasizes realism and pragmatism, but it was new forms of both fiction and political thought that were necessary to the conception of a new Ireland on the brink of nationhood, and it was the Revivalists and the revolutionaries who would invent them. Francis's fiction can be accurately described as being written of and for her country, of and for her religion, but it was not the type of fiction that was required of and for its time.

In 1892, a commentator in *United Ireland* claimed that it was 'one of the misfortunes of this country that while we complain that we have no present-day literature, we really have, but do not know it. For we do not read our own books'.³⁵¹ The reasons for this neglect are abundantly in evidence in the variety of articles and essays written by Irish Catholic commentators between the fall of Charles Stewart Parnell and the Easter Rising. For them, the Revival remained primarily a Protestant construct with aims and ideologies at odds with their own interests. The search for a representative Irish Catholic novelist therefore persisted. Rosa Mulholland, in sending out her own plea for an 'Irish novelist' in 1891, asserted that there were only a 'few Irish writers who continued to write for Ireland', and regretted that those who did do so did 'not more often [dip their pens] in the milk of human kindness when describing the faults and shortcomings of [their] worsen fellow-

³⁵¹ Clipping 'A Great Irish Novelist', *United Ireland* (June 1892), n.p., Emily Lawless Papers, Marsh's Library, Dublin, vol. Z2.1.15, no. 27.

countrymen'.³⁵² Likewise, the last public assessments Father Matthew Russell was to make of Francis's work — written for *The Irish Monthly* in 1912, the year of his death — were overtly critical of her Irish output. Commenting on the subject of Irish Catholic Literature, Russell was to echo Mulholland's sentiments, rebuking Francis for not 'excluding all that is hostile and offensively hostile to our country and our creed' in her novels. For that reason, he proceeds to confess, '[M. E. Francis's] Irish stories do not please me as much as the long and brilliant series of novels that deal chiefly with Lancashire and Dorset'.³⁵³ The overriding impression that can be gleaned from the opinions of both commentators is one of exaggerated nationalist sensitivity. To them, the works of writers who criticized Ireland and the Irish, no matter how briefly or trivially, were unacceptable. These types of sentiments, echoed in the words of other Irish essayists throughout the country's newspapers and magazines, acted as a form of unofficial suppression — as censorship in all but name.

If Russell's support for Francis's Irish output gradually waned, however, Stephen J. Brown's did not. In the aftermath of the Easter Rising, Brown was to recognize that those frequent, late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century appeals for an Irish Catholic novelist had not, in reality, gone unheeded. Over time, he would temper his early advocacy of Mulholland's and Tynan's novels, which he came to believe did not 'embody in some sort the national idea or some phase of it'.³⁵⁴ Yet he remained unfalteringly supportive of Francis's work, finding among her portrayals many 'in which the national temperaments of Celt and Saxon were ably contrasted'. 'I venture to say that the reading of the fifteen or

³⁵² R. M. [Rosa Mulholland], 'Wanted An Irish Novelist', *The Irish Monthly*, vol. 19, no. 217 (July 1891), p. 370.

³⁵³ Father Matthew Russell, 'A Word about Irish Catholic Literature', *The Irish Monthly*, vol. 40, no. 468 (June 1912), p. 311.

³⁵⁴ Stephen J. Brown, 'Novels of the National Idea', *The Irish Monthly*, vol. 48, no. 563 (May 1920), pp. 255-6.

twenty novels that "M. E. Francis" has published', Brown was to suggest in 1920, 'would impress almost any reader with the greatness of the difference in character and outlook which distinguishes [Ireland and England]'.³⁵⁵

It is also true that Brown was decades younger than Russell and would outlive him by almost fifty years. He was thus granted the benefit of both an optimism and a hindsight which his fellow Jesuit lacked. Russell had lived through the Famine and the Land Wars, and had already reached late middle age by the time of Parnell's fall and the defeat of the first two Home Rule Bills. He had ample reason to be discouraged about the prospects for Ireland's future, and would write his final opinions on Francis's work at a point immediately between the quashing of an Irish devolution 'scare' and the passing of the third Home Rule Bill in Parliament. In 1912, Ireland's future hung in the balance, and Russell knew only too well that novels could act as political instruments which might sway opinion in favour of or against the Irish cause, and therefore urged Irish authors to portray their country in the manner which he felt would most benefit her in the political process. He would not live to see the Home Rule initiative pass Parliament.

Francis survived her mentor by nearly two decades, dying in 1930 at another of her many adopted homes — Maes Alyn, Mold, in Wales. On her deathbed, she was granted an Apostolic Benediction 'in recognition of good service done [on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church] with her pen'.³⁵⁶ Her final novel, *Wood Sanctuary* (1930), written in collaboration with her daughter Margaret, appeared just days after her death. In a review, the Catholic publication *The Tablet* would note the degree to which Francis's final work was suffused with her own spiritual values:

This brings us to our crowning praise of "M. E. Francis" — whose death last month hugely bereaved English literature [...] In these columns we have

³⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 260.

³⁵⁶ Margaret Blundell, *An Irish Novelist's Own Story* (Dublin: Catholic Truth Society, n.y.), p 27.

argued again and again that truly Catholic novelists are not necessarily novelists who write about Catholics. Rather are they those who write about life in a Catholic way. No priest nor nun, nor mass nor shrine, is mentioned in *Wood Sanctuary*; but all is viewed *sub specia aeternitatis*.³⁵⁷

Her daughter would echo these sentiments in a reminiscence published not long afterwards, in which she asserted that her mother's defining characteristic was that '*she saw life through her Catholic eyes*'.³⁵⁸

Father Stephen J. Brown lived until 1962 — through the passing of the Home Rule Bill, the events of the Easter Rising, the forming of the Free State, the Civil War and even the creation of the Irish Republic. He would make what turned out to be his final and brief assessment of Francis's work in 1935, five years after her death, when he included her in his survey of exemplary Catholic novelists.³⁵⁹ By then, no longer burdened by the task of privileging texts he knew would help his country to nationhood, he could afford to be liberal. Its nationhood had been achieved.

³⁵⁷ 'Outstanding Novels, No. XXXVII, *Wood Sanctuary*'. *The Tablet* (12 April 1930), p. 486.

³⁵⁸ Margaret Blundell, 'M. E. Francis', *The Catholic World*, vol. 134, no. 804 (March 1932), p. 689.

³⁵⁹ Stephen J. Brown, 'The Catholic Novelist and His Themes', *The Irish Monthly*, vol. 63, no. 745 (July 1935), p. 435.

V

'Observations from a Quiet Corner': Katharine Tynan's Novels from Revivalism to Rebellion

'I had lived eighteen years in England, I had come to believe that affection for England and love of Ireland could quite well go hand in hand.' - Katharine Tynan, *The Years of the Shadow* (1919).³⁶⁰

Late in 1915, the Irish poet and novelist Katharine Tynan (1859-1931) ceased writing a diary she had been working on for more than a year. That she did so is somewhat surprising, for this was no ordinary private memoir, but one that she had laboured over industriously and had been intent on publishing. She had begun the writing of it immediately at the onset of the First World War and, she asserted, 'had done it self-consciously, with an eye on posterity' (YS 146). To that purpose, the first lines she wrote on the opening page were the words that were to make up the title upon its publication — '*A Woman's Notes in War-Time: Observations from a Quiet Corner*'.³⁶¹

As the 'quiet corner' of her chosen title suggests, Tynan's memoir was preoccupied from the outset by her sense of distance from war-related events. Dublin was conspicuously removed from the centre of the war's action, and life in Ireland was, frustratingly for the author, much the same as it had been before fighting began. 'There was no general air of calamity,' Tynan writes on her journal's opening page. 'Everyone was doing pretty well what they had been doing since the Deluge.'³⁶² Yet simmering below this placid surface there was also, she asserts, a shift in political thinking. The thoughts and

³⁶⁰ Katharine Tynan, *The Years of the Shadow* (London: Constable, 1919), p. 204. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as YS.

³⁶¹ Katharine Tynan, *A Woman's Notes In War-Time: Observations from a Quiet Corner*, Unpublished memoir, John Rylands Library (Manchester), Papers of Katharine Tynan, GB 0133 KTH, Box 13, Folder 1. Collection hereafter cited as 'Tynan Papers, Manchester'.

³⁶² Tynan, *A Woman's Notes in War-Time*, Tynan Papers, Manchester, undated entry on page numbered '1'.

concerns of Dubliners had for the first time in many years moved beyond the boundaries of their native country: everyone had begun talking 'of the War instead of the Civil War, which latter question had retired into obscurity'.³⁶³

Although she suggests the alignment of her own opinions and behaviour with those of the Irish people who were then her neighbours, friends and associates, Tynan's ill-disguised disappointment at the *laissez faire* attitude with which her fellow Dubliners greeted the onset of war demonstrates that there was indeed a perceptible difference between the author and her contemporaries in the Ireland of 1914. Tynan's acts of migrating from Ireland to England and back again between 1893 and 1911 had in fact transformed her political views and resulted in an emotional investment in the British war effort which was distinctly lacking in many of her Irish compatriots, as she would admit in her memoirs: 'I had lived eighteen years in England, I had come to believe that affection for England and love of Ireland could quite well go hand in hand. I was enthusiastically pro-Ally' (YS 204). Tynan's interest in the war would lead her to write a body of First World War poems which enjoyed what she termed 'an extraordinary vogue' in Britain, and the approximately one hundred letters per week she at one point was receiving from war-bereaved readers attest to the extent of her popularity (YS 175-6). As the fighting dragged on, her sons, each in his turn, would enlist in the British army and serve as officers with recognized distinction, despite the fact that the eldest was just twenty years of age by the time of the armistice. Notwithstanding these circumstances which continued to connect her to Britain and to convey upon her a vested interest in its war effort, Tynan's acknowledged fondness for her one-time adoptive homeland would suffer unexpected challenges before the war's end. Her novels written to 1916 effectively chart the course of

³⁶³ Ibid.

that testing ground, and make the decision to set aside her war diary more readily understandable.

That Tynan had come to live eighteen years in England is to some extent incongruous with her personal history, for her life until 1893 was passed exclusively in County Dublin, and there were few indications before that year — the thirty-fourth of her life — that she was inclined to roam. She was born in 1859, the fifth child of Andrew Cullen Tynan, a cattle farmer and entrepreneur, and his wife Elizabeth (*née* O'Reilly).³⁶⁴ Though they were financially well off, Tynan's was a Catholic family whose prosperity was always tenuous — threatened as it consistently was by fluctuating markets for the cattle which were their main source of income — and which had been achieved only recently before Tynan's birth through her father's business acumen and work ethic.

About her parents, Tynan's opinions were deeply divided. She describes her mother only fleetingly in her memoirs with an indifference bordering on unkindness as 'a large, placid, fair woman, who became an invalid at an early age and influenced my life scarcely at all'.³⁶⁵ This terse introduction is followed by similarly brusque references to Elizabeth Tynan's puritanical attitudes about the reading of novels, plays and poetry, which amplify a sense of Tynan's disappointment in and detachment from her mother. Tynan might easily have been led to succumb to a state of semi-invalidism and insular domesticity herself when a childhood bout of measles caused ulcerations on her eyes and left her nearly blind, yet the daughter railed against her mother's fate. Rarely inactive or unoccupied, her later decisions to write professionally and travel widely represented the

³⁶⁴ The year of Tynan's birth has been disputed. See Peter Van de Kamp, 'Some Notes on the Estate of Pamela Hinkson', in Warwick Gould (ed.), *Yeats Annual No. 4* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), p. 186.

³⁶⁵ Katharine Tynan, *Twenty-Five Years: Reminiscences* (London: Smith, Elder, 1913), p. 27. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *TFY*.

antithesis of the domestic drudgery, invalidism and staid 'mid-Victorianism' that had defined her mother's life (TFY 27).

Andrew Cullen Tynan, in contrast, is ubiquitous in Tynan's writings and reminiscences, and is consistently described in the most laudatory of terms. He was, according to her, 'the tenderest of friends and comrades' (TFY 5) who, in open opposition to his wife, indulged the precocious Katharine in her love of reading. Her youngest sister Nora Tynan O'Mahony would recall:

[Our father] recognised her special talents from the first, and often boasted to his family and friends that 'Kate' could read easily from the day she was three years old! Indeed, she spent most of her young life reading; and sometimes would seem to be entirely lost from morning to evening. But no one worried much; they knew for certain if she were not to be found amongst her father's voluminous shelves of books, she was sure to be browsing in the library of some country friend and near-by neighbour.³⁶⁶

Despite her father's tendency to dote on her, Tynan's formal education was limited. As a very young girl she briefly attended a day school in Dublin run by two spinster sisters, the Misses McCabe, whose enduring impression on their pupil is evidenced by the fact that they feature as characters, with names and circumstances unchanged, in her 1922 novel *The House on the Bogs*. At the age of eleven, after a friend of her father's suggested that she was 'running wild' (TFY 46), Tynan was sent to the Siena Convent at Drogheda. Her education there, also fondly recalled and frequently featured in various incarnations in her fiction, was to come to its premature end just three years later when her father summoned her home: 'I was withdrawn at fourteen wholly and solely,' Tynan suggests, 'because my father wanted my society'.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁶ Nora Tynan O'Mahony, 'Katharine Tynan's Girlhood', *The Irish Monthly*, vol. 59, no. 696 (June 1931), p. 359.

³⁶⁷ Katharine Tynan, *Memories* (London: Eveleigh Nash and Grayson, 1924), p. 399. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *MM*.

This truncated schooling appears to have mattered very little to Tynan, who often described her love of literature as inherent, with adequate reason. Although she is the one of her family in which the literary tendency most famously manifested itself, the Tynans and their kin were before her, and after her would remain, a clan of writers. Sir William Howard Russell, the Crimean War correspondent who coined the phrase 'the thin red line', was a near relation of Tynan's.³⁶⁸ Her father was himself a talented storyteller and avid reader, and it was Andrew Cullen Tynan's charismatic personality and flair for anecdote that inspired William Butler Yeats to write two short tales in *The Celtic Twilight*, 'An Enduring Heart' and 'A Knight of the Sheep', loosely based on remembrances of Tynan's father at Whitehall, the family's sprawling farmhouse. Tynan's younger son Giles Aylmer Hinkson would become, much like his ancestor Sir William, a journalist and South American correspondent for *The Times* (London) who, during his decades-long tenure in that capacity, reported on, among other things, pro-German tendencies in Second World War-era Argentina and the developments and difficulties in the same country under the Perón regime. Tynan's daughter Pamela Hinkson was a journalist, author of non-fiction books and novelist whose works included the critically-acclaimed *The Ladies' Road* (1932), a novel inspired in part by her own and her mother's experiences in Ireland during the First World War. Nora Tynan O'Mahony — herself a poet, novelist, journalist and the woman's editor of the *Weekly Freeman's Journal* from 1918 to 1923 — was the mother of Gerard J. C. Tynan-O'Mahony and grandmother of David Tynan-O'Mahony, the former a journalist for and eventually manager of *The Irish Times*, the latter better known as the comedian and comedy writer Dave Allen.

Andrew Cullen Tynan was to be the first means by which this literary tendency was sparked in the gifted daughter he called 'Kate' and everyone else referred to as 'Katie' or

³⁶⁸ O'Mahony, p. 358.

'KT', but others were soon to be added to the list of Tynan's literary advocates. Most prominent among these was Father Matthew Russell, editor of *The Irish Monthly*, who was to become Tynan's long-term correspondent and most important mentor. By the time Tynan was in her early twenties, she admits to having a 'stock phrase' for referring to Russell: 'my dear Father Russell; the most unweariedly kind friend a young writer ever had'.³⁶⁹ The epithet is apt, for without Russell's influence Tynan, on her first visit to London in 1884, would not have been able to make the acquaintance of well-connected writers like Oscar Wilde and Wilfrid and Alice Meynell who would later prove imperative to the growth of her career and reputation. Perhaps even more importantly, it was because of Russell that she was introduced to Charles Hubert Oldham, editor of the *Dublin University Review*, and through Oldham that she was to meet and form lasting and invaluable friendships with Yeats, Douglas Hyde and George Russell ('A.E.'). The list of the friends and connections that Tynan owed to Father Russell is long, and includes Rosa Mulholland, Edward Dowden, and William and Christina Rossetti.

Looking back in her memoirs, Tynan would tend to exaggerate the importance of her father to her literary success while marginalizing people like Father Russell. In the early days of their acquaintance, however, and counter to what is written in her reminiscences, Tynan turned to Russell to complain about her father's lack of interest in her life: 'My father is wrapped up in me,' she wrote to Russell in 1885, 'but I have no companionship from him; he is a business man, working all day, and going to bed weary at night. And when we talk, it is of course of his pursuits'.³⁷⁰ Acting as adviser to her both personally and professionally, Russell, in many more ways than her father ever did or could do, enabled Tynan in her career, particularly in its earliest phase. Left solely to her

³⁶⁹ Letter from Katharine Tynan to Father Matthew Russell (22 April 1884), Papers of Father Matthew Russell, Jesuit Archive (Dublin), Folder J27/73. Collection hereafter cited as 'Russell Papers'.

³⁷⁰ Letter from Katharine Tynan to Father Matthew Russell (8 September 1885), Russell Papers, J27/73.

own and her family's connections, Tynan's life in fact would have been nearly devoid of artistic camaraderie. The most significant of the early literary associations that Tynan was to make without Russell's influence was her friendship with the Reverend Henry Stuart Fagan, a Protestant clergyman of Irish birth who was also an amateur antiquarian and occasionally dabbled in journalism. Tynan claimed that Fagan had 'the entree to some of the very best' magazines of the period, 'including the "Pall Mall", "Echo," and "Graphic"'.³⁷¹ Yet his influence, if he indeed had any, appears to have had scant impact on Tynan's professional life, and the fact that the Fagan family were, according to her, 'steeped in poetry' and possessed of 'the artistic instinct' was certainly very little boon to a woman who already boasted a string of Russell's high profile literary friends among her acquaintances (*TFY* 118).

It is true, however, that several years after the poetry that Tynan began to produce in her late teens had found a regular market in periodicals such as *Young Ireland Magazine* and *The Irish Monthly*, Andrew Cullen Tynan fostered his daughter's growing reputation and assisted her in enhancing her circle of literary friends by encouraging her to begin hosting a weekly literary *soirée* at Whitehall in a room set aside and redecorated exclusively for that purpose. Tynan's sister Nora remembered those gatherings thus:

Katie's friends came every Sunday into the quiet green country, where they enjoyed first of all a hearty lunch of somewhat Gargantuan proportions — oh, those old lavish and carefree days! Afterwards, in the intervals between lunch and tea — usually taken on the tennis lawn — and the later heavy supper, they talked literature and poetry or politics — for my sister, indeed, held, even in those days, what was quite a 'salon' of her own, enjoyed by everyone who was *anyone* in the artistic and literary or political life of the Dublin of that day.³⁷²

Over the course of the years, the leading lights of Irish literature — including John and Ellen O'Leary, A.E., Hyde and the man Tynan would thereafter ever be linked to, W. B.

³⁷¹ Letter from Katharine Tynan to Father Matthew Russell, (22 November 1883), Russell Papers, J27/73.

³⁷² O'Mahony, p. 361.

Yeats — all became regular Sunday visitors to Whitehall, the house situated 'four Irish miles' from Dublin in what was then the countryside between Clondalkin and Tallaght.³⁷³

If it appears from her sister's description that Tynan was welcomed readily into the circle of the Dublin literati, however, evidence from the diaries Douglas Hyde kept during the period suggest otherwise. 'They all have a frightful brogue', Hyde wrote of his first meeting with the Tynan family on 23 January 1887, and a second encounter with Tynan and her sister two days later at Trinity College Dublin elicited similar comments: 'I was terribly embarrassed lest anyone should see me talking to them. Katherine [sic] was all right but her sister was a sight'.³⁷⁴ The discrepancies Hyde recognizes between his situation as an Anglo-Irish Protestant and Tynan's as a *nouveau riche* Catholic place a seemingly insurmountable gulf between them and, although his first impressions would gradually give way to an appreciation of her intelligence and artistic talent, it is this sense of difference which lingers throughout Hyde's reminiscences of her. That she was aware of the divide between her position in Irish society and that which was occupied by Hyde, Yeats and others is evidenced in her novels, in which she consistently defends the brogues of her Irish characters, understandably discerning in them something 'musical' and 'sweet' rather than undignified or discomfiting.³⁷⁵ She also begrudgingly came to recognize that her speaking voice automatically made her a figure of amusement among both the Anglo-Irish and the English, and it was with a distinct sense of 'desolation' that she found herself forced, when speaking publicly, to adopt a jocular tone in order to conform to the ingrained attitudes of her audiences, 'who would begin to laugh the minute I opened my mouth,

³⁷³ Ibid, pp. 360-1.

³⁷⁴ Quoted in Dominic Daly, *The Young Douglas Hyde: The Dawn of the Irish Revolution and Renaissance 1874-1893* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1974), p. 87.

³⁷⁵ See, for instance, Katharine Tynan, *The Dear Irish Girl* (London: Smith, Elder, 1899), p. 39, and *Julia* (London: Smith, Elder, 1904), p. 33.

because I had a brogue!³⁷⁶ That Tynan's manner of speaking, and by extension her class status, was so closely scrutinized suggests that notions of authority, rather than of what might be termed authenticity, were of utmost importance in deciding who was permitted to speak on behalf of Ireland, and accounts for a degree of the distance that was placed between Tynan and the majority of the Revivalists then, and continues to define her position in relationship to the movement even now.

Despite her uneasy situation within their ranks, it is almost invariably for her associations with the writers who would come to be listed among the principal figures of the Irish Literary Renaissance that Tynan is mentioned in academic studies today. Interest has understandably centered on her close associations with, and reminiscences about, the foremost poet among the Revivalists, Yeats. Yeats was Tynan's junior by six years. The pair met in 1885, when Oldham, then a student at Trinity College Dublin but shortly to become editor of the *Dublin University Review*, brought Yeats to one of Tynan's Sunday gatherings. Their introduction significantly came in the year that her first book of poetry, *Louise de la Vallière*, was published. This inaugural volume was greeted with overwhelming enthusiasm in Ireland: *The Irish Monthly* devoted more than ten pages in various editions to singing its praises, referring to it as a 'true work of art', while an admirer in *The Ampleforth Journal* would assert that upon its publication 'the whole Irish world broke into rapturous delight'.³⁷⁷ Yeats, meanwhile, had yet to make his mark on the literary establishment, in Ireland or elsewhere.

³⁷⁶ Katharine Tynan, *The Wandering Years* (London: Constable, 1922), pp. 333-4. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *WY*.

³⁷⁷ 'New Books', *The Irish Monthly*, vol. 13, no. 144 (June 1885), p. 331 and J. B. McLaughlin, 'Katharine Tynan', *The Ampleforth Journal*, vol. 18 (1913), p. 277. See also 'Katharine Tynan's Poems', *The Irish Monthly*, vol. 12, no. 138 (December 1884), pp. 618-624; and 'Miss Tynan's "Louise de la Vallière", &c', *The Irish Monthly*, vol. 13, no. 145 (July 1885), pp. 377-82.

It was, as such, to Tynan's literary reputation that he was drawn rather than, as might be expected, vice versa. Recognizing in Tynan 'a link to the world of literary editors', Yeats actively cultivated the friendship, and the two soon became the closest of confidantes.³⁷⁸ During the latter half of the 1880s and into the first years of the decade that followed, the pair often discussed their literary ideas, exchanging in their frequent letters to one another drafts of their poetic projects-in-progress for comment and critique. It is in his letters to Tynan that many of Yeats's poems — including 'The Wanderings of Oisín', 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree', and 'When You Are Old' — first appear, often in rudimentary and almost unrecognizable form, and it was together with Tynan that Yeats edited what was in essence the first published volume of work, *Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland* (1888), recognizably attributable to the Irish Literary Renaissance.

Their surviving correspondence traces the path not only of his development as an artist, but also of the course of their relationship, which would grow in intimacy to the point that, in an unpublished autobiography, Yeats admits to having considered proposing marriage to Tynan ('a very plain woman') because he believed she was in love with him.³⁷⁹ While this is a fascinating admission on Yeats's part, and reveals much about the degree of his attachment to Tynan, its veracity is suspect. Tynan herself remained conspicuously silent about the episode throughout her writings, but members of her family would assert that Yeats, rather than merely contemplating the act, did indeed propose marriage to Tynan and was rejected. Evidence suggests that he was encouraged to do so by his father, who had voiced his concerns that the ardour of his son's friendship may have led Tynan to mistake it for a more intimate form of attachment.³⁸⁰ Yeats's father would also have

³⁷⁸ R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life, I: The Apprentice Mage 1865-1914* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 54.

³⁷⁹ W. B. Yeats, *Memoirs*, ed. Denis Donoghue (London: Macmillan, 1972), p. 32.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

recognized that hers was a unique voice among his son's friends in being antagonistic to Willie's spiritualist obsessions, which John Butler Yeats had resentfully referred to in 1890 as those 'various paradoxical subjects in which he believes or persuades himself he is interested'.³⁸¹ Others in Yeats's family, his sisters in particular, had meanwhile been concerned about his amorous obsession with the indifferent Maud Gonne, and encouraged him to look elsewhere for romantic fulfilment. Tynan, a close friend of both Lily and Lolly Yeats, was a likely candidate for their advocacy.

R. F. Foster conjectures that the proposal occurred in the late 1880s, when Yeats made several extended visits to Whitehall.³⁸² This timeframe, however, is an unlikely one. If the proposal had occurred then, indications are that the outcome might very well have been different than it eventually was, for Tynan at that point was in a position to entertain romantic ideas about Yeats, and almost certainly did so. At the time that she met Yeats, Tynan was recovering from the heartbreak of her first love, which had been an unrequited one. During her initial visit to London in 1884 she had become enamoured with Henry Fagan's poetically-inclined son, Charles, only to learn that he was in love with another, and in Tynan's opinion less-deserving, woman. Only when Charles Fagan died in India a little less than two years later did Tynan finally confess her heartbreak to Father Russell:

I am glad you have spoken in a way that gives me an opportunity of telling you about my poor dear, the more so that I will remove a cloud which has lain over my affection for you. If there had been anything definite to tell, I would have told you long ago, but [...] there was nothing at all, like what you think between us; he has been engaged for more than a year. You would not have feared that he would affect my happiness if you knew how much good he has done me: he gave me a great affection and trust and honour which at first I was very unworthy to hold, but it has done so much to shape my soul.³⁸³

³⁸¹ Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life*, I, p. 105.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 72.

³⁸³ Letter from Katharine Tynan to Father Matthew Russell, (8 September 1885), Russell Papers, J27/73.

It is unlikely that Tynan was overestimating the profound effect this relationship had on the moulding of her personality, which ever afterwards would incline to selflessness and sacrifice, for Charles Fagan had asked her to watch over and care for his young fiancée, a task she at first resisted but eventually entered into wholeheartedly.

When she first met William Butler Yeats in June of 1885, Charles Fagan was still alive, however, and Tynan, realizing the hopelessness of her situation with him, appears to have been willing to turn her attentions elsewhere. Writing to a friend shortly after this first meeting, she enthusiastically described the sorrowful Yeats, deeming him even more 'poetical looking' than Charles Fagan.³⁸⁴ That Yeats had called Fagan to her mind upon her first glimpse of him indicates that her interest was more than platonic from the outset. Further evidence of an amorous attachment on Tynan's part may be found in her various descriptions of Yeats's physical appearance during the first days of their acquaintance, which are unfailingly admiring. Her earliest known reminiscence of him, written in 1910, reads: 'The poet, — then just twenty years old, — was an ideal poet to look at. Tall + slender with hair as black and sleek as a raven's wing, straight features of a certain Spanish dignity: great, dark, dreamy eyes'.³⁸⁵ By 1913, little had changed. 'He was beautiful to look at,' she writes in her first book of memoirs, and details his physical attributes by referring to his 'dark face', 'vivid colouring' and 'eager dark eyes' (*TFY* 144).

Yeats's letters to Tynan would become increasingly intimate from the autumn of 1889, and on 10 October of that year he would write to ask if he might begin to address her by her Christian name. In part due to this growing confidentiality in his correspondence, other scholars argue that Yeats's offer of marriage may have come several years after

³⁸⁴ Tynan wrote to her friend Mrs James Pritchard in June of 1885 of her first meeting with Yeats, 'he [Yeats] has the saddest, most poetical face I ever saw; he looks a poet much more than Mr Fagan though he was poetical looking also'. Quoted in Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life*, I, p 53.

³⁸⁵ Quoted in James McFadden and Daniel Kiefer, "Abstracted in His Dreams": Katharine Tynan's "W. B. Yeats", *Modern Philology*, vol. 88, no. 3 (February 1991), p. 265.

Foster conjectures.³⁸⁶ Peter van de Kamp asserts in his *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry on Tynan that the proposal occurred on 19 July 1891, at a point when Yeats had recently returned to Ireland after a lengthy spell in London and was again staying at Whitehall.³⁸⁷ This date coincides with the first mention in Yeats's correspondence of Henry Albert Hinkson, the man who would become Tynan's husband, and, barring the few letters which came in a flurry immediately after 20 July 1891 and indicate that Yeats left Whitehall in some haste, with a decline in the frequency of his communications to Tynan.³⁸⁸ It also pinpoints the proposal to a stage at which he had already met and been rejected by Gonne and, as such, makes it relevant to speculate that the offer of marriage may have occurred because Yeats, having been forsaken by his true love, decided to turn his romantic attentions to Tynan, his dearest friend. Nora Tynan O'Mahony would later recall that her elder sister thought Yeats's offer 'a lovely and suitable thing', yet it was eventually refused, perhaps because Tynan had quickly realized her position as second best in Yeats's affections and had little desire to repeat her

³⁸⁶ See Marie O'Neill, 'Katharine Tynan Hinkson: A Dublin Writer', *Dublin Historical Record*, vol. 40, no. 3 (June 1987), pp. 91-2 and McFadden and Kiefer, p. 261.

³⁸⁷ Peter van de Kamp, 'Tynan, Katharine (1859-1931)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33887>, accessed 30 Aug 2011]. Van de Kamp has had extensive and unparalleled access to Tynan's papers at University College Dublin, which have long been unavailable to researchers, and has asserted in correspondence held by Whitney Standlee that his sources leave no doubt as to the proposal or its date.

³⁸⁸ Yeats wrote to Tynan on 24 July 1891 to tell her, 'I left my razor strops behind me also my brush & comb & am rather a stray for lack of them. Could Dan [Tynan's younger brother] find them & send them to me?' In the same letter, he states, 'I asked Charles Johnston did he remember a boy at Harcourt St called Hinckson [sic]. He said he did and that he was a very nice fellow & had "the true instinct of a scholour [sic]".' In two letters that followed, written in late July and early August, he again inquired about the belongings he had left behind at Whitehall and settled some debts to Tynan and her family. Although he spent the week between 10 to 17 August 1891 at Whitehall, this was, for Yeats, a truncated stay. He would not write Tynan again until December 1891. Prior to this period, except for a spell of three months in early 1891 when he was writing a study of the Romantic poet William Blake and all of his correspondence dwindled considerably, his letters to Tynan had been regular, averaging about one per month. See John Kelly and Eric Domville (eds), *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats, Volume 1, 1865-1895* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

experiences with Fagan, and certainly because, by 1891, she had already become secretly engaged to the far more devoted Hinkson, a university student and aspiring writer.³⁸⁹

Whatever the truth about the proposal, Tynan's affections for Yeats persisted long after her marriage in 1893. She was to write in 1910 of the most intimate days of their acquaintance: 'it is a very gentle personality I think of in those days, — very gentle and very dear'.³⁹⁰ As to her opinions of him as a poet, she would declare that she 'always knew that [Yeats] was that precious thing to the race and the world, a genius', an idea she reiterates in numerous letters and reminiscences. 'Driving Willie Yeats to and fro,' Tynan would write on more than one occasion with only subtle variances to her phrasing, 'I used to say to myself: "And did you once see Shelley plain?"' (TFY 145) Throughout her memoirs, sketches and novels, she in fact portrays Yeats as the genius she had always longed to be but had, very early on, realized she was not.³⁹¹

In a memoir written late in her life, she would describe what she viewed as her own artistic limitations with the same degree of self-effacement that had marked her references to Yeats's literary prowess:

I had been adjured by friends in the 'nineties and since to let myself go, as though there was always *that* held back. It was no use telling them that I let go what I had. They used to shake their heads sorrowfully over me, and say that I had *It* right enough if I would only let myself go. I think in time they gave up thinking, or even suggesting, that I had *It*. (WY 288)

Among the vanguard of those who had once believed in Tynan's talent but had since lost faith was her dear friend Yeats. His literary reputation would eventually outstrip hers; they would grow apart. Yet years after her closest intimacy with him had dissipated — when

³⁸⁹ Nora Tynan O'Mahony, interviewed by Austin Clarke ca. 1930, quoted in R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life*, I, p. 39.

³⁹⁰ McFadden and Kiefer, p. 261.

³⁹¹ See also McFadden and Kiefer, p. 273; Katharine Tynan, *Her Ladyship* (London: Smith, Elder, 1907), p. 104; and Katharine Tynan, *John-A-Dreams* (London: Smith, Elder, 1916), p. 54.

she had become but a fond and faded memory to him — Tynan continued to place him at the centre of her thoughts and prayers, and revealed to a friend that 'she never went on her knees without praying for Willie'.³⁹²

Any comprehensive study of Tynan's work must necessarily include something of Yeats. His influence on her is irrefutable. Yet the converse is also true, and Tynan's contribution to Yeats's development should not be underestimated. Of the many women who nurtured the poet, she was among the earliest and most formative, and it is almost certainly true that the imperative role that Lady Augusta Gregory later played in Yeats's life was initially filled by the combination of Ellen O'Leary and Katharine Tynan. O'Leary took it upon herself to look after Yeats's physical well-being, as Tynan makes clear in her reminiscences:

Between Ellen O'Leary and W. B. Yeats there was a charming and touching friendship. She loved Willie in a motherly way, because he was young, because he was not very robust, because he knew so little how to take care of himself. Willie would never know when he had missed a meal though he might feel a vague discomfort: when he was wet and weary, when he was too thinly or heavily clad, when he had a hole in his shoe, though the water squished in it. (*MM* 100)

At the same time, it fell to Tynan to assist in cultivating and nurturing his poetic sensibilities, and she did so with indefatigable enthusiasm. She was his first reviewer and for many years thereafter remained his most diligent and fervent advocate in the press. Thus when Yeats wrote, 'I had about me from the first a little group whose admiration for work that had no merit justified my immense self-confidence', he undoubtedly had Tynan uppermost in his mind.³⁹³

Moreover, as C. L. Innes has ably demonstrated, the traces of Tynan's influence are recognizable in Yeats's poetic output. His *The Wanderings of Oisín* (1889) grew out of a

³⁹² Tynan quoted in letter from Mary Sullivan to Pamela Hinkson (6 May 1931), Tynan Papers, Manchester, Box 17, Folder 2.

³⁹³ R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life, I*, p. 39.

project, inspired by John O'Leary and encouraged by Alfred Perceval Graves, that had begun with her own Ossianic poem, 'The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Grainne' in 1887, and at least one of his verses, 'In Memory of Robert Gregory' (1919), is perceptibly indebted to her work.³⁹⁴ A.E. always maintained that 'Katharine Tynan was the earliest singer in that awakening of our imagination which has been spoken of as the Irish Renaissance' and Yeats himself acknowledged Tynan's importance both to the direction his poetry would take and to Irish literature more generally when in 1908 he publicly credited her with being one of the triumvirate who embarked on a venture 'to reform Irish poetry' and thereby kindled the Literary Revival.³⁹⁵ Bearing in mind the considerable part she played in launching Yeats both in his literary career and on the path towards the projects which first made him famous, his refusal to author an introduction for her *Collected Poems*, published the year before her death, is difficult to understand.³⁹⁶ Yet it is true that, by 1930, Yeats was loath to draw attention to his literary kinship with Tynan.

There are a number of reasons why the ardour of the relationship between Tynan and Yeats eventually waned. In the earliest days of their friendship, the pair had seen almost eye-to-eye on most literary and political matters. As early as 1881, Tynan was writing to Father Russell regarding the Irish legends that had served previously as inspiration for her poetry: 'Do you think I ought to continue writing legends? I like them, because the story is made for me, and sometimes I feel like the young man that told Hans Andersen that he wished to be a poet but that all the subjects had been written about before

³⁹⁴ See C. L. Innes, *Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society: 1880-1935* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1993), pp. 126-7. Yeats's 1919 elegy to Robert Gregory features the lines, 'Soldier, scholar, horseman, he,/As 'twere all life's epitome' and 'Our Sidney and our perfect man', which recognizably echo these in Tynan's 1913 elegiac poem, 'George Wyndham': 'Soldier, poet, courtier/He was these and more than these. [...] Sidney's brother, Raleigh's twin'.

³⁹⁵ A.E., 'Foreword', *Collected Poems by Katharine Tynan* (London: Macmillan, 1930), p. vii and W. B. Yeats and Lionel Johnson, *Poetry and Ireland: Essays by W. B. Yeats and Lionel Johnson* (Dundrum: Cuala Press, 1908), p. 3. The other two in the triumvirate, according to Yeats, were Lionel Johnson and himself.

³⁹⁶ A.E. agreed to write the introduction after Yeats refused.

his time'.³⁹⁷ Poems such as 'Waiting' (1884), a dramatic monologue based on the prehistoric legend of the giant Finn awaiting his chance in the caves of Donegal to fight for Ireland's redemption, and 'The Children of Lir' (1888), the mythological tale of the children of an Irish king transformed into swans by their jealous stepmother, intriguingly marry pagan storylines to Catholic imagery and themes. Both poems pre-date Yeats's *The Wanderings of Oisín*, yet to assert this point is not to suggest that Tynan was unique in her interest in Irish legends or Celtic myths. Standish O'Grady utilized and popularized them before her, John Todhunter and Douglas Hyde did so alongside her. Viewed with hindsight, however, Tynan's tendency to turn to Irish myth for her poetic inspiration lends weight to the argument that she may have been one of the earliest and most active influences over Yeats's poetic preoccupations.

Likewise, at the beginning of their friendship it was even more so than Yeats that Tynan interested herself in politics. A nationalist and a political progressive, particularly where Ireland was concerned, she could be outspoken in her activism but, like her friend Sir Horace Plunkett, who expressed his wish that 'the existing peace [in Ireland] be the forerunner of material and social progress', was generally content to follow a cautious and law-abiding route towards Irish independence rather than the more radical paths of female contemporaries such as Gonne and Constance Markiewicz.³⁹⁸ This political activism extended to the realm of women's rights, and Tynan, more so than many of her female literary colleagues and to a much greater degree than the majority of her Irish compatriots, was a staunch and public advocate for women's suffrage. A member of the Constitutional Movement and supporter of the National Union of Women Suffrage Societies from the time she was recruited to the cause in 1908 by her close friend, the Irish-born New Woman

³⁹⁷ Letter from Katharine Tynan to Father Matthew Russell (March 1881), Russell Papers, J27/73.

³⁹⁸ Sir Horace Curzon Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century* (London: John Murray, 1905), p. 12.

novelist Sarah Grand, Tynan would remain resolutely a suffragist rather than a suffragette. Even after her return to Ireland, at which point she was appointed a Vice-President of the Irish Federation of Suffrage Societies, she refused to follow the aggressively rebellious routes that her colleagues Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington and Eva Gore-Booth charted in their attempts to gain the franchise for women.³⁹⁹

While it may be true that the degree of Tynan's political involvement was fuelled by her relationship, albeit tangential, to the Celtic Twilight movement, the genesis of her nationalist inclinations predated her associations with Yeats and his Revivalist cohort by a number of years and may in fact have acted as an early influence on Yeats's own political ideology. She admits to having developed her political conscience when the first appearances of her poetry in periodicals and newspapers lent to her a sense of civic responsibility, and it was in 1878, the year that her first poem was published in *Young Ireland Magazine*, that she found herself 'taken up with a new interest in the shape of active politics' (TFY 71). Her fervour for affairs of state was further invigorated by what she describes as the 'romantic force' of the personalities of the Land League's leaders, Michael Davitt and Charles Stewart Parnell (TFY 72). Angered at their arrests in 1881, she became an active member of the Ladies' Land League at its inception — it was Tynan who suggested the organization be called the 'Women's Land League', a name that was rejected for being 'too democratic' — and formed during the period of her involvement a friendship with Anna Parnell, its effective leader (TFY 75). She would remain adamantly and publicly Parnellite ever after, although ten years later her loyalties to Ireland's 'uncrowned king' would be strongly tested during the split of the Irish Parliamentary Party precipitated by the revelation of Parnell's affair with Katharine O'Shea. Tynan evocatively describes the damage inflicted on her by anti-Parnellites during the period of the party schism in her

³⁹⁹ See Marie O'Neill, p. 88.

memoirs and correspondence, including one notable letter written to Mary Gill on 14 November 1891, a month after Parnell's death:

I'm feeling now as if I was a wicked person since this morning when I got a letter from Father Russell telling me he couldn't do anything for my poems or my nun [a reference to her recently published biography of Mother Mary Xaveria Fallon] in the *Irish Monthly* because of the part I'd taken in politics. It isn't *his* will but stronger wills outside. He told me for the first time that last December two of his subscribers returned the *Irish Monthly* because I had something in it. I'm sure those two were priests and I shall say for the future that for intolerance and un-Christian uncharitableness priests take the cake.⁴⁰⁰

Her affection for Parnell and for the Home Rule cause he advocated remained intact, but subsequent events would lead to many changes in Tynan's political opinions, in her literary career, and in her relationship to Ireland. If her views on Ireland, its politics and its literature were initially very similar to Yeats's own, the pair's increasingly divergent personal circumstances meant that variances in their beliefs and ideologies would appear over time to create irremediable fissures in their relationship.

Of those events that altered Tynan's personal viewpoints, the two most important occurred simultaneously in 1893: her move from Ireland to England and her marriage to Hinkson. The result of these altered circumstances was a conspicuous shift in Tynan's literary output, for it was after she migrated to England and married that she first began to write novels. It is also at this point that the seeds of her literary fall from grace were planted and a partial answer to the question of her increasing distance from Yeats may be found, for from this point forward Tynan's work necessarily became more popular, and thus less reconcilable with Yeats's vision of what literature should be and was meant to achieve. Yeats had spelled out for Tynan in one of his most intimate epistles both his reluctance to turn to prose as a literary medium, and the centrality of Ireland to what he perceived as their mutual poetic project:

⁴⁰⁰ Letter from Katharine Tynan to Mary Gill (14 November 1891), Tynan Papers, Manchester, Box 16, Folder 3.

When you write, always tell me what you are writing, especially what poems, the journalism interests me more dimly of course, being good work for many people, but no way, unless on Irish matters, good work for you or me, unless so far as it be really forced on us by crazy circumstance. [...] so much in the way of writing is needed for Irish purposes. You know all this as well as I do, however. Much may depend in the future on Ireland now developing writers who know how to formulate in clear expressions the vague feelings now abroad — to formulate them for Ireland's not for England's use.⁴⁰¹

This letter, written in October of 1889, prefigures Yeats's late, important remarks concerning the 'long gestation' of the Easter Rising, and predates the earliest comments — made by Tynan, William Patrick Ryan and others — regarding the rise of literature to fill the void left by the political inertia that afflicted Ireland in the wake of Parnell's fall.⁴⁰² Yet despite the bond she felt for Yeats and the undeniable force of his repeated arguments that she should focus her attention on the production of poetry — and, even more specifically, poetry solely 'for Ireland' — Tynan would stray widely from the path her friend had charted for her. Over the course of her career she increasingly turned to prose for her livelihood and would write over one hundred novels before her death in 1931. The necessity of earning a living meant that the quality of her work often suffered, and, although she joined the Irish Literary Society upon her relocation to London, her devotion to Literary Revivalism waned considerably.

Despite the fact that English commentators would continue to perceive in her work a partiality towards Irish interests and the Irish people — a reviewer in the *Manchester Guardian*, commenting upon her biography of the Irish temperance movement leader Father Theobald Mathew in 1905, for instance, accused her of punctuating her volume with the 'glib repetition of stale calumnies on English statesmen' and of exhibiting a

⁴⁰¹ Roger McHugh (ed.), *W. B. Yeats: Letters to Katharine Tynan* (Dublin: Clonmore and Reynolds, 1953), pp. 102-3.

⁴⁰² See Percy L. Parker, 'Katharine Tynan at Home', *The Woman's Signal*, no. 2 (11 January 1894), p. 17 and William Patrick Ryan, *The Irish Literary Revival* (New York: Lemma, 1894 [1970]), p. v.

'hysterical' form of Irish bias — it is evident that Tynan's move to England had the effect of distancing her from the Irish Revivalists.⁴⁰³ Ernest Boyd, in his comprehensive 1916 survey of the Celtic Revival, would criticize the literary course that Tynan followed from 1893 when he argued that the whole of her talent had been revealed and spent in her first three volumes of poetry, thoughts that are foreshadowed by the comments of William Patrick Ryan in his 1894 study, *The Irish Literary Revival*:

[Tynan's] power is unquestioned, her nature is Irish, but her art and standpoint are sometimes English, strange to say. This is even evident in her Gaelic excursions. [...] She has not entered eagerly into the spirit of our present movement, preferring to work apart, and on her own lines.⁴⁰⁴

Both Ryan and Boyd, preoccupied by a collective Irish literary project the centrality of which they assert in at times self-aggrandizing ways, inevitably perceived in the newly-independent Tynan a writer in decline. In actuality, there is little evidence in her poetry, when viewed as a corpus, to suggest that her literary powers diminished over time. Boyd's opinions are further tainted by his obvious anti-Catholic bias, particularly when he asserts that Tynan's religion had already precluded her from the realms of poetic greatness:

Interesting though she may be as the only important Catholic poet in Ireland, Katharine Tynan will hardly rank with the best writers of the Literary Revival. [...] Irish Catholicism is necessarily a shallow vein of inspiration, and even at its best, it has not created, and cannot create, great poetry.⁴⁰⁵

That Yeats shared in the assessments of Boyd and Ryan with regard to Tynan's poetic output is implicit as early as 1895, when his tepid remarks about her work and its lack of 'Gaelic' passion in the third of a series of four articles he published on 'Irish National Literature' in *The Bookman* suggest that his disillusionment had by then already begun.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰³ 'New Books', *Guardian* (Manchester) (15 May 1908), p. 5.

⁴⁰⁴ Ernest Boyd, *Ireland's Literary Renaissance* (London: Grant Richards, 1923), p. 107 and William Patrick Ryan, p. 117.

⁴⁰⁵ Boyd, p. 112.

⁴⁰⁶ W. B. Yeats, 'Irish National Literature', *The Bookman*, vol. 8, no. 48 (September 1895), pp. 168.

The message conveyed by these men who were convinced of the overarching importance of the Revivalist movement — like many of Ireland's political movements, a predominantly Anglo-Irish Protestant one — is that Tynan's work after 1893 was too far removed from the Literary Renaissance's collective ethos to hold merit. Despite the fact that she, as a Catholic who had spent the entirety of her life until that point in Ireland, had more in common with the majority of Irish people than did many of the Revivalists, the implication is that her work was simply not 'Irish' enough.

It is difficult to fault Tynan for gradually placing herself at a remove from the members of a literary movement who consistently and often publicly emphasized the degree of her distance from them. Had the opinions of Hyde, Ryan, Boyd and Yeats been her only reasons for altering her literary focus, that change of focus would have remained understandable. Yet Tynan had other and more important instigations. That the beginning of her career as a novelist coincided with the beginning of her marriage is no mere coincidence, for, in marrying Harry Hinkson, she left financial security behind and thereafter found herself having to turn to the writing of novels as a means of 'boiling the pot'.⁴⁰⁷ This change of literary focus was primarily a financial matter, but the degree to which Tynan's religion affected and guided her life should not be overlooked as a significant subsidiary catalyst. As Boyd would note years later, Catholicism had always been central to Tynan's work. Father Russell had noticed early on that 'Katharine Tynan owes more than she imagines to her years at Sienna [sic]; [...] all that convent atmosphere of prayer, all that affectionate familiarity with the saints, has had no small share in making her the poet that she is', while another priest, Father J. B. McLaughlin, in a laudatory review of her writings to 1913 which also acts as a sustained lament of her literary

⁴⁰⁷ Katharine Tynan, *The Middle Years* (London: Constable, 1916), p. 353. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *MY*.

downfall, recognized that Tynan's was 'a Catholic mind in the highest sense'.⁴⁰⁸ Indeed, Tynan's devotion to Catholicism is everywhere in evidence in her writing, as it is in the decisions she was to make concerning her life in relation to that writing. As a Catholic woman, she was committed above all to her family, and especially to the roles of wife and mother she entered into during the 1890s. In her first full-length prose work she describes the exemplar that she sought to 'imitate' in her own life: 'Mary, Mother of God, is the ideal set before all Catholic women. From their childhood they are taught to weigh their actions by her modesty and humility and patience'.⁴⁰⁹ Tynan's modesty and humility are demonstrated in the passages she writes about herself in her memoirs, her patience more actively so in her turning from her treasured poetry to the writing of prose upon her marriage. From that point on, writing was for her less an artistic pursuit, and more of an attempt to 'keep the fire on the hearth for the children and the securities and sanctities of home about them' (*MY* 353) — things that her husband apparently was unable to do.

Tynan had met her future husband when, in November of 1888, Charles Fagan's brother Francis visited Dublin and stayed with Hinkson at Trinity College. Hinkson was a Classics scholar, and Tynan's immediate romantic interest in him can be gleaned from the fact that, very soon thereafter, she began writing to friends to say that she was studying Greek.⁴¹⁰ After graduating from Trinity, Hinkson taught Classics at Clongowes Wood School and by the time of their marriage was working as a schoolmaster in London. Less than two years later, however, and at a point when Tynan was in the latter stages of her first pregnancy, serious problems would begin to arise in Hinkson's professional life. In

⁴⁰⁸ Father Matthew Russell, 'Poets I have Known. No. 5: Katharine Tynan', *The Irish Monthly*, vol. 31, no. 359 (May 1903), p. 253 and J. B. McLaughlin, p. 278.

⁴⁰⁹ Katharine Tynan, *A Nun, Her Friends and Her Order: Being A Sketch of the Life of Mother Mary Xaveria Fallon* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1891), pp. 119-20.

⁴¹⁰ See, for instance, letter to Father Russell in which Tynan writes, 'I don't know whether you will be pleased or displeased to hear that I am trying to learn Greek'. Letter from Katharine Tynan to Father Matthew Russell (1 April 1889), Russell Papers, J27/73.

May of 1894 Tynan would write anxiously to Father Russell that her husband had received a letter from the principal of the school at which he worked which suggested that 'there were a great many complaints of Harry's manner to the boys, etc. [...] such a letter that Harry had no option but to write and say that if desired he would leave at the month's end.'⁴¹¹ In the stressful time that ensued, Tynan gave birth prematurely to a stillborn son.

Forced out of teaching, Hinkson next tried his hand at journalistic work and managed to write and publish several novels, none of which were a significant source of income for the family. He studied law, was called to the bar and authored what was then the definitive tract on copyright, yet his attempts at legal practice were abortive, and his one viable source of regular income over the course of his twenty-six-year marriage to Tynan in fact came only when his wife's long-term friendship with Lord and Lady Aberdeen resulted in his appointment as Resident Magistrate for Mayo in 1914. By that time, Yeats's sister Lily was writing to her father:

now I hope poor K.T. will be able to write less and now will write the good stuff she can write — drink has [Hinkson] by the hand these many years, she is likely to have him in handcuffs in Castlebar — all the same I am glad. K.T. was being worked to rags to keep the whole family — a good deal of debt too I know.⁴¹²

On a visit to Tynan in 1920, a year after Hinkson's death, Lily would again write her father about her friend, this time to remark upon the welcome differences she perceived in the household now that Tynan was widowed: 'K.T.'s whole family are at home & the air is free & warm since her husband died,' she writes, 'such a difference — before it was

⁴¹¹ Letter from Katharine Tynan to Father Matthew Russell (29 May 1894), Russell Papers, J27/73.

⁴¹² Letter from Lily Yeats to John Butler Yeats (10 October 1914), National Library of Ireland, Yeats Correspondence, Ms 31,112 (23).

electric & Katharine always anxious & working to keep the peace & to keep her own temper'.⁴¹³

These comments could, of course, be dismissed as the petulant remarks of a sister jealous for her brother's sake of the man for whom he was 'thrown over'. The fact that five children were born to Hinkson and Tynan — only three of them, Theobald Henry ('Toby'), Giles Aylmer ('Bunny' or 'Patrick') and Pamela, surviving to adulthood — and that Tynan used many of the pages of her 1919 memoir *The Years of the Shadow* to detail the hardship of a Resident Magistrate's life in the west of Ireland and dedicated her 1922 memoir, *The Wandering Years*, to 'him who made home for me' indicates that Tynan's affections for her husband may have endured. Yet Hinkson's lack of gainful employment, the scarcity of letters to, from or about him in Tynan's extant papers, and the level to which he is otherwise effaced in her memoirs and private diaries nonetheless lend a degree of authority to Lily Yeats's comments.⁴¹⁴

Evidence that her marriage to Hinkson may have exacerbated fissures in the friendship between Tynan and Yeats can be glimpsed in her memoirs, the first volume of which was published in 1913 and features two full chapters about her poet friend. These chapters include a number of extracts from Yeats's correspondence which were printed without his consultation or permission. While her reminiscences are often affectionate and, as has been demonstrated, detail her admiration for the man and his poetry, Tynan also focuses heavily on Yeats's passion for mysticism and his absent-mindedness, as often

⁴¹³ Letter from Lily Yeats to John Butler Yeats (30 June 1920), National Library of Ireland, Yeats Correspondence, Ms 31,112 (45).

⁴¹⁴ It is also intriguing when contemplating the relationship between Tynan and Hinkson to consider George Moore's short story 'The Wild Goose', from *The Untilled Field* (1903), in which Moore paints a thinly-veiled portrait of Tynan in his character Ellen Cronin. Ellen is a flame-haired Irish Catholic beauty who, after having spent her early life being pandered to by her prosperous dairyman father at an expansive farmhouse called 'Brookfield' (whose geographical situation and features, including tennis court, make it recognizable as Whitehall), marries a Protestant writer and journalist whose persistent anti-Catholic activism leads to the breakdown of the relationship. See George Moore, 'The Wild Goose', *The Untilled Field* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 2000), pp. 139-178.

as not reinforcing the 'fairy Willie' reputation Yeats had long struggled to transcend. 'A sad accident happened at Madame Blavatsky's lately,' Yeats writes in a characteristic passage from Tynan's *Twenty-Five Years*. 'A big materialist sat on the astral double of a poor young Indian. It was sitting on the sofa, and he was too material to be able to see it' (TFY 269). Tynan's reasons for what amounted to an affectionate mockery of her literary comrade are, however, relatively easy to surmise. Hinkson appears to have become increasingly jealous of his wife's success as his own literary career faltered. In 1899, writing to Father Russell, Tynan mentions that her husband has been complaining to her about literary critics who 'think he can't write because I can'.⁴¹⁵ If Hinkson was envious of his wife's success, he almost certainly would have been more so of that of the former suitor who had forged a writing career far greater than hers. Yeats's disparagement of the artifice he recognized in Hinkson's plays, which Tynan had sent to him for feedback in 1906 at her husband's request, could not have helped matters.⁴¹⁶ Her husband's increasing lack of self-esteem and his diminishing career were understandable reasons for Tynan to have tempered her regard for Yeats's 'genius' with references to some of his more eccentric qualities, but Yeats could not have guessed at her instigations, and was understandably hurt by her indiscretion in printing his letters and confused by the portrait she painted of him. In Tynan's descriptions, he would admit to Lady Gregory, he failed to recognize himself.⁴¹⁷

By October of 1914 Tynan was writing in her war diary of a meeting with Yeats: 'I am carried back to an evening two months ago when I talked with a distinguished writer about the War & we disagreed so sharply that I felt the old friendship would never be

⁴¹⁵ Letter from Katharine Tynan to Father Matthew Russell (31 July 1899), Russell Papers, J27/73.

⁴¹⁶ *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats*, Accession Letter #635, Oxford University Press (IntelLex Electronic Edition), 2002.

⁴¹⁷ McHugh, *W. B. Yeats: Letters to Katharine Tynan*, p. 22.

possible again'.⁴¹⁸ Their disparate opinions on her dear friend Lionel Johnson — whom Tynan viewed posthumously as a much beloved 'Catholic Poet' and Yeats as a 'dissipated...drunkard' — would distance them further from one another.⁴¹⁹ By 1919, Tynan was referring to Yeats as 'A Strayed Poet' with a 'muddling philosophy', and Yeats had long since ceased to take notice of her work altogether.⁴²⁰ Under the circumstances, it is perhaps surprising that a degree of their affection for one another — if not their intimacy *with* one another — was indeed 'possible again', and endured throughout Tynan's lifetime.⁴²¹

Yeats's first negative appraisal of Tynan's poetry, however, had come with his articles on Irish literature in *The Bookman* in 1895, and it is certainly no accident that his altered opinion of her work surfaced in the year that her first novel was published. If Tynan's decision to turn to the writing of popular fiction dismayed and disappointed her old friend, however, it nonetheless made sound financial sense. Novels were by then the favoured format among the British reading community and their sales were continuing to grow at an exceptionally rapid pace, as an 1894 report in *The Bookman* makes clear:

And what about the novels? 'Unprecedented' is hardly a sufficiently strong adjective to apply to the present demand for this class of publication. Perhaps 'phenomenal' is nearer the mark. Anyhow, the number now being sold is enormous.⁴²²

⁴¹⁸ Tynan, *A Woman's Notes in War-Time*, Tynan Papers, Manchester, Box 13, Folder 1, page numbered '57'.

⁴¹⁹ Katharine Tynan, 'A Catholic Poet', *Dublin Review*, vol. 142, no. 283 (July 1907), p. 327; Yeats quoted in Van de Kamp, 'Some Notes on the Literary Estate of Pamela Hinkson', p. 185.

⁴²⁰ Katharine Tynan, 'A Strayed Poet', *The Bookman*, vol. 56, no. 332 (May 1919), pp. 78-79.

⁴²¹ As evidence that the affection endured on both sides of the Tynan-Yeats friendship, Foster suggests that the death of Tynan, Yeats's first 'literary comrade', had a profound effect on him: 'her death snapped the link back to the days of his early apprenticeship, when he had discovered John O'Leary and the world of nationalist culture'. R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life, II. The Arch-Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 414.

⁴²² 'Monthly Report of the Wholesale Book Trade', *The Bookman*, vol. 7, no. 39 (December 1894), p. 74.

Tynan, already a household name in both Ireland and England through her poetry and journalistic work, found a ready readership for her fiction and quickly settled into a pattern in which she produced on average three novels per year while still managing to generate a steady and copious volume of newspaper and magazine articles, memoirs, biographies, school textbooks, volumes of poetry and short story collections. Although she would claim about her novels that they were created 'not to please [her]self, but to meet demand' (MY 353), more than a third are set in Ireland, and the necessity of writing them did not deter her from using them as a means to confront the serious topics about which she had been debarred from speaking *in propria persona*.

Her first novel, *The Way of a Maid*, is a case in point. Published in 1895, it is markedly concerned with the topic of inter-religious marriage in Ireland and deals with issues with which Tynan had long been acquainted. Some of the novel's inspiration may have come from her father, who was the product of an ill-fated interdenominational marriage, about which Tynan writes in her memoirs:

My father's mother, being a Catholic and an only child, had run away with and married in a Protestant Church one Tynan, a young Dublin man. The prejudice against mixed marriages being very strong at that time, the marriage was bitterly resented by her parents. Her husband dying and leaving her and her two children unprovided for, she returned to her parents, who brought up the children in their own name. My father claimed his real name when he grew to manhood, but he could learn very little about his father, whom his mother had not long survived. (WY 249)

Her use of the past tense in this passage to describe Irish religious prejudices belies the reality in Ireland at the time that she was writing and more particularly of her own situation, and *The Way of a Maid* is also undoubtedly a more personal testament to the intolerance she herself had experienced in Ireland during her courtship with and marriage to the Protestant Hinkson. The marriage provoked a falling out with the Irish Catholic author Rosa Mulholland, one of Tynan's literary heroes and closest friends, and Andrew Cullen Tynan also emerged at that time as one of the most vocal opponents to the union.

While her father's objections may reveal much about his own experience of the bigotry such alliances could arouse and the suffering inflicted upon those who entered into, or were the progeny of, these types of marriages, Andrew Tynan's animosity may have been instigated by a more personal dislike of Hinkson which had little to do with religion. He appears never to have fully reconciled himself to his son-in-law, as is evidenced by the fact that, in the year in which *The Way of a Maid* was published, Tynan consistently complained of her father's 'jealous estrangement from my husband' in letters to Father Russell.⁴²³

In *The Way of a Maid*, Tynan argues that cross-religious alliances, although rare, are of benefit to Ireland and its people. Many of the almost exclusively Catholic inhabitants of her fictional town of Coolevara are, we learn, descended from the Protestant Cromwellian soldiers who long ago came to vanquish and remained to be subjugated:

Those unconquerable warriors settled down in various parts of the fertile Irish country, and, in days of peace, had to ground arms before the violet-eyed daughters of the mere Irish. In course of time they or their sons renegaded to the Scarlet Woman, and became as sturdy on her side as they had been on the other in their psalm-singing days. Admirable results these marriages have had.⁴²⁴

By the end of the novel, similar intermarriages have been achieved between Tynan's present-day Protestant and Catholic characters, but these unions cannot be achieved until obstacles have been overcome. For the central character, the Protestant Jessie Oliver, it is her father's objections that must be confronted before her marriage to the Catholic Jim Hurley. 'I am a broad-minded man,' Mr Oliver tells Jessie, 'but I don't like a mixed marriage for a daughter of mine. [...] But for the religion I should say "yes" willingly. [...] How will it be when your dearest faiths are not shared by the human heart you have to

⁴²³ Letter from Katharine Tynan to Father Matthew Russell (23 March 1895), Russell Papers, J27/73.

⁴²⁴ Katharine Tynan, *The Way of a Maid* (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1895), pp. 6-7. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *WM*.

lean upon all your life?' (*WM* 282). Jessie's answer to her father's arguments is to convert wholeheartedly to Jim's Catholic faith, as the town's Cromwellian forebears had done. 'Your people shall be my people,' she tells her fiancé at the end of the novel, 'your God my God!' (*WM* 279). It is significant to note, however, that although Tynan would regularly feature admirable Protestant characters and favourable Protestant-Catholic marital alliances in her novels, an inverse action — a Catholic to Protestant conversion — never occurs in any of her texts, and it was not a course she herself agreed to take upon her own marriage.⁴²⁵ She remained Catholic, and devoutly so, throughout her life.

This first novel is representative of Tynan's early work, much of which features a central romance plagued by difficulties, and promotes Tynan's political and religious sensibilities, particularly when Ireland is her focus. While Katherine Sutherland asserts that the 'bulk of Tynan's work [...] may be grouped essentially into three periods, each characterized by a specific genre: romantic, Gothic, and realistic', her novels can in fact be seen from the earliest stages of her career to range freely between the genres Sutherland identifies.⁴²⁶ Her first recognizably Gothic storyline appears in 1899 in *The Handsome Brandons*; *A Girl of Galway* (1901) sets the tone for many of the Gothic creations which follow, and her last quintessentially Gothic tale, *The House in the Forest*, was published in 1928. Likewise, the first of her novels to feature realist elements is *A Daughter of the Fields*, published in 1901; the last the harrowingly naturalistic Civil War tale *The Playground* in 1930. Much of her work disappoints those seeking evidence of significant shifts in genre or style. Viewed as a corpus, what it reveals is a writer seemingly contradictory in her opinions who is able to sympathize with a variety of differing

⁴²⁵ It was in fact Hinkson who converted to Catholicism, but he did not do so until 1919, and then only when he was on his deathbed.

⁴²⁶ Katherine Sutherland, 'Katharine Tynan (1861-1931)', in George M. Johnson (ed.), *Late-Victorian and Edwardian British Novelists: First Series*, vol. 153 (Detroit, Washington, D.C., London: Gale, 1995), p. 312.

viewpoints and convey them in a compellingly readable manner, while at times offering troublingly simplistic resolutions to the complex questions her texts raise.

During the first two decades of her novel-writing career, Tynan's fictional output altered only subtly in theme and content. *The Handsome Brandons* and *A Girl of Galway* are typical of Tynan's earliest work in that they largely eschew nostalgia for her homeland to feature plots which act as critiques of the Irish and allude to the means by which Ireland and its people might be reformed and regenerated. In each of these novels, a young member of an Irish family who has been raised abroad returns to Ireland to mend relations between his or her parents and a landowning grandfather, who incidentally has been mismanaging his property and mistreating his tenants. This attempt at reconciliation in each case meets with failure, and the new generation must instead forge alliances across religious, cultural and/or national boundaries in order for peace and well-being to be restored to the Irish homeland. Concurrently, it is the land itself which enacts a 'natural' form of revenge on the immoral older generation. In *The Handsome Brandons*, a storm swells a bog, the resulting flood sweeps away and drowns both Harry de Lacy's corrupt grandfather and the evil manager of the ancestral estate, and the land that has been misused is eventually claimed by a younger, more civically responsible generation. In *A Girl of Galway*, it is a fire that destroys the cursed woods that surround and isolate the heroine, Bertha Grace, in her family's castle, kills the cruel and criminally-minded manager of the estate, and maims Bertha's grandfather, Sir Devlin Grace. Sir Devlin's injuries lead to a loss of his memory, and thus of the jealousies and enmities that instigated his wicked behaviour, with the result that his friendships and family alliances are renewed immediately prior to his death. In both novels, legitimacy and responsibility are efficiently restored by the introduction of a nationally and culturally diverse younger generation to Ireland, while the 'acts of God' which rid the land of those who have theretofore governed

it cruelly or wrongly effectively eliminate the need for physical violence or organized rebellion. Forgetting or transcending the legacies of the past is, in each case, an important prerequisite for the regeneration of the land and the family.

Tynan's Irish protagonists are invariably reformers, and it is frequently her fictional project to show the means by which her young heroes and heroines achieve absolution for their ancestors, thereby staking rightful claims to both Irish land and the Irish people. In *The Dear Irish Girl* (1899), Maurice O'Hara is descended from a long line of Connaught squires who have 'rack-rented their tenants gaily from father to son'.⁴²⁷ Rather than repeat the mistakes of the past, Maurice overcomes them through his exposure to an emerging and radically different set of ethics, ones that Tynan represents as specifically maternal in origin. From his biological mother, a member of the worldly La Touche family, Maurice inherits a 'new strain of conscience and responsibility' (*DIG* 31), while through his Celtic Irish foster mother, Nannie, he learns to empathize with 'the people' (*DIG* 54). With this newfound sense of morality and responsibility, legitimate governance of the land is restored to the O'Hara family, and Maurice simultaneously is able to wrest the attention and affections of the exiled Biddy O'Connor back from England and the English suitor, John Ayers, who has been vying with him for her allegiance.

In this and Tynan's other early novels *Three Fair Maids* (1900) and *That Sweet Enemy* (1901), issues of rightful ownership figure prominently, while religion plays little or no role in the relationship between land and legitimacy. The increasing polarization of Irish society along sectarian lines is quickly evidenced, however, in works such as *Julia* (1904), *The French Wife* (1904) and *Cousins and Others* (1909), in which a burgeoning notion of 'Irish Ireland' can be glimpsed in Tynan's narrative bias as Catholicism acts as a precondition for ownership of property. Over the course of these narratives, the law and

⁴²⁷ Katharine Tynan, *The Dear Irish Girl* (London: Smith, Elder, 1899), p. 30. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *DIG*.

moral integrity are consistently shown to be at odds as Catholic characters are deprived of land that is rightfully, but not lawfully, theirs. In each case, ownership of property is reinstated to the Catholic family to which it had traditionally belonged, even when such a restoration means the displacement of those of Protestant descent who have lived on and governed the land for generations, as it does in both *The French Wife* and *Cousins and Others*.

While in *Julia* lands are returned to their rightful Catholic owners through the marriage of Protestant and Catholic characters of common ancestry, Tynan is at pains to emphasize that her Protestant protagonist, Murty O'Kavanagh, has been raised in England, and thus away from the taint of Irish Protestant prejudices. There is no equivocation within the text on the matter of blame for religious and racial intolerance in Ireland. For Tynan, it rests squarely on the shoulders of Protestants: 'It is the Anglo-Irish who are the irreconcilables, and not the complaisant and easy-going Celt', she asserts, and re-affirms a specifically Irish Protestant culpability for sectarian animosities by stating that 'there may be a Union of Hearts between Celt and Saxon; but to the Anglo-Irishman, more especially if he calls himself Irish, the marriage will be a thing unnatural, impossible'.⁴²⁸ By reiterating the idea first broached in *The Way of a Maid*, that inter-religious, interracial and international alliances — the 'Union of Hearts' between 'Celt and Saxon' she portrays in this novel — are beneficial for, and even necessary to, the rehabilitation of Ireland and the restoration of legitimacy of governance to its people, Tynan attempts to circumvent any accusations of an overarching Protestant bias. Yet it is the sense of menace towards, and apprehension about, Protestant attitudes that lingers at the close of the novel.

Julia exemplifies a type of novel Tynan was capable of writing: one in which the endemic racial differences and religious animosities in Ireland form the fulcrum upon

⁴²⁸ Katharine Tynan, *Julia* (London: Smith, Elder, 1904), p. 62.

which the action of the novel turns. Yet more often in Tynan's novels Ireland is a country in which social boundaries are so indistinct as to be virtually unrecognizable. Such is the case in *She Walks in Beauty* (1899), in which the Graydons, the 'Quality' family around which the plot centers, are in a steady but largely unlamented financial and social decline, while the Irish community in which they live is characterized as 'a large family' whose diverse members are willing and able to interact freely and affably.⁴²⁹ In Tynan's fictional evocations of Ireland, it remains the case that 'the good blood is very often in the cottages, and the base blood in the castles', and she deploys this idea regularly to highlight the degree to which eccentricities and inconsistencies thwart attempts to firmly define social categorizations.⁴³⁰ Tynan's characters rise and fall along the social and economic scale more often on the basis of their own merits and inclinations than through recourse to notions of birth, heredity and family. In *The House of the Crickets* (1908), Hannah Moore is the daughter of an indolent and impoverished Irish farmer. Through her innate poise, singing talent, and the education she is able to pursue because of that talent, Hannah transcends the legacies of her upbringing and the ill-treatment of her puritanical, fatalistic and slovenly father by achieving professional acclaim and marrying into a landed family. Molly De La Poer, the protagonist of 1903's *The Honourable Molly*, is likewise able to move up and down the social spectrum with ease, but opts to make the opposite transition. Despite her status as 'half a peasant', Molly assimilates herself into life with the upper-class half-sisters and aunts with whom she is raised, yet eventually chooses to marry Hugh Sinclair and subsequently settles comfortably and ably into the role of farmer's wife (*HM* 206). This blurring of traditional class boundaries — poor and middle class characters rising along the social scale, upper class characters falling, the whole of society mixing

⁴²⁹ Katharine Tynan, *She Walks in Beauty* (London: Smith, Elder, 1899), p. 40.

⁴³⁰ Katharine Tynan, *The Honourable Molly* (London: Smith, Elder, 1903), p. 206. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *HM*.

cordially — is a common undercurrent in Tynan's early- and mid-career work, in which unification and conciliation of the social classes is represented as an often hard-won, but nevertheless natural and proper, outcome.

Molly de la Poer's descent into the rank of life her chosen partner inhabits highlights what is implicit in a number of Tynan's novels: that for the Irish male, class transitions of any kind are generally more problematic than they are for women. Whereas Tynan's female characters — through beauty, poise, honour or professional accomplishment — may attract an upper-class man and thereby be raised into the milieu their partner inhabits, working- or middle-class male characters regularly remain more class-bound than their female counterparts, and their chosen partners must accept the social decline which inevitably accompanies the marriage. Just as Molly de la Poer, by marrying Hugh Sinclair, must leave behind the aristocratic home in which she was raised, in *The Story of Cecilia* (1911), Maurice Grace and Cecily Shannon must make their way, after their marriage, on his doctor's wages and live without the companionship of her well-to-do relations. In each case, however, Tynan shows these men achieving a degree of financial and social success which elevates them above their initial status, and the overriding sense is that the notion of class, within Ireland, remains an indistinct and ever-changing concept.

It is with works such as *A Daughter of the Fields* (1901), however, that Tynan presents her most convincingly complex portraits of characters who range across conventional cultural boundaries, and in which she most effectively portrays a sense of women's fluctuating roles in turn of the century Irish society. Though none qualifies as a 'New Woman', many of her characters are educated and working women who must resolve themselves to ever-altering gender roles, and such is the case with the two central female characters in *A Daughter of the Fields*. In this intricate evocation of the relationship between gender, class, education and notions of privilege, Meg O'Donoghue, the novel's

protagonist, is the child of small farmers whose father has been ruined in both reputation and livelihood by his alcoholism. Meg's elevation by means of her convent schooling to the hyper-feminized status of 'lady' is achieved against a backdrop in which the mother's physical masculinization and social decline act as the prerequisite for the daughter's rise. Upon Meg's return from school, mother and daughter, more estranged than reconciled by the sacrifices the mother has made and the advantages the daughter has been given, struggle to find metaphorical common ground, yet mirror each other in their displacement and dislocation. Having been educated beyond her station, Meg is neither at home with the landed and financially superior class with whom she has been educated but from whom she senses an inherent social distance, nor does she belong to the working class society from which she emerged. Her mother, meanwhile, after having taken on the heavy physical work of the family farm, no longer occupies a conventionally feminine role. Thus, while Meg finds herself in a position between traditionally-defined social classes, her mother is effectively stranded between genders. The resolution of their differences and the difficulties of self-definition in terms of class and gender roles remain problematic even as Tynan struggles to show her characters, at the end of the novel, reconciling themselves to each other and to their newly-realized positions within Irish society.

A Daughter of Kings (1905) acts as both companion piece and complement to *A Daughter of the Fields* by centering its action around a similarly intricate, yet conversely structured, type of social movement. Anne Daly is a member of the Irish landed gentry forced by financial hardship to seek employment in England. Despite settling readily into working life, she cannot transition as easily into English life, and expresses her distaste for the opulence she perceives in her newfound homeland in culturally-specific terms: 'I don't like the — the moneyed people,' she explains. 'It is one of the painful things about living

in England. There is so much money. We never suffer from that complaint in Ireland'.⁴³¹

Anne is a character who believes firmly in the stratification of society along lines of financial and hereditary privilege, asserting that a culture in which there is 'no aristocracy of wealth, nor refinement, nor birth' is untenable (DK 126-7). Her ultimate desire is not for a return to her own position of economic superiority but for a general and renewed sense of the type of civic responsibility she believes was once intrinsic to the Ascendancy in Ireland. Through the act of recognizing, in the self-made Englishman John Corbett, the innate sense of honour she believed was confined to her own class, Anne's prejudices against English prosperity are effectively dispelled, yet her nostalgia for a feudalistic type of social hierarchy is never undermined, or even effectively challenged, in the novel.

Anne Daly's views concerning class are in contradiction to those of other affectionately portrayed characters in Tynan's novels, including Mother Joseph in *The House of the Crickets*, who asks, 'What cause could there be for either pride or humility in the mere accident of birth?' (HC 126-7) Locating Tynan's own opinions in the midst of such divergent characterizations is problematic, yet some patterns of thought are discernible throughout her *oeuvre*. If, for instance, by uniting John Corbett and Anne Daly in *A Daughter of Kings*, Tynan constructs a partnership which on one side of its equation reflects positively on modern society and capitalist economics, it is also in keeping with the sentiment of much of Tynan's fiction that on the other side of that partnership there exists a character who represents all that was honourable about feudalism. 'It was such a golden and pleasant place, Feudal England', Tynan would write in 1924, and her novels written years before suggest that she had long felt just such nostalgia for old world values (MM 345). Many of her writings display a sense of equivocation concerning the wholesale trade of feudalistic values for capitalistic ones, and Tynan's novels frequently feature

⁴³¹ Katharine Tynan, *A Daughter of Kings* (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1905), p. 126. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as DK.

aristocratic characters who aid or guide their *nouveau riche* counterparts. The underlying message may remain one of cooperation between classes, races, generations and religions, but the consistent use of aristocratic and upper class characters as a guiding force is telling in terms of Tynan's own allegiances, and reveals a subtle and surprising but nonetheless perceptible lack of confidence in the new order.

As often as she uses her texts to offer solutions to society's inherent problems, Tynan employs them to trouble or query communal categorizations. In much the same manner that she questions class- and gender-based conventions in novels such as *A Daughter of Kings*, in other works she can be seen to disrupt political categorizations. Her works feature a number of Irish characters to which conventional 'unionist' or 'nationalist' political definitions do not apply, and those such as Mrs Brabazon in *Princess Katharine* (1912) are created seemingly for the sole purpose of confounding expectations of any unambiguous political partisanship within Ireland. 'Of course I am [a Unionist] when I'm here [in Ireland],' Mrs Brabazon explains. 'You should hear me when I'm over there [in England]. I make the hair stand up on their heads with the violence of my rebelly opinions'.⁴³² Similarly constructed is the character of Lord Carbery in *The Honourable Molly*, who, like his unmistakable real-life counterpart Edward Lawless (Lord Cloncurry), is a reminder of the difficulty of 'placing' the Irish in terms of political allegiances. In her creation of Carbery, Tynan recognizably draws on her personal knowledge of Lawless and his novelist sister Emily, both anti-nationalist in their political leanings, who had admitted to being — seemingly incongruously — proud of a rebellious Irish ancestor who had on more than one occasion been imprisoned in the Tower of London for treason.⁴³³ In an echo of their sentiments, Tynan's characters Lord Carbery and his sister Edith are 'staunch

⁴³² Katharine Tynan, *Princess Katharine* (London, Melbourne, Toronto: Ward, Lock, 1912), p. 202.

⁴³³ See Emily Lawless, 'Of the Personal Element in History', *The Nineteenth Century*, vol. 50, no. 297 (November 1901), pp. 790-798.

Unionists' for whom it is a matter of inordinate pride that there is a 'lawless vein' in their family and that an ancestor was once jailed for sedition (*HM* 87). With its basis in reality, Tynan's fleeting but noteworthy emphasis on the Carbery family demonstrates that being 'to some extent anti-Irish [...] doesn't involve being pro-English' (*WM* 62) and exemplifies the degree to which the Irish 'aren't made of a pattern' (*HM* 87) which can be easily mapped out in terms of either-or political distinctions. Her point in creating characterizations such as Carbery is almost certainly revisionary: to defy her reader's expectations and to deconstruct the boundaries of conventional conduct.

This type of tactic serves to elucidate and normalize what might have appeared to her readers to be variant behaviours or identities. So too does another of Tynan's most recognizable fictional missions — that of justifying and defending the Irish to her English audience. Over time Tynan could be seen to expand on such a project, effectively using her texts as warnings to the English to alter their behaviour towards the Irish before trouble ensues — warnings which appear, with hindsight, to be prescient. With *A Union of Hearts*, from 1901, she appropriates for her title a phrase often deployed in political circles to describe the long-standing union between Ireland and England in recognizably ameliorative terms which attempted to redefine it as an alliance based on mutual affection rather than the imposed and uncomfortable position of political dependency that it actually was for Ireland. In her fictional re-envisioning of the English-Irish relationship, Tynan inverts the terms of the union by forcing her well-meaning but misguided English landowner, Rivers, into a state of dependence on the Irish land reformer Aileen Considine, who acts as both his guide and conscience. By educating Rivers about the violent 'League days' and cautioning him that 'the Celt is peacable and gentle — till his home or his family

is menaced', Aileen manages to convince the Englishman to alter his ways and thus curtails a murderous tenant-led mutiny, saving many lives, including Rivers's, in the process.⁴³⁴

To the same ends but by very different methods, Tynan uses *A King's Woman* (1902), set during the 1798 Rising, to create characters whose experiences and opinions are recognizably based on real-life Irish counterparts including Lady Lucy Fitzgerald, sister of the insurgent Lord Edward Fitzgerald and love interest of his compatriot Arthur O'Connor, and Lady Sarah Napier, the loyalist whose close relationship to the Fitzgerald family led her to a measure of empathy with the cause of the 1798 rebels. As the tale of *A King's Woman* unfolds, Tynan's first person narrator, Penelope Fayle, gradually moves from a steadfastly loyalist stance to one in which she views the Irish insurgents with whom she is forced to live sympathetically. Ultimately, it is her lyrical description of the rebels' final resting place which most effectively serves to evoke a sense of their heroism: 'That is the green grave of rebels, the long tongue of grass of too-vivid green, which you shall see stretching out in many a plough-land, sacred for ever, inviolate for ever. For they have long memories here, and they are in love with graves'.⁴³⁵ Although Penelope remains a 'king's woman' at the close of the narrative, her burgeoning compassion for the Irish and their suffering is made both apparent and understandable, while her references to 'long memories' and 'too-vivid' graves lend to the text a conspicuous sense of foreboding.

Tynan's most effusive praise is reserved for her fictional Irish conspirators, in all their guises, who wage war against the oppression they face — even when that oppression is not represented by the Crown. These types of characters are ubiquitous in her fiction, but most readily identifiable in the number of her novels which, like *A King's Woman*, use historical episodes as their points of genesis: the Catholic characters who rebel against

⁴³⁴ Katharine Tynan, *A Union of Hearts* (London: James Nisbet, 1901), p. 77.

⁴³⁵ Katharine Tynan, *A King's Woman: Being the Narrative of Miss Penelope Fayle, now Mistress Frobisher, Concerning the Late Troublous Times in Ireland* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1902), pp. 308-9.

Protestant oppression in her Tudor-period novel *The Golden Lily* (1902), the Jacobite fighters in *For the White Rose* (1905), and Edward Fitzgerald in *Lord Edward: A Study in Romance* (1916). Conversely, her sharpest criticisms surface in her depictions of those Irish characters resigned to their respective fates. While in her early novels the peasantry are figured largely as the helpless victims of misguided, absentee or willingly cruel landlords, they become over the course of time increasingly complicit in their own victimization through their recourse to a destructive fatalism. This is the case in novels such as *The House of the Crickets* and *Heart o' Gold*, in which Tynan laments 'a fatalism, a supineness' against which her reforming characters can be powerless.⁴³⁶

Equally condemnatory are her depictions of Ascendancy figures unable to adapt to encroaching change. These are often families forced to inhabit increasingly smaller areas of their ancestral homes as those homes crumble around them. Though they may take on the differing names of Castle Angry in *The Handsome Brandons*, Corofin in *A Girl of Galway*, Witch's Castle in *A Daughter of Kings*, Castle Finn in *That Sweet Enemy*, Aghadoe Abbey in *The Story of Bawn*, Castle Truagh in *The Adventures of Alicia* (1906), Cappamore in *Heart o' Gold*, Castle Eagle in *The House of the Foxes* (1915), and Castle Kilmorna in *They Loved Greatly* (1923) — these various Big Houses act consistently as the most readily recognizable symbols of their owners' statuses and by extension as metaphors for their incipient social and economic downfall. Together with Tynan's depictions of decrepit Georgian mansions situated in the midst of a progressively more ghettoized Dublin, recurring images of Castle Rackrent-type homes act as commentaries upon the illegitimacy of the Pale, while her consistent rebuke of the inert peasantry hints that the rise of the Gael, if the Gael can only be kindled, might be nascent.

⁴³⁶ Katharine Tynan, *Heart o' Gold, or The Little Princess: A Story for Girls* (London: S.W. Partridge, 1912), p. 27. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *HG*.

Tynan nevertheless regularly creates pitiable Ascendancy figures, poor and elderly widows and spinster sisters most prominent among them. These women, always malnourished and ill, are trapped either in disintegrating Dublin tenements, as are Miss Stasia in *Her Ladyship* (1907) and Miss MacSweeney in *Heart o' Gold* (1912), or victimized by servants in dilapidated country manor homes surrounded by bogs and other desolate landscapes, as is the case with Miss O'Neill in *The House of the Secret* (1910) and Miss Peggy Hamilton in *The House on the Bogs* (1922). The predicaments of these women are often figured as specifically Irish in origin, and consistently and revealingly linked to the activities of the Land League. While repeated images of 'distressed ladies [...] who had suffered during the land agitation' (HL 57) may appear incongruous with the author's own political ethos, particularly her support of Parnell and involvement in the Ladies' Land League, Tynan had with hindsight come to view the League as an 'ugly and sordid, though necessary, revolution' (YS 63) whose precepts ruined 'many a fine family' (HG 260). Having realized after the fact that the League fell short of her own ideal vision of and for Ireland, Tynan uses her fallen Ascendancy ladies to emphasize her personal disillusionment.

In what is certainly a comment upon the ineffectuality of Irish political movements of the past, Tynan increasingly uses her novels to endorse specific policies for the regeneration of Ireland which reflect her own political philosophies. This tactic is apparent in the manner in which her fictional Irish politician in *The French Wife*, Sir Gerard Molyneux, promotes anti-emigration policies of the type that John Redmond, a long-time acquaintance of Tynan's, was advocating at the time of the novel's publication. Through his experience of visiting Irish slums in New York, Molyneux is said to have

learned to appreciate the thing that emigration means to the Irish peasant [...] He saw their children dying like flies, themselves familiarised with vice and crime, forgetting their religion, contemptuous of their old ideals, the one saving grace left to them the desire to return to the old country. (FW 27)

This desire for return is always explicable, for the Ireland that Tynan creates is more often than not a near-idyllic space. She may occasionally peel back the layers of Irish society far enough to show Dublin's crumbling tenements and the Irish countryside's poverty-stricken districts, but these are always anomalies in what is, for her, largely a 'clean and innocent' country.⁴³⁷ America is characterized in Tynan's novels exclusively by its slums, poverty and overcrowding, and England is represented in novels like 1912's *Heart o' Gold* as a country where even nature has been tainted by the filth of industry, taking on an almost apocalyptic visage in images of 'the blackness of the trees in their stems and branches, the blackness of the earth which seemed to have been mixed with soot; [...] the curious phenomenon that one could not even pluck a flower without having one's fingers soiled' (*HG* 146). Ireland alone remains a country which is for the most part unsullied, spacious, inhabited by honourable people, and teeming with untapped wealth. Irish characters in Tynan's novels may mimic their real-life counterparts by emigrating to America and England in search of better lives, but they are doomed to disappointment as these destinations are repeatedly figured as unhealthy and unwelcoming.

More threatening by far, however, are the Indian sub-continent and Africa, as Tynan consistently creates characters only to show them disappearing in these outer reaches of the Empire. The reasons for her narrative bias against these regions can in part be illuminated by evidence from her own life: Charles Fagan died in India while attempting to earn the money he needed in order to marry his fiancée, and Jim Alderson, another of her most intimate friends, was killed in a skirmish during the Boer War in South Africa. As evidence that these fictional themes occasionally had their genesis in real-life experiences, Tynan can at times be seen to use her plots as instruments to re-write Fagan's

⁴³⁷ Katharine Tynan, *Her Ladyship* (London: Smith, Elder, 1907), p. 156. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *HL*.

and Alderson's fates, allowing their fictional counterparts more pleasant destinies, even if those destinies are always tainted by a sense of danger and loss. Thus the Fagan-esque Jim Annesley, in *The Dear Irish Girl*, after having endured years of separation from his fiancée Caroline LaTouche in which the personal fortune he has been seeking remains elusive, is able to survive the travails of India and comes back to Ireland to marry the woman he loves. Godfrey Barron in *The House of the Secret* likewise is able to return to his Irish homeland in time to rescue his fiancée Maeve Standish from the homicidal servant who has been menacing her, even though the injuries he suffers, identical to those inflicted on Alderson, result in his partial paralysis.⁴³⁸ Yet others of Tynan's wanderers to these far-flung regions do not fare as well as Fagan's and Alderson's fictional counterparts. Pierce Brandon in *The Handsome Brandons* returns home to Ireland from Africa, penniless and morally compromised, only to die of the fatal disease he has contracted on the dark continent and leave his family of sisters unprovided for and unprotected. Likewise, both Paul Chadwick in *The Story of Cecilia* and Roderick O'Moore in *A Union of Hearts* endure kidnapping by African cannibals and, although they eventually return to Ireland, lose the women they love to other men during their absences. Such diverse but consistently ominous fates suggest that Tynan's intention in creating this litany of characters transcends the personal to reveal an overriding scepticism concerning the efficacy and rectitude of the Imperial project. The implication of each of these stories is clear: remaining in Ireland is not only a far safer option than leaving it, but is also imperative to the country's and people's maintenance and protection.

⁴³⁸ Before fighting in South Africa, Alderson was sent to India, where he was attacked by a tiger and had 'the muscle torn clean out of his 'sword-arm' (*TFY* 305-6), resulting in the loss of use of the arm; Godfrey Barron is in India when he is attacked by a knife-wielding native. His fiancée, Maeve Standish, is subsequently told that the 'knife went clean through the muscles of his right arm. He will never hold a sword again'. Katharine Tynan, *The House of the Secret* (London: James Clark, 1910), pp. 157-8.

It is significant, therefore, that in the same novel in which her anti-emigration themes are first explicitly stated, Tynan can be seen to advocate policies which might give those Irish people who were most inclined to emigrate — the peasantry — a reason to remain. In *The French Wife*, Tynan creates in Gerard Molyneux a virtual clone of George Wyndham, the contemporary politician she most ardently admired and with whom she enjoyed a long-term and cordial correspondence. Wyndham was at the time of the novel's publication Chief Secretary for Ireland, and his Irish Land Purchase Act had been passed by Parliament in 1903, a year before *The French Wife* appeared. Like Wyndham, the fictional Molyneux becomes a Member of Parliament whose political projects culminate with the introduction of a bill for land reform in Ireland. Unlike Wyndham, both Molyneux and his bill suffer defeat, but Tynan's fictional modifications serve to strengthen the reader's sense of empathy with Molyneux and his political projects at a time when Wyndham's own policies were increasingly being subjected to criticism.

To these same anti-emigration ends, from the turn of the century onward Tynan would use her novels to advocate policies intended to regenerate the Irish economy. Plots centering on co-operative farming and industry in Ireland — the types of projects that Wyndham and Tynan's close friends Sir Horace Plunkett and A.E. were then espousing — were in particular to become regular features in her fiction. In *The Honourable Molly*, Tynan's heroine works to establish a flower farming co-operative in rural Ireland, while in *The Story of Bawn* the main character defends Arthur Balfour's light railway by arguing that it has opened up the Irish countryside to commerce, and the successful co-operative farms, creameries and cottage industries that rapidly spring up around Bawn's rural Irish home soon prove her arguments. The central romance of 1907's *Her Ladyship* is similarly carried out against the backdrop of the weaving and lace-making industries that Irish landowner Lady Anne establishes and nurtures. Tynan would feature comparable plots

and analogous business ventures in a number of her novels up to and including 1912's *Heart o' Gold*, in which Cushla MacSweeney and Harry Silvester, both newly returned from England, must fight against the 'fatalism' of the peasantry in order to achieve reform on their Irish land (*HG* 27, 116). By the end of the novel, Cushla and Harry are united both in marriage and in business. Having together convinced their tenants that 'misfortune is not inevitable, and that God means His children to be happy in this world', they are finally beginning, as the narrative closes, to gain a measure of success with the factory they have built and the local industries they have established (*HG* 344).

With its central tale of Cushla MacSweeney, a young girl devoted to her Irish homeland suddenly and unexpectedly relocated to the English town of Tunbridge Wells, *Heart o' Gold* features a migration precisely opposite to the one its author and her family were to embark upon in the year it was written. Tynan left her home in Southborough, near Tunbridge Wells, in late 1911, and found herself upon her homecoming in an irretrievably 'changed Ireland' (*YS* 1). Faced with the unexpected and 'appalling' poverty of Dublin (*YS* 8) and now occupying a vastly different social stratum to the one she had left — 'we returned to the Anglo-Irish having gone away from the Celts' (*YS* 1) — Tynan reacted to the dislocation and disorientation of her renewed residence in Ireland by remaining resolutely silent about what confronted her upon her return. Following *Heart o' Gold* and *Princess Katharine*, both of which were published in 1912 but largely written while she was resident in England, Tynan took a hiatus from writing novels set in Ireland. *Molly, My Heart's Delight* (1914), a life of the English bluestocking artist and writer Mary Granville Delaney who spent her late life in Co. Down, represented her only Irish-themed output in the years 1913 or 1914. Although she wrote at least six full-length works of fiction with contemporary settings during that period, not one would feature Ireland.

During her tenure in England, Tynan's fictional vision of Ireland had altered very little. The fact that she did not always appear to be certain where the boundaries of class and race were drawn in her homeland did not detract from her optimism for and about her native country, and in many ways merely aided her in selling to her reading public her vision of an Ireland whose inherent social and religious divisions could be readily overcome through understanding and conciliation. As long as she viewed it from a distance, Ireland could be imagined as a place that could and would be renovated, if it were only treated justly and kindly. That she remained, upon her return to Ireland, silent in her fiction on the subject of her homeland — a topic that had theretofore preoccupied her regularly — suggests that Tynan's homecoming may have involved a period of reconciliation and re-envisioning which she could not, or did not want to, work through in the very public arena of her novels. Her return to Irish fiction did not in fact come until 1915, with *The House of the Foxes* — a novel which, through its representation of an aristocratic Irish family whose members believe they are doomed to endlessly repeat the misfortunes of the past, represents a marked departure from all of her previous work. Distinctly more violent and claustrophobic than any of its predecessors, *The House of the Foxes* is overtly concerned with the ways in which the legacies of the past thwart opportunity and paralyse action in the present. The central relationship in the novel concerns the remaining members of the landed Turloughmore family, a mother and son, and prefigures the mutually dependent and reciprocally destructive mother-son alliance in Kate O'Brien's *The Ante-Room*. The mother's obsessive love of, and smothering fears for, her son mean that he lives a truncated existence, unable to overcome the invalidism which he believes is fated and incurable. Meg Hildebrand, newly recruited to work for the Turloughmores and only recently returned to Ireland from Austria, enters the household to disrupt the injurious bond between mother and son and convince them that 'God is stronger

than the devil'.⁴³⁹ In Meg's assertion that she 'can't believe that God put all that brightness into the world to leave us to the power of darkness' (*HF* 46), a repudiation of Irish fatalism, significantly transferred for the first time in Tynan's novels from the peasantry to the aristocracy, is readily recognizable.

Added to the family's fatalism is the more personal suffering that Ulick Turloughmore endures. Maudlin and self-pitying, Ulick has consistently been afflicted with the 'blue devils' due to his physical disabilities and feels that his life is not worth living as a result (*HF* 173). By representing, in condemnatory terms, his ensuing indifference and inertia when he learns that an operation is available in mainland Europe that will either cure or kill him, Tynan can be seen to make her most readily discernible novelistic comment about a specifically Irish form of neutrality — a comment made more poignant when considered in its mid-war context. In her war diary Tynan would refer to the Irish men she witnessed in Dublin who ignored the call to fight in Europe as 'Shameful! Intolerable! [...] a degradation of the *homo*'.⁴⁴⁰ More subtly conveyed in *The House of the Foxes*, Tynan's message remains the same: fear and apathy are reprehensible; bravery and deeds rewarded.

It was not characteristic of Tynan, whose texts so often act as testaments to her enduring faith, to continue to believe in portents of gloom during these first years of the war. The spiritual optimism fuelled by her Catholicism left her, like her character Meg, unable to countenance the 'power of darkness' and incapable, even in this novel written in the midst of the fighting, of maintaining a façade of unflinching cynicism. A year earlier, with the war looming, Tynan had tellingly created a sympathetic character — the admired

⁴³⁹ Katharine Tynan, *The House of the Foxes* (London: Smith, Elder, 1915), p. 45. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *HF*.

⁴⁴⁰ Tynan, *A Woman's Notes in War-Time*, Tynan Papers, Manchester, Box 13, Folder 1, entry for 16 April 1915.

priest in her English-set novel, *A Shameful Inheritance* — who was a German. Such a tactic served to humanize, rather than demonize, the war-time enemy, and explicit references in *The House of the Foxes* to the numbers of Ireland's Wild Geese who served in Austria, the parallels between Ireland's violent past and that of the Hungarian region of Austria in which Meg has worked, and her compassionate evocation of Meg's former employer, an Austrian Archduchess, serve a similar edifying purpose. These types of textual references lend to this often-ominous tale an overriding sense of humanity's decency, and Tynan's conclusion, in which the Turloughmores are able with Meg's assistance and encouragement to overcome their long-held fears, emotionally and physically healing the family in the process, conveys a significant message about endurance and hope.

When Tynan was accused in his presence of writing 'doctrine' rather than literature, A.E. defended her by suggesting that even the greatest of poets, 'Dante or Milton', have 'many pages where the intellectual anatomy which underlay their fantasy was apparent', adding to this assertion his own editorial comments:

They appear the greater to our imagination because of this, that they wrote with their whole being and not merely out of part of their being. [...] I like Katharine Tynan's poetry best where I find her nature harmonious with my own. Others may take much more pleasure in poems whose art I admire but which are born out of emotions I have not shared [...] I was not fortunate enough to be born under a happy star.⁴⁴¹

Alluding to the faith she shared with the majority of their countrymen, A.E. suggests the degree to which her Catholicism informed her writing, and particularly the manner in which it inspired that optimism so consistently evidenced in her work. She admitted to being 'born under a kind star/In a green world withouten any war', and throughout the first

⁴⁴¹ A.E., 'Foreword', pp. xii-xiii.

two years of the most terrible war the western world had yet seen, her novels would continue to convey a sense of hopefulness.⁴⁴²

Like her exemplar A.E. — about whom she once wrote, 'One feels inclined to say of him as Lord Henry Fitzgerald said of Lord Edward, "Dear fellow, he is perfect!"' — Tynan was a pluralist as well as a Home Ruler (YS 83). She would admit that she, like many of the diasporic Irish characters featured in her fiction, occupied a political position somewhere between 'Irish' and 'English' which could be difficult to reconcile. 'I was a Sinn Feiner to my English and Scottish friends, and even dared to call myself so,' Tynan would write in 1922 in an echo of sentiments she once attributed to her fictional character Mrs Brabazon. Yet she confessed that her 'Sinn Fein friends' would think her 'sadly lacking', and ascribed this 'lack' to her migrancy: 'a long period of years lived out of the country has taught me that no cause and no people are altogether black or altogether white' (WY 135). It is unsurprising, given Tynan's enthusiasm for politics and the number of Irish reformers she counted among her many friends, that her novels frequently act to promote the ideals of those who shared her Home Rule values. It is equally unsurprising, considering her fondness for the English homeland she had adopted and only recently relinquished, that the policies she most often and avidly promotes in her novels written to 1916 are ones of conciliation, compromise and cooperation, on both sides of the Irish-English equation.

Tynan, unable to invest herself unequivocally in the either-or policies of 'Irish Ireland', nowhere in her novels endorses a Sinn Féin ethos of 'ourselves alone', never actively promotes her friend Douglas Hyde's de-anglicizing mission for Ireland, and only cursorily involves herself in the cultural nationalism of Yeats and his Revivalist colleagues. More often, in fact, her works act to mock or critique the projects that Hyde and Yeats actively promoted: Aileen Considine, in *A Union of Hearts*, replies to her

⁴⁴² Katharine Tynan, 'I was born under a kind star', *Collected Poems by Katharine Tynan*, p. xiv.

father's boast that 'Orangemen and Fenians' are equally welcome at his Irish historical society by detailing the infighting she has witnessed there and ironically referring to the ways in which 'a common love of a pursuit or an art unites people' (UH 17), while in *Julia* the Maud Gonne-like Mary Craven is said to have recently discovered that she is Irish, and to be, as a result, 'enthusiastically desirous of learning the language, and something of the literature of [her] late-found country'.⁴⁴³ Revivalist pursuits in novels such as *The Dear Irish Girl* and *Heart o' Gold* consistently distract characters from more pressing, and far more serious, Irish issues, and with this in mind it is significant to note that, while others of her politically active friends surface as influences on her novelistic themes early and identifiably in her *oeuvre*, neither Yeats's political nor his literary projects appear to have had a recognizable impact on Tynan's fiction. Yeats does not in fact make his first perceptible appearance in her work until *Her Ladyship* in 1907 — twelve years after Tynan began publishing novels. Yet in this first appearance, he is central to the plot: it is Yeats's poetry that inspires Hugh, a poor tailor, to aid Lady Anne in her co-operative industries and eventually leads him to win her heart.

Yeats, it could be said, is conspicuous in Tynan's fiction for his absence. We might, however, read him into the many and varied tales Tynan constructs in a number of her novels — including *The Way of a Maid*, *The Dear Irish Girl*, *She Walks in Beauty*, *Three Fair Maids*, *That Sweet Enemy*, *A Union of Hearts*, *Julia*, *The Honourable Molly*, *Her Ladyship*, *A Daughter of Kings*, *The Adventures of Alicia*, *The Story of Bawn* and *The Story of Cecilia* — of men who propose marriage but are rejected, and particularly to the number of those spurned suitors who are poetically gifted writers but terrible spellers, as Yeats undoubtedly was. Of these, the most compelling is the main character of Tynan's novel *John-A-Dreams*, published in September of that all-important year, 1916. The John

⁴⁴³ Katharine Tynan, *Julia* (London: Smith, Elder, 1904), p. 187.

of the title is, like Yeats, a talented poet who loves the seemingly unattainable Octavia Sweeney. Octavia can be seen to act as a composite of two women central to Yeats's life to that point: her name, pre-existing romantic relationship, and affection for John are reminiscent of the married woman, Olivia Shakespear, with whom Yeats once had a passionate affair, while her stately physical appearance and humanitarian projects are more redolent of the poet's great love, Maud Gonne. Rather than the elusive Octavia, John's family encourage him to marry his dear friend Monica, whom they admire and advocate for John much as the Yeats family admired Katharine Tynan and once advocated her for their son and brother 'Willie'. John at first cannot contemplate proposing to a woman with whom he is not in love, but his opinion soon changes when Monica considers entering a Convent — as Tynan herself once did. At that point, John, 'in sudden angry revolt against' what he terms 'her sacrifice', asks her to marry him.⁴⁴⁴ She rejects him only because he is not in love with her.⁴⁴⁵

Noting the many ways in which the details of Tynan's novel dovetail with what we now know about her relationship with Yeats, it is conceivable that, into *John-A-Dreams*, Tynan wove at least some of the tale of their friendship. Lending credence to this suggestion, Tynan borrows her title from the nickname, 'Jack o'Dreams', that Yeats gave to the main character of his only published novel, *John Sherman* (1891).⁴⁴⁶ In this earlier work, the titular John bears a resemblance to the author himself, while Tynan almost certainly can be glimpsed in the character of John's true love, the plain but honourable Mary Carton. If *John-A-Dreams* does indeed write back to *John Sherman* and was intended

⁴⁴⁴ Katharine Tynan, *John-A-Dreams* (London: Smith, Elder, 1916), p. 256.

⁴⁴⁵ For additional information on Tynan and Yeats's relationship, see James J. McFadden, 'William Butler Yeats at Katharine Tynan's Home, Whitehall', in Richard J. Finneran (ed.), *Yeats: An Annual of Critical and Textual Studies*, vol. 8 (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1990), pp. 206-242; Katharine Tynan, *Twenty-Five Years*, p. 39; and Katharine Tynan, *The Middle Years*, p. 66.

⁴⁴⁶ W. B. Yeats, *John Sherman & Dhoya* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1990), p. 9.

as an allegory for Tynan's relationship with the poet, it was an understandable undertaking considering the import of events in the year it was published and the history of their acquaintance. Tynan and Yeats had spent much time together in their idealistic youth, had shared an enthusiasm for the 'Young Ireland' ethos of their friend, the '48 man' John O'Leary, and had together envisioned an ideal Ireland. By the time that Tynan was to publish *John-A-Dreams*, those early aspirations for Ireland were being shattered by the violent aftermath of the Easter Rising.

Over the course of the First World War, the tone and subject matter of Tynan's output would alter. Perceptibly more melancholy during the war's first two years, it would become even more so after the spring of 1916, particularly when its setting was Ireland. The liaison of John and Octavia at the end of *John-A-Dreams* is achieved, but only against the backdrop of a poverty-stricken and disease-ridden Ireland. *Lord Edward: A Study in Romance*, also published in the year of the Rising, is an elegiac biography of Edward Fitzgerald suffused with a sense of sadness and a tone of regret, in which Tynan's frequent asides serve to highlight the similarities between the failed 1798 and 1916 Risings: 'Is it 1796 or 1916?' she interrupts the narrative to ask at one point; 'Was not the old wine in new bottles in the Dublin rising of 1916?' she queries at another.⁴⁴⁷ Her novels of the period, *The West Wind* (1916) and *The Rattlesnake* (1917) are, respectively, a tale replete with misalliances, divorce and orphaned children, and one which features a murderous character never suitably punished for his crimes.

A shift in the tone of Tynan's novels would come again in 1922, when she would rewrite her 1910 novel *The House of the Secret* as *The House on the Bogs* with noteworthy modifications. In the earlier novel, two female characters are terrorized in an isolated country house by their Irish servants, who are brother and sister. By the end of the

⁴⁴⁷ Katharine Tynan, *Lord Edward: A Study in Romance* (London: John Murray, 1916), pp. 242 and 243.

narrative, Tynan allows even the more sinister of the siblings, Corney Reardon, a partial redemption when, consumed with remorse and believing he has killed his beloved sister, he drowns himself in a bog. In the latter tale, French rather than Irish siblings intimidate the women, and Tynan's conclusion is perceptibly more grim. It is as though, after the Rising, she could not envision an unequivocal happy ending for her Irish characters, and in the midst of Civil War could not bear to imagine a story in which the Irish victimized one another. The servants, Pierre and Margot, continue to be the objects of 'disgust and horror' long after their demise, and remain unforgiven at the close of *The House on the Bogs*.⁴⁴⁸ At the same time, it is only those characters who choose to live out their lives away from Ireland who are able to feel 'young and happy again' (HB 298). Tynan may leave her Irish characters with the possibility of a contented future by suggesting in the novel's final pages that 'the ghosts of the old house should be banished by the happiness of the children' (HB 298), yet even here her use of the modal verb conveys a sense of uncertainty, and she must defer her vision of contentment to another generation.

Tynan would never abandon her project of pointing out Ireland's difficulties to her readers, but she would increasingly struggle to achieve adequate resolutions to the problems she portrayed. By the time she was to write her 1930 novel *The Playground*, Dublin had become for her a place of slums and poverty much as America once was, and imbued with the same types of apocalyptic imagery that had once defined her fictional London, but with the added menace of vigilante violence. The playground of Tynan's title acts as a metaphor for an untroubled Ireland, but her final images — of a 'crippled child' sitting by a window and of a 'baby who had leant adoringly over a withered flower in a bottle, talking to it' — instill a sense of melancholy, while her closing thoughts concerning

⁴⁴⁸ Katharine Tynan, *The House on the Bogs* (London and Melbourne: Ward, Lock, 1922), p. 298. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *HB*.

a future when the 'Spirit of Evil should be shut out' of the still unfinished playground are unambiguously about dreams for Ireland which have yet to be realized.⁴⁴⁹

The genesis of these darker visions of her homeland can be glimpsed at the close of her 1922 memoir *The Wandering Years*, in which she initially finishes her tale 'on the happy days of the Truce' (WY 386). Due to a delay in publication, however, Tynan was forced to append the volume's original ending with a qualification:

at the moment of writing (May, 1922) Ireland is more than ever in the melting-pot, and what is to emerge from it God only knows. I make this statement to anticipate the critic who might say that I jested while a dearer Rome was burning. The Irish always jest even though they jest with tears. Instead of ending at a happy moment I end at the saddest; but Hope is at the bottom of the Pandora's box of Irish troubles, and I believe proudly and firmly in the ultimate destinies of my country. (WY 387)

By 1923, Tynan's increasing disillusionment with Ireland was to become apparent in her personal letters: 'Those wretched rulers of Ireland & the whole ignominious affair!' she would write to her friend, the Irish novelist Frank Mathew, on 21 December of that year. 'How one detests it all'.⁴⁵⁰ Despite professing her enduring optimism about her homeland, the sense of hopefulness would diminish perceptibly from her Irish fiction, and she would make what was arguably her most revealing statement about her personal disenchantment with post-Treaty Ireland by leaving her homeland permanently in 1924. She passed the rest of her days on the European continent and in England, dying in Wimbledon in 1931, disappointed to the last in what had transpired after the Free State was formed, and mourning the man, 'Mick' Collins, who was to join the ranks of Lord Edward Fitzgerald, Charles Stewart Parnell and George Wyndham as one of her beloved, fallen Irish heroes.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁹ Katharine Tynan, *The Playground* (London and Melbourne: Ward, Lock, 1930), p. 320.

⁴⁵⁰ Letter from Katharine Tynan to Frank Mathew (4 July 1923), Tynan Papers, Manchester, Box 16, Folder 4.

⁴⁵¹ Letter from Katharine Tynan to Frank Mathew (6 December 1921), Tynan Papers, Manchester, Box 16, Folder 4.

In 1916, however, this future remained unforeseen and unforeseeable. Tynan's novels of that period express not a sense of disillusionment, but only the note of sadness, betrayal and loss that the English reprisal to the Easter Rising had engendered — emotions rendered more profound by her acknowledged affection for the country in which she had been married, her children had been born and she had lived for nearly two decades. At home in Ireland, Tynan would work assiduously on her war journal until late 1915, regularly writing of life on the home front, making almost daily entries about the events of the war, and collecting letters from friends concerning the fighting and first hand accounts from the war zone to intersperse with her own thoughts. The death of George Wyndham's only remaining son Percy is noted, with alarm and regret, in her entry of 18 September 1914.⁴⁵² A.E.'s visions of 'Empire fallen from its throne' are detailed in a passage written during the same month, and a few pages later she affectionately recalls witnessing a group of Protestant soldiers invalided home to Ireland requesting from a local shop the 'necklaces with a cross at the end' that they had seen in the hands of their Catholic fellow soldiers.⁴⁵³ Several letters from a war nurse, Estelle Scally, who was working in the Somme in 1914 and 1915, vividly convey the conditions in the hospitals and the attitudes of the men at the front.⁴⁵⁴ A string of correspondence from Robert Anderson, Horace Plunkett's Secretary at the Irish Agricultural Organization Society, recounts his anguish over the deaths of two of his three sons in the war.⁴⁵⁵ Her diary spans the events of Suvla Bay and Gallipoli, her

⁴⁵² Tynan, *A Woman's Notes in War-Time*, Tynan Papers, Manchester, Box 13, Folder 1, entry for 18 September 1914.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid*, entries for 18 September 1914 and 17 November 1914.

⁴⁵⁴ Letters from Estelle Scally to unidentified recipient (29 December 1914 and 5 January 1915), in Tynan, *A Woman's Notes in War-Time*, Tynan Papers, Manchester, Box 13, Folder 1.

⁴⁵⁵ Letters from R. A. Anderson to Katharine Tynan (n.d. and 17 March 1915), in Tynan, *A Woman's Notes in War-Time*, Tynan Papers, Manchester, Box 13, Folder 1.

own sons' enlistments, the death of Rudyard Kipling's son and the loss of friends, their sons and brothers to the fighting.

Her entry for 16 April 1915 is representative of her thoughts on Ireland in the early days of the war. In it, she conveys her impressions of the troop of Irish Volunteers she had seen marching through Harcourt Street Station that morning:

These are the Volunteers who have broken away from Redmond & his party. Fine, stalwart, splendid material of soldiers — playing at the game, not playing the game. Some wounded Tommies home on leave stood & watched them go past with the flaunting & triumphal air. One wondered at the thoughts behind the quiet-bitter faces of the men who had known war & the men who were playing at war & playing ungenerously. There were some five hundred stalwart, well-equipped young men in that procession. Did the immense, heroic tragedy of the war wake in them nothing but derision?⁴⁵⁶

Four years later, this episode would be tellingly re-imagined in Tynan's memoirs: 'we saw about five hundred of the Irish Volunteers going for one of their route-marches,' Tynan recalls about that same morning. 'A good many people in Dublin believed that the Volunteers were only play-acting — in their ignorance. They swung along, splendid, vigorous fellows, full of life and the joy of life. [...] A couple of very small, very insignificant Tommies stood and stared at them from the side-walk' (YS 175).

By 1919, Tynan's perspective of the Irish Volunteers had been distorted by her knowledge of what was to ensue and, with hindsight, she was to rewrite her own history to ignore her part among the 'ignorant' onlookers who viewed the Irish fighters with derision. Such a rapid re-envisioning indicates the pace at which the Rising had shifted Irish consciousness back within the boundaries of the homeland, and had become, for many Irish people, the cornerstone of a new nation-building mythology. For Tynan more specifically, it suggests that belief in Ireland's rectitude in taking up arms against England

⁴⁵⁶ Tynan, *A Woman's Notes in War-Time*, Tynan Papers, Manchester, Box 13, Folder 1, entry for 15 April 1915.

had supplanted any earlier faith in the efficacy of following a course of mutual respect and patient cooperation which had burgeoned during her many years as a migrant in England.

Tynan readily admits to having been blind-sided by the violence of the English response to the Rising: 'To me any bloodiness between England and Ireland was unthinkable,' she would write in 1919. 'All that belonged to the bad old days. And here was '98 come again, and the people who were my own people were being shot and deported by the people with whom we had lived in amity and affection for eighteen long years' (YS 205). Although her horror at England's violent retaliation against the Irish would eventually be usurped by her disgust at the terms on which the Free State was formed and the fact that it was among themselves that the Irish could not live in amity and affection, Tynan's Irish novels from 1916 onwards would retain and reinforce that same sense of dreams partially shattered that first suffused her fiction with *John-A-Dreams*. Conciliation and cooperation between Irish and English characters was thereafter less easily imaginable. Irish politicians and reformers largely disappeared from her stories, while her images of Ireland thenceforth became those of a decaying land with little hope of prosperity.

Equally significantly, Tynan's war diary would remain unpublished. Just before the Rising, she set it aside and never again resumed the writing of it. Her reasons for doing so are readily conjectured. By 1916, the question of a Civil War in Ireland had re-entered the communal consciousness. Tynan's 'quiet corner' was no longer quiet.

Conclusion

'In one of the publisher's notes or announcements attached to this fresh and graceful story, it is remarked, presumably by way of heightening interest or of allaying alarm, that "Katharine Tynan," in her new book, does not deal in any way with Irish problems. It is not a compliment, and it is in some ways an injustice. Nobody could write sincerely about Ireland without writing about problems.' - G. K. Chesterton, Review of Katharine Tynan's *Her Ladyship* (1907).⁴⁵⁷

In 1907, G. K. Chesterton, musing on Katharine Tynan's most recent novel, noted the contradiction inherent in her publishers' affirmation that the book in question did not deal with Irish problems. While Chesterton admitted that *Her Ladyship* was 'a fresh and graceful story' which did not overtly address the 'political problem of Irish nationalism', he also assured his readers that it was preoccupied in no small measure with Irish political issues. In particular, it had much to do with what he deemed a prevalent lack of patriotism among the Irish aristocracy, and with the subject of those numerous Big House owners who had failed in their duties to Ireland by remaining loyal to the Union. 'Had [the Irish aristocracy] been true to nationalism', Chesterton conjectured, 'the Irish would have followed their lords; they might even have followed their tyrants. The deepest offence of the great Irish peers is not that they are tyrants, but that they are traitors'.⁴⁵⁸ Whether or not Chesterton came to these conclusions as a result of reading Tynan's novel, or whether the reading of it acted merely to confirm and distil suppositions he had arrived at independently of her text, his stance was unequivocal: *Her Ladyship* was, in his opinion, a novel intended to enlighten and even persuade its readers on a subject of political import to Ireland. As a book which dealt earnestly with its Irish subject matter, it was also and by

⁴⁵⁷ G. K. Chesterton, 'A Book of the Day: The Irish Aristocrat', *The Daily News* (London) (30 October 1907), p. 11.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

necessity, he asserted, centrally concerned with the troubles that afflicted Ireland, for no one 'could write sincerely about Ireland without writing about problems'.⁴⁵⁹

Her Ladyship is, indeed, a narrative set in an Ireland replete with difficulties. Its elderly aristocratic women, left with no money and no recourse to employment, are shown starving and freezing in Dublin tenements, its peasant children are forced to act as 'missionaries' of industry to combat their parents' overriding 'squalor and laziness' (*HL* 179) and its young land reformers are criticized for their capitalist ethics and hindered in their plans for improvements by a society in thrall to its traditions. Most notably, the novel abounds with positive images of manufacturing and commerce, particularly through its portrayal of a peasant population raised out of its torpor by work provided to them through new business and agricultural initiatives, which range from the harvesting of blackberries and the draining of bogs to cottage lace-making industries and the mining of natural resources. The romantic entanglements with which the story is supposed to be centrally concerned often read as the subtext to Tynan's reformist message for Ireland in the novel, and *Her Ladyship* confirms that its author believed herself to be writing about a country struggling to find the means to care for its people of all classes and creeds because it remained resistant to change: 'it was an inevitable law, people could not stand still,' she asserted in the narrative, 'to stand still was to decay' (*HL* 93).

The caveat that Tynan's publishers felt it incumbent to attach to *Her Ladyship* assuring its readers of its apolitical status also indicates Tynan's collusion in the prevailing Redmondite tactic of avoiding 'the uncomfortable reality of Home Rule'.⁴⁶⁰ Not only Smith and Elder but also *The Irish Monthly* — which, in praising the novel, drew primary attention to the fact that it managed to tell its tale 'without an allusion to the unwholesome

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁰ *The Times* (London), no. 37365 (20 February 1905), p. 7.

problems' besetting Ireland at the time — hint that the combination of Ireland and politics was, just then, a subject best avoided.⁴⁶¹ Yet it is difficult, viewed with hindsight, to surmise how anyone might have read the novel without recognizing its political significance. That both Tynan's English publishers and her Irish reviewers did so indicates the degree to which Irish politics had by the time of *Her Ladyship's* publication become synonymous with a narrowly-defined form of Irish nationalism, a political stance which was, in the first decade of the twentieth century, anathema to much of the lucrative British reading public. At the same time, *Her Ladyship* enacts a process of industrializing the Irish countryside and of unifying Irish and English interests on Irish land, a fictional project which would have found ready favour with the Empire-worshipping British public in the post-Boer War period. Yeats's poetry may figure into Tynan's narrative, and her fictional projects for reform may also suggest the influence of A.E.'s opinions on her text, but her vision of an ideal Ireland is far from a return to the 'mythic west' so beloved by the visionaries of the Celtic Twilight. Tynan's novel eschewed Revivalist sentiments, overt references to Home Rule and nationalist rhetoric. As such, it spoke about Ireland in a liberal but implicitly English idiom, and, because it did so, its political biases were not only tolerated, but completely overlooked, by some commentators.

Tynan's long period of exile can be glimpsed in this novelistic merging of Irish and English viewpoints. Her earliest Irish novels had neither been so subtle in their politics nor so deeply enamoured of industrialization: but then, Tynan had lived in England for fourteen years by the time *Her Ladyship* was written. An extended period of exile had, it seems, acted to alter her fictional tactics — she had learned over the course of her residency in Britain how to address her English readers in a manner that would engage their interests without offending their ethnic sensibilities. Emily Lawless's Irish works

⁴⁶¹ 'Notes on New Books', *The Irish Monthly*, vol. 35, no. 414 (December 1907), p. 704.

indicate that her narrative approach underwent a similar transformation. Coming to her subject matter with a unionist sensibility, she would enact a shift precisely the opposite to the nationalist Tynan's. The backlash against *Hurriah* and its narrative preoccupation with extant political concerns would have demonstrated to her the necessity of adopting a more clandestine approach towards issues of current political import to Ireland in her texts. As evidence that this was indeed the case, from 1890 onwards, she would consistently tackle the subject of Ireland from a position of remove. Thereafter, she frequently employed historical rather than contemporary settings in her fiction, occasionally visualized Ireland through a child's (or a child-like character's) perspective, and always assumed the viewpoint of a foreigner to, or exile from, Ireland to tell her Irish tales. If her work was of no less political significance as a result of these modifications, she would manage, by taking this more nuanced approach to the subject of Ireland, to make her texts increasingly palatable to a nationalist readership. The altering attitudes towards her novels among the Irish press confirm that this change of literary tactic had, in at least some nationalist quarters, met with distinct approval. Just four years after *Hurriah* was published to widespread condemnation in Ireland, *The Nation* was suggesting about Lawless and *With Essex* that '[n]o writer has ever sounded the depths of that horror [British misrule in Ireland] so completely, or depicted the tragedy in such an effective way'.⁴⁶² In asserting the power and veracity of Lawless's vision of Elizabethan Ireland, *The Nation* also admitted, without rancour or remorse, to being swayed by the author's vision of a 'noble' English conqueror.⁴⁶³

Exile played an equally defining role in the texts of L. T. Meade, which often featured emigrant characters and the clash of English and Irish cultures. In her schoolgirl

⁴⁶² 'The Romance of Butchery', *The Nation* (27 September 1890), p. 2.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*

texts, Irish girls who arrive in England to be educated are demonstrated to be variant in their manners, behaviour, morals and attitudes towards education, yet what remains consistent about them is the degree to which they reflect the differing values of the country from which they come and the country in which they come to live. In her Irish novels written for an adult readership, English characters similarly and just as regularly misunderstand their Irish counterparts to the detriment of those on both sides of the international relationship. The narrative devices Meade employed in both her children's and adult works may have acted to advocate English tolerance of Irish idiosyncrasies, but novels such as *Light o' the Morning* and *The Stormy Petrel* affirm that the converse was also true. Conspicuously critical of English attitudes and behaviour towards the Irish while finding significantly less fault on the Irish side of things, these texts indicate that Meade understood the reasons for Ireland's drive towards separatism as much as she did the need for English forbearance.

Francis's Irish texts would feature female revolutionaries and Irish communities distrustful of English law, women who managed their Irish lands more capably than their male counterparts and innocent Irish women victimized by corrupt English and intolerant Northern Irish societies. In the earliest of her Irish texts, her country's political landscape is subordinated to the machinations of plot, yet politics would come increasingly to the fore as her period of exile in England lengthened. By the time she was to write *Dark Rosaleen* in the run-up to the Easter Rising, Ireland's political landscape had become her central concern. *Dark Rosaleen* is a novel which, despite its heavy-handed deployment of allegory and obvious Catholic bias, must be ranked among the most forthright works of Irish political literature to emerge during the 1910s. Through its portraits of a violently riven Derry and the microcosmic version of that city's society enacted within Hector and Norah's household, it offered its readers both a personal and communal viewpoint on the

Protestant-Catholic and north-south divides which presciently revealed the kinds of misconceptions and animosities that would, less than a decade after its publication, lead to Civil War. That she undertook to write the novel despite the censure she had already received from Irish Catholic quarters suggests that her physical distance from Ireland lent her a sense of freedom to write more openly about the political situation in her homeland. *Dark Rosaleen's* lukewarm reception likewise acts as an indicator that her views had, over the period of her exile, become too ambivalent to meet with overwhelming enthusiasm among either her Irish or her English readers.

Egerton's and Thurston's texts stand apart from those of the other authors covered in this study by privileging gendered politics over national or nationalist issues, but it is arguably in the novels written by these women that the spectre of exile looms most ominously. In their works, limited in number though they may be, the moral stringency of Irish Catholic society and the lack of economic opportunity for women in Ireland is central to their female characters' fates: the motivations for Mary Desmond's retreat into an all-female community in England at the close of *The Wheel of God*, Clodagh Asshlin's need to transcend the legacies of her Irish heritage in *The Gambler* and Isabel Costello's doomed rebellions against convention in *The Fly on the Wheel* can all be traced to the narrowness of prospects for women within Irish society. According to the terms on which an Irishwoman's life must be lived in Egerton's and Thurston's texts, escape by any means becomes a necessity. With this in mind, it comes as little surprise that researchers such as Stephen J. Brown and the Loebers would reveal that many Irish female authors chose to live their lives and pursue their careers outside of Ireland.

The actions that each of these six authors would take in their own lives serve to corroborate Egerton's and Thurston's narrative vision of Ireland as a place in which women were denied opportunities for personal fulfilment and economic progress. The

correspondence, autobiographical writings and prolific output of Meade, Francis and Tynan attest to the economic necessities that instigated and/or perpetuated their literary careers, and Egerton's letters to John Lane likewise confirm that, increasingly as her career progressed, her writing projects were undertaken to fill a financial void. Lawless, too, seems to have been seeking to make a financial break from her family through her literary efforts. Although her relatively modest output suggests that her writing career was not undertaken due to any form of extreme economic need, this fact does not preclude the notion that she may have wanted to achieve something for and by herself, independently of family funds and influences, through her writing. What little of her correspondence survives — that to Lecky and to her publisher Alexander Macmillan most notably — substantiates the idea that she viewed writing as a profession rather than a pastime, her letters to Lecky indicating the degree of attention she paid to the accuracy of historical detail in her novels, those to Macmillan evidencing her assiduous management of her career. These letters also confirm that she took actions which served to increase her own income, and was not averse to pitting publishers against one another in the bidding for the copyrights to her novels.⁴⁶⁴ Thurston's career alone among the group was not initiated as a result of financial need, yet it is apparent that her economic concerns grew over time, and by the point at which her final novel was published she was privately admitting her anxieties about its success and her hopes of the financial rewards it might bring.⁴⁶⁵ The fact that these women's careers were, in every case, pursued outside of Ireland strongly suggests that the prospects for publishing success there — as Tynan's references to the demoralized state of the Dublin publishing industry indicate — were extremely limited.

⁴⁶⁴ See, in particular, letter from Lawless to Alexander Macmillan (23 September 1891), Macmillan Archive, Add. 54966, British Library, London and undated letter from Lawless to Lecky, Lecky Correspondence, MSS 18827, Manuscript 2482, Trinity College Dublin.

⁴⁶⁵ See letter from Thurston to Gavin (17 September 1910), KCT Papers, NLS, Acc. 11378, Box 12.

Perhaps the most damning indictment of the opportunities Ireland offered to its women is the fact that, once they had left their homeland for England, not one of these authors was willing to make a permanent return. Tynan stands alone among the group in having attempted to live in Ireland once again, but her repatriation would in fact last less than a decade.

Chesterton's review indicates that the process Stephen Brown would later refer to — that of highlighting a 'contrast of temperaments' between the Irish and English rather than addressing the subject of Home Rule directly — was at work in Tynan's *Her Ladyship*. That Chesterton found a verification of the improprieties he attached to the Irish aristocracy in what others believed to be a politically innocuous work also suggests the degree to which Brown may have been correct in his assumption that the popular novel could act as an effective form of political propaganda. It is evident that not only Tynan, but Lawless, Meade, Egerton, Thurston and Francis all believed the novel to be a viable forum for airing political views, and, despite the fact that some would publicly profess otherwise, did not consider their gender to debar them from adding their own voices to the debates surrounding the Irish and Woman Questions. The regularity with which these women use their texts to address the political landscape of their homeland in fact suggests that, when Ireland was their subject matter, they may have felt compelled or even obliged to deal with 'Irish problems'. Among those texts which have too long been overlooked by the Irish literary establishment in its assessments of the literature of the post-Parnell and pre-Easter Rising era, Lawless's *Grania*, Egerton's *The Wheel of God*, Thurston's *The Fly on the Wheel* and Francis's *The Story of Mary Dunne* must rank among those which are most unfairly neglected, and each of these works has compelling and unique ideas to convey about the politics, gendered or national, of its author's homeland.

What impact these texts and others like them may have made on the political attitudes of their reading public is impossible to quantify, but evidence suggests that the novels written by Lawless, Meade, Egerton, Thurston, Francis and Tynan reached a far more extensive audience than did the poetry of, most notably, Hyde or Yeats.⁴⁶⁶ In some cases, too, the ideas conveyed by these authors could be seen as potentially as politically inflammatory as were those expressed by their male compatriots. Despite its Celticist stereotypes, Lawless's *Maelcho*, for example, graphically depicts atrocities committed by British troops on Irish soil and is openly and vehemently critical of English misrule in Ireland. *Maelcho* could indeed be seen to harbour the potential, as one commentator suggested, to 'make rebels' of its Irish readers.⁴⁶⁷ Similar seditious possibilities may be glimpsed in Meade's *The O'Donnells of Inchfawn*, Tynan's *A King's Woman*, Francis's *Miss Erin* and *Dark Rosaleen* and Thurston's *The Gambler*. The greater majority of these texts, however, performed an ameliorative function by addressing their English readers in what was, so to speak, their own language. Whatever approach the author chose to take, few of these novels would portray the Irish situation without simultaneously tackling English misconceptions of it. In seeking to elucidate, these authors were not only entering into the political debates surrounding Home Rule, they were actively attempting to alter hearts and minds. There is, as such, every reason to believe that, in overestimating the part he and his fellow Revivalists played in the period he defined as Ireland's 'long gestation', Yeats was not only underestimating the importance of events such as the Dublin Lock-Out and the First World War to the turn of events in 1916, but also the degree to which women's popular fiction may have played its own subversive role during the era.

⁴⁶⁶ For a study of reading trends in Ireland, see J. C. McWalter, 'The Dublin Libraries', *The Irish Times* (29 September 1910), p. 5.

⁴⁶⁷ Clipping from *Irish Daily Independent* (5 November 1894), n. p., Lawless Papers.

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