

THE FICTION AND FICTIONALISING OF WILLIAM CARLETON

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William Carleton, widely acknowledged to be the most important Irish writer of the nineteenth century, has, nevertheless, been subject to little rigorous examination. This neglect stems, firstly, from the notoriety he gained early in his career. An Ulster peasant by birth, and a convert to Protestantism in early adulthood, he commenced his career as a writer by attacking the Catholic Church into which he had been baptised. Consequently, despite his later skilful and sympathetic depictions of the Catholic peasant classes he knew so well, Irish attitudes towards him long remained ambivalent, and neither his work, nor his life, received the critical attention they deserved. Secondly, the fact that there is relatively little authoritative information on Carleton has further discouraged any proper investigation of what evidence is available, a fact which has reinforced a tendency for erroneous suppositions about Carleton to remain, not only uncorrected, but repeatedly cited as fact. This thesis, the aim of which is to present a corrective analysis of the author and his writings, is the first study to properly redress that failure. It pursues those lines of inquiry which, in the judgement of the writer, are most productive for the purpose of explicating the complexities of Carleton's work and character.

The fundamental issues with which this thesis engages are ones of identity and identification; those imposed upon Carleton and those he sought for himself. The opening chapter gives a critical overview of the way in which scholars have presented Carleton, from the nineteenth century until the present day. A dearth of primary source material has made him an easy subject for appropriation; once vilified as an apostate, his more recent fate has been to be defined by the Famine. The second chapter examines how Carleton's personal identity was connected to the matter of his religious affiliation. The misinterpretation of circumstances connected to Carleton's shift of religious identity – an error corrected in this chapter of the study – provides the most obvious example of widespread critical neglect which he has suffered. Chapter three assesses the way in which Carleton's changing religious attitudes are reflected in his fictional writing. The final three chapters together constitute an examination of Carleton's literary identity. Chapter four proposes that Carleton can be understood as standing in the tradition of the *senachie*, as one who found his voice, and gained his reputation, by identifying with the peasant classes with which he was familiar. The penultimate chapter addresses Carleton's self-image as a young man, and the way in which both his empathy and identification with particular human types is expressed through his fiction. The final chapter examines Carleton's decline, as, confronted by the limits of his own imaginative capabilities, he wrestled with a form to which his talents were ill-adapted, and with subjects with which he could not properly identify.

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A NOTE ON EDITIONS

Where possible I have used the original editions of both William Carleton's books and those of other nineteenth-century writers. Where this has not been possible I have used, in the main, facsimile editions. Most, but not all, are those published by Garland.

William Carleton's *Autobiography* was originally published as volume I of D. J. O'Donoghue's *Life of William Carleton*. Although I have referred to O'Donoghue's introduction contained in that volume, for reasons of convenience I have otherwise used the 1996 edition published by White Row Press, which retains O'Donoghue's original notes on the text.

For reasons of convenience, too, I have used the Appletree edition of Carleton's *Fardorougha the Miser*, which is reproduced from the text of the 1839 edition, published by William Curry, Jun. For Carleton's preface to that edition, and for the publicity material for 'The Chronicles of Ballymacruikeen', I have referred to the Garland facsimile of the same edition. The 1848 edition, appearing under the imprint of Simms and M'Intyre, has been referred to for the author's introduction to that publication. Where necessary, in note references I have indicated, in parenthesis, the date of the edition.

The edition of Carleton's *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry* generally referred to is the definitive two-volume 'New Edition' of 1843-44, published by William Curry Jun. and W. S. Orr. Other editions used are the three-volume, 'Second Series', 1833 edition published by Wakeman, and the 1871, single volume version of the 'New Edition' with illustrations by Maclise, published by William Tegg. In order to avoid any confusion between the texts, note references to both the complete editions, and to the tales which compose them, give the date of publication in parenthesis.

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INTRODUCTION

‘We are earthworms of the earth, and all that
has gone through us will be our trace.’¹

No writer has been more widely acclaimed, readily traduced, and consistently neglected than has William Carleton. Although his position as the most significant Irish writer of the early and mid-nineteenth century is frequently acknowledged, neither his life nor his work have received the analytical attention they deserve. Accounting for this paradox, and correcting some of the most persistent misconstructions of Carleton’s life and work is the burden of this thesis.

It has been a remarkably easy thing to misrepresent him. Despite the reputation he gained in his lifetime, he remained uneasily positioned at the margins of Dublin literary society. It is in some ways not entirely surprising that, a peasant by birth and the product of a largely oral tradition, he left little in the way of personal documentation. Apart from a small number of letters held in library archives and his unfinished autobiography, the main source for information on Carleton is the account of his work and life given, almost three decades after his death, by his first biographer, David J. O’Donoghue. O’Donoghue, finding information on him ‘scanty and scattered’, could not begin his biography until he was given access by Carleton’s daughters to the then unpublished autobiography, and to what little correspondence the family held.² While other information, in the form of anecdotal accounts, was given to him by acquaintances of Carleton, as he acknowledges, this was of limited value. By the time of his enquiries, most of those who had known Carleton in the

¹ Seamus Heaney, ‘Station Island’, II, in *New Selected Poems, 1966-1987* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), p. 168, line 16. The words are those spoken by William Carleton in that section of Heaney’s poem devoted to him.

² David J. O’Donoghue, *The Life of William Carleton: Being His Autobiography and Letters; and an Account of His Life and Writings, From the Point At Which the Autobiography Breaks Off*, 2 vols (London: Downey, 1896), I, p. xi.

1830s and 1840s, before his physical and professional decline, were no longer alive, and those who knew him in his later years, writes O'Donoghue, found him unremarkable, and 'do not speak with enthusiasm of his manner or presence'.³

More than eighty years later, in one of the few major works on Carleton, *William Carleton, Irish Peasant Novelist: A Preface to His Fiction*, Robert Lee Wolff remarked on the difficult terrain encountered by researchers on Carleton:

Here, then, we have by common consent Ireland's greatest literary figure of the nineteenth century. Yet nothing about his inner life is clear; the tone of his work arouses bitter controversy; his mental processes remain mysterious; and it is hard to find out precisely what he actually said in print and when he said it. How to interpret what he actually said is of course the most important question, and one to which this essay will propose answers that may well prove unsatisfactory or even distasteful, but will at least be based upon all the genuine texts.⁴

The texts to which Wolff refers are, of course, the sketches, stories and novels that Carleton produced. On the actual merits of Carleton's work there has been little disagreement. Carleton, it is widely acknowledged, was a skilled sketch writer and tale-teller, and, notwithstanding his considerable talents, a less accomplished novelist. But, as Wolff's words indicate, in the absence of factual information about the author, his fiction has been scrutinised as much, if not more, for the light it throws on his character and actions as for any inherent literary value it might have.

Like all such studies, this thesis draws and builds upon the work of others. Of those earlier researchers, I am particularly indebted to two, whose examinations of Carleton have removed the need for much painstaking groundwork. One of these is Robert Lee Wolff, from whose *William Carleton* I have quoted above. The other is

³ O'Donoghue, *Life*, I, p. xii.

⁴ Robert Lee Wolff, *William Carleton, Irish Peasant Novelist: A Preface to His Fiction* (London: Garland, 1980), p. 7. Wolff's book is a companion volume to the Garland facsimile editions of Carleton's major works.

Barbara Hayley whose analytical study of Carleton's tales, *Carleton's Traits and Stories and the 19th Century Anglo-Irish Tradition* (1983), gives an exhaustive account of multiple changes the author made to the texts included in *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry* between the appearance of the first story in 1829 and the definitive 1842-44 edition. Also of importance, although more for its historiographical groundwork than for any critical understanding, is Andre Boué's *William Carleton, romancier irlandais (1794-1869)* (1978). While Boué's outstanding achievement was to uncover a letter from Carleton to the home secretary Robert Peel which threw new light on the author's early anti-Catholic sentiments, his diligence, both in reproducing correspondence from Carleton held in the British Museum and in the National Library of Ireland, and in listing the numerous editions of Carleton's works which appeared between 1828 and 1972, has been immensely useful to subsequent scholarship.

Research, by its nature, is a matter of revision and re-evaluation, and in the case of Carleton, new investigation is long overdue. This present work deploys approaches that are biographical, historical and literary, with the intention of delivering an understanding of Carleton which is multi-faceted and properly nuanced. It makes no claim to be exhaustive, either in its examination of Carleton's writings, or of his life. It is instead predicated on the assumption that there are a number of key perspectives on Carleton which, taken together, will yield a truer sense of the mainsprings of his ambitions, the nature of his failures, and the extent of his achievements. Its aim is to provide a corrective balance to other studies of Carleton and a dispassionate assessment of a writer to whom lip service is frequently paid, but of whom impartial examination is rarely made.

In this task, two particular sources of evidence not previously utilised, one primary and one secondary, have proved particularly illuminative. The first of these consists of three letters written by Carleton and now in the possession of the University of Illinois. Two have, until now, remained undiscovered and unexamined by Carleton scholars. The third was briefly alluded to in a journal article (though not on Carleton) published in 1952.⁵ One in particular, dating from 1842, reveals much about Carleton's protectiveness towards his work, particularly when he believed it under threat from his publisher's disregard for its distinctively Irish character. The significance of these letters is such that they have merited inclusion as an appendix to this study. The second hitherto unutilised source is secondary material, in the form of research published by the Clogher Historical Society on the state of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Clogher in the early nineteenth century. The investigations by contributors to the *Clogher Record*, I believe, shed new light both on events in Carleton's early life, and on his presentation of the Catholic clergy in his writings.

A reassessment of Carleton must of necessity begin with a fresh examination of the ways in which critics have interpreted his works and his motives. The first, introductory chapter addresses Carleton's critical reception and prepares the ground for a fresh evaluation. The shift in the presentation of Carleton – from religious mercenary prepared to embrace any cause for advancement to victim of Irish social and economic circumstances – has been a gradual one. From being a writer defined by apostasy he has become one defined by famine. In 1948 the Carleton scholar Benedict Kiely implied that he was a 'souper', a Judas who had betrayed his religion for money, and as late as 1959 the literary critic Thomas Flanagan, discussing Carleton's presentation of the Ireland of his youth, wrote that 'to this subject he was

⁵ Gordon N. Ray, 'The Bentley Papers', *Library*, 5th s. 7 (September 1952), 178-200 (p. 186).

faithful, and to nothing else'.⁶ In a country where for centuries religious differences have run dangerously deep, and where the nurturing of enmities has been something of a national pastime, a more forgiving approach to one who, though recognised as a 'profound and sympathetic student of the Irish character', was also seen as 'a hired traducer' would inevitably take some time to develop.⁷ The fact, too, that there is a dearth of authoritative information on Carleton has left him particularly vulnerable to undue and sometimes unjustified categorisation and has also proved a deterrent to any serious investigation of the little factual evidence that does exist.

It is impossible to obtain a proper perspective on Carleton's work, or his life, without giving due regard to his religious views and the changes they underwent through the years. The second and third chapters of this thesis constitute, firstly, a re-examination of Carleton's circumstances, particularly in the years which immediately preceded his rejection of the Roman Catholic Church in favour of the Church of Ireland; and secondly, a consideration of the religious views presented in his fiction, as, abandoning his early resentments, he moved to a more inclusive doctrinal position. Particularly intriguing are the opaque circumstances surrounding Carleton's failure to join the priesthood for which he had been intended. While the full facts remain obscure, secondary historical material, hitherto ignored by Carleton scholars but made use of in this thesis, reveals much about Catholic Church politics in Carleton's home area, and gives the lie to the widely promulgated belief, long accepted as fact, that the thwarting of Carleton's ecclesiastical ambitions was a direct consequence of his schoolmaster's difficult relationship with the Catholic Bishop of Clogher.

⁶ Benedict Kiely, *Poor Scholar: a Study of the Works and Days of William Carleton (1794-1869)* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1997), pp. 33-34, p. 88; Thomas Flanagan, *The Irish Novelists 1800-1850* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p. 256. Kiely's *Poor Scholar* was first published in 1948.

⁷ Flanagan, *Irish Novelists*, p. 255.

Of one fact we can be certain: in his early adulthood, Carleton's animus towards the Catholic Church was deep and unyielding. Nevertheless, as his confidence as a writer increased, the virulent and discordant tone employed in his early anti-Catholic works was exchanged for a more natural, and more engaging register as he described the culture and people familiar to him from his childhood and youth. Like the *senachie*, that guardian of the old oral tradition who had preceded him, Carleton was uniquely positioned to present an authoritative, affectionate and often entertaining account of the culture that had nurtured him. The fourth chapter of this thesis describes his contribution to literature in the context not only of the Irish scene, but also in that of contemporary European cultural developments. Carleton was determined to create out of his knowledge of his own Ulster background a national picture, and by this means to secure for himself a position as a national figure. By doing so, he also gained a reputation as a writer of international standing. One piece of hitherto unlocated material which I have examined, a letter from Carleton to his publisher, leaves little doubt about his understanding of the need to present to the world a distinctive representation of Irish life and culture, and of the need to accommodate an authentic, regional picture within a national framework.

That accommodation, Carleton believed, could be best achieved through what was, by then, the ascendant literary form, the novel. The penultimate and final chapters of this thesis evaluate Carleton's achievement as a writer of fiction: firstly by considering his handling of character; and secondly by assessing his struggle with the structural and conceptual aspects of the novel form. While his first novel, the masterly depiction of avarice, *Fardorougha the Miser; or, The Convicts of Lisnamona* (1839) was warmly received, and while he produced other significant novels in the 1840s, he never brought to that genre the assurance he displayed in his short stories

and sketches. After 1850 he produced little of any significance. Not without some reason, his literary decline has been directly related to the Great Irish Famine. But while that calamity certainly had an impact on his work, Carleton's decline had other causes intrinsic to the writer himself. It is the case that he had a profound, and irresolvable difficulty with the novel form and with the dynamics of realism in particular. The lack of an enabling theory of fiction prevented him from distinguishing between authenticity and veracity, between reality as a source and realism as an outcome. In the last analysis, Carleton could not allow fiction to stand alone as a valid expression of truth. Preoccupied with being believed as a chronicler – a reflex strong among Irish tellers of tales but notably strong in Carleton – he insisted upon invoking fact to substantiate fiction, rather than trusting to the fictional principle of verisimilitude itself. In this failure truly to master the novel form, the insecurities of national culture and those of William Carleton's personality become tragically indistinguishable. In other words, it was not only Irish conditions alone, but also Carleton's inherent inability to recognise that giving to fiction the appearance and impress of truth was a more appropriate aim for a novelist than claiming to validate fact through fiction, that was to become his undoing.

CHAPTER 1

WILLIAM CARLETON AND HIS CRITICS

In July 1854, Charles Dickens wrote to William Carleton. Carleton had communicated twice with the English author. His initial correspondence had been to suggest that the two should meet. Then he had approached Dickens with a proposal that he, Carleton, should write a number of sketches for *Household Words*. To Carleton's chagrin (despite the fact that he had received a reply informing him that Dickens was abroad), Dickens had not responded personally to his first letter. Dickens subsequently wrote:

If I had supposed for a moment that you did not understand the impossibility of answering the letter myself, I would have never rested until I had made it known to you.

For pray believe, my dear sir, that very few things are more precious to me than the approval and regard of a writer so truly, justly distinguished as yourself. I receive it as one of the greatest honours of my life and treasure it with sincere appreciation and gratitude. I am fortunate in not having unconsciously presented myself to you once more in an unfavourable light.⁸

Whether Carleton recognised that these words might be taken at other than their face value is a matter for speculation. If he did, it did not deter him from making another – unsuccessful – effort to meet Dickens when the latter was visiting Dublin. Dickens pleaded fatigue, and the two never met.⁹ Whether Dickens had reservations about Carleton the man or Carleton the writer, or both, we cannot know. Certainly, he was not so impressed that he was prepared to pay him in advance for any sketches.¹⁰

Quick to perceive a slight – ‘rather too quick to see an insult in a loosely-constructed sentence’ states O’Donoghue, who gives several examples of Carleton’s

⁸ Letter from Charles Dickens to William Carleton, 20 July 1854, reproduced in O’Donoghue, *Life*, II, 188.

⁹ O’Donoghue, *Life*, II, 188-89.

¹⁰ *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. by Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson and Angus Easson, 12 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965-2002), VII (1993), 429 (4 October 1854).

readiness to nurse a personal grievance (Dickens was by no means the only offender)¹¹ – Carleton was not an easy individual to deal with. His seemingly inflated view of his own status is evidence not of an innate confidence, but rather the reverse: his wearying and continual demands for recognition indicate not only his very real financial difficulties but also problems of identity. His profound personal insecurities, reinforced by his peculiarly ambivalent position, social, cultural and not least, religious, have given exceptional opportunities to those few critics who have been inclined to examine his work to interpret it according to their various agendas. And – this being an Irish subject – Carleton, from the time he took up his pen, has always provided ample scope for conflict: an Irishman who begins his writing career attacking the Catholic religion of his birth and who, correctly or not, is perceived to change allegiance according to who holds the purse strings can hardly avoid making enemies.

Very little of length has been written on Carleton. In 1938, Roger McHugh, writing in *Studies*, observed that if Charles Gavan Duffy's description of him as a writer who 'lifted a head like Slieve Donard over his contemporaries' was accurate, then recent surveyors of nineteenth-century Irish literature had been suffering from defective vision.¹² Since then various critics have devoted chapters, or parts of chapters, in larger works to him. Carleton is one of five writers examined in Thomas Flanagan's *The Irish Novelists 1800-1850* (1959). In the 1980s, his place in Irish literature was discussed by John Cronin, in *The Anglo-Irish Novel* (1980); by James M. Cahalan, first in *Great Hatred, Little Room* (1983) and then in *The Irish Novel* (1988); and by Barry Sloan, in *The Pioneers of Anglo-Irish Fiction* (1986). In the following decade Terry Eagleton looked at the problematic nature of Carleton's work

¹¹ O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, 75-77.

¹² Roger McHugh, 'William Carleton: A Portrait of the Artist as Propagandist', *Studies*, 27 (1938), 47-62 (p. 47).

in *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* (1995). In the present century, Declan Kiberd has devoted a chapter to him in *Irish Classics* (2001), and in *The Irish Story* (2001) Roy Foster discusses the relationship of his work to that of W.B. Yeats. Carleton also merits a chapter in Melissa Fegan's *Literature and the Irish Famine, 1845-1919* (2002).

For more than this (in terms of length at least), in the twentieth century one finds first, in distractingly lyrical, determinedly Irish-language influenced prose, Benedict Kiely's *Poor Scholar* (1948). Margaret Chesnutt's *Studies in the Short Stories of William Carleton* (1976) was published almost three decades later. This was followed by Robert Lee Wolff's invaluable *William Carleton, Irish Peasant Novelist: A Preface to His Fiction* (1980). Three years later Eileen A. Sullivan's somewhat naïve exploration *William Carleton* (1983) appeared, as did Barbara Hayley's detailed and highly regarded textual analysis, *Carleton's Traits and Stories and the 19th Century Anglo-Irish Tradition* (1983). The succeeding lull was broken with the publication of David Krause's *William Carleton the Novelist* (2000).

The ambivalence of Carleton's position, social, cultural and religious, and the difficulties critics experience in coming to terms with him are reflected in the many paradoxical, and sometimes contradictory, references to him. For Seamus Deane, writing in 1986, he was 'the most famous or the most notorious' Irish victim of Irish nineteenth-century conditions.¹³ Almost a century earlier, in 1896, O'Donoghue had described him as 'a man of whom his countrymen will always be justly proud, although he vexed them sorely', one who 'gave offence to every class of Irishmen in one or other of his books', and observed that it was hardly surprising that that despite

¹³ Seamus Deane, *A Short History of Irish Literature* (London: Hutchinson, 1986), p. 107.

his importance biographers avoided tackling him as a subject.¹⁴ More than eighty years later John Cronin can be found making a similar observation. This ‘flawed giant’ remained subject to ‘ardent neglect’.¹⁵ In 1959 Thomas Flanagan described him, somewhat unfairly, as being, in spiritual matters ‘a bewildering nondescript – not least, bewildering to himself’, and thirty years later as ‘the one writer with whom every student of nineteenth-century literature must come to difficult terms’.¹⁶

Carleton may have been a tiresome self-publicist, but he left little in the way of personal (as opposed to public) documentation. Consequently, critics have had few resources on which to base their judgements. The relative neglect of Carleton as a writer is reflected in the very limited availability of his books, a fact that further compounds the problems of research. And Carleton is not always the easiest writer to read. It is generally acknowledged that, with the exception of his unfinished autobiography, by the time of his correspondence with Dickens he had his best work well behind him. His widely acclaimed *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry* had first appeared in book form in 1830, and his first full-length, and generally well-regarded novel, *Fardorougha the Miser* had been published in serial form in 1837, and as a book in 1839. By the late 1840s his reputation as a novelist was well established. What was to become his most popular novel, *Willy Reilly and his dear Cooleen Bawn*, first appeared in serial form in the London *Independent Newspaper* in 1850, and ran to several book editions in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was by no means his best work. His biographer David J. O’Donoghue observes ‘That the reign of simplicity and naturalness in Carleton was over, and that artificiality had

¹⁴ O’Donoghue, *Life*, I, pp. ix- x.

¹⁵ John Cronin, *The Anglo-Irish Novel*, 2 vols (Belfast: Appletree, 1980-90), I, *The Nineteenth Century* (1980), 88.

¹⁶ Flanagan, *Irish Novelists*, p. 48. Thomas Flanagan, ‘Literature in English, 1801-91’, in *A New History of Ireland*, general eds. T. W. Moody, F. X. Martin and F. J. Byrne, 9 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976-2005) V, *England Under the Union*, ed. by W. E. Vaughan (1989), 482-522 (p. 491).

usurped their place, was made clear by this work'.¹⁷ 'Simplicity and naturalness', certainly in his novels, were never the only elements in Carleton's work. Poor plot construction, awkward stylistic shifts and clumsy authorial interventions, the overwhelming majority of critics agree, mar even his best fictional efforts.

Nevertheless, Carleton's significance within the Irish literature has always been acknowledged, and for a variety of reasons. Bilingual, hedge-school educated, risen (or half-risen) from the peasantry, the affectionate chronicler of an Irish oral tradition being eroded by the literacy he himself so valued, he was acclaimed for sketches of Irish life by his younger contemporary and friend, the Young Irelander and leading light of *The Nation*, Thomas Davis, as the authoritative commentator – 'a hearty peasant, not a note-taking critic' – on a vanishing world.¹⁸ More than four decades later, for the young W. B. Yeats, romantically attached to the idea of an Irish national culture, he had a similar significance. Carleton, Celtic eyes and all, was both 'a great Irish historian', and 'the great novelist of Ireland', a semi-tragic figure, 'like the animals in Milton, half emerged from the earth and its brooding', his novels pervaded by 'a clay-cold melancholy'.¹⁹

In Ireland, with its long and troubled history of English political domination, the inevitable fusions of religious and cultural identities, found in all socio-geographical contexts, have a particular keenness. Davis and Yeats, both from Protestant backgrounds, not surprisingly chose to see Carleton within the context of a unified and unifying national culture. Others had their reservations. In 1916 the nationalist Thomas MacDonagh, contemptuous of Carleton's efforts to exploit the

¹⁷ O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, 199.

¹⁸ Thomas Davis, 'Habits and Character of the Peasantry', in *Literary and Historical Essays*, 1846 (Dublin: James Duffy, 1846; repr. Poole: Woodstock, 1998), pp. 208-10 (p. 210). This essay first appeared in the *Nation*, 12 July 1845.

¹⁹ *Stories from Carleton*, with introduction by W. B. Yeats (London: Walter Scott, [1889]), p. xvi, p. xvii.

English market, cursorily dismissed him. ‘Carleton knew Irish, and might possibly, some think, have been the Irish Mistral – if he had been a patriot.’²⁰ That MacDonagh writes ‘some think’ is significant: for him, Carleton was beyond the pale, or to be precise, too firmly, if uncomfortably, ensconced within it. The poet Patrick Kavanagh, in his preface to a 1968 edition of Carleton’s autobiography is marginally more understanding; Carleton was a good writer, ‘but with no opening into the world [...] his only ploy – sad indeed – was to change, or pretend to change, his historical Catholicism for Protestantism’. ‘Naturally’ continues Kavanagh, ‘I have no prejudice against Protestantism, except that it appears to me to be based on everything that is weak in Christianity’.²¹ That resounding ‘naturally’, investing as it does his words with such total contempt, denies any debate on Carleton’s possibly complex reasons for abandoning Catholicism. In a country in which religious resentments were keenly felt, Carleton’s position was for many, certainly into the second half of the twentieth century, non-negotiable.

Carleton has frequently been judged as much on his apparently self-serving pragmatism as on the literary merits, or otherwise, of his work. Carleton the pragmatist has been for many Carleton the apostate. He has been accused of accommodating his literary stance to the ideas of whichever publisher he was writing for, most notoriously, to those of his early mentor Caesar Otway, editor of the anti-Catholic *Christian Examiner and Church of Ireland Magazine* between 1825 and 1831. Having followed Otway to the pro-ascendancy *Dublin University Magazine* (which serialised *Fardorougha*, hardly an anti-Catholic work) in 1833, he found himself, with other writers, effectively forced to quit by the new editor, Charles

²⁰ Thomas MacDonagh, *Literature in Ireland: Studies Irish and Anglo-Irish* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1920), p. 33. First published in Dublin by the Talbot Press in 1916.

²¹ *The Autobiography of William Carleton*, with preface by Patrick Kavanagh (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1968), p. 9.

Lever, in 1841. Although unsympathetic to its pro-repeal stance, he then made occasional contributions to the non-sectarian cultural and political journal of Young Ireland, *The Nation*, which made its first appearance in October 1842 under the editorship of Charles Gavan Duffy.

In November 1842, before he had any literary connection with the journal, Carleton visited Duffy, to ask that the *Nation* deny rumours which he claimed were circulating, that he was its sole contributor. His motive in doing this has been a matter of debate. David Krause, always over-ready to give the author unqualified support, accepts the episode at face value.²² Other critics have found explaining Carleton's motives more problematic. Benedict Kiely has suggested that the request, as absurd as the rumour itself, 'displays his offence-avoiding anxiety to dissociate himself from the political principles of a paper to which he afterwards contributed'.²³ Flanagan has considered it equally likely that this was a warning shot to the government. Carleton, always short of money, was at this time nurturing hopes of obtaining the government pension which had earlier been awarded to his fellow countryman, the now deceased John Banim. The payment (which, says Flanagan, 'he pursued with the dexterity and lack of reticence of an O'Connell henchman'²⁴) having once been refused, Carleton might well have wanted to indicate a preparedness to align himself with government opponents should official financial recognition not materialise. These views are not mutually exclusive. It is highly likely that Carleton was flattered by the rumour, if rumour there was. He wanted the pension, and, given that he had recently parted company from the *Dublin University Magazine*, no doubt also wanted to write for the *Nation* if the opportunity arose. His request for a denial

²² David Krause, *William Carleton the Novelist: His Carnival and Pastoral World of TragiComedy* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2000), p. 74.

²³ Kiely, p. 111.

²⁴ Flanagan, *Irish Novelists*, pp. 309-10, p. 323.

by the *Nation*, then, might be viewed as doubly expedient, a way of publicly distancing himself from the journal's pro-Repeal stance whilst at the same time bringing his availability as a writer to Duffy's attention.

Carleton's 'apostacy', of course, has been directly linked to his ambitions. To what extent this change of allegiance was underpinned by conviction, and to what extent it was merely a strategy employed to further his prospects, as many of his Catholic contemporaries believed, remains a matter for debate, and one that will be discussed at more length in the next chapter of this thesis. For many Catholic critics, certainly until the mid-twentieth century, that his religious shift had been for entirely pragmatic reasons was regarded as a matter of indisputable fact. An article by E. J. Quigley which appeared in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* in 1917, entitled 'The Prelate, the Pervert and the Professor', contains a hagiographic description of the early life of the first archbishop of New York and a contrasting account of the conduct of his contemporary and fellow Ulsterman, the 'pervert' Carleton. Here were 'two boys destined to fame – the glory of the Church and her shame'. Carleton, the betrayer of his inheritance and a man who had attached himself to 'the school of intellectual hostility to all things Catholic',

became a parasite, a tramp, a tutor, a clerk in a Souper office, an idler, a schoolmaster, a literary hack for his employers, the Soupers, who had perverted him and supplied him with a wife, a kind poor soul. His new masters were task-masters and compelled the weak renegade to write bitterly against the old Faith of his fathers.²⁵

The 'professor' of Quigley's article, Dr. Patrick Joseph Murray, the professor of theology at Maynooth, was more sympathetic to Carleton's position than was Quigley. Murray, whose correspondence with Carleton in the 1850s and 1860s –

²⁵ E. J. Quigley, 'The Prelate, the Pervert, and the Professor', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 5th s., 9, 1917, 206-14 (p. 211).

notwithstanding some criticisms of his work – was amicable,²⁶ wrote in an *Edinburgh Review* article of 1852 that the patronage of ‘some of the most unbending enemies of Catholic emancipation and the most noted leaders in the angry warfare of the day’ and Carleton’s consequent obligation to copy ‘but too faithfully the language and spirit of his new political associates’, largely accounted for the intemperate tone of his early work: for him, clearly, Caesar Otway, the editor of the anti-Catholic *Christian Examiner and Church of Ireland Magazine*, bore considerable responsibility for the extreme anti-Catholic tone of the early sketches Carleton wrote for that magazine.²⁷ Murray claimed to have learned ‘on good authority’ that had the author been allowed ‘to exercise his own discretion uncontrolled’, later editions of his early tales would have undergone ‘a more unsparing process’ of revision of those earlier anti-Catholic views.²⁸ What that ‘good authority’ was, Murray does not reveal, but it was not Carleton; Carleton’s acquaintanceship with Murray was prompted by the review itself. And Quigley, despite his hostility to Carleton, found it difficult to ignore the view of so distinguished a churchman as Murray. While Quigley was reluctant to concede to Carleton more than was absolutely necessary, he felt obliged to end his article with a tacit nod in the direction of forgiveness for a writer whose ‘early-life bitterness’ towards the Church had moderated. Murray, he acknowledged, held information on Carleton which had prompted him to defend the writer’s reputation. The precise nature of this information remains unknown, and a matter for speculation; Murray died before he had the opportunity to reveal it, in 1882.²⁹

²⁶ See letter from Patrick Murray to Carleton, 18 February 1853, reproduced in O’Donoghue, *Life*, II, 182-84. That Carleton was still in contact with Murray in 1863 is clear from a mention he makes in a letter to Charles Gavan Duffy. See letter from William Carleton to Charles Gavan Duffy, 1 June 1863 (National Library of Ireland), reproduced in André Boué, *William Carleton, romancier irlandais (1794-1869)*, (Paris: Publication de la Sorbonne, 1978), pp. 355-58.

²⁷ Patrick Joseph Murray, ‘Traits of the Irish Peasantry’, *Edinburgh Review*, 96 (October 1852), 384-403 (p. 384).

²⁸ Murray, ‘Traits of the Irish Peasantry’, 384.

²⁹ Quigley, 213-14.

Carleton's relationship with Otway – 'surely the most misinterpreted man in Irish literature', according to Barbara Hayley³⁰ – at the beginning of his writing career did much to damage his reputation. Tales such as 'A Pilgrimage to St. Patrick's Purgatory', 'Father Butler' and 'The Broken Oath', written for the *Christian Examiner* (the first two then appeared in a single volume book edition in 1829), did nothing to endear Carleton to Catholics. The *Christian Examiner* though ('this infuriate little periodical', Thomas Flanagan calls it³¹), although being the first on the scene (in 1825, four years before Catholic emancipation), was as Hayley observes, just one of several periodicals to be produced, each employing a tone highly offensive to those of an opposing religious persuasion. The fact that under Otway's editorship at least, this particular publication, in marked contrast to the others, was as concerned with issuing literature of a high standard as with religious proselytising, tends to be disregarded – as does the fact that Carleton wrote for various non-sectarian magazines which Otway founded.³² Whether Carleton's final piece for the *Christian Examiner* in 1831, 'Dennis O'Shaughnessy Going to Maynooth'³³, was somewhat abruptly curtailed because Otway was perturbed at its developing a vigour, and certainly a momentum, which threatened to carry it beyond Carleton's religious remit, or whether, as seems more likely and as Hayley believes to be the case, it was simply that that momentum threatened to carry it beyond the term of Otway's relatively discerning editorship, is debateable.

It is worth noting that whilst most critics have stressed the fact that the anti-Catholic rhetoric of the *Christian Examiner* stories was moderated for *Traits and*

³⁰ Barbara Hayley, 'A Reading and Thinking Nation: Periodicals as the Voice of Nineteenth-Century Ireland', in *Three Hundred Years of Irish Periodicals*, ed. by Barbara Hayley and Enda McKay (Gigginstown: Lilliput Press, 1987) pp. 29-48 (p. 32).

³¹ Flanagan, *Irish Novelists*, p. 279.

³² Barbara Hayley, *Carleton's Traits and Stories and the Anglo-Irish Tradition* (Gerrards Cross: Smythe, 1983), p. xi, pp. 15-16, pp. 88-89.

³³ 'Dennis', in the *Christian Examiner* version, is changed to 'Denis' for all later versions of the story.

Stories, Hayley, in her detailed examination of its various editions ('an attempt', she says, 'to dispel the legend of Carleton and find the writer') has placed the emphasis in the other direction; Carleton not only allowed anti-Catholic passages to remain but actually added some to *Christian Examiner* pieces for book publication.³⁴ Carleton's views, then, appear to owe little to Otway's influence.

Whether or not Otway actually altered some of Carleton's texts – and stylistic discrepancies strongly indicate that he did – is, in Wolff's view, immaterial. Wolff's opinion is that the anti-Catholic tone of the 'The Broken Oath' is so pervasive that it can only reflect the author's own strongly held opinions. Having never been republished – its tone is so extreme that any revision and republication would have been impossible, says Wolff – it is difficult to obtain and consequently overlooked by critics. Carleton began writing for Otway in 1828, the two having first met in 1827. André Boué's discovery of Carleton's letter of 1826, forwarded to Robert Peel, who was then Home Secretary in Liverpool's cabinet, clearly showed that Carleton's antagonism toward the Catholic Church predated his association with the *Christian Examiner*. The writer, expressing a deep hostility toward the Catholic clergy and their influence, offered his help, in the form of advice and information, in the cause of thwarting Catholic Emancipation.³⁵ Carleton may have accepted Otway's thirty pieces of silver, and, as Kiely writes, 'walked in the procession to the house of Mr. Phineas Lucre' and 'taken his guineas', but it is probable that disillusionment, for whatever reason, had preceded the deed.³⁶

The question of Carleton's 'apostasy', then, has remained problematic. Unsubstantiated evidence is to be regarded with some caution. Autobiographical

³⁴ Hayley, *Carleton's Traits and Stories*, p. xi.

³⁵ Letter and memorandum from William Carleton to William Sisson and Robert Peel, 3 November 1826 (BL, MSS 40 390, Peel Papers, vol CXX, fols 29-35), reproduced in Boué, pp. 343-47.

³⁶ Kiely, p. 104. Kiely is alluding to a character and event in Carleton's novel *Valentine M'Clutchy*.

accounts, which are by their nature apologia, need to be assessed with a high degree of scepticism; in common with the Catholic Church, their authors occasionally find economy of truth appropriate, or expedient, and Carleton undoubtedly was no exception. Robert Lee Wolff, in his 1980 study of Carleton, puts forward the proposition that Carleton's rejection of Catholicism was not the Damascus Road (or Lough Derg) experience which, with the literary convenience of hindsight, Carleton would have us believe: more credibly, his ultimate disillusionment was the consequence of a gradual, and complex process.³⁷

Carleton's pilgrimage to Lough Derg may well have been significant event, but it was only one of a number of factors which influenced his decision to leave the Church. While Carleton himself makes no reference to the matter, from the nineteenth century onwards it has been generally supposed that his disillusionment with Catholicism stemmed in part from the Bishop of Clogher's refusal to allow him the opportunity to become a priest, and to apply for entry to St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. This assumption may well be correct, but the evidence for it is tenuous. The accepted version of events is based upon information given to O'Donoghue, that Carleton had completed his education with a priest named Campbell. Campbell had quarrelled with the bishop, 'in consequence of which the latter would not advance any of his students to the Church'.³⁸ That Carleton names this schoolmaster, not as Campbell, but as Keenan, has done little to deter scholars from accepting O'Donoghue's version as true. The fact that this discrepancy has been disregarded is symptomatic of a tendency amongst Carleton's critics to work from unexamined assumptions.

³⁷ Wolff, pp. 10-15.

³⁸ O'Donoghue, *Life*, I, p. xv.

Whether Carleton should be categorised, as he frequently was, as a ‘spoiled priest’ is debateable. Carleton was never a cleric, and in a literal sense there was no priest to be corrupted. Furthermore, what circumstantial evidence there is suggests that initially at least, the Church refused Carleton rather than Carleton the Church. Flanagan, who himself describes Carleton as ‘a “spoiled priest” as well as a “peasant”’, speculates on Carleton’s vocation, or lack of it.³⁹ For an academically inclined Catholic youth with limited prospects, the Church was an avenue to things other than manual labour; it held the possibility of education. There is no indication of any spiritual dimension to his calling. Whereas Carleton’s father (who according to *The Autobiography* had ambitions that his son should be a priest) was a genuinely devout man, the sights of the son, however unclearly focussed, were on little more than recognition and advancement. ‘And yet’, writes Flanagan, recognising the paradox which the writer always presents, ‘we would know much about Carleton if we knew his feelings when the priesthood was blocked to him’.⁴⁰

Carleton’s conversion may have been, in Flanagan’s words, ‘accidental and issuing from his circumstances’, but this might be said of practically all decisions and acts made by all individuals. It may be ‘that in a hard hour, he bargained for station, respectability and security’, but motives are rarely so simple, and certainly not in the case of as complex a personality as Carleton.⁴¹ His change of allegiance was more than the necessary pragmatism of a young man with high ambitions and little money. His early antagonism towards Catholicism, although very likely conceived through his personal experience and disappointment, appears to have been reinforced, or been given intellectual justification, by the authority and influence which the Catholic clergy enjoyed – and frequently abused – amongst the uneducated rural populace.

³⁹ Flanagan, *Irish Novelists*, p. 263.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 275, p. 274.

The retort of Carleton's comic character, the incorrigibly pragmatic Protestant convert Darby O'Drive to the irascible Catholic priest McCabe, 'So long as you take your divinity from the saddler's shop, so long you will have obedient men, but indifferent Catholics', no doubt reflected Carleton's own view.⁴²

His views were not, it seems, without foundation. As evidence cited by Wolff indicates, there was concern within the Church itself about clergy behaviour.⁴³ And, as Vance observes, Carleton's objection to Catholicism – perhaps it would be more correct to say his rational objection – was as much to the clergy's social influence and (sometimes direct) involvement in organised violence as to any doctrinal objections.⁴⁴ There is certainly no dissent from the general view that from his youth, Carleton had a genuine and deep abhorrence of violence. As a boy, he had experience of the brutal methods of instilling education favoured by a not inconsiderable number of hedge schoolmasters. As a young man wandering the Louth countryside, he had come upon the evidence of justice meted to the perpetrators of a local atrocity. The sight of a gibbet, with decomposing contents oozing from a suspended tarred sack, reinforced for him the horror of the crime, the killings at Wildgoose Lodge, and left a profound impression on his memory.⁴⁵

Yeats, who – somewhat cautiously (a fact generally overlooked) but correctly – was suggesting that Carleton's anti-Catholicism abated over the years, is quoted repeatedly, and rather tiresomely, as stating that Carleton's heart always remained Catholic.⁴⁶ More recently, David Krause has expressed the same view, albeit with less

⁴² William Carleton, *Valentine M'Clutchy the Irish Agent; or, The Chronicles of Castle Cumber*, 2nd edn (Dublin: James Duffy, 1847), p. 178.

⁴³ Wolff, pp. 37-38. Wolff quotes from correspondence discovered in the Vatican archives by Emmet Larkin, concerning complaints about the behaviour of Irish clergy in the 1840s.

⁴⁴ Norman Vance, *Irish Literature: A Social History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 142.

⁴⁵ Carleton, *Autobiography*, pp. 113-18.

⁴⁶ Letter from W. B. Yeats to Father Matthew Russell [after 15 July 1889], in *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats*, general ed. John Kelly, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986, 1997, 1994), I (1986), 174.

erudition.⁴⁷ Norman Vance too, has voiced a similar opinion. ‘Imaginatively, he [Carleton] stayed with the unreformed Catholicism, the traditions and the communal bitterness of his youth, but rationally he rejected the ignorance and irregularity of the old ways. Becoming a Protestant was one of the ways of doing this.’⁴⁸

Krause may argue otherwise, but it should be remembered that Carleton was never prepared to properly retract the anti-Catholic sentiments he had expressed early in his career.⁴⁹ In publicity material, written in 1839 for a book which was never published, ‘Chronicles of Ballymacruikeen’, Carleton wrote that while there was nothing in his writing which he could not justify, there were passages in his works which ‘by giving offence unnecessarily and unseasonably’, he regretted having penned.⁵⁰ Later, in his preface to *Valentine M’Clutchy*, an apologia written to deflect accusations that, in attacking Orangeism, he had, not for the first time, shifted loyalties, he refers again, at greater length, to his early anti-Papist writings:

I have written many works upon Irish life, and up to the present day the man has never lived who could lay his finger upon any passage of my writings and say ‘*that is false*’. I cannot, however, avoid remarking here, that within the last few years, a more enlarged knowledge of life, and a more matured intercourse with society, have enabled me to overcome many absurd prejudices with which I was imbued. Without compromising, however, the *truth* or *integrity* of any portion of my writings, I am willing to admit, which I do frankly, and without hesitation, that I published in my early works passages which were not calculated to do any earthly good; but on the contrary, to give unnecessary offence to a great number of my countrymen.⁵¹

Acknowledging earlier prejudice whilst reaffirming the legitimacy of the views held makes for a bewildering sort of apology. But the tone which emerges

⁴⁷ Krause, p. 77.

⁴⁸ Vance, p. 141.

⁴⁹ See Krause, p. 68.

⁵⁰ Publicity for the ‘Chronicles of Ballymacruikeen’ was bound, unpaginated, into the introductory section of the first book edition of *Fardorougha the Miser*. See William Carleton, *Fardorougha the Miser; or, The Convicts of Lisnamona* (Dublin: William Curry, 1839; repr. London: Garland, 1979).

⁵¹ Carleton, *Valentine M’Clutchy*, pp. ix-x. Carleton’s emphasis.

through the opacity of Carleton's prose is undoubtedly more significant than the words themselves: there is no regret for opinions once, and still, held, but genuine regret for the vehemence with which they had been expressed. This qualified retraction is somewhat more than a calculated attempt by Carleton to placate his readership. Murray, who could hardly have been oblivious to its ambiguities, described it in his *Edinburgh Review* article as 'candid and generous' and deserving of being met in the same spirit.⁵² Wolff has implied that had Murray known of the 1826 Peel memorandum, he would have been generally less well disposed towards Carleton.⁵³ Even allowing for Murray's mistaken readiness to attribute Carleton's splenetic attacks on Catholicism to Otway's influence, his preparedness to overlook the apology's limitations, whilst certainly being a credit to his Christian forbearance, might also be an indication that he accepted the sincerity of Carleton's religious views.

If Carleton's heart did remain Catholic it was surely in the sense that it remained attached to the peasant culture of which Catholicism was an integral part. Carleton's heart remained, despite all his later complaints of his country's neglect of him, firmly and emphatically, Irish. He was, in Murray's words, 'not only Irish, but thoroughly Irish, intensely Irish, exclusively Irish'.⁵⁴ The experience of his childhood and youth, the emotional landscape from which he never properly departed, provided the essential background to his work. Nevertheless, although Carleton claimed an intimate knowledge with peasant society, he was deeply ambivalent about that world, and about his relationship to it. A seemingly inoffensive etching for 1843 edition of *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry* entitled 'Prillisk, the birth place of William Carleton' (Prillisk no longer existed), infuriated the writer, who observed that

⁵² Murray, 'Traits of the Irish Peasantry', 384.

⁵³ Wolff, p. 122-23.

⁵⁴ Murray, 'Traits of the Irish Peasantry', 388.

although his origins were humble, they were respectable.⁵⁵ The artist, it should be noted, forbears from claiming that this is the Carleton family's house. Significantly, Carleton referred to himself not as Thomas Davis did, as a peasant, but as a 'peasant's son'.⁵⁶ He had acquired a profession, and practically if not emotionally, he was no longer attached to the land.

Murray, more magnanimous than some contemporary, and a good number of later commentators, confined any criticism of Carleton to literary, rather than religious lapses. His objections, repeated time and again by later commentators, are to the didactic authorial voice and to the 'dissertations on topics which any fourth-rate newspaper correspondent would handle much better', which mar the novels.⁵⁷ In contrast, Carleton's depictions of the peasantry do a great deal to redress the common pictorial broadsheet view of the vulgar Irishman, which although not without foundation, is representative only of 'that vagrant gipsy brood [...] bearing to the fixed community very much the same relation as Mr. Mayhew's London street folks bear to the London householders'.⁵⁸ Carleton's portrayals are unrivalled and painted with an impartial hand – not the view, observes Murray, of a number of Carleton's countrymen, who have either criticized him 'for not representing his peasant as the finest in the world, if not absolutely faultless', or 'have assailed him for bestowing graces and noble feelings and noble virtues where they are not to be found'.⁵⁹

More recently, Eileen A. Sullivan has found little – perhaps too little – to quarrel with in Carleton's characterisations of the peasantry. She herself seems over-inclined to attribute 'graces and noble feelings and noble virtues where they are not to

⁵⁵ Carleton, *Autobiography*, p. 17.

⁵⁶ Carleton, *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry*, 'New Edition', 2 vols (Dublin: William Curry, Jun., 1843-44), I, p. vi.

⁵⁷ Murray, 'Traits of the Irish Peasantry', 403.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 389-90.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 386.

be found'. In an *Eire-Ireland* article of 1977 entitled 'William Carleton, Artist of Reality', in which she discusses the relationship of the 'ideal' to the 'real' in Carleton's work, she observes that 'In the tradition of the classics [...] Carleton transposes the rural poor to his pages through a primitive and elemental act. In this process, man's spirit appears innocent and pure; evil is out of place. The poor enjoy prelapsarian Eden with a pure vision of the world and believe in the supremacy of virtue. Carleton sees this and makes it the basis of his novels'.⁶⁰ Carleton's novels certainly have their share of virtuous, and sometimes idealised characters, but they are intended to be no more representative of their class, or of humanity at large, than his common crowd. They are for the most part less convincing than his much more robust rogues and villains. It is not clear how Sullivan reconciles her interpretation of Carleton's depiction of the peasantry with her view that 'The capacity to idealize rests in minds of more intellectual and abstract nature; neither of these characteristics is found in Carleton'. She goes on to assert that Carleton 'loves country people rather than ideal country people', for whom 'love is the central force of the universe and God is the divine ruler'.⁶¹ Sullivan's observations, here and elsewhere, on both *Traits and Stories* and on the novels, appear contradictory and take too little account of the social and historical context of Carleton's work. It is notable that she carefully avoids using the word 'peasantry'. In her book *William Carleton*, she suggests that Carleton's use of this 'derogatory' term, with its 'connotations of uncouthness and ignorance' is regrettable: '*country people*' would be more appropriate. Bizarrely, she attributes Carleton's use of the word to anti-Catholic, *Christian Examiner* influence. Fictional parents in Carleton's 1848 book *The Emigrants of Ahadarra: A Tale of Irish Life*, determined on a marriage that will provide financial security for a reluctant

⁶⁰ Eileen A. Sullivan, 'William Carleton, Artist of Reality', *Eire-Ireland*, 12. 1 (1977), 130-40 (p.135).

⁶¹ Sullivan, 'William Carleton, Artist of Reality', 137.

daughter, are dismissively labelled 'social climbers'.⁶² Carleton (who *was* arguably a social climber), with his first-hand experience of the practicalities of peasant life, if not unreservedly sympathetic, was certainly not condemnatory of such materialism.

All critics bring to their subjects their own ideas of the interrelationship of the fictional and the real, and of how the world is, or should be ordered – and Carleton's cultural situation, notoriously, makes for emotive critical responses. That fact notwithstanding, Sullivan's perspective does seem unusually reductive. Irish, or at least Ulster-Irish factional tensions still may be far from dormant, the Great Famine and related questions of government culpability (or otherwise) may remain emotive issues, but the passage of time does give a longer, and for the most part, healing, perspective on a world in which the legacy of the penal laws was keenly felt, and the questions of Catholic emancipation and the repeal of the Act of Union were to the fore. To extricate any sense of order from the continuous confusion of Irish history was a problem for Carleton, and remains one for a number of those who have commented on his work.

A more recent critic than Sullivan, David Krause, in *William Carleton the Novelist*, is intent on presenting Carleton not only as the literary figure of exceptional importance that he so obviously is, but as a consistently first-rate writer, which he certainly is not. Krause, seeking to bring a new perspective to bear on the author's work, ignores the widely acclaimed sketches and short stories, and, as his title makes clear, focuses exclusively on the novels. Determinedly, he sets about making a case for Carleton as a writer with full mastery over his material, and as one whose talents as a novelist have gone unrecognised by previous critics. In doing so he has set himself a task which is not only impossible, but spectacularly so.

⁶² Eileen A. Sullivan, *William Carleton* (Boston: Twayne, 1983), pp. 50-51, p. 89.

Writers on Carleton, states Krause, have been more inclined to pay attention to each other than to the subject of their research. Leaving aside the fact that Krause himself devotes considerable wordage to his supposedly erring fellow critics, there is certainly an element of truth in this accusation. Given that much of Carleton's work is long out of print and difficult to obtain, and given that the degree of stamina required for reading *all* of Carleton's works (not all of his novels are of the standard of his best, and Carleton's best is frequently taxing) is not inconsiderable, it seems not unlikely that the occasional corner has been cut. Krause's main complaint is that the widespread and continuing neglect of the primary literature has served to reinforce a negative, and false, perception of Carleton. Furthermore, O'Donoghue and Flanagan, he states, must bear much of the responsibility for setting the 'negative tone' adopted by other critics, who, he claims, almost without exception have failed to understand Carleton's work.⁶³

How Krause reconciles his sweeping statement that these two 'deny Carleton any conceivable talent as a novelist' with anything which they have actually written, is unclear.⁶⁴ It is certainly true that O'Donoghue was of the opinion that Carleton, despite his evident abilities, 'did not possess the skill to construct a first-rate plot',⁶⁵ and it is true too that this has been the almost universally held view – well in evidence before O'Donoghue put pen to paper in 1896. Murray, for instance, was complaining of Carleton's intrusive authorial interventions in 1852. But that is far from denying him any status as a novelist. O'Donoghue's observations on *Fardorougha the Miser*, 'it soon became apparent that Carleton *could* write a novel, and a powerful one', and on *The Black Prophet* that it was 'one of the most powerful Irish novels ever written',

⁶³ Krause, p. 1.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶⁵ O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, 353.

are hardly dismissive.⁶⁶ He does refer to what he terms the ‘characteristic redundancies’ present in *The Black Prophet*, and complains that in *Fardorougha*, ‘The chief figure [...] is overdrawn, and there is too much shedding of tears on any and every provocation’, but nevertheless recognises in the miser ‘a superb study of strongly-warring emotions’, in which the conflicts between avarice and parental love are ‘finely suggested’.⁶⁷ This may be qualified praise, but it in no way undermines O’Donoghue’s initial observations. On *Valentine M’Clutchy*, O’Donoghue gave no personal opinion, merely quoting – favourably – from the *Nation* and the *Athenaeum*.⁶⁸ *The Emigrants of Ahadarra*, with its ‘fine character-drawing’, he considered to be one of Carleton’s best, and ‘the most irreproachable’ of his novels, ‘being almost entirely free from the bad taste, coarseness and rancour which occasionally blemish his works’.⁶⁹

Although Flanagan reserves his highest praise for the *Traits and Stories* and the *Autobiography*, he is by no means as dismissive of Carleton the novelist as Krause, who appears to regard anything approaching objective appraisal as outright rejection, would have us believe. The best of the novels, *Fardorougha*, *The Black Prophet* and *Valentine M’Clutchy*, he wrote, ‘are concerned with the constants of peasant experience: famine, avarice, and land; and their power of vision is concentrated and terrible. He knew that he was expressing for the first time in English a civilization that lay hidden behind the hedges, and his knowledge that an entire world lay within his imaginative possession lent power, at times bravado, to his pen’.⁷⁰ And Carleton’s attempts at that expression were, as Flanagan recognises, and Krause does not, a struggle. ‘It is not easy’ he writes of *Valentine M’Clutchy*, ‘to

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 35, p. 85.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 85-86, p. 35, p. 358.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 65-66, p. 67.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 101.

⁷⁰ Flanagan, ‘Literature in English’, p. 492.

define the power of this awkward, ill-constructed novel'.⁷¹ Carleton's novels, particularly perhaps *The Black Prophet*, may be 'marked by the painful conflicts between his creative energies and the literary "moulds" in which he felt compelled to form them', but Flanagan is far from dismissing them out of hand.⁷²

Other critics fare little better than O'Donoghue and Flanagan at Krause's hands. He seems as incapable of recognising subtlety in the arguments of others as he is of incorporating it in his own. Barbara Hayley is attacked for placing 'an unfair and unreasonable burden' on Carleton in presuming to suggest 'that he was not a disciplined enough writer 'to found and carry through a "tradition" for himself, and certainly for Ireland'.⁷³ Krause omits to mention that Hayley's observation is immediately preceded by a recognition of Carleton's weighty contribution to Irish literature; although he never fully overcame his weaknesses, Carleton 'found his own voice as a short story writer [...] and it was to a great extent the voice of Ireland'.⁷⁴ Whatever the reasons for his shortcomings – and lack of education and financial insecurity must certainly have contributed to them – the fact remains that those shortcomings existed. His had difficulty in organising material into a coherent whole, and his works were frequently printed without proper correction.

'And why', Krause asks, on a different tack, 'have practically all of the critics up to the present day unquestioningly accepted the distorted view of Carleton as a man who couldn't be trusted after his conversion to the enemy, Protestantism, and possibly its political extreme, Orangeism?'.⁷⁵ Although the defensive note struck in Carleton's preface to *Valentine M'Clutchy*, 'I am not, nor ever was, an Orangeman', indicates that a number of his contemporaries believed that he was just that, precisely

⁷¹ Flanagan, *Irish Novelists*, p. 313.

⁷² Flanagan, 'Literature in English', p. 492.

⁷³ Krause, pp. 25-26; Hayley, *Carleton's Traits and Stories*, p. 394.

⁷⁴ Hayley, *Carleton's Traits and Stories*, p. 394.

⁷⁵ Krause, p. 78.

which present-day critics would regard Carleton, even at his most virulently anti-Catholic, as an Orangeman, Krause does not make clear.⁷⁶

Wolff, whom Krause accuses of pro-Catholic bias, is certainly not one of them.⁷⁷ With characteristic hyperbole Krause writes that ‘with the attitude of an outraged Catholic’, Wolff ‘refuses to forgive Carleton for his apostasy and anti-Catholicism’.⁷⁸ Wolff, he says, both dismisses Yeats’s belief in Carleton’s continuing attachment to Catholicism and suggests that the violently anti-Catholic sentiments of the Peel memorandum are being expressed in the novels as late as 1849, the year that *The Tithe Proctor* appeared.⁷⁹ Whilst it is true that Wolff is somewhat over-inclined to find evidence in Carleton’s work of the author’s continuing antipathy to Catholicism, his observations are considerably more measured than Krause suggests, and are hardly those of an unforgiving and furious Catholic. Wolff does refer to a lack of the (he admits, sometimes mild) ‘characteristic anti-Catholic bias’ in *Valentine M’Clutchy*, and, unjustifiably, to an anti-Catholic ‘note’ in *The Tithe Proctor*, but also acknowledges that with the passage of time Carleton’s early militancy ‘cooled’. Wolff’s supposed ‘outright rejection’ of Yeats’s view is in actual fact an assertion that Yeats ‘exaggerated’, in part at least because not having read all Carleton’s works, and not having had access to earlier editions of some titles that he had read, he was not in the position to make a properly informed assessment.⁸⁰

Krause’s main complaint about his fellow critics is that, approaching Carleton’s works with pre-conceived ideas about the structural constraints to which the novelist is subject they have consistently misinterpreted the texts. Far from being unable to deal with the disciplines of the novel, he is a highly competent writer; they

⁷⁶ Carleton, *Valentine M’Clutchy*, p. x

⁷⁷ Krause, p. 37.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 69n., p. 83.

⁸⁰ Wolff, p. 95, pp. 5-6.

have failed to appreciate his 'instinctive and non-formalistic notion of multiple storytelling motifs that revolve around an open and non-linear structure'.⁸¹ Krause is, of course, preparing the ground for a new approach to the author's work. This broadside attack upon previous critics is preliminary to his own advancing of a well-intentioned but misplaced apologetic for Carleton. The work of a novelist who, for all his perceived abilities, is widely perceived as having fallen short of the task he has set himself, structurally and linguistically, is fertile ground for fresh theoretical approaches: if the writer is less than successful within previously recognised parameters, others can be found within which to accommodate him.

Given the overt social, political, and dialogic tensions that a nineteenth-century Irish peasant background can bear witness to, it is not surprising that Bakhtinian theory, which originally found necessarily muted expression within the repressive regimes of the U.S.S.R, provides the basis for Krause's analysis. In Bakhtinian terms, the novel is not to be viewed as a representative prose narrative, but as an expression of the tensions within society, and a means by which the various 'dialogues' of a society can be represented and controlled. In contrast to the monologic novel, in which the author's control is explicit, within the dialogic novel a number of voices compete on equal terms. The novel is polyphonic, and its multiple voices are a source of carnival. It is subversive: social hierarchies are inverted and consequently authority is undermined. Examination according to these criteria, says Krause, negates the previously held view of Carleton. Far from being unable to produce a properly coherent sustained work of fiction, Carleton has, at his best (and his best, in Krause's view, includes a good deal) complete mastery over his material. He does though, consider *Jane Sinclair*, *The Evil Eye* and *The Double Prophecy* to be

⁸¹ Krause, p. 111.

‘outright failures’, and *Willy Reilly* and *The Black Baronet* to show a loss of nerve. And, with splendid understatement he acknowledges ‘some problems of authorial intrusion’ in volume two of *The Squanders of Castle Squander*.⁸²

Krause himself seems somewhat uncertain of his bearings, and is wary of venturing too deeply into the ‘neologisms and abstractions’ of Bakhtin’s theoretical waters. He chooses instead to select what he terms ‘enlightened fragments’ from Bakhtin’s 1962 publication, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, to demonstrate that concepts of ‘carnival’ and the ‘polyphonic’ are applicable to Carleton’s novels.⁸³ Krause strains too hard to justify the structural and stylistic weaknesses of Carleton’s novels. Even within the limited terms he sets, it cannot be said that Carleton succeeds. Within the polyphonic novel the authorial voice may be suppressed, but the author nevertheless maintains covert control over the text. Carleton’s problem, which Krause will not recognise, is that in his case that control is uneven. Furthermore, his difficulty in handling the structure of the novel is not unrelated to his being unable to relinquish the habit of intrusive authorial intervention; in his novels Carleton lacked the confidence (even in deference to the polyphonic) to deny himself the last word.

Carleton’s natural – and authoritative – voice is that of the peasant he no longer is; with the voice he strives to adopt, that of the respectable professional man, he is rather less comfortable. Frequently it is disproportionately strident rather than assertive. The dialogic is all too often undermined by the monologic: time and again, his directing voice disrupts, if not subverts, the interactions within the novel. Away from his peasant roots Carleton’s tone is uncertain. He frequently fails to establish a properly dialogic tension between his voices; often they do not contend on equal terms. The ‘amazingly instinctive polyphonic fictional techniques’ to which Krause

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 4, p. 220.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 60, p. 87.

refers when commenting on *Valentine M'Clutchy* are only fully evident when the competing dialogues are those which emerge from within the strata of peasant society.⁸⁴ There are some exceptions: for instance the absurd epicurean clergyman Turbot of *Valentine M'Clutchy*, and the lively Julia Purcel, daughter of the eponymous tithing proctor in the novel of that name, each provide, in different ways, a degree of balance in the respective novels. Although Krause includes the 'epistolary' in his list of *Valentine McClutchy's* voices, he avoids any mention of Carleton's uncomfortable appropriation of the letters of the pseudonymous Evory Easel as an undisguised device for advancing his plot.⁸⁵

The carnival elements – and they undoubtedly exist – within Carleton's novels reflect, perhaps too uncomfortably, the underlying aspects of the original, socially enacted carnival. Far from undermining the social order, carnival served to reinforce it, by providing a temporally defined outlet for inherent social tensions. A brief period of tolerated disorder is far from being an inverting of social hierarchies. Subversion was illusory. And Carleton, a self-described 'liberal Conservative'⁸⁶ (some would say political reactionary), was certainly not a man to want the world turned upside down, or, at a rational level at least, see the carnival get out of hand. That amongst his contending voices his own is too loud is an indication of his deep and unconscious ambivalence about his own status in relation to those others; within the gallery of high and low voices to which Krause refers, the 'low' are assured, the 'high' are less so, and Carleton has constantly to reaffirm his own position.⁸⁷ Krause's method of argument, far from exposing Carleton's confidence with the form

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 86.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 86, p. 87. This is discussed in chapter six of this thesis.

⁸⁶ Carleton, *Valentine M'Clutchy*, p. x.

⁸⁷ Krause, p. 87.

of the novel, indicates his weakness as a writer and the roots of that weakness in his personal insecurity.

Reservations may be expressed, if not about Carleton's innate literary capabilities, then certainly about his use of them, but as an authority on pre-Famine peasant society his position is assured. The nature of socio-historical research necessitates a degree of detachment not always found in literary criticism. While ambivalence, and even animosity towards him has frequently distorted the views of those assessing his capabilities as a writer of fiction, his unique status as a recorder of Ulster Catholic life in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries has always been unchallenged. The extent to which he is cited as an historical source bears evidence to his importance. Marianne Elliott, in *The Catholics of Ulster; A History*, recognises his importance as a source on folk superstition, on the practice of religion, on the status of the clergy, on literacy levels and the importance of hedge school education for both Protestants and Catholics, and on both Ribbonism and Orangeism; D. George Boyce, in *Nationalism in Ireland*, cites Carleton's observations on the inflammatory nature of much of the reading material used by hedge schoolmasters; and Sophia Hillan King, assessing Carleton's representations of the social issues of the mid-1840s (contained, she says, in works which are 'ultimately, not great literature'), remarks on the wealth of precise and affectionate detail he furnishes.⁸⁸

Harold Orel, writing in *Éire-Ireland*, whilst critical of the *Autobiography*, unreservedly recognises its value as source material. He compares Carleton's fiction to early 'coloured photographs'; the monotone of the past is given life by the colour he has added. The picture he produces is essentially truthful, not least in its portrayal

⁸⁸ Marianne Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster; A History* (London: Allen Lane, 2000) p. 180, p. 181, p. 185, p. 201, pp. 207-08, p. 241, p. 289, p. 346; D. George Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland*, 3rd edn (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 148; Sophia Hillan King, "'The Condition of Our People': William Carleton and the Social issues of the Mid-1840s", in *The Hungry Stream; Essays on Emigration and Famine*, ed. by M. Crawford (Belfast: Queens University Belfast, 1997), pp. 175-183 (p. 176, p. 182).

of the vitality of Irish life in the pre-Famine period. He was, writes Orel 'in his fictions an able historian; and if his historical sketches are viewed, simultaneously, as exercises in the creative imagination, one can understand – and even forgive – the slipperiness of practically every piece of factual information in the *Autobiography*'.⁸⁹ There is, arguably, little to forgive. Orel states that Carleton's unfinished memoir, although heavy on detail, is unreflective and unstructured, and shows a disregard for dates. However, that can hardly be construed as deception. Autobiographies invariably tend towards self-justification, and Carleton's is no exception: evasions there certainly are, and they are often as significant as the presented facts, certainly in what they reveal, or confirm, of the writer's character.

Carleton, perhaps more than any other Irish literary figure, is not merely the observer of a world disappearing into history, but a part of the process. He may have been, as Yeats wrote, half emerged from the earth, but he could equally be described as being half-submerged, trapped within an unrelinquishing Irish bog, Seamus Deane's Irish victim of Irish conditions.⁹⁰ Carleton was not so much a representative of an Irish past as a figure of his own disordered early and mid-nineteenth century present. With no properly established Irish tradition of fictional writing by which to take his bearings, Carleton had behind him an uncomfortable history and a peasant culture that he saw as becoming increasingly, and inevitably, debased.

The optimistic Whig view of history was hardly an appropriate model on which to base Irish literature of the early to mid-nineteenth century. As Terry Eagleton has observed, 'The disrupted course of Irish history is not easily read as a

⁸⁹ Harold Orel, 'Colored Photographs: William Carleton's Contribution to the Short Story Tradition', *Éire-Ireland*, 19.2 (1984), 75-97 (p. 77).

⁹⁰ Deane, *Short History of Irish Literature*, p. 107.

tale of evolutionary progress, a middle march from a lower to a higher state'.⁹¹ James Cahalan put it more bluntly. It was 'an unresolved mess'.⁹² In England, where increasing industrialisation and urbanisation were instrumental in increasing social tension, change, for all the difficulties it presented, could be counted as progress. In Ireland the writer was confronted by problems of historical process and interpretation not met with by his English counterpart. In *Valentine M'Clutchy*, Carleton may, in Krause's words, have 'captured the anguish and comic energy of his turbulent Irish world', but that 'open and non-linear structure'⁹³ which Krause insists should be seen as a deliberate literary strategy is in fact an unhappy and unplanned reflection of Carleton's confusion over the world within which he moved. Eagleton observes that:

Unlike the great European realists, Carleton is unable to discover a plot in history itself – to organize an evolving narrative in accordance with some deep historical logic, or to find in those historical dynamics the driving force of his own fable. As with Banim and Griffin, melodrama must [...] be made to propel the storyline [...] while the social contents of the fiction move in some separate, more static dimension. The present is seen, in the odd allusion, as the product of history; but it is not on the whole possible to represent the present *as* history, to grasp it in that powerfully shaping perspective, as it is with a Stendhal or Tolstoy.⁹⁴

This is, of course, true, and well expressed, but arguably self-evident. Art can only arise out of the society that nurtures it. England, a more obvious candidate for comparison with Ireland than either France or Russia, did not produce a Stendhal or a Tolstoy either, although (slightly later), she did manage George Eliot. As a contemporary, Dickens, yes, but Eagleton would not have made an obvious point so effortlessly by referring to a novelist with such clear similarities, in terms of energy

⁹¹ Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London: Verso, 1995), p. 147.

⁹² James M. Cahalan, *Great Hatred, Little Room: The Irish Historical Novel* ([New York]: Syracuse University Press, 1983), p. 15.

⁹³ Krause, p. 109, p. 111.

⁹⁴ Eagleton, pp. 211-12.

and humour, to Carleton. Dickens of course, does succeed where Carleton, in his novels, repeatedly fails: Dickens is able to accommodate fictional events and even conventional happy endings within a developing social framework; he is spared Carleton's problem of attempting to mould 'a coherent tale from the ruptured course of Irish history'.⁹⁵ Carleton could only fully succeed in being a recorder of history, not its interpreter; or in being, in effect, Orel's producer of coloured photographs.

The difficult context within which Carleton worked has been dealt with more recently in a chapter entitled 'Confronting Famine: Carleton's Peasantry' in Declan Kiberd's *Irish Classics*. The chapter title itself is, of course, partly metaphorical. Kiberd, who is over-inclined to organize his argument around metaphor and rely heavily on simile, as well as on artistic license, occasionally oversteps his own mark. Like Eagleton, he occasionally seems too much enraptured by his own imaginative prose to give an accurate account of his subject. Seeking an original way of linking Carleton to the concept of famine, he turns to the *Autobiography*, and to Carleton's description of the suspended remains of the gibbeted Wildgoose Lodge murderers, Catholics, and members of a Ribbon group brought to trial for the atrocity committed upon fellow Catholics. The following extracts are from Carleton's account of how, as a young man on his travels, he had chanced upon the body of Paddy Devaun. He writes of how, initially uncomprehending,

I looked on before me [...] and perceived something like a tar sack dangling from a high beam of wood, or rather from the arm which projected from it. There was a slight but agreeable breeze, the sack kept gently swinging backward and forward in obedience to the wind, and I could perceive long ropes of slime shining in the light, and dangling from the bottom.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

⁹⁶ Carleton, *Autobiography*, p. 114.

After giving a brief account of the crime for which Devaun and his accomplices were brought to justice, he continues:

During that autumn, fruit in the county of Louth was avoided, as something which could not be eaten. [...] There were in all, twenty-four dead bodies swinging from gibbets in different directions throughout the county of Louth. The autumn was an unusually hot one; the flesh of the suspended felons became putrid, and fell down in decomposed masses to the bottom of the sacks; the pitch which covered the sacks was melted by the strong heat of the sun, and the morbid mass which fell to the bottom oozed out, and fell [...] in slimy ropes. [...] Every sack was literally covered with flies, which having enjoyed their feast, passes away in millions upon millions throughout the country.⁹⁷

Carleton does not suggest, as Kiberd implies he does, that the people rejected the crop despite being 'often hungry'. And Carleton's phrase 'passed away in millions' does not equate to Kiberd's 'expired in millions', but rather the reverse. It does not provide, as he insists it does, 'an image *in parvo* of what would later happen to humans'.⁹⁸

Although Kiberd contributes nothing new to the study of Carleton (and in such a massive overview of Irish literature that could hardly be expected), after this strained beginning he does give an imaginatively written summary of the context within which Carleton worked. The Great Famine, widely regarded as a pivotal event in Irish history, is a point from which to gain a perspective on a language then in decline, on an endangered culture, and on Carleton himself. The famines which afflicted the Irish and Carleton, as Carleton himself observed, were not only material, but cultural. In 1842 he wrote,

During some of the years of Irish famine, such were the unhappy circumstances of the country, that she was exporting provisions of every description in the most prodigal abundance. [...] So was it with

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 117.

⁹⁸ Declan Kiberd, *Irish Classics* (London: Granta, 2000), pp. 265-66.

literature. Our men and women of genius uniformly carried their talents to the English market, whilst we laboured at home under all the dark privations of a literary famine.⁹⁹

The loss of the Irish language, as English increasingly became the language of education and progress, was, as Kiberd says, associated with a literary emigration; the negligent landlord was not the only kind of absentee.

The profound psychological effect of The Great Famine, Kiberd suggests, might be 'a fearful, final symptom of a prior cultural failure'.¹⁰⁰ Kiberd's use of the word 'symptom' is deliberate. The social and psychological impacts of the Famine, conditioned by pre-existing circumstances, were as significant as the physical hardships endured at the time. The idea of Famine bears a conceptual weight extending beyond its physical manifestation. But, if the Great Famine can be seen to represent the cumulative failures which preceded it, it also informed a later sense of cultural identity. 'The Great Famine was important', Kiberd observes, 'because it made that threat [of cultural extinction] seem all the more formidable': the awareness of that threat ensured that it never became a reality.¹⁰¹ The succeeding history of Irish literature bears witness to the fact.

Carleton though, was a man of his time, a displaced figure, involved in creating a literature which, says Kiberd, lapses too easily into apologetics. It becomes one written by the alienated for the outsider, for an English readership. It was he says, to put Carleton in a position where he was to find himself 'a literary equivalent of the despised middlemen'.

Caught between his peasant material and his educated readership, he is in a cleft stick. If he keeps his eye on the audience, he risks betraying

⁹⁹ Carleton, *Traits and Stories*, I (1843), p. v.

¹⁰⁰ Kiberd, p. 279.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 283-84.

the material; but if he keeps his gaze on the material, he risks losing the audience. If every writer must choose between expressing material or exploiting it, Carleton was rather unusual in trying to do both at once.¹⁰²

Carleton, of course, was not at all unusual in attempting both at once. Adapting material for a market, after all, is a function of literature. Kiberd, it must be assumed, means to restate what has been said many times before: that Carleton, displaced from his customary milieu, lacked the education and the frame of reference necessary to access the intellectual life. Carleton did not know where he belonged, who he represented, or for who he was writing. More than any other writer of the period, he epitomised the age in which he lived. 'Even in his flaws', writes Kiberd, 'he was a true representative of his people's condition.'¹⁰³

Kiberd's words find an echo in those of Roy Foster, discussing Carleton's influence upon Yeats. 'Yeats' own uneasy relationship to the perceived authenticities of Irish life, as well as his ability to keep one eye on a metropolitan audience and one on the contentious critics at home, implies a fellow feeling with Carleton which went deep, and continued'.¹⁰⁴ 'In the anxieties of influence woven around Yeats', Foster observes, 'the earthy and essentialist voice of Carleton is a continuing and discernible presence.'¹⁰⁵ Foster quotes Yeats' lines, written in John Quinn's copy of Yeats' collection of Carleton's tales, *Stories from Carleton*, decades after the book's publication: 'I thought no end of Carleton in those days & would still I daresay if I had not forgotten him.' In his youth, Yeats, like others before and since, was to appropriate Carleton and to create out of his life and work an exemplar of romantic rural Ireland, a man 'who remained ever a peasant', one who 'grew into one of the

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 273.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 285.

¹⁰⁴ R. F. Foster, *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making It Up in Ireland* (London: Allen Lane, 2001), p. 125.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

most deeply religious minds of his day – a profound mystical nature, with melancholy at its root'.¹⁰⁶ Carleton's significance for Yeats in his early life is clear, but the diminished figure which the poet recalls years later suggests Carleton's fate in Irish culture generally – to become an imperfectly recalled folk memory of the kind Carleton himself memorialised.

Although in the critical literature, Carleton the spoiled priest has long coexisted with Carleton the victim of history, over a period of time the spoilt priest has been allowed to recede, and the other has emerged more clearly. He is more than the 'old fork-tongued turncoat' of Seamus Heaney's 'Station Island' – as Heaney himself recognises.¹⁰⁷ Carleton the apostate was always an incomplete figure, as much a reflection of the progress (or lack of progress) of Anglo-Irish history as an individual existing in his own right. In the more sympathetically presented figure too, Carleton is often lost. He becomes a representative figure, informed by the broad movements of history, devoid of real identity. Local and personal influences on Carleton, and his inherent character, fade. Carleton, as many of his critics have recognised, is difficult to find beneath the aggregations of history and of prejudice, both his own and that of others. He remains an isolated figure, an impatient being encountered on a hard road, Heaney's 'aggravated man' attempting to make creative sense of a chaotic world.

Flanagan writes of Carleton: 'His was the richest talent in nineteenth-century Ireland and the most prodigally wasted. For the critic he is a continuous torment, joy, and puzzle.'¹⁰⁸ For all his faults, he is a novelist we are obliged to take seriously. It is those very faults, the discordances of style, the intrusive interventions, which make

¹⁰⁶ Letter from W. B. Yeats to the editor of the *Nation*, 3 January 1890, in *Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats*, I, pp. 206-07; *Stories from Carleton*, p. xii.

¹⁰⁷ Heaney, 'Station Island', II, p. 167.

¹⁰⁸ Flanagan, *Irish Novelists*, p. 255.

Carleton worth reading. They are, in their ways, rewarding. In Carleton's work the reader is confronted by the *process* of writing as much as by the product. It is impossible to read Carleton and remain unaware of the energy expended, and wasted, in his effort. He is a challenging presence still to be properly investigated. Received opinion on Carleton categorises him in three ways: as authority on the peasantry, as turncoat, and as famine writer. But a full understanding of him can only be gained by examining more thoroughly the assumptions which have shaped his reputation and critical reception.

CHAPTER 2

CARLETON AND THE CRISIS OF RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

Misconceptions about Carleton's religious position have been pervasive since his own time. His supposed 'apostasy' has been a prism through which commentators on his life and works have been too ready to view him. Therefore, clarity on Carleton's true relationship with religion is a prerequisite to a proper critical appraisal of his work.

O'Donoghue writes that the Jesuit Father Richard Carbery, to whom Carleton dictated a letter from his deathbed, thanking him for his interest in his 'eternal welfare', was of the opinion that, 'if left to his own inclinations', Carleton might well have re-embraced the religion of his birth.¹⁰⁹ This was certainly wishful thinking on Carbery's part. Writing in 1970 on 'The Death of William Carleton', Terence Brown speculated that the writer might indeed have been considering such a thing, and concluded that 'since Carleton was influenced by his friend [...] the Rev. William Pakenham Walsh', a Church of Ireland clergyman, whether or not he would have converted could not be known.¹¹⁰ The fact that Carleton could count amongst his friends members of the Catholic clergy is a poor foundation for such speculation. There is no evidence that Carleton wished to resume the sacraments of the Church into which he had been baptised. Indeed, for one who had throughout his life paid such a heavy price for his 'apostasy' in terms of popular disapprobation, such a step, in effect a negation of a position adhered to for most of his adult life, must surely have been unthinkable. Although his virulent anti-Catholicism had long abated, he died a member of the Church of Ireland, and expressly so; he named the rector of Sandford, the Rev. William Pakenham Walsh (later Bishop of Ossory), and another Church of

¹⁰⁹ O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, 334, 326-27.

¹¹⁰ Terence Brown, 'The Death of William Carleton', *Hermathena*, 60 (1970), 81-85 (p. 83).

Ireland clergyman, the Rev. Ambrose Leet, as those he wished to conduct his burial ceremony. His message to Carbery, expressing the hope that they would both meet ‘in the presence of Him who created us, and who is the father of us all’, indicates, as Brown himself acknowledges, that his appreciation of the priest was of his human, and his Christian, rather than his Catholic virtues.¹¹¹

In the last two years of his life, according to O’Donoghue, Carleton, having been ‘for many years more or less indifferent to religion’, had taken to attending the Sandford church, and was on close terms with the rector, and his curate. He was also in the habit of visiting the Jesuit house at Miltown Park, where Carbery resided. Intimations of his own mortality almost certainly account for Carleton’s late devotional habits; and the death, a few months before his own, of his daughter Rose, undoubtedly reinforced the theological interests of the ailing writer.¹¹²

Carleton’s practice of religion through much of his adult life may indeed have been minimal, but to describe him as ‘indifferent to religion’ is not appropriate. A note by Pakenham Walsh describes Carleton as being, until the last year or eighteen months of his life, a Socinian.¹¹³ To have arrived at a heterodox theological position which not only asserts that reason, rather than creed, dogmatic tradition or church authority should be the arbiter of Scriptural truth, but also rejects Christ’s divinity, hardly suggests indifference. Carleton’s mature attitude to religion, revealed most clearly in *Valentine M’Clutchy*, was essentially a latitudinarian one; the indications are that he had little patience with credal and denominational claims. Whatever his personal faith, or absence of it, his fiction reveals that he had a significant interest in ‘religion’. The interrelationship between belief and cultural identity is evident in all

¹¹¹ O’Donoghue, *Life*, II, 334. See also Brown, ‘Death of William Carleton’, pp. 83-84.

¹¹² O’Donoghue, *Life*, II, 326-27.

¹¹³ A note on Carleton’s death, written by Pakenham Walsh in an autographed copy of Carleton’s *Traits and Stories*, outlines Carleton’s changing religious views. This is reproduced in Brown, ‘Death of William Carleton’, p. 84.

societies. In Ireland, where socio-religious differences were particularly intense, and often translated into political conflicts, not to have an interest (in all senses of that word) in religion would hardly be possible.

Carleton claimed that the seeds of his disaffection with Catholicism were sown on the occasion of his visit, as a young man, to St. Patrick's Purgatory on Lough Derg, an experience first recorded in Caesar Otway's anti-Catholic *Christian Examiner*, in 1828.¹¹⁴ As he himself makes clear, the process of rejection was a gradual one. 'It was that pilgrimage, and the reflections occasioned by it, added to a riper knowledge and a maturer judgement, that detached me from the Roman Catholic Church, many of whose doctrines, when I became a thinking man, I could not force my judgement to believe.'¹¹⁵ In his account of his early days in Dublin, Carleton writes:

One doctrine of the Catholic Church I had sent to the winds long before that period. I allude to exclusive salvation. Neither logic nor reasoning was required to enable me to discard it. Common feeling – the plain fact of simple humanity – was sufficient. This, indeed, was the doctrine which first taught me to feel the justice of thinking for myself; and from that moment I felt that I could not much longer hold the doctrines of a Catholic. *This course of thought was not suggested to me by a human being.*¹¹⁶

Carleton, then, is emphatic in his claims that his doubts predated his arrival in Dublin, and that his decision to convert was very much his own. Wolff's somewhat brusque comment on Carleton's rejection of the doctrine of *nulla salus extra ecclesiam*, that he was seemingly unaware that the Catholic Church concedes that salvation is not denied to those living in 'invincible ignorance', who have had no opportunity to embrace Catholicism, evades engagement with the fundamental issues. Firstly, it disregards the fact that Carleton, growing up as a Catholic, was well aware

¹¹⁴ Carleton's account first appeared as 'A Pilgrimage to St. Patrick's Purgatory'. Later book versions were entitled 'The Lough Derg Pilgrim' or 'The Lough Derg Pilgrim'.

¹¹⁵ Carleton, *Autobiography*, p. 92.

¹¹⁶ Carleton, *Autobiography*, p. 180. My emphasis.

that the laity was encouraged to believe that the ultimate consequences for those outside the Roman Church were dire; that ‘all Protestants, after death, were gifted with a prodigious “alacrity at sinking”’.¹¹⁷ That an Augustinian friar was complaining to Rome in 1825 about the spread in Ireland of ‘the detestable doctrine’ that Protestants who had embraced their religion in good faith could be saved, indicates that the long-promulgated Catholic view was that they were damned.¹¹⁸ Secondly, it fails to address the fundamental difficulty Carleton had in accepting the Church’s imperative that doctrine should have precedence over scripture.¹¹⁹

There is no reason to distrust Carleton’s claim that in Dublin, already sceptical of the claims of his own Church, he spent some time investigating the various Protestant denominations. Whatever the truth concerning his theological and ideological reasons for converting from Catholicism (about which more will be said later), the fact that chance had a hand in bringing him well within the orbit of the evangelical wing of the Church of Ireland must have been a factor in his conversion.

Even sincerely held beliefs can be predicated upon motives not entirely selfless, and if Carleton’s transference of allegiance to the Established Church did lasting damage to his reputation amongst Catholics, in the short term at least, it brought practical advantages. As Carleton, surveying this period of his life, observes, ‘There is nothing more valuable in life than respectable connection’.¹²⁰ In old age, he appears still impressed by the social standing of his early Dublin contacts. About 1820, following a dispute with a landlady, he had been taken into the family of an employer, an Erasmus Smith schoolmaster named Fox, who ‘was a personal friend of

¹¹⁷ William Carleton, ‘Lachin Murray and the Blessed Candle’, in *Tales of Ireland* (Dublin: William Curry Jun., 1834, repr. New York and London: Garland, 1979), p. 335.

¹¹⁸ Patrick J. Corish, *Maynooth College 1795-1995* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1995), p. 84. This raises the interesting possibility that Carleton’s views were influenced not only by Protestantism, but by ideas beginning to circulate within the Catholic Church.

¹¹⁹ Wolff, p. 16.

¹²⁰ Carleton, *Autobiography*, p. 186.

Grattan'. It was at about this time that Carleton became friendly with William Sisson, who in the course of his work as a librarian, had made 'a very warm friend' of the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin, William Magee.¹²¹ It was to Sisson he showed his earliest writings, and to Sisson he was to entrust his memorandum to Peel, the Home Secretary in Liverpool's Cabinet, in November 1826, offering his help in thwarting the campaign for Catholic emancipation.¹²²

Employed as tutor to Mr. Fox's son, Carleton remained with the family for, he claims, two years or so, during which time he fell in love with and married a niece, Jane Anderson, resident with them. Through contacts of the Foxes he had obtained employment as a clerk to the Sunday School Society, but the relative security this afforded him was short lived; within a year he had lost his post. Consequently, by the mid 1820s, with a wife and child to support, he had left Dublin and was earning a meagre living as a schoolmaster. Carleton, who as a Catholic had once hoped to enter Maynooth College, and had more recently harboured vague, and unrealistic hopes of furthering his education at Trinity, the university of the Protestant Ascendancy, was finally obliged to relinquish any academic ambitions.¹²³

Carleton had come to the capital searching for work, probably in 1819, and remained there as attempts by Church of Ireland and Protestant evangelicals to educate and convert Catholic Ireland were gaining momentum. One response to the 1798 uprising had been determined efforts by various Protestant groups to educate Catholic Ireland out of error, both social and religious, by disseminating scripture-based education. These movements were given fresh momentum after 1822 by the

¹²¹ Carleton, *Autobiography*, p. 185, p. 204. Carleton's dating is characteristically hazy. He is discussing events in his life at he says, 'A.D. eighteen hundred and twenty'. Magee did not become Church of Ireland Primate until 1822. Boué has also detailed the unreliability of Carleton's dating at this period. See Boué, p. 342.

¹²² Carleton, *Autobiography*, p. 204, p. 211. The letter to William A. Sisson is discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis.

¹²³ Carleton, *Autobiography*, p. 190, p. 193, pp. 197-98, p. 201.

Church of Ireland's newly appointed Archbishop of Dublin, William Magee, who was determined on reinvigorating the Established Church in order that it should establish its moral superiority over Irish Catholicism. Carleton's continued and heartfelt calls for peasant education, and his concerns that a poorly educated priesthood had a vested interest in keeping their flocks in ignorance in order to maintain their own influence, and were frequently the instigators of violence, if born out of his own familiarity with peasant culture, was certainly reinforced by that propaganda which became a feature of this 'second Reformation'.

There is no evidence to indicate that in these early Dublin days Carleton was actively seeking the company of Protestant zealots. That Fox had been a friend of Henry Grattan, a man of liberal views, hardly suggests that he himself held extreme sectarian views. The Hibernian Sunday School Society, to give the full title to the organisation which briefly employed Carleton, although dominated by the Church of Ireland, had an interdenominational constitution.¹²⁴ Carleton though, almost certainly made the acquaintance of the aggressively anti-Catholic Protestant proselytiser Samuel O'Sullivan, whom he mentions as the curate to the parish clergyman who was a visitor at Fox's school. He probably also met his brother, the Rev. Mortimer O'Sullivan, a renowned public speaker, about whom he wrote 'I have heard many eloquent men, but a more eloquent man than Mortimer I never heard'.¹²⁵ Mortimer, like his brother, had converted from Catholicism, and although later to become almost as notorious in Catholic circles as Samuel, in the early 1820s his opinions demonstrated less of the fanaticism of the convert. Charles Gavan Duffy was to observe that Mortimer 'but rarely fell into the monotony of hysterics which

¹²⁴ See David Hempton and Myrtle Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism in Ulster Society 1740-1890* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 59.

¹²⁵ Carleton, *Autobiography*, pp. 193-94.

distinguished his junior'.¹²⁶ Relatively moderate in his views, he was appreciative of Ireland's social and political complexities, and of the wrongs the Catholic majority had suffered under English rule.¹²⁷

By the early 1830s it was apparent that the Protestant advances which had so alarmed the Catholic Church in the mid and late 1820s were faltering. Catholic Emancipation, which Carleton had vehemently opposed, was an established fact, and it was increasingly apparent that the conversion of Ireland to the Established Church would never become a reality. At this time too, the impact of the Catholic Church's response to Protestant assaults, the 'devotional revolution', was bringing about noticeable improvements in Church discipline. Carleton's work, no doubt partly as a consequence of these changes, became less didactically anti-Catholic. Also, he was discovering his natural voice, and finding humour, rather than invective, a more effective tool, and one to be used not only against the Catholic Church, but also against the bigotry and excesses of other groups. This is not to suggest that his work developed as a smooth continuum, or that the note of stridency which characterised his early attacks on Catholicism disappeared from his later works; indeed, his limitations as a novelist were to be most obviously, and repeatedly, displayed where he failed to curb his didactic tendencies and the intrusive tone of his authorial voice.

Carleton's reservations about Catholic doctrine are explicitly stated in his *Autobiography*, and in his fiction. It was, after all, the teaching with which he had been familiar from birth, and the faith which was intimately bound to his cultural heritage, and which, for good or bad, had most impact on his life. His feelings

¹²⁶ Charles Gavan Duffy, *Short Life of Thomas Davis 1840-1846* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1895), p. 43. In suggesting that Samuel was the elder brother Duffy is mistaken; Samuel was born in 1790, and Mortimer probably in 1792 or 1793.

¹²⁷ See Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant Crusade in Ireland 1800-70: A Study of Protestant-Catholic Relations Between the Act of Union and Disestablishment* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978), pp. 117-22.

towards Catholicism were intense, and ambivalent. Any reservations he may have had about Presbyterianism, the predominant Protestant denomination within Tyrone, or about Protestant doctrine generally, are, not surprisingly, barely addressed in his writings. In his early days in Dublin, when a young man in search of a religion, he had on several occasions visited Presbyterian places of worship. His only comment on them is that he 'did not relish them so well'.¹²⁸ A decade or so before Carleton's denominational investigations, the writer John Gamble, a member of the Established Church, had observed that the rigid observance of the Sabbath demanded by Presbyterianism was a good enough reason for the people to reject it: 'People who labour six days in the week, may, I think, without a crime be merry on Sunday.'¹²⁹ Carleton, a man not averse to pleasure, could be expected to agree with him.

Neither does Carleton display any interest in Calvinist rigidity in his fictional work. In only one of his stories, his unremarkable 1836 novella, *Jane Sinclair; or, the Fawn of Springvale*,¹³⁰ does he touch on the subject of Protestant doctrinal severity. The theme though, remains undeveloped. In *Jane Sinclair* the Catholic peasantry of the *Traits and Stories* is temporarily abandoned for that industrious Protestant social group 'one grade beneath' the gentry class. The tale's heroine, a girl of delicate temperament, having committed a trivial indiscretion that she has avoided revealing to her father, a 'dissenting clergyman', is then parted from her young lover. This separation reinforces her feelings of guilt, and she becomes convinced that her lover's departure is evidence that she is 'cast-away', an irredeemable reprobate, abandoned by God. She descends into insanity, before (to the modern reader's immense relief) dying. If her ideas on predestination are attributable to Calvinist doctrinal influences,

¹²⁸ Carleton, *Autobiography*, p. 180.

¹²⁹ John Gamble, *A View of Society and Manners, in the North of Ireland, in the Summer and Autumn of 1812* (London: C. Craddock and W. Joy, 1813), p. 25.

¹³⁰ The work was initially serialised in the *Dublin University Magazine* and appeared in volume form in 1841.

as might be expected, this is not mentioned. The roots of the tragedy lie in the combined effects of her family's indulgence towards her, the youngest child (a matter on which Carleton, himself an indulged youngest child, had some experience), and her father's demand for what the authorial narrator terms an 'unnecessary proof of obedience' to his will.¹³¹

Carleton's publication record into the mid-1830s must have presented his Catholic readership with a bewilderingly mixed message. He had met Caesar Otway, through whom he soon gained notoriety in Catholic circles for his contributions to Otway's *Christian Examiner and Church of Ireland Magazine*, in 1827. In 1834, as the Second Series of *Traits and Stories* was published, to widespread acclaim, *Tales of Ireland*, a volume edition of his stories previously published in the *Christian Examiner* appeared. So, as his bitter attacks on the Catholic Church abated and his representations of peasant Catholic life were bringing Carleton recognition as a major Irish literary figure, such virulently anti-Catholic works as 'The Brothers', 'The Death of a Devotee' and 'The Priest's Funeral', were also being resurrected. As Barbara Hayley has observed, his reputation as a spokesman for Ireland might have been more easily secured if that had not been the case.¹³²

The preface to *Tales of Ireland*, written in the spring of 1834, indicates that Carleton himself was well aware that he had a problem of presentation. He needed to reconcile his positions as both champion of Catholic peasant culture, and scourge of a Church whose influence upon it was so pervasive. Alluding to his *Traits and Stories*, he claimed his intention had been to impart an understanding of that class 'unknown

¹³¹ William Carleton, *The Fawn of Springvale, The Clarionet, and Other Tales*, 3 vols (Dublin: William Curry Jun., 1841, repr. New York and London: Garland, 1979), I, 1-300. The title immediately preceding the text of the first work is *Jane Sinclair; or, The Fawn of Springvale*. Carleton does not specify Jane's denominational background. He refers to Mr. Sinclair's 'modest white meeting-house', which might suggest that he is a Methodist. Jane's obsession with what she believes is her total rejection by God, though, suggests that if her family was not Presbyterian, it was certainly Calvinist.

¹³² Hayley, *Carleton's Traits and Stories*, p. 383.

in literature, unknown by their own landlords, and unknown by those in whose hands much of their destiny was placed', knowledge which was a prerequisite for the moral and civil education of the people. In the few years since they were written, he commented, the Irish situation had deteriorated. Alluding to the agrarian unrest of the previous three years, he observed that the problems engendered by neglectful landowners and interfering priests had recently been compounded by 'the pestilent poison of mercenary agitation'. The stories resurrected for this book edition, several of which depicted 'the narrow and exclusive spirit which darkens and demoralizes the minds of her peasantry', were, he implies, a necessary and regrettable complement to his other tales.¹³³

Despite its acknowledgement of wrongs suffered by the Catholic majority, such an argument was unlikely to endear him to his countrymen. His change of religious allegiance, and his early writings, continued to be deeply resented within Catholic Ireland. According to Charles Gavan Duffy, who claimed to have persuaded James Duffy to publish *Valentine M'Clutchy*, his was 'up to that date a name odious to Catholic publishers'.¹³⁴ Michael Banim, on being informed by Duffy that the *Nation's* tribute to his deceased brother, John Banim, in 1843, had been penned by Carleton, voiced a widely held view:

It is a pity, this talented man should ever have bent his high powers to advance the views of a party so inimical to the religion of the great mass of his countrymen. My conviction when reading his works always has been, that he wrote against his principles, for the very reason that he forced into the foreground of his pictures a distorted, not a true representation of the Catholic priesthood, and Catholic dogma and discipline.¹³⁵

¹³³ William Carleton, *Tales of Ireland*, pp. ix-xi.

¹³⁴ Duffy, *Short Life of Thomas Davis*, p. 150.

¹³⁵ Letter from Michael Banim to Charles Gavan Duffy, 5 October 1843, National Library of Ireland, MS 5756.

Carleton had attacked the Catholic clergy and the doctrines they promulgated, and had done so in highly offensive terms, but he was not the only Irish writer on Irish life to present an unsettling picture of clergy behaviour. John Banim himself, in his sympathetic description of a priest's struggle with his own carnality in his novel *The Nowlans*, had given a frank account of an issue which was, and continued to be, a problem for the Catholic Church. The fictional John Nowlan's problems though, originate not in the ecclesiastical but in the secular sphere; early exposure to worldly temptation in the home of his dissolute uncle had been a major corrupting influence. Nowlan himself is unworthy of his Church, not the Church unworthy of him.¹³⁶

In contrast, in Carleton's early tales, it is the secular concerns of the Catholic Church itself that Carleton attacks. Priests are depicted as overwhelmingly unprincipled and devious. At best, they are intimidated, and ultimately corrupted, by Church authority, being prepared to subordinate the demands of conscience to self-interest. The exception is the priest who, true to his Christian calling, rejects his Church and embraces Protestantism. The eponymous character Father Butler of the 1828 *Christian Examiner* tale which was republished with 'The Lough Dearg Pilgrim' as a book in 1829, is the victim of an unscrupulous and deceitful Jesuit priest who secures him for the priesthood in order to obtain for the Catholic Church the inheritance which otherwise would have been his. Predictably, before his death, Butler converts to the Church of Ireland.

The Catholic clergy depicted in 'The Priest's Funeral', a *Christian Examiner* tale republished in *Tales of Ireland*, like the mendacious Jesuit in 'Father Butler', are, almost to a man, morally bankrupt, having a preoccupation with temporal matters which totally negates their claims as spiritual guides. A dying priest, Father Moyle,

¹³⁶ John Banim, *The Nowlans* (Belfast: Appletree, 1992). *The Nowlans* was first published in London by Henry Colburn in 1826.

having for some time struggled with his conscience, has finally, and explicitly, rejected his Catholic faith. Despite intense pressure from his fellow churchmen, he has repeatedly refused absolution. The bishop, 'Dr. M-', identifiable from the description given of him as James Murphy, the Bishop of Clogher, who, with several acolytes, is present at the scene, determines that the only remaining avenue is one of discretion. This defection must be hidden from the local laity, not only because it might undermine Catholic morale, but also for practical reasons. Father Moyle is a popular man, and if he dies a Catholic, the funeral offerings collected by the Church will be substantial. The Church's interests being paramount, the dying man's Protestant friends, in contravention of his wishes, must not be allowed to see him. An inebriate Dominican friar present at the scene reveals to the fictional narrator, a Protestant, and the priest's good friend, the reason for the clergy's hostile reaction to their appearance:

It's a heretic minister he [the priest] wants to pray with him, and to witness that he dies publicly *out* of our church; for he tould them to their noses, that it's every man's duty, who has got the light of the Gospel, to lave her – the poor ould crathur, as if we were all in the dark – they fear he might prevail upon you to get him one.¹³⁷

When they do gain access to the cold, unheated room in which he lies, he is already a corpse. Wilful neglect, it is suggested, has hastened his death; the attendant priests have connived with their bishop to speed his demise. There are, it is implied, no depths to which the Catholic clergy will not descend. Even Moyle's conscientious curate colludes, albeit reluctantly, with his fellow churchmen; he must retain the bishop's favour in order to inherit the priest's living.

'The Priest's Funeral' is the sequel to an earlier *Christian Examiner* tale, 'The Death of a Devotee', which was also republished in *Tales of Ireland*. Apart from

¹³⁷ Carleton, 'The Priest's Funeral', in *Tales of Ireland*, pp. 58-59.

some rearranging of paragraphs, both remained unchanged from the initial versions.¹³⁸ ‘The Death of a Devotee’ is an attack on the formulaic rites associated with Catholicism, and presents the same elderly priest, a conscientious, but troubled man, as the reluctant attendant at the deathbed of a parishioner, John Lynch. Lynch, a man who of late has become a *voteen*,¹³⁹ is Moyle’s one-time servant, and has been complicit with him in an unspecified crime, committed abroad, years earlier. The situation in which the troubled priest now finds himself precipitates a religious crisis. Struggling with his own guilt, and unable to reconcile his clerical role as a cipher for divine forgiveness with his own human fallibility, the priest attempts to impress upon his unfortunate parishioner that any absolution he can give is worthless. Unable to comprehend that it is not through the absolution he is being denied, but through the expression of genuine repentance that his eternal soul can be saved, the *voteen* refuses to abandon ‘even at the remonstrances of a priest, his scapulars, his cords, his absolutions, and extreme unctions’. The impasse is only resolved by the appearance of the priest’s curate, from whom the unrepentant and uncomprehending sinner receives final absolution.¹⁴⁰

‘Father Butler’, like ‘Death of a Devotee’ and ‘The Priest’s Funeral’, remained unchanged from the initial version when it was included in a volume.¹⁴¹ At least two of the passages most offensive to Catholics, a diatribe against Popish observance, and a final affirmation of Protestant scriptural understanding, are clearly insertions, and the first, at least, bears Otway’s stylistic imprint.¹⁴² The second is essentially an

¹³⁸ ‘The Death of a Devotee’ appeared in the *Christian Examiner* in October 1829, and ‘The Priest’s Funeral’ from January - February 1830, both under the pseudonym Wilton.

¹³⁹ One whose adherence to religious practice appears excessive.

¹⁴⁰ William Carleton, ‘Death of a Devotee’, in *Tales of Ireland*, pp. 1-40.

¹⁴¹ ‘Father Butler’ appeared in the *Christian Examiner* from August – December 1828, under the pseudonym Winton.

¹⁴² William Carleton, ‘Father Butler’, in *Father Butler. The Lough Dearg Pilgrim. Being Sketches of Irish Manners* (Dublin: William Curry Jun., 1829, repr. New York and London: Garland, 1979), pp. 133-39, pp. 197-99.

extract from the book of Job, which interrupts the eponymous priest's deathbed farewell to his father. The first is a six-page attack upon Papist doctrines and superstitions, which sits uncomfortably within Father Butler's account of his beloved's untimely death from a broken heart, and his consequent reflections upon his Church's stance on exclusive salvation. The wording in the following extract is undoubtedly Otway's, not Carleton's:

Behold him [the Pope], like the Pharisee, anticipating his Creator in the awful office of Divine Judgement – usurping in idea the prerogative and power of the Almighty, before whom he is but a worm, and dealing damnation to those who, though not within the limits of his church [sic], are still in the hand of their God. Behold him, like them, setting aside or concealing the direct commandments of God, and substituting in their stead human rites, and superstitious observances; establishing, as it were, rules and regulations for the commission of crime, and indulgences for its perpetrators.¹⁴³

There is no clear evidence of Otway's hand in 'The Death of a Devotee', although in 'The Priest's Funeral', a sentence in Carleton's description of the dead priest, describing how 'the sublime confidence of Christian hope beamed from the expression of rapture, [...] beamed with a fullness and power, which nothing but undivided trust in his Redeemer's blood' could be observed, is probably Otway's.¹⁴⁴ An attack on the behaviour of Moyle's self-appointed guardians, in the same tale, in which the writer again refers to 'the efficacy of his Redeemer's blood', is likely to have been embellished by Otway.¹⁴⁵

Speculation about Otway's editing, and the extent to which it may have reinforced the anti-Catholic tone of Carleton's early works, has been dismissed as irrelevant by critics as eminent as Hayley and Wolff. Hayley's view, that Carleton was himself 'quite capable of using anti-Catholic phrasing' of the most bigoted kind without any help from Otway is certainly justified. Wolff has argued that Carleton's

¹⁴³ Carleton, 'Father Butler', p. 136.

¹⁴⁴ Carleton, 'The Priest's Funeral', p. 72.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 79-81.

1826 memorandum to Peel, and the accompanying letter to Sisson, not only provide irrefutable evidence that his own hostility towards Catholicism predated his association with Otway, but are also more offensive than any of the *Christian Examiner* stories.¹⁴⁶ The 1826 memorandum and letter, attacking the leading campaigners for emancipation, and the hedge schoolmasters and Maynooth-educated clergy who are involved in violence, or incite insurrection, plainly contradict Carleton's defensive claim, made late in life, that his heart and affections were never estranged from the Catholic people 'or even from their priesthood'.¹⁴⁷ It is certainly penned by a man who needs no urging to express his detestation of Catholicism. But, although written by one who claims he would rather see his children 'in their graves than under the dreadful yoke of Romish influence',¹⁴⁸ contrary to Wolff's claim, this correspondence is by no means more offensive, in either content or tone, than these early tales. Otway undoubtedly thought otherwise, but the anti-Catholic sentiment invested in tales such as 'Father Butler' by Carleton himself needed no reinforcing by his patron.

Hayley's assertion that to argue that Carleton was not totally responsible for the anti-Catholic content of his stories 'epitomizes the myth of defending Carleton from his own writings' is to ignore an important point.¹⁴⁹ The fact is that the phraseology that disfigures several of Carleton's anti-Catholic tales is identifiable, stylistically, as Otway's. If Otway's influence should not be disregarded, and it should not, it is because Carleton's stories should be considered for their literary merits as well as for any religious and political content. From a strictly literary point of view, 'Father Butler', as written by Carleton, has little to commend it; with

¹⁴⁶ Wolff, p. 26.

¹⁴⁷ Carleton, *Autobiography*, p. 92.

¹⁴⁸ Letter and memorandum from William Carleton to William Sisson and Robert Peel, p. 345.

¹⁴⁹ Hayley, *Carleton's Traits and Stories*, pp. 339-40.

Otway's additions, even less. For this reason, if for no other, it is to Carleton's credit that, publicly at least, he took full responsibility for them. Carleton himself makes only a single reference to Otway's editing. In his final version of 'The Lough Derg Pilgrim', recalling the occasion on which he gave Otway an account of his pilgrimage to St. Patrick's Purgatory, Carleton writes, 'he requested me to put what I had told him upon paper, adding, "I will dress it up and have it inserted in the next edition [of the *Christian Examiner*]"'.¹⁵⁰

What made Carleton's early propagandist tales particularly offensive to Catholics was that one born into their church, and with intimate knowledge of it, should deny the validity of a sacrament of such significance. To die without receiving extreme unction was considered a major tragedy. It was a commonly held belief amongst the Catholic populace, one exemplified by the attitude of Carleton's friend of his later years, the priest Richard Carbery, that, if undue Protestant influence was not brought to bear on them, few apostates, at the point of death, would refuse the sacrament and not return to the arms of their Church.¹⁵¹ In 'The Priest's Funeral', it is not Protestant, but Catholic interference, that the dying priest must contend with. Not apostates in life, the fictional priests Father Butler and Father Moyle commit, in Catholic eyes, the unpardonable offence of becoming so in death. But Carleton goes further than declaring the last rites merely unnecessary. In 'The Death of a Devotee' he is asserting that the receiving of the sacrament is itself the real calamity. Not only is the reassurance that it gives worthless, but it is also an impediment to genuine repentance, and consequently, to divine forgiveness.

¹⁵⁰ Carleton, 'The Lough Derg Pilgrim', in *Traits and Stories*, I (1843), 237.

¹⁵¹ Accounts of deathbed conversions were not confined to apostates returning to the Catholic fold. In the mid-twentieth century, an oral account, detailing events back to 1815, was given of a Protestant minister in Donegal, who, having been visited daily by the local Catholic priest in his final illness, was believed by the Catholics of the parish to have died a member of their Church. See Charles McGlinchey, *The Last of the Name*, ed. by Brian Friel (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1986), p. 77.

For a peasantry whose concerns were primarily with practicalities, adherence to the letter of the Church's religious requirements, it seems, was often regarded as a satisfactory substitution for conforming to her spiritual demands. Writing of peasant life in the first half of the nineteenth century, S. J. Connolly observes that 'Confession [...] appears to have been primarily conceived of, not in terms of the theology of repentance and amendment, but as a wiping of the slate to be accomplished before death', and notes that contemporary records indicate that in the southwest of Ireland at least, participants in agrarian violence habitually avoided confession for the period of their involvement.¹⁵² Viewed in the light of such evidence, that less than complete apology of 1839, in which Carleton expressed regret for passages contained in these early works which had given offence 'unnecessarily and unseasonably', whilst insisting that the sentiments he had expressed were valid, is perhaps understandable.¹⁵³

The prime significance of the Peel memorandum and the accompanying letter to Sisson is in their demonstrating that Carleton's readiness to attack the Catholic Church predated his friendship with Otway. They are, though, important for another reason. They give the first indication that Carleton, who was already trying his hand at writing, realised that his Ulster Catholic peasant background could be exploited. Like many of his class and religion, he had been, if only nominally, a Ribbonman. If, in the cause of thwarting Catholic emancipation, any man was capable of investigating and exposing the links between Catholic schoolmasters and illegal combinations within a particular locality, his letter implies, it was he.

¹⁵² S. J. Connolly, *Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland, 1780-1845* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), p. 105, pp. 130-31, p. 217. Carleton gives a light-hearted presentation of this attitude to 'wiping the slate clean' in the tale 'Ned M'Keown'. The parish priest jokingly refers to one of his companions, a Protestant, as one who will be 'sent down', and concurs with the view of another in the group, that for Catholics, 'come or go what will, a man's always safe in the long run, except he dies without his clargy'. Carleton, *Traits and Stories*, I (1843) 21.

¹⁵³ William Carleton, publicity for 'Chronicles of Ballymacruiskeen'.

*If it can be proved that within a certain local extent (say of a few parishes) [...] where Roman Catholic society is comparatively quiet and liberal (their prejudices being qualified by the liberality of Protestant feeling) those individuals who educate the lower orders be so corrupt, what must they be in those parts of Ireland where the population is dense and unmixedly Catholic?*¹⁵⁴

Whatever the partiality of his argument, the fact remains that he had a deep and abiding loathing of violence, and the involvement of men of the cloth in insurrection he found totally abhorrent. He continues:

*If it can be proved that a great proportionate number of the Roman Catholic clergy who are educated at Maynooth College have been and are in the habit of being connected with such flagitious combinations, before their entrance into that establishment, and that they connive at and tolerate them afterwards, would this not be a dreadful and terrible exposure of the settled and systematic disaffection of the Irish Roman Catholic Church?*¹⁵⁵

It is undoubtedly the case that some parish priests did indeed condone violent action, although the extent to which they were implicated probably has been overestimated. They had certainly become, by the mid 1820s, increasingly politically active.¹⁵⁶ The distinctively Irish brand of Catholicism promoted by such figures as the highly popular John MacHale, until 1825 Professor of Moral Theology at Maynooth, and then coadjutor Bishop of Killala, was a cause of consternation. Carleton himself was to attack MacHale in a serialised work of 1837.¹⁵⁷ This first generation of Irish-educated clergy, less well educated, less quiescent and less amenable to Church discipline than their predecessors, and suspected of embracing

¹⁵⁴ Letter and memorandum from Carleton to Sisson and Peel, p. 346. Carleton's emphasis.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 346. Carleton's emphasis.

¹⁵⁶ Connolly has suggested that in the early-nineteenth century, both the increasingly restraining influence of parish priests on communal violence, and, at a slightly later date, their involvement in political agitation, are both aspects of the same trend; priests were assuming a more prominent role in local communities. See Connolly, p. 223.

¹⁵⁷ Carleton's 'Autobiography of the Rev. Blackthorn M'Flail' was published in the *Dublin University Magazine* in January, April and October 1837.

Galician revolutionary principles, alarmed Protestants, and caused concern amongst more moderate Catholic Church leaders at home, and in Rome.¹⁵⁸

Nevertheless, Carleton's complaint that such priests were in the service of religious and secular leaders of the emancipation movement whose aim was to 'divert the thoughts of the people from the course of their private occupations, to images of *imaginary oppression*' can only be disingenuous.¹⁵⁹ The injustices that the Catholic majority continued to suffer were far from imaginary. The continuing right of the Established Church to claim tithes from an overwhelmingly Catholic populace remained as a justifiable, and decidedly real, source of resentment. That matter though, was to become the issue of the early 1830s. Carleton's dismissal of the prominent concern of the time of his memorandum to Peel, Catholic Emancipation, as no more than a response to 'imaginary oppression', appears perverse.

Neither the immediate advantages of changing religion, nor his rejection of Catholic doctrine, seem entirely to account for Carleton's loathing of a clergy he had once intended to join, and was now describing, a year before he was introduced to Otway, as 'Black, malignant and designing, systematically treacherous and false'.¹⁶⁰ If there were other reasons for his resentment though, Carleton was no more prepared to reveal them to the world than he was to acknowledge this 1826 correspondence with Peel.

Although Carleton himself is silent on the matter, it has been widely accepted as fact that, for reasons beyond his control, he was denied the chance of entering St. Patrick's College Maynooth by the Bishop of Clogher, James Murphy. It has been

¹⁵⁸ See Connolly, p. 66, pp. 208-25; Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant Crusade in Ireland, 1800-70; A Study of Protestant-Catholic Relations 1800-70*, pp. 8-24; Corish, pp. 81-84. For contemporary comment, see the various observations on the early period of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, appended to Seosamh Ó Dúfaigh, 'James Murphy, Bishop of Clogher, 1801-24', *Clogher Record*, 6.3 (1968), 419-92.

¹⁵⁹ Letter and memorandum from Carleton to Sisson and Peel, pp. 344-45. Carleton's emphasis.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

supposed that, his early ambitions being thus thwarted, he was justifiably resentful. This widespread assumption may well be correct, but there is no concrete evidence to support it. If Carleton was refused entry to the priesthood by the bishop, the circumstances are unclear. The general presumption is that he was the unwitting victim of a dispute between the priest who ran the classics school where he finished his education and Bishop Murphy. A supposed consequence of the quarrel was that the bishop refused to countenance any of his adversary's pupils being allowed access to study for the Church. Alternative versions of this story name Murphy's errant priest as either Thomas Campbell or John Sproule Keenan.

The fact that Carleton's conversion remained for so long a source of resentment to his Catholic compatriots has undoubtedly been a factor in ensuring that supposition has been repeated as fact. In 1917, E. J. Quigley, who was only deterred from completely impugning Carleton's character through deference to the views of a late Professor of Theology at Maynooth, Patrick Murray, referred, with some satisfaction, to the unedifying influence that 'two years of study of classics under the tuition of a suspended priest' must have had on the young Carleton.¹⁶¹ He clearly alluded to Campbell, who had been suspended by the bishop four years before Carleton began what were to be his final two years of study.¹⁶² Although the tendency to dismiss Carleton out of hand as an apostate faded with time, the legacy remains. Alternative, and irreconcilable, accounts have never been properly investigated. Historical research on the situation in the Clogher diocese in the early-nineteenth century has produced a good deal of material directly relevant to Carleton's incomplete education. Surprisingly, it has been ignored by literary critics.

¹⁶¹ Quigley, p. 211.

¹⁶² See Denis Carolan Rushe, *History of Monaghan for Two Hundred Years, 1660-1860*, 2nd edn (Monaghan: Clogher Historical Society, 1996), p. 235; Ó Dufaigh, p. 434, p. 441. Rushe's *History of Monaghan* was first published in 1921.

The Campbell story originates with information supplied by the Rev. D. Canon O'Connor to Carleton's biographer O'Donoghue. O'Connor had lived for many years in Carleton's parish of Clogher, and in the adjoining parish of Errigal Truagh, and according to O'Donoghue, 'was in an excellent position for obtaining hitherto unknown information about the Carletons'.¹⁶³ Despite his credentials, he was not an entirely reliable source. According to him, Carleton's classical tutor was Thomas Campbell. Campbell had come to Errigal Truagh in 1804, and was in constant dispute with Bishop Murphy, being suspended by him in 1809. Murphy, a determined reformer, was a man whose confrontational style, and sometimes inconsiderate treatment of his priests, repeatedly brought him into conflict with a number of his diocesan clergy.

Through the years of the Penal Laws, obedience to the Catholic Church hierarchy remote from the people had often been subordinated to the importance of retaining, at parish level, the hearts and minds of the peasantry amongst whom they lived and worked. The tradition of family control of local churches, and the fact that under the Penal Laws a priest had security only in his own parish, had served to reinforce a tendency to parochial autonomy. Struggles inevitably ensued between the abrasive Murphy, determined to improve the calibre of his priests and to impose a uniformity of discipline, and a section of his clergy, equally intent on retaining the individual authority they enjoyed. The Archbishop of Armagh, who investigated the tumultuous situation in the Clogher diocese in 1815, said of Murphy that, although he was an exemplary prelate, 'perhaps his zeal surpasses the limits prescribed' – a

¹⁶³ O'Donoghue, *Life*, I, xiii-xv. The only reference to Carleton being denied the possibility of entering Maynooth in O'Connor's own work, in his book on Lough Derg, is less informative. It simply states that Carleton failed to obtain from Bishop Murphy an appointment to one of the diocesan burses in the college. See Rev. D. Canon O'Connor, *St. Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg. Its History, Traditions, Legends, Antiquities, Topography, and Scenic Surroundings*, 5th edn (Dublin: James Duffy, 1931), p. 192. O'Connor's book was first published in 1879.

diplomatic way of suggesting that Murphy's treatment of his clergy was, on occasions, unjust.¹⁶⁴ Of Murphy's troublesome priests, Campbell, who continued to challenge the bishop's authority for several years following his suspension, was certainly the most difficult, and the most indefatigable, but there is no evidence whatsoever that he was ever Carleton's schoolmaster.¹⁶⁵

Carleton names his final tutor, not as Campbell, but as his second cousin, John Keenan, who held a curacy at Donagh and ran a classical school at Glasslough.¹⁶⁶ This troublesome discrepancy has done little to curb the popular belief that Carleton was the victim of an ecclesiastical squabble, not least because he himself, recalling Keenan's abrupt departure from Glasslough, reinforces the impression that his tutor was indeed suspended.¹⁶⁷ Keenan, he writes, on closing his school and moving to a larger one at Dundalk 'ceased to act officially as a priest, and disencumbered himself of all parochial duties, even as a curate'.¹⁶⁸ In 1816, John Keenan, curate of Donagh, was indeed in dispute with Murphy. He was one of twenty-four signatories to the Monaghan Resolutions, a list of grievances against Murphy addressed to Rome, the

¹⁶⁴ Quoted from the archives of Congregatio de propaganda fide, in Ó Dúfaigh, p. 436.

¹⁶⁵ Ó Dúfaigh, who erroneously assumes that Campbell was Carleton's tutor, otherwise gives an informed account of the events leading to Campbell's removal, and of Campbell's continuing opposition to Murphy. Ó Dúfaigh, pp. 434-35, pp. 441-42, p. 445.

¹⁶⁶ Carleton had for a short time attended a classical school at Tulnavert, run by a tyrannical master who he refuses to name, but who is clearly not Campbell. This man had been a student at Maynooth, but became mentally deranged and was obliged to leave. See Carleton, *Autobiography*, p. 41, and *Traits and Stories*, I (1843) pp. xii-xiii.

¹⁶⁷ In 1921, Denis Carolan Rushe, clearly relying on O'Connor's information to O'Donoghue, simply assumed that Carleton had omitted to mention that he had been Campbell's pupil before he attended Keenan's school. He also asserts that Keenan too was suspended by the bishop. See Rushe, p. 235. Thomas Flanagan attempted to resolve the problem by stating that Carleton used the name Keenan as a pseudonym for Campbell. He makes no suggestion as to what Carleton's motive in doing this might be. See Flanagan, *Irish Novelists*, p. 267. Julian Moynahan avoids mentioning names, or schoolmasters, merely commenting that any hopes that Carleton had of a nomination to Maynooth 'went for naught owing to a feud between the Carleton family's priest and the bishop'. This assertion is unfounded. The Carletons lived neither in Errigal Truagh, Campbell's parish, nor in Donagh, where Keenan was curate, but in Clogher. There is no evidence that Edward McArdle, the priest of that parish, was in dispute with Bishop Murphy. See Julian Moynahan, *Anglo-Irish: the Literary Imagination in a Hyphenated Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 45.

¹⁶⁸ Carleton, *Autobiography*, p. 84.

main one of which was an objection to Bishop Murphy's choice of coadjutor with right of succession to the see of Clogher.¹⁶⁹

However, there is good reason to doubt whether Keenan's differences with the bishop persisted beyond his signature of the Monaghan Resolutions. Carleton refers to his having suffered a serious illness after moving to Dundalk, and refers to him as 'being publicly prayed for in every chapel throughout the country'.¹⁷⁰ If true, this hardly suggests a man in continuing dispute with his bishop. The Rev. P. Ó Gallachair's account of Keenan's life and career, published in the *Clogher Record* in 1968 and overlooked by commentators on Carleton until now, presents what is clearly a more accurate account of Keenan's career and life than that usually accepted. Ó Gallachair argues convincingly that, far from being pressured by Bishop Murphy to abandon his clerical post and his school at Glasslough, Keenan's sole motive in leaving was to take charge of what was likely to be a more profitable school, the proposed Dundalk Academy, where he was to stay until 1823.¹⁷¹ It seems highly improbable that Keenan would have been appointed to what was clearly a prestigious teaching post if he was in serious disfavour with Bishop Murphy. Certainly, by 1817, the year in which the Dundalk Academy opened and Keenan took up his post, the troubles between Murphy and his priests had considerably abated.

The reasons for Carleton's failure to obtain a studentship at Maynooth, then, remain a matter for speculation. It is possible that the answer, or a partial answer, lies in Carleton's visit as a young man to Lough Derg. 'The Lough Derg Pilgrim' a fictionalised account of his experiences, initially appeared in the *Christian Examiner*

¹⁶⁹ Monaghan Resolutions, documentary evidence appended to Ó Dufaigh, pp. 472-74.

¹⁷⁰ Carleton, *Autobiography*, p. 133.

¹⁷¹ P. Ó Gallachair, 'Clogherici: A Dictionary of the Catholic Clergy of the Diocese of Clogher (1535-1835)', *Clogher Record*, 6.3 (1968), 578-96 (pp.588-96). Ó Gallachair refutes Rushe's assertion that Keenan, who by Carleton's account was in poor health shortly after he took the Dundalk post, died there. Keenan became President of the seminary in Newry, and then Parish priest in Annaclone. He died when visiting Rome, in 1847.

as ‘A Pilgrimage to St. Patrick’s Purgatory’ from April to May 1828, before being published, with very little alteration, in book form the following year.¹⁷² In it, Carleton tells of a confrontation between himself and one of the priests ministering to the pilgrims to the station island there. The priest had demanded money for admittance to confession from an elderly man and his ailing son, which they could not afford. Carleton writes that this was, ‘a season when sickness and famine prevailed’; clearly father and son were in difficult circumstances.¹⁷³ The priest’s indifference to their plight, and his contemptuous dismissal of them, prompted a furious outburst from Carleton. Another priest, summoned to the scene to remove Carleton, recognised him. Being aware of Carleton’s ambitions to join the priesthood, he afterwards cautioned him, ‘*make submission*, and ask his pardon; for you know he can injure your prospects, and will do so, if you don’t *make submission*; he is not of the most forgiving cast – but that is between ourselves’.¹⁷⁴

Carleton, of course, did not apologise. This incident might indeed have had a bearing on Murphy’s decision, if decision there was, to refuse him a candidature for the priesthood. The prior of the pilgrimage, Patrick Bellew, was a relative of the bishop’s, and, consequently, a man of some influence, as well as the cause of some resentment, in the diocese.¹⁷⁵ In his report on the diocese to the Vatican in 1814,

¹⁷² It later appeared, with several anti-Catholic passages removed, in the 1842-43 edition of *Traits and Stories*. The second, 1829 version, which is almost identical to the original, is referred to in this chapter.

¹⁷³ Carleton, who is notoriously unreliable over dating, claims to have performed this station ‘in the middle of my nineteenth year’. This, then, would have made him eighteen, and the year, 1812. However, in a letter to Charles Gavan Duffy, written in 1863, Carleton refers to his having long believed, erroneously, that he was born in 1898. It is possible, therefore, that his visit to Lough Derg was in 1816 or 1817. The reference to ‘sickness and famine’, suggests that the year was 1817. In a footnote to the version of this tale contained in the 1842-43 edition of *Traits and Stories*, Carleton dates it as 1817. See Carleton, ‘The Lough Derg Pilgrim’, in *Father Butler. The Lough Derg Pilgrim*, p. 206; letter from William Carleton to Charles Gavan Duffy, 1 June 1863, reproduced in Boué; Carleton, ‘The Lough Derg Pilgrim’ (1843) p. 265n. O’Connor gives the date as 1820, but this is almost certainly incorrect. See O’Connor, p. 192.

¹⁷⁴ William Carleton, ‘The Lough Derg Pilgrim’, p. 294. Carleton’s emphasis.

¹⁷⁵ Bellew was prior at the Lough Derg station until 1829. In 1806 Murphy had appointed him rector of the Monaghan seminary, in the face of considerable clergy opposition. In 1811 he was appointed the

Murphy describes the prior as being ‘besides the General Superior of the Station, regularly employed in examining the Pilgrims in the Catechism, and giving tickets for admission to Confession to such of them that have the necessary knowledge of it’.¹⁷⁶ Carleton’s altercation, then, may well have been with Bellew himself. That Carleton was warned that he had crossed a man who could harm his career suggests that this was indeed the case. Murphy himself took a keen interest in the administration of the station at Lough Derg, partly at least because unfavourable accounts of practices there were concerning the Vatican.¹⁷⁷ Given his difficulties with the oppositional priestly faction within his diocese, it is unlikely that he would have been eager to promote the interests of a youth as prepared to challenge Church authority as Carleton.

This, of course can be no more than speculation. If Carleton himself knew, or strongly suspected, that an unfavourable account of his altercation with the priest had reached the ears of the bishop and had set Murphy against him, he makes no reference to it in his fiction, or in his autobiography. Carleton was a man whose resentments readily, and repeatedly, surfaced in his fiction, and such reticence would be uncharacteristic. Either he had no such suspicions, or had the good sense to keep them to himself. To have presented himself as a victim of Catholic injustice would have undermined the position he was to maintain consistently throughout his life, that his conversion had been entirely a matter of informed choice.

One person who may have known something of the matter was Dr. Patrick Murray, Professor of Theology at Maynooth, who had a continuing friendship with Carleton from the 1840s. Murray was from Clones, County Monaghan, and had been

bishop’s vicar-general, and there was concern in some clergy quarters that Murphy planned to promote him to coadjutor. See O’Connor, p. 193, and Ó Dufaigh, 432.

¹⁷⁶ Report to Propaganda on the Diocese of Clogher, 1814, appended to Ó Dufaigh, 462.

¹⁷⁷ O’Connor gives an account of Murphy’s reforms at the station. See O’Connor, pp. 186-90. See also Ó Dufaigh, 423, and ‘Reports to the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda, 1804 and 1814’, appended to the article, 457-60, 461-65.

ordained in the diocese of Clogher in 1837, and knew something of Carleton's home area. A strong nationalist, and a man with a keen interest in literature (his first post at Maynooth had been as Professor of English), he was highly appreciative of Carleton's representations of the peasantry. A student he taught in his later years was to describe him as 'a bigot, if ever there was one', with 'not enough sympathy with error to realise an adversary's position'.¹⁷⁸ Whatever his theological conservatism, and it undoubtedly increased as he aged, it did not affect his warm relationship with a writer many Catholics continued to dismiss as a traitor to his religion.

His tolerance is largely attributable to his recognition of Carleton's significance within a national cultural context; Carleton's sympathetic presentations of Irish Catholic life more than compensated for a religious stance adopted in youth. But Murray also appears to have known something of Carleton's experience at Lough Derg which caused him to take a rather more compassionate view of the writer than would otherwise be expected. His brief letter to Canon O'Connor, following the first publication of the latter's book, *St. Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg*, in 1879, is a response to criticism of Carleton contained within it.

I on yesterday entirely forgot communicating some very interesting information regarding William Carleton, and in reference to the L. Derg tale – information of which I am now the only living repository, having had it partly from his own lips, partly from his old school-fellow, F. James Smith. There can be no doubt that grave abuses existed in those old days. The great blemish in the tale is the '*suppressio veri*,' and the paragraphs written, not by Carleton himself, but by Caesar Otway. I will, before you come to a second edition, think of some way by which your censure of Carleton may be, not withdrawn, but softened.¹⁷⁹

Murray died in 1882, with his secret, regrettably, intact. He had had no opportunity to confide it to O'Connor. His remarks, though, are intriguing not only

¹⁷⁸ Walter McDonald, *Reminiscences of a Maynooth Professor* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1925), p. 55.

¹⁷⁹ O'Connor, p. 192n.

for what they fail to reveal, but also for what they do. His categorical assertion that Otway had supplied the tale's more offensive passages suggests that Carleton himself had volunteered this information. The reminder that there were 'grave abuses' appears to be to be a gentle reproof to O'Connor for what is a sanitised account of the station; it certainly implies that Carleton's unfavourable representation of the place should not be dismissed out of hand.¹⁸⁰ More importantly, the ordering of Murray's remarks suggests a direct connection between the 'interesting information' he holds, and those abuses. That he was unwilling to commit this knowledge – some of it obtained from a priest – to paper, indicates that if it were to become public it would damage the reputation of one or more individuals within the Catholic Church, and the Church itself.

It is highly unlikely that written evidence of this confidential information will be found, or indeed, ever existed. If there is a connection between Carleton's experience at Lough Derg and his failure to become a priest, it cannot be conclusively demonstrated.

There are, of course, other possible reasons for Carleton's abandonment of any hope of a career in the Church. Maynooth appears to have had a high proportion of entrants from similar social backgrounds to his own,¹⁸¹ and at this time, two decades after its foundation in 1795, educational requirements for entry there were almost certainly not high. Nevertheless, it is possible that either through circumstance or through lack of commitment, or a combination of the two, he failed to meet the standard Bishop Murphy required of his diocesan candidates – supposing, of course, that he was actually suggested to Murphy as a candidate. Shortly after his appointment to Clogher, Murphy had declared himself generally satisfied with the

¹⁸⁰ Even in the fifth edition of his book, O'Connor is reluctant to concede that the Vatican's concern over practices at Lough Derg in the early-nineteenth century were justified. O'Connor, p. 189.

¹⁸¹ Connolly, pp. 59-63.

calibre of his older priests, of a generation educated in Europe, but had expressed considerable concern about the proficiency of the younger, Irish-educated curates.¹⁸² Students who could afford to pay for good schooling were clearly at a great advantage in securing a nomination to Maynooth.¹⁸³ In the tale ‘Going to Maynooth’, Carleton has the bishop, who is identifiable as Murphy,¹⁸⁴ observing, of the many hopeful students who presented themselves to him, ‘There is none of them properly qualified.’ Of Denis O’Shaughnessy, the tale’s hero, the bishop concedes, ‘He is not without natural talent, [...] his translations are strong and fluent, but ridiculously pedantic. That, however, is perhaps less his fault than the fault of those who instructed him.’¹⁸⁵ Basic education, obtained through hedge schools, was, by its nature sporadic, and proceeding to a higher level, to education at a classical school, was clearly problematic. In his autobiography Carleton repeatedly, and ruefully, refers to his difficulty in obtaining a classical education. ‘So far as education was concerned, it seemed to fly from me’, he writes, referring to the closure of Keenan’s school at Glasslough.¹⁸⁶

Another possibility is that Carleton was already displaying that lack of self-discipline which was later to exasperate his literary friends. Caesar Otway, in an otherwise complimentary portrait of the writer in the *Dublin University Magazine* in 1841, was to comment on his ‘unsteadiness of purpose, and want of regular and systematic exertion’.¹⁸⁷ There are certainly indications that Carleton was not as enthusiastic a scholar as he would have his readership believe, and indications too,

¹⁸² Ó Dufaigh, p. 426.

¹⁸³ Connolly, p. 62.

¹⁸⁴ In the tale, a letter from the bishop is signed ‘+ James M.’. William Carleton, ‘Going to Maynooth’, in *Traits and Stories*, II (1844), 153.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹⁸⁶ Carleton, *Autobiography*, p. 84.

¹⁸⁷ ‘Our Portrait Gallery, no. 15: William Carleton’, *Dublin University Magazine*, 17 (January 1841), 66-72 (p. 71). This unattributed article is credited to Caesar Otway.

that his final tutor, Keenan, did not hold him in particularly high regard. Referring to the period following his aborted intention to become a poor scholar, he writes, 'Here I was again for upwards of two years without the means of acquiring classical knowledge.'¹⁸⁸ Yet, the abandoned journey to Munster was a journey in search of precisely that, a classical education and an opening to the priesthood. That Keenan did not suggest Carleton accompany him when he moved from Glasslough to the school in Dundalk Carleton attributed to his tutor's straitened circumstances. Keenan did, though, employ another of his Glasslough students, described by Carleton as an excellent scholar 'who had read most assiduously [and] whose eyes were never off his books by night or by day' as his classical assistant.¹⁸⁹ When Carleton visited Keenan at Dundalk, hoping for employment as an assistant master, he received a cold response. An acquaintance of Keenan's had suggested that Carleton accept a lift on a hearse for the final part of his journey, and Keenan, who was then in ill health, was not amused at such a vehicle halting at his door. His brusque advice to Carleton, whose family's circumstances had declined, was that he should 'take to the spade and the reaping-hook', as others in his position had been obliged to do. This dismissal might simply be attributable to his annoyance, but it might also suggest that academically, he had little regard for Carleton.¹⁹⁰

Carleton's account of the matter, of course, is not impartial. He had spent several hours in a tavern in Corcreagh before reaching Dundalk, and, although he does not refer to his state, he was almost certainly the worse for wear. In later life he drank heavily, and it is likely that he was already over-fond of the bottle. He was certainly inclined to enjoyment. His claim that in the period following the closure of the Glasslough school he 'indulged in the practice of every athletic exercise that can

¹⁸⁸ Carleton, *Autobiography*, p. 69.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 132-34.

be named', all the while devoting 'at least six hours out of the twenty-four to self-instruction', should be regarded with circumspection. He writes: 'Notwithstanding this habit of study, no wake missed me, no dance missed me. I was perpetually leaping, and throwing the stone and the sledge. No football match was without me.'¹⁹¹ As one critic has observed of Carleton at this directionless period of his life, he was 'still doing nothing in particular and doing it very well'.¹⁹² Such energetic pursuit of pleasure seems hardly compatible with academic application; indeed, Carleton himself acknowledges that others might find it difficult to believe. It is certainly possible that his early ambitions had been blighted as much by his own lack of commitment as by any unreasonable prejudice against him.

There are then, several possible reasons for Carleton's failure to become a priest. The simplest explanation is that, either because his classical education remained uncompleted, or, because he lacked academic application, he failed to meet the required standard for consideration for Maynooth. It is possible that he came to Bishop Murphy's attention as a troublemaker, and consequently, Murphy refused to put his name forward for Maynooth. It may be the case that his lack of success was due to a combination of these factors. What is almost certain is that the generally accepted account, in circulation since the late-nineteenth century, that Carleton was debarred from applying to Maynooth because of a dispute between his tutor and Bishop Murphy, has no foundation. Whatever the truth, it is undoubtedly the case that Carleton's abandonment of any hope of becoming a Catholic priest was pivotal in determining his religious allegiance, and, critically, on the perspective taken upon religion in his work.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁹² McHugh, p. 49.

CHAPTER 3

CARLETON AND THE FICTIONAL CRITIQUE OF RELIGION

Whatever the circumstances of Carleton's failure to enter Maynooth, there is little in his work to suggest that he bore a grudge against Murphy. His depiction of the bishop in 'The Priest's Funeral' is certainly unflattering. However, the tale is intended less as an exposure of individual mendacity than one of institutional corruption, a vituperative assault, not on a person, but on Catholicism *per se*. The priestly mendacity the story claims to expose is symptomatic of the Church's fundamental inability to address issues of moral behaviour and religious truth. When the prelate, referring to the dying priest in whose house he sits, insists that 'his spiritual obedience is due to me, and to me only', and thus elevates himself above the Almighty, he represents the worldly and obstructive nature of the Catholic Church.¹⁹³ By contrast, in 'Denis O'Shaughnessy Going to Maynooth', the tale in which he displays his first consistent handling of the comedic, Carleton's depiction of the bishop is correspondingly benign.¹⁹⁴ In 'Denis O'Shaughnessy', the prelate's ability to accommodate his Catholic conscience when it is advantageous to do so indicates his human fallibility rather than serious corruption within the Catholic Church. His response, by letter, to the proposed gift of a horse from the O'Shaughnessy family, a bribe intended to ease Denis's entry to Maynooth, is one of indignation. The import of his strictures, however, is belied by the summons to the family's parish priest to present himself in person at the bishop's residence 'to place the transaction in a light as will raise you once more to the estimation in which I have always held you', and is further undermined by the encouraging observation that 'There are three other

¹⁹³ Carleton, 'The Priest's Funeral', p. 64.

¹⁹⁴ The first, *Christian Examiner* version of the story is not entirely as Carleton intended it. Otway shortened the ending, and, Barbara Hayley suggests, also removed some of Denis's dialogue from an earlier part of the tale. See Hayley, *Carleton's Traits and Stories*, pp. 88-89.

candidates, one of whom is a relation of your excellent curate's; but I have as yet made *no* decision, so that the appointment is still open'.¹⁹⁵ Ultimately, the bishop's brother, a lawyer, receives the animal, Denis obtains his nomination, and all parties are satisfied.

Whether, like his character Denis O'Shaughnessy, Carleton was actually interviewed by the Bishop to establish his suitability for candidature to Maynooth is not known, but he clearly knew Murphy, by sight at least, as, no doubt, did many of the diocesan laity. Murphy was a man who, although not old, 'wore powder, which gave him an air of greater reverence; [...] his features were sharp and intelligent, his eye small but keen, and his manner altogether impressive and gentlemanly, if not dignified.'¹⁹⁶ This description, and the similar, though less favourable, description in 'The Priest's Funeral', would have been immediately recognisable to those whose contact with their bishop was limited to confirmation, or to a blessing before the burial ceremony for a deceased local priest.¹⁹⁷

That the area of Ireland of which Carleton had intimate knowledge happened to be characterised by ecclesiastical tumult was a boon to a young author whose ambition was to gain recognition as a national figure, and who had an interest, if a vested one, in diocesan affairs. The see presented a microcosm, and a particularly colourful one, of tensions within the Catholic Church in the late 1820s and 1830s, as, sensitive to accusations of religious laxity, and determined to align Irish Catholicism more closely with Rome, the Church attempted to impose stricter codes of discipline upon both clergy and laity. In his tales, then, Carleton presented not only fictional types, but also actual individuals, many of whom must have been recognisable within, and even beyond, his home area. The priest he confronted at Lough Derg, although

¹⁹⁵ Carleton, 'Going to Maynooth' (1844), p. 153.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

¹⁹⁷ Carleton describes such a funeral in 'The Priest's Funeral', p. 51.

unnamed, was, he states, notorious for the use of the whip he carried, and would, presumably, have been identifiable to many of his Catholic readers.¹⁹⁸ Carleton certainly knew Murphy's adversary Thomas Campbell by reputation, and, his description in 'The Priest's Funeral' suggests, also by sight; it is to Campbell that he gives the doubtful privilege of preaching the pre-burial sermon. Carleton was clearly aware of Campbell's combative temperament, and has the fictional, self-serving Dominican friar in 'The Priest's Funeral' describe him as 'educated on the Continent, the big scholar, but a far bigger pedant – 'tis he that makes all the Priests knock undher the table, when he bates them in argument'.¹⁹⁹ Thomas Buie, by which name Campbell was commonly known, was a 'broad-shouldered yellow-looking man, with a dark countenance, and an exceedingly affected accent, superinduced upon a thick Irish brogue, garnished by a lisp'.²⁰⁰ That his portrayal of a man so hostile to Murphy is not a favourable one reinforces the perception that Carleton, always so ready to harbour a grudge, felt no personal animosity towards the bishop for any involvement he had in confounding his early ambitions.

It was not only clergy as determinedly resistant to ecclesiastical authority as Campbell who presented difficulties for the Catholic Church. Certainly, under Murphy's episcopal governance of the Clogher Diocese, the lax priest and the indolent friar met with little toleration. Not surprisingly, given the time he spent under Keenan's tutorship, Carleton appears to have taken a keen interest in diocesan politics. Certainly, his fiction indicates that he appreciated the practical, as well as the psychological, nature of the relationship between bishop and clergy, regular as well as secular. His sympathetic, if qualified description of the typical parish priest in 'Going

¹⁹⁸ Carleton, 'The Lough Dearg Pilgrim', pp. 292-93.

¹⁹⁹ Carleton, 'The Priest's Funeral', p. 107.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. Carleton writes that Campbell was removed from his parish by the bishop 'for countenancing one of the Hibernian Schools'; see p. 108n. Rushe refers to Campbell as being known by the nickname 'Thomas Bwee' (yellow Thomas). Rushe, *History of Monaghan*, p. 235.

to Maynooth' is of a man 'regular, but loose and careless in the observances of his church' [sic], one who 'could not be taxed with any positive neglect of pastoral duty'. A man of some authority, yet close to the people he served, he was 'a rough, shrewd, humorous divine', one 'who [...] kept an eye to his own interest, and sweetened the severity with which he exacted his "dues" by a manner at once jocose and familiar'.²⁰¹ Such individuals were relatively unproblematic, and were, anyway, under the direct control of the bishop. By contrast, the bishop's position in relation to the members of the regular clergy was somewhat ambiguous. The friars, although theoretically subject to the specific religious discipline of their monastic order, and not directly under the governance of the see, in practice frequently performed many of the duties undertaken by the priesthood. Their position within the diocese, then, not being properly defined, as Carleton recognised, could be an uncomfortable one.²⁰² His fictional Dominican friar Mahon of 'The Priest's Funeral', intent on protecting his own interests, takes a keen interest in diocesan politics. Mahon's alcoholic excesses and general laxity clearly establish him in that category of dissolute monks that Bishop Murphy described in an 1814 report to Rome as 'unfit to be employed in the ministry'.²⁰³ Resentful of the bishop's assumed authority, and lacking economic security as well as moral scruple, Mahon, who has succeeded in retaining his 'snug little priory there above, in the upper ind of the diocese', is 'jist houlding it till the ould times come back agin; and tisen't in his power it is to touch either me or it'.²⁰⁴ He is clearly intended to be representative of a group who, in actual life, had good reason for hoping that those priests determined on retaining their customary control within

²⁰¹ Carleton, 'Going to Maynooth' (1844), pp. 142-43.

²⁰² On the position of the regular clergy, see Desmond Keenan, *The Catholic Church in Nineteenth-Century Ireland: A Sociological Study* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1983), pp. 69-70, pp. 144-45.

²⁰³ James Murphy's Report on the Diocese of Clogher, 8 October 1814, included in Ó Dúfaigh, 463. Although there were no religious houses within the diocese, the area held two Dominican and two Franciscan friars, of which only two, a Dominican and a Franciscan, were employable as priests.

²⁰⁴ Carleton, 'The Priest's Funeral', p. 57.

the parishes would be successful. He opines that ‘the Catholic Church of Ireland will never be what she ought to be, while a few upstart bishops rule the roast over inferior clergy’, and continues, ‘more power to their elbow, that are striving to have the appointment of their own bishops in their own hands – it will put an end to plotting with the Pope, any how’.²⁰⁵

A footnote explains that this allusion is to the debate within the Catholic Church over the issue of ‘Domestic nomination, independent of Rome’. One aspect of this controversy was that the Catholic Church in Ireland, rather than the Pope, should elect its own bishops. The other was the proposal to place the appointment of Irish bishops in the hands of the bishops alone, excluding the lower clergy from the process. Feelings on the matter, it seems, ran particularly high within Murphy’s diocese. Carleton himself would have been aware of at least one struggle between the authoritarian bishop and a number of his priests determined to retain their traditional influence. In 1815, when he was studying at Keenan’s school, and when unrest amongst the Clogher clergy was at its height, Murphy was forced to deny claims that he was attempting to promote his relative, Patrick Bellew, to whom he had already shown considerable preferment, to the post of coadjutor bishop.²⁰⁶

It is clear, then, that not only could Carleton give accurate portrayals of members of the Catholic clergy, but also that he could, and did, give an accurate picture of church politics within the Catholic Diocese of Clogher. And, as he makes clear, political manoeuvrings between the clergy were not confined to struggles between the bishop and his acolytes and the lower ranks of the secular clergy over whom he exercised direct authority. Barbara Hayley, examining the revisions to Carleton’s tales throughout the various editions of *Traits and Stories*, has detailed the

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 90.

²⁰⁶ See Ó Dufaigh, 432, for an account of this conflict. Bellew’s position is referred to in chapter 2 of this thesis.

various modifications Carleton made to the text of ‘Shane Fadh’s Wedding’ in order to give a more favourable picture of the Catholic clergy.²⁰⁷ What she does not comment on, and what is equally important, is Carleton’s success, throughout these alterations, in retaining a clear representation of the complex relations between the wider ranks of the Catholic Church.

As it eventually appeared in the 1842-44 edition of *Traits and Stories*, the verbal sparring between two clerics of the tale, the parish priest, Father Corrigan, and the friar, Frank Rooney, is, at a superficial level at least, amicable; they are, after all, as the title to the story indicates, present at the celebration of a marriage, and their behaviour is suitably restrained. Corrigan’s accusation, directed at the friar, that ‘you, and the parsons, and the fat bishops, are too far from the right place – the only difference between you is, that you are lazy *by toleration*, whereas the others are fat and lazy *by authority*’, is made only half in jest. The priest, then, refuses to concede to the regular clergy of his own religious persuasion any spiritual superiority over ‘the parsons’, that is, the Church of Ireland clergy. Neither is he prepared to recognise that his own direct superiors, the Catholic bishops, are, morally, in a superior position to those representatives of the Established Church whose economic security is based upon the tithes extracted from a populace they do not represent.

*You are fat and lazy on your ould horses, jogging about from house to house, and stuffing yourselves either at the table of other people’s parishioners, or in your own convents in Dublin and elsewhere. They are rich bloated gluttons, going about in their coaches, and wallying in wealth. Now, we [the parish priests] are the golden mean, Frank, that live upon a little, and work hard for it.*²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ See Hayley, *Carleton’s Traits and Stories*, p. 44, pp. 65-66, p. 284.

²⁰⁸ Carleton, ‘Shane Fadh’s Wedding’, in *Traits and Stories*, I (1843), 76-77. Carleton’s emphasis. The first version of ‘Shane Fadh’s Wedding’ appeared in the 1830 edition of *Traits and Stories*, and was revised for subsequent editions. The version quoted here, although presenting the friar in a slightly less damaging light than the original version, carries the same message. See Hayley, *Carleton’s Traits and Stories*, pp. 43-46, pp. 65-67, pp. 284-86.

Looking for inspiration to the oral tradition with which he was familiar had enabled Carleton to utilise the comic strain within it. As the above examples indicate, it also allowed a more benign, although by no means uncritical, presentation of Catholicism to emerge. Through his repeated revising of the various editions of *Traits and Stories*, by the time the definitive 1842-44 version appeared, if it is not entirely true that, in the words of one notable historian, there ‘is not even a hint of a lapsed Catholic in his stories’, it is the case that a diligent search is required to uncover the evidence.²⁰⁹

As a number of his revisions to *Traits and Stories* indicate, Carleton was undoubtedly increasingly, if not consistently, careful not to offend either his Protestant or Catholic readerships. The transition from the sustained invective of his early years to a more humorous, and affectionate, representation of Catholicism was not an entirely comfortable one.

Over-fond of the bottle himself, it is perhaps not surprising that he presents excessive imbibing of alcohol by Catholic clergy as something to be exploited for comic effect, rather than to be exposed as a matter for serious criticism. It was, anyway, a matter of Church discipline rather than of organisational corruption. Furthermore, while Father Mathew’s temperance campaign of the late 1830s and early 1840s was to have a notable, if brief, impact on Irish attitudes to drink, the Catholic Church had already made strenuous efforts to ensure that her own clergy showed exemplary restraint; in the Diocese of Clogher, Bishop Murphy’s attempts to impose tighter discipline on his clergy had included an edict ordering his priests to abstain

²⁰⁹ Elliott, p. 284. Anti-Catholic elements can be found in several tales, but it is the final line of the autobiographical ‘The Lough Derg Pilgrim’ in the 1843-44 edition of *Traits and Stories*, retained from earlier versions of the tale, which indicates that the author has rejected the faith into which he was born. The tale ends with the narrator giving an account to his parish priest of his being robbed on the journey. The amused priest’s warning, that he should ‘beware the next time’, elicits a cryptic response. “‘There is no danger of that,’ said I, with peculiar emphasis.’ Carleton, ‘The Lough Derg Pilgrim’ (1843), p. 270.

from ‘those pernicious drinks, which are generally called spiritous’.²¹⁰ The celebrations described in Carleton’s story ‘Shane Fadh’s Wedding’ by the fictional narrator, Shane Fadh, now an old man, preceded such strictures. The friar present at the celebrations had become ‘a little nettled, for the dhrop was beginning to get up into his head’. He was eventually sent home with poultry in one pocket and whisky in the other, ‘so that his Reverence was well balanced anyhow’. While the parish priest, Father Corrigan, had the age and experience to remain ‘correct enough’, his curate, when ‘roused up’ in order to be sent on his way, ‘could hardly stir with a *heddick*’.²¹¹

The breaking of the vow of celibacy by the Catholic clergy, a less widespread problem than drunkenness, was, again, an issue of indiscipline, and consequently, not an issue which, even in his early anti-Catholic works, Carleton was prepared to exploit as the basis for an attack upon the Church. He was undoubtedly aware that it was a matter of concern for the Church. In the parish adjoining his home area, the troublesome Thomas Campbell had accused his own curate of having sexual relations with a parishioner.²¹² Sexual impropriety on the part of the Catholic clergy, or at least, allegations of sexual misconduct, if not widespread, were not unusual, and common enough to be mentioned in both fictional and non-fictional literature. The devoutly Catholic John Banim, in his novel *The Nowlans* (1826), addresses the problem of clergy celibacy. John Gamble, a Protestant commentator sympathetic to Catholicism, gives an account of a conversation with a priest, who, when questioned on the strains of a celibate life, acknowledged that as a student he had been ‘no saint’. Since that

²¹⁰ Clogher Diocesan Statutes no. 17, appended to Ó Dufaigh, 470.

²¹¹ Carleton, ‘Shane Fadh’s Wedding’ (1843), p. 77, p. 82. Despite modifications to the earlier editions of the tale resulting in the removal of passages showing the priesthood in an unflattering light, the final 1842 version continues to represent the lower Catholic clergy as being fond of the bottle. See Carleton, ‘Shane Fadh’s Wedding’ (1843), pp. 79-80, p. 82.

²¹² Campbell’s accusation was dismissed. See Letter from Dr. James Murphy to John Joseph Argenti, 30 November 1817, reproduced in Ó Dufaigh, ‘James Murphy’, 474. Keenan gives other examples of accusations of sexual impropriety made against Catholic clergy. See Keenan, pp. 67-68.

time, he maintained, he had been ‘neither fornicator nor adulterer’.²¹³ Carleton himself, in the final version of his tale ‘The Lianhan Shee’, mentions that ‘*Lianhan shee an Sogarth*’ was a term, then falling out of usage, used to describe a priest’s mistress.²¹⁴

That coyness was not a factor in Carleton’s disinclination to exploit sexual misconduct on the part of priests is evident from an examination of his work as a whole. Both his fictional and non-fictional writings demonstrate a remarkable directness about human sexuality. The conclusion of his comic tale ‘The Three Tasks’, in which Jack Magennis dreams of having won the hand of a beautiful lady, is, by the standards of the day, remarkably unrestrained. The wedding celebrations having reached the point of the ‘throwing of the stocking’, the indication that the union is about to be consummated, Jack is suitably enthusiastic. At which point, his mother, interpreting his ‘grunting, and groaning, and snifthering’ not as anticipatory delight but as pain, intrudes upon his bliss, and rouses him.²¹⁵ In his *Autobiography*, referring to the early days of his marriage, Carleton writes of ‘the force of that happiness’ felt ‘with such power, and fulness [sic], and enthusiastic tenderness’.²¹⁶ It is clear from the context that he is referring to the physical aspects of his relationship with his wife. Of his early days in Dublin, before his marriage, he describes having stayed at the premises of a circulating library, where ‘such a mass of obscenity and profligacy was [...] never put together’.²¹⁷ By his own cheerful admittance, he took full advantage of the unexpected bonus that these lodgings afforded him, and remarks:

²¹³ Gamble, pp. 91-92.

²¹⁴ Carleton, ‘The Lianhan Shee’, in *Traits and Stories*, II (1844), 96n.

²¹⁵ Carleton, ‘The Three Tasks’, in *Traits and Stories*, I (1843), 46-47.

²¹⁶ Carleton, *Autobiography*, p. 198.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 176-77.

‘It would be useless to attempt anything like a description of my enjoyment. I think I could not have read less than from twelve to sixteen hours a day.’²¹⁸

The breaking of the vow of celibacy, and excessive consumption of alcohol by Catholic clergy, then, were matters of peripheral interest to Carleton. His prime concerns were with broader issues of Catholic influence. ‘The Lianhan Shee’, a Gothic tale first published in the *Christian Examiner* in 1830, and later included in the various editions of *Traits and Stories*, contains Carleton’s only non-comic presentation of clergy sexuality.²¹⁹ An errant priest, Father Philip O’Dallaghy, suspended after breaking his vow of celibacy, is tormented by guilt and self-disgust, feelings reinforced by his having resorted to providing ‘miraculous’ cures to a gullible peasantry in order to survive. The reappearance of the woman he seduced, now mentally deranged, and wrongly believed in the neighbourhood to be host to a feared fairy presence, a *lianhan shee*, precipitates in him a mental crisis. He ultimately seeks purification, and oblivion, through self-immolation.

As its several explanatory footnotes indicate, the story is as much as an account of the hold of superstition on the peasantry as a tale of the dire psychological and spiritual consequences of sinful behaviour. When the parish priest, recognising that his flock’s fears of the woman have no logical basis, refuses to take any action concerning her, this is interpreted by the parishioners as his having ‘showed the white feather’.²²⁰ Unlike Carleton’s earlier writings for Caesar Otway, this tale shows no obvious anti-Catholic bias. Father Moyle, the fictional priest of ‘Death of a Devotee’ and its sequel ‘The Priest’s Funeral’, had rejected Catholicism in order to embrace true religion, in the form of the Established Church. In this story, Catholicism and

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 176.

²¹⁹ The tale appeared in *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry*, 2nd Series, 3 vols (Dublin: Wakeman, 1833), II, and was revised for subsequent editions.

²²⁰ Carleton, ‘The Lianhan Shee’ (1844), p. 86.

Christianity are presented as synonymous; the rejection of the one is a rejection of the other. For Father Philip, the empiricist and humanist philosophy of Voltaire, which he has reluctantly embraced, is an arid substitute for the religion he has abandoned.

Would *I* have plunged into scepticism had I not first violated the moral sanctions of religion? Never. [...] Religion! Christianity! With the hardness of an infidel's heart I feel your truth. [...] Yet why can I not believe? – Alas! why should God accept an unrepentant heart? Am I not a hypocrite, mocking him by a guilty pretension to his power, and leading the dark into thicker darkness? [...] Swim, world – swim about me! I have lost the ways of Providence, and am dark!²²¹

'The Lianhan Shee' apart, Carleton's fictional references to the sexual conduct of the Catholic clergy are affectionate, or comic. In 'Shane Fadh's Wedding', the priest's celibate vocation places him above suspicion; his attentions, not entirely welcome, to the pretty young bride and her bridesmaid are those of a man enjoying the privileges accorded partly by age, but also by his inviolable status within the community.²²² Carleton's most enthusiastic, and mischievous, treatment appeared in the second, 1833, version of 'Denis O'Shaughnessy Going to Maynooth', but was removed from all later editions. Part of a monologue delivered by Denis at the instigation of his father, who is keen to demonstrate his son's learning and erudition to a neighbour, it depicts Luther, well-primed with whisky, and musing on the benefits of the matrimony denied to him as one in holy orders, being engaged in a fireside conversation by the Devil, who has appeared in the guise of a monk.

Luther complains, at considerable length, about the hypocrisy of a Church which, although insisting that its clergy remain celibate, turns a blind eye to the flagrant disregard of their vow by bishops and cardinals.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.

²²² Carleton, 'Shane Fadh's Wedding' (1843), pp. 78-79.

They won't allow us inferior clergy to take wives to ourselves, though they're not ashamed to carry comforters about their necks in the open face of day. A poor clerical now can't afford to be licentious, for want o' money.

Warming to his theme he continues,

You know as well as I do, that profligacy at present is at an extravagant price. The rich can afford to buy themselves dispensations for a month's or three months' licentiousness, or from a year's to seven years' indulgence, or seven hundred years for that matter, if they lay down the cash; but wid us it's different: we can't afford to purchase the right to sin an' threspas, yet we won't be allowed to marry.²²³

His companion suggests a solution to the reluctant celibate. With 'Harry the Aighth goin' to put away his wife, an' to take another in her place', and in dispute with the Pope, they have a prospective ally, and the opportunity to create the Protestant Church, and so resolve Luther's difficulties. 'Broach the subject now, Luther, an' he's the boy will support it.'²²⁴

It is possible, as Wolff suggests, that the anecdote was omitted from later editions because the depiction of Luther in league with the Devil, with the English Crown willingly lending support, would be offensive to Protestants.²²⁵ It is far more likely, though, that his main concern was that Denis's catalogue of clergy corruption, despite its historical, or quasi-historical context, and despite its comic nature, would offend his Catholic readership. Even Denis's blithe assurances to his concerned audience that Luther's complaints were entirely unfounded serve to reinforce, rather than refute, an impression of pervasive, and continuing, ecclesiastical corruption. By including the single word 'then' in the first line of Denis's defence of Catholicism,

²²³ William Carleton, 'Denis O'Shaughnessy Going to Maynooth', in *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry*, 2nd series, 3 vols (Dublin and London: W. F. Wakeman, Simpkin and Marshall and R. Groombridge, 1833), III, 26-27.

²²⁴ Carleton, 'Denis O'Shaughnessy' (1833), p. 28.

²²⁵ Wolff, p. 50.

Carleton indicates Denis's tacit, possibly unconscious and certainly uncritical acknowledgement of the failures of contemporary Catholicism.

There was no such thing as tyranny, or persecution, or overgrown wealth in the Church then, at all. No man ud be punished for not thinkin' or spakin' accordin' as the Church commanded. The clergy were as mild as lambs, an' didn't lord it over or trample upon the people, good or bad. If a washerwoman was to summon a bishop for his quarther's washin', he'd attend like any other man, an' pay down the money, if he had it, [...] so that Luther, the dirty vagrant, had no grounds for makin' such a schism in the Church as he did.²²⁶

A major factor underlying Carleton's attacks on the Catholic clergy, even before widespread social unrest of the early 1830s, is his detestation of violent action. He deplored the involvement, either direct or indirect, of religious leaders in agitation, and considered the hold of the Catholic Church over an uneducated, or under-educated peasantry to be a significant factor in promoting unrest. It is not surprising, then to find him attacking John MacHale.

An unattributed work of Carleton's, entitled 'The Autobiography of the of the Rev. Blackthorn M'Flail, Late P.P. of Balleywhackem', which appeared in three parts in the *Dublin University Magazine* between January and October 1837, was clearly intended as a satirical attack upon MacHale, since 1834 the Catholic Archbishop of Tuam. MacHale, the first Irish bishop to be educated solely in his home country, had begun his career as lecturer in dogmatic theology at Maynooth, and had rapidly become a controversial figure. His adeptness in challenging not only British rule but also the more conciliatory voices within his own Church, his support of Daniel O'Connell, and his preparedness to condone violent insurrection in the pursuance of the nationalist cause, found no favour with one as instinctively conservative as Carleton. The sensitivities of his Catholic following, or, more precisely, John

²²⁶ Carleton, 'Denis O'Shaughnessy' (1833), p. 29.

MacHale's following (Carleton was, anyway, writing this sketch for a strongly pro-Ascendancy publication) were less a concern to him than the need, as he saw it, to attack one whom he regarded as a dangerously destabilising influence on Irish social and political life. The sketch, never republished, remained uncompleted; the final line of the third, and concluding part, spoken by the fictional narrator, M'Flail's cousin the Rev. Phelim M'Fun, 'Gentle reader, ever irregularly thine', suggests that Carleton recognised its unsatisfactory nature and abandoned it.²²⁷

That the sketch is described in the title as an 'autobiography' when it is in fact a fictional biography can only be intended to suggest the ignorance of those Catholic clergy, who, like MacHale, were products of the Irish seminaries. M'Flail is depicted as a man whose 'last glass was run', the 'hydrophobia' with which he had long been afflicted, no longer troubling him.²²⁸ Now on his deathbed and attended by his clerical cousin, M'Flail expresses his hopes for the future of his country under the capable watch of 'the Earl of Mulligrub', easily identifiable as the Earl of Mulgrave, Constantine Henry Phipps. Lord Lieutenant of Ireland since 1835, Mulgrave's tolerant attitude towards O'Connell did not, it seems, endear him to Carleton. M'Flail observes:

Our party is predominant; Orangeism is in the dust, and we live under the benign government of our warm friend the Earl of Mulligrub, one of the most Viceregal governors that ever our unhappy country *seen*. [...] Let him obey Dan, as he has done, and allow us – the clergy of the people – to keep dictating to him, as heretofore.²²⁹

The sketch fails on several counts. The opening is scurrilous rather than satirical, and any attempt at satire is rapidly abandoned to an account of M'Flail's lowly social origins and family history. The tale progresses no further than the

²²⁷ Carleton, 'Autobiography of the Rev. Blackthorn M'Flail', *Dublin University Magazine*, 10 (July-December 1837), 409-29 (p. 429).

²²⁸ It is no doubt significant that MacHale's father, a farmer, was also an innkeeper.

²²⁹ Carleton, 'Blackthorn M'Flail', *Dublin University Magazine*, 9 (January-June 1837), 20-32 (p. 21).

baptism of the prospective priest, by which time the fictional narrator is merely a nominal presence, his voice having been succeeded by Carleton's own, often didactic tones.

Carleton's emphasis on his fictional subject's somewhat disreputable peasant background serves to suggest his character's unsuitability for a career in the church, and by implication, MacHale's also. Given that Carleton's background was not dissimilar to MacHale's, and given that he had wished to follow a similar path himself, that he should resort to using such biographical facts as literary ammunition seems somewhat inappropriate. To give Carleton credit, though, it is probably the case that this material was of less importance as a means of attack than as a means of exercising his natural wit in the area in which he excelled: the presentation of the peasantry. And in parts, the sketch is highly comic. Describing the preparations for the christening celebrations for the young M'Flail, Carleton turns to the scene of indiscriminate slaughter created by the infant's father, that 'Appolyon of the poultry – the Attila of the farm-yard', who, on completing his task, 'after wiping his scythe [...] went in amidst the loud mirth of the servants, murdering the tune of "push about the jorum," in addition to the other murders he had already committed'.²³⁰

At this point humour is abruptly curtailed. Observing that 'Mirth and murder are more nearly related with us than in any other country under the sun',²³¹ Carleton resumes his attack with an assault on the Catholic clergy that has marked similarities to that of his memorandum to Peel a decade previously.

The Roman Catholic peasantry of Ireland actually possess less of freedom at this moment than they did before the concession of Emancipation. They are now the trampled and goaded slaves of priests and agitators, and ere long will feel in the grinding spirit of oppression, what that 'Domestic Tyranny' is, into whose clutches the

²³⁰ Ibid., 386-99 (pp. 490-91).

²³¹ Ibid., 491.

concessions of the British legislature have unwittingly consigned them. [...] There is no such domineering aristocrat as your Catholic priest, no such insolent and vulgar tyrant as your agitator, and no such corrupt and prostitute place-hunter as your patriot of the people.²³²

A decade later, in his novel *The Emigrants of Ahadarra*, he is equally forthright, but rather more inclusive in his condemnation. Although written at the time of the famine, the book addresses conditions of the 1820s, and is a protest against the negligence of the land-owning classes and the Irish land-letting system, and against an English government indifferent to social conditions in Ireland. Although urging the investigation of the conditions that foster unrest, Carleton is at pains to stress that to acknowledge the existence of those circumstances is not to condone violence. By now extremely careful to avoid being regarded as anti-Catholic, in his preface to the book, dated 13 December 1847, he writes:

The moment a priest of any church desecrates the altar or the pulpit by political harangues, or denounces individuals for political offences, that moment he should be held responsible for the immoral abuse of his office and position, and the outrages or darker crimes that such abuse may occasion. There has been, and there is, too much of this unjustifiable assumption of perverted authority on all hands in our unhappy country, to the disgrace of true religion and her mild and soothing influences.²³³

This preparedness to condemn both Protestant and Catholic churches when apportioning blame for unethical practices is not new. His preface to the *Tales of Ireland* of 1834, the volume which contained 'Death of a Devotee', is equally inclusive in its condemnation. That his previous novel, *Valentine M'Clutchy*, had been favourably received by Catholics was no doubt also an incentive to adopt an even-handed approach; Carleton would not have wished to squander the goodwill, so

²³² Ibid.

²³³ William Carleton, *The Emigrants of Ahadarra: A Tale of Irish Life* (London: Simms and M'Intyre, 1848), p. vi.

long denied him, of his Catholic compatriots. In the text of *The Emigrants of Ahadarra* itself, while denouncing those Catholic clergy who perpetuate violence, he stresses that such individuals do not represent the whole priesthood. Having condemned the practice of denouncing from the Catholic pulpit any individual regarded as politically and therefore religiously disloyal, he concedes that those involved in violence are a minority.

We are bound to say [...] that none among the priesthood encourage or take a part in them [violent acts], unless those low and bigoted firebrands who are alike remarkable for vulgarity and ignorance, and who are perpetually inflamed by that meddling spirit which tempts them from the quiet path of duty into scenes of political strife and enmity, in which they seem to be peculiarly at home. Such scenes are repulsive to the educated priest, and to all who, from superior minds and information, are perfectly aware that no earthly or other good, but, on the contrary, much bitterness, strife, and evil, ever result from them.²³⁴

The distinction drawn between the ‘educated’ and the ‘low and bigoted’ Catholic clergy is not confined to polemic. The tensions that frequently characterised relations between the older, Continental-educated priests and that new generation of clergy, the products of the recently established Irish seminaries, are sharply observed in the first two *Traits and Stories* tales.²³⁵ Peter McIlclatchagan, the curate accompanying Father Ned Deleery, is one of that group of fictional, or semi-fictional characters whose fireside story-telling sessions compose the first five *Traits and Stories* tales.²³⁶ The curate is a product of Maynooth, and a man whose intellectual understanding is in inverse proportion to both his impregnable self-confidence and his

²³⁴ Carleton, *Emigrants of Ahadarra*, p. 225. That Carleton had long recognised that not all clergy, particularly the older, Continent-educated priests, were less likely to be involved in violence is apparent from the fact that his fictional narrator of ‘Wildgoose Lodge’ in an observation included in all editions, observes that the parish priest, ‘an excellent and amiable old man’, is unaware of the violence being organised in his chapel. See Carleton, ‘Wildgoose Lodge’, in *Traits and Stories*, II (1844), 352.

²³⁵ Even John MacHale was prompted to complain about the attitudes of some of the younger clergy. See Bowen, *The Protestant Crusade*, p. 14.

²³⁶ In the first tale, ‘Ned M’Keown’, Carleton makes it clear that his characters are based on actual villagers he knew as a youth. See Carleton, ‘Ned M’Keown’, in *Traits and Stories*, I (1843), 6n., 9n., 10n.

theological dogmatism. Whether his debt to Maynooth, an institution commonly believed to be a hotbed of Hibernian nationalism, includes a preoccupation with insurrection, is unclear. It is apparent, though, that the word ‘plot’, for him, only exists within the context of insurrection. When the parish priest, impatient that Father Peter’s repeated interjections are hampering the progress of the tale being recounted, asks him to ‘let us come to the plot without interruption’, that is, to allow the tale to continue, Peter’s response is one of astonishment. ‘Plot! I’m sure it’s no rebellion that there should be a plot in it, any way!’²³⁷

Like that other Maynooth graduate, Anthony Trollope’s ‘violent politician’, the curate Father Cullan of Trollope’s *The MacDermots of Ballycloran*, Peter M’Illclatchagan is a man of limited intellect, little breadth of knowledge, and a marked rigidity of outlook, whose character contrasts markedly to that of the parish priest with whom he serves.²³⁸ M’Illclatchagan’s physical appearance, like Cullan’s, is correspondent with his mental abilities. Automaton-like, he was ‘a tall, raw-boned young man, with high jutting cheekbones, low forehead, and close knees: to his shoulders, which were very high, hung a pair of long bony arms, whose motions seemed rather the effect of machinery than volition’.²³⁹ Unaware of the limitations of both his natural capabilities and of his seminary training, he has an unassailable belief that his Latin, learned by rote, is superior to that of Father Ned, and is determined to demonstrate the fact. The exasperated priest responds with a barbed reproof.

Pether, you think you’re a scholar, and, to do you justice, you’re cute enough sometimes; but Pether, you didn’t travel for it as I did – nor

²³⁷ Carleton, ‘The Three Tasks’ (1843), p. 45.

²³⁸ Trollope describes Cullen as having had a ‘logical’ education, a consequence of which was that he could only conduct theological argument syllogistically. ‘If you could not answer him in syllogisms, he conceived that you must be, evidently to yourself, in the wrong, and obstinacy alone prevented you from owning it’. Anthony Trollope, *The MacDermots of Ballycloran* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 44-45. *MacDermots*, Trollope’s first novel, was first published in London by Thomas Newby in 1847.

²³⁹ Carleton, ‘Ned M’Keown’ (1843), p. 18.

were you obliged to lep out of a college windy in Paris, at the time of the French Revolution, for your larning, as I was: not you, man, you ate the king's mutton comfortably at home in Maynooth, instead of travelling for it, like your betters.²⁴⁰

Maynooth received its 'king's mutton', its funding, from the British government. While Father Peter's theoretical and often erroneous knowledge may well have extended to rebellion, Father Ned, with his wider experience and education, was familiar with the uncomfortable reality of violence.

It is never commented on that even in his early works Carleton's literary assaults on the clergy were not confined to those within the Catholic Church. Carleton had expressed reservations about Protestantism as early as 1834, in his preface to *Tales of Ireland*. In it, while directing his strongest criticisms at the involvement of Catholic priests in 'mercenary agitation', and at the Catholic Church for its refusal to 'appeal to the Scriptures and to reason', he also acknowledges, somewhat wryly, the failings of other Christian professions.

All rash and hurried attempts at conversion, whether by priest or parson, I look upon as folly or dishonesty. It is strange, that in this view of the case I find many creeds and sects agree with me; but it is stranger still, that not withstanding this remarkable liberality, I never knew one of them, no matter of what denomination, who would not go to any length to gain a proselyte. The only type of conversion creditable to the convert, or to the creed he joins, is that which is spontaneous – all others should be looked upon with suspicion.²⁴¹

This observation can be interpreted, in part at least, as an oblique allusion to his own defection from Catholicism. By presenting himself as an impartial observer of New Reformation struggles between the churches in Ireland, the circumstances of his own conversion, he implies, cannot be called into question; his decision was made freely, and not as a response to inducements. But to regard his statement as no more

²⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 19.

²⁴¹ Carleton, *Tales of Ireland*, p. xi-xii.

than a self-defensive precursor to an attack on Catholicism would be to do Carleton an injustice. *Tales of Ireland*, which contained the tales 'The Death of a Devotee' and 'The Priest's Funeral', was after all, a book that had considerably more appeal for a Protestant than for a Catholic readership. This statement is also a genuine expression of opinion, intended, primarily, as a salutary reminder to non-Catholics that in the battle for souls it was not only the Church of Rome which was prepared to engage in dubious practice.

It was not until 1845, following the publication by James Duffy of *Valentine M'Clutchy*, that Carleton's criticisms of Protestantism, first expressed, if somewhat cautiously, a decade previously, attracted public and critical attention. *Valentine M'Clutchy* initially intended for serialisation in the *Nation*, in the event made its first appearance in three-volume form, under the imprint, and imprimatur, of the Catholic firm James Duffy, which had close connections with that magazine. The *Nation's* editor, Charles Gavan Duffy, recognising the potential significance of what was to prove a highly ambitious work, considered that its publication as a book, rather than in instalments, would maximise its impact. The novel is organised around a theme common to Irish literature of the first half of the nineteenth century, that of absenteeism and the iniquities resulting from Ascendancy neglect of duty towards the Irish populace. As the lengthy reference to Solomon M'Slime in the book's title indicates, it is also an attack on religious hypocrisy and corruption, in this case within the Church of Ireland. Valentine M'Clutchy, a 'furious Orangeman',²⁴² contrives to obtain the position of agent of the absentee Lord Cumber's estate. His unscrupulous management of Cumber's affairs and his malevolence towards those tenants who cross him, are ultimately exposed by Cumber's brother, visiting under an assumed

²⁴² William Carleton, *Valentine M'Clutchy*, p. 85.

name. Whereas M'Clutchy and M'Slime, the New Reformation enthusiast who gives legal sanction to the agent's dubious dealings, together represent the worst aspects of secular Protestantism, the Church of Ireland rector Phineas Lucre provides an exemplification of neglect and bad practice within the Established Church itself.

The widely held view that *Valentine M'Clutchy* marked a turning point in Carleton's literary career, evidence of an expedient change to a pro-Catholic and anti-Protestant stance, is, as his observation in the *Tales of Ireland* preface indicates, an over-simplification of the truth. While Carleton must have calculated that the anti-Orange sentiments in as significant a work as *Valentine M'Clutchy* would improve his standing amongst Irish Catholics, he undoubtedly recognised too that it would enhance his reputation within the not inconsiderable liberal ranks of the Established Church itself. The work would certainly serve to increase his kudos as a national writer. Now more confident of his status after the success of his *Traits and Stories*, Carleton was not so much presenting himself as a champion of Catholic Ireland as adopting the role of impartial commentator. He has come, he says, 'to the determination, as every honest Irishman ought, of knowing no party but my country, and of devoting such talents as God has given me, to the promotion of her general interests, and the happiness of her whole people'.²⁴³ Having in the past attacked the abuses within Catholicism, and with Catholic Emancipation, which he had opposed, now an historical fact, he was now prepared to redress the balance, and acknowledge past wrongs perpetrated in the name of Protestantism. Religious inclusivity, after all, had to be correspondent with cultural inclusivity.

This is not to suggest that the views he expressed were insincere. His stance, though, certainly lays him open to criticism. Melissa Fegan has pointed out that to

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. xii.

see Carleton simply as a pen for hire, a man prepared to accommodate his conscience to whichever party was paying him at the time, is to ignore the complexities of his situation. Other writers of that period readily and regularly crossed such boundaries, but avoided castigation; it was not Carleton's willingness to write for all shades of opinion (many of his works anyway were politically and doctrinally neutral), but his defection from Catholicism two decades previously which made him particularly vulnerable to attack. And, as Fegan points out, by the 1840s there was considerable 'ecumenical enthusiasm' for Carleton.²⁴⁴ That support for his application for a government pension came from both sides of the religious divide indicates, at the very least, that within the more educated sections of Catholic society, any reservations about his shifts of allegiance were more than outweighed by the appreciation of his contribution to Ireland's cultural reputation.

However, it was those less sympathetic critics who preoccupied Carleton. His preface to the 1847 edition of *Valentine M'Clutchy*, dated November 1846, was written, as he makes clear, to counter misrepresentation 'by bigoted or venal pens', from which it can be deduced that criticism was already widespread following the book's appearance almost two years previously.²⁴⁵ It seems too, that he was uneasy about the relevance of his subject matter. His plot was set in the Ulster of forty years earlier, in 1804. In the time of which he wrote, the Church of Ireland was, he says, 'a sordid corporation', pervaded by 'a gross secular spirit' and 'replete with political hatred and religious rancour'. Indeed, he writes, in Ascendancy circles of that time, 'all that was necessary to constitute a good Protestant was "to hate the Pope"'.²⁴⁶ As one not only born a Catholic 'in one of the most Orange counties in Ireland' but also

²⁴⁴ Melissa Fegan, *Literature and the Irish Famine, 1845-1919* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), pp. 132-34.

²⁴⁵ Carleton, *Valentine M'Clutchy*, pp. ix-x.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 116-17.

having first-hand experience of Orange harassment, he can justifiably claim that his depictions of such injustice have the stamp of historical authenticity. Nevertheless, he feels obliged to offer a further defence of his text. His book, although an account of Ulster life four decades previously, has relevance to contemporary society. It stands as a salutary lesson both to landlords and agents and to ‘the violent and bigoted Conservative, [...] the man who *still* inherits the Orange sentiments of past times’.²⁴⁷ Although sectarian tensions were never to disappear from Ulster society, by the 1840s serious governmental attempts to suppress Orange control of the yeomanry had ensured that parties such as that which had once threatened the Carleton family were no longer free to intimidate the Catholic populace with impunity.

One way in which Carleton could ensure that his book did have contemporary relevance, as well as an entertaining plot line, was to engage with that other controversial aspect of Protestantism, the ‘Second Reformation’. Although attempts to convert Catholic Ireland had begun in the early years of the century, in the period in which *Valentine M’Clutchy* is set, it was considerably later, after 1822, that the ‘Second Reformation’ can be said to have properly commenced. In that year, Magee, the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin, declared the superiority of the Established Church over both the Catholic and the non-episcopal Churches, an act which served to reinforce the growing hostility between the two episcopal Churches.

As Carleton acknowledged, some aspects of the ‘Modern Reformation’, as depicted in *Valentine M’Clutchy*, were anachronistic.²⁴⁸ Polemical religious debating sessions of the type that took place at the Sessions House of Castle Cumber were engaging public mind in the late 1820s, not in the first years of the nineteenth

²⁴⁷ Ibid., p. x, p. xi. Carleton’s emphasis. See also Carleton, *Autobiography*, pp. 37-40.

²⁴⁸ Carleton, *Valentine M’Clutchy*, p. xi.

century.²⁴⁹ That the fictional contests referred to in Carleton's novel were indeed polemical can be inferred from the names of the participants; the Reverends Christopher Gammon, Vesuvius M'Slug ('who's powerful against Popery'), Bernard Brimstone, and Phineas Lucre, for the Church of Ireland, and opposing them, the Reverend Fathers M'Stake, O'Flary, M'Fire, and the Rev. Nicholas O'Scorch.²⁵⁰ Carleton's depiction of the proselytising efforts of Lucre and his friends, conducted against a background of severe economic hardship, indicates that Carleton took his inspiration, not from circumstances prevalent in the first decade of the century, but from those of the early 1830s. The repercussions of the campaigns of the previous decade were still in evidence at the time Carleton was writing *Valentine M'Clutchy*. Protestant advances, conducted at a time of severe hardship, such as those that resulted in the establishment of protective colonies for converts in the impoverished west of Ireland in the 1830s, were a continuing source of Catholic resentment at the time when Carleton was writing this novel.²⁵¹ As his own experience indicates, it was popularly supposed by Catholics that, given the unquestionable superiority of their own Church, any readiness on the part of its members to convert could only be for material gain.

It was during that period of aggressive proselytising that Carleton had first expressed his contempt for such practices, and had dismissed as worthless the resulting conversions. His argument was made more forcefully now. His text indicates, though, that he had some sympathy for those who, *in extremis*, were

²⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 393-96.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 138.

²⁵¹ Protestant colonies were established on Lord Ventry's estate near Dingle, and on Achill Island.

prepared to offer themselves as brands ‘to be plucked from the burning’.²⁵² Carleton, always prepared to differentiate between peasant types and ranks, observes that converts, or prospective converts, are of three sorts: ‘the profligate and unprincipled’, ‘the simple and honest poor’, and those that constitute ‘a set of thorough Irish wags, who looked upon the whole thing as an excellent joke’.²⁵³

A rumour that Phineas Lucre will pay five guineas to every convert to the Church of Ireland produces considerable local interest, and a long queue at Lucre’s door. Lucre, being ‘about two thirds of the Tory and High Churchman, and one of the Evangelical’,²⁵⁴ is an enthusiast for the type of dubious conversion which Carleton abhorred. In a vignette which is both comic and moving Carleton indicates his personal disquiet, not only at the lack of any moral and religious underpinning for the proselytising methods employed, but also at the humiliation suffered by those driven by need to succumb. One man, offering himself and his wife, is willing, in his desperation, to negotiate a price for his children. ‘The crather on the breast, your reverence, we’d throw in as a luck penny, or *dhuragh*, and little Paddy we’d give at half price.’²⁵⁵ The rumour, and consequently the supplicant’s hopes of immediate relief, is unfounded. There are no financial incentives to convert; any material aid will only be forthcoming when there is evidence of continued commitment to Protestantism on the part of the convert.

Cummin’s face lengthened visibly at such an intimation which threw him so far from his expectations; [...] He looked at Mr. Lucre again as significantly as he could – gave his head a scratch of remonstrance – shrugged himself as before – rubbed his elbow – turned round his hat slowly, examined its shape, and gave it a smarter set, after which he gave a dry hem, and prepared to speak.

²⁵² Carleton’s summary of chapter 12 of *Valentine M’Clutchy* includes the description ‘A few Brands offer themselves to be Plucked from the Burning – Their Qualifications for Conversion, as stated by themselves’.

²⁵³ Carleton, *Valentine M’Clutchy*, p. 180.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

‘I’ll hear nothing further on the subject’, said the other; ‘withdraw.’²⁵⁶

Disappointed, Cummins starts for home, with nothing to present to his starving family.

Another, more forceful individual, offers his family of seven for baptism (‘maybe it ‘ud be plaisin’ to you to stand godfather for me yourself, your reverence’), and his pugilistic skills for the service of the Protestant cause; he would be, he says, ‘dam useful in fairs and markets to help the Orangemen to lick ourselves, your honour, in a skirmmage or party fight, or any thing o’ that kidney’.²⁵⁷

Darby O’Drive, who can be counted as one of those converts described as ‘unprincipled’ by Carleton, has an equally confused sense of loyalty. Darby, who in conversation with Solomon M’Slime, has voiced the view that the prospects for his immortal soul would be improved by the acquiring of a second religion to complement the first, is primarily concerned for those of his interests that lie on this side of the grave. A change of loyalty will, he believes, considerably improve his chance of acquiring the post of under-gaoler at Castle Cumber.²⁵⁸ In a confrontation on the public highway between himself and Bob Beatty, who has also traversed the religious divide, but in the opposite direction, theological boundaries are crossed, and re-crossed, by both parties. Bob, until recently a passionate Orangeman, according to local hearsay, had been cured of epilepsy by the parish priest. This event was held to account for his abrupt transference of zealous allegiance to the Catholic Church. Now, in the heat of argument, the two protagonists, ‘in the bitterness of their hatred, were beginning to forget the new characters they had to support, and to glide back unconsciously, or, we should rather say, by the force of conscience, to their original

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 199.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 200.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 161, p. 196.

creeds'.²⁵⁹ Their verbal dispute rapidly becomes a physical one, with workers from the adjoining fields lending enthusiastic, and pugnacious, support to the proceedings.

The Catholics, ignorant of the turn which the controversy had taken, supported Bob, and Protestantism; whilst the Protestants, owing to a similar mistake, fought like devils for Darby and the Pope.²⁶⁰

The intervention of womenfolk, and some less disputatious individuals of their own sex, results in a semblance of peace.

If the weapons of warfare ceased, however, so did not their tongues; there was abundance of rustic controversy exchanged between them [...]. The fact of the two parties too, that came to their assistance, having mistaken the proper grounds of the quarrel, reduced Darby and Bob to the necessity of retracing their steps, and hoisting once more their true colours, otherwise their respective friends, had they discovered the blunder they had committed, would, unquestionably, have fought the battle a second time on its proper merits.²⁶¹

Valentine M'Clutchy is a political work, not only in content, but also in intent. As Carleton is at pains to point out in his preface, the Established Church had undergone reform since the period in which *Valentine M'Clutchy* was set. The first decades of the nineteenth century may have been a time of increasingly aggressive evangelising, but they also constituted a period in which serious attempts were made by the Church of Ireland to remove abuses and to ensure that clergy shouldered their pastoral responsibilities. As Carleton states, by the time *Valentine M'Clutchy* was written, the Established Church had taken considerable steps to put its house in order. It was, of course, in his own interests to draw this fact to the attention of his readership. The Church of Ireland was, after all, the Church to which he now owed allegiance.

His early resentments having abated, Carleton's views, with time, had become more reasoned. In a scene which, in content if not in style, has similarities to

²⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 211.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 211-12.

depictions of the religious struggles for the souls of the dying in his earlier anti-Catholic tales 'Death of a Devotee' and 'The Priest's Funeral', Carleton both redresses the religious balance in favour of Catholicism and indicates the broad nature of his own religious understanding. In chapter 26 of *Valentine M'Clutchy*, Catholic curate and Church of Ireland rector vie with each other to claim for their own church the soul of the dying Bob Beatty. About to meet his maker, Bob is obliged to endure the pressing ministrations of the fiercely enthusiastic Catholic curate Father Patrick M'Cabe and the Protestant rector, Phineas Lucre. A clergyman more preoccupied with the state of his table than with the spiritual health of his parishioners, Lucre is in this instance inclined to meet those obligations normally undertaken by his worthier curate more out of concern for the arithmetic of souls saved than out of concern for the dying. Bob's prevarications on the increasingly urgent matter of his religious commitment cease when the virtuous Catholic priest, Father James Roche,²⁶² makes his appearance. M'Cabe and Lucre, having for several hours held vigil, or, more precisely, guard, over their contested prize, find themselves redundant. Bob's doctrinal understanding may be tenuous, but he knows enough about the characters of his hopeful attendants to remain adamant that he will not die an adherent of either of the creeds they represent. 'I'll die a Christian', he announces. 'You're both any thing but what you ought to be; and if I was'nt [sic] on my death-bed, you'd hear more of it. Here is a Christian clergyman, and under his ministry I will die.'²⁶³

This conclusion leaves Carleton with an awkward authorial problem. If Roche, a Catholic priest, ministers to Bob Beatty, it follows that the dying man receives the Catholic Church's final sacrament. Whatever Bob's protestations, the fact is that, technically at least, he remains securely within the Catholic fold. Such an

²⁶² Elsewhere Carleton refers to Roche as Francis Roche. See *Valentine M'Clutchy*, p. 104.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 392. Carleton's emphasis.

inconvenient, if logical, outcome would place Carleton's own continued affiliation to the Church of Ireland in a somewhat awkward light. But more importantly, it would undermine the point that Carleton is so determinedly making, that religion divorced from morality has no credibility. Accordingly, avoiding any mention of final unction, he merely observes that the priest 'prepared him for his great change, as became a pious and faithful minister of the gospel'.²⁶⁴

Roche's doctrinal affiliation, then, is of less significance than his embracing of Christian principles; the minister true to his faith is restricted to no particular religious profession. Notwithstanding his assault on Protestant Evangelicalism, Carleton is intent upon depicting an underlying moral equilibrium between the Established and Roman Churches. Religious differences, Carleton is maintaining, are not conveniently arranged along sectarian lines; Lucre's 'poor, overworn curate', the Reverend Clement, has far more in common with the 'pious and excellent Father Roche' than with his rector.²⁶⁵ The devotion of both men is expressed, not through competing for souls or through those vituperative exchanges which characterised evangelical efforts on both sides of the religious divide, but through their pastoral work within the parish. Attending to 'the calls of the sick, the poor, and the dying', and 'the varied phases of human misery that pressed upon their notice, [...] all in their opinion, and, in ours too, constituted a sufficiently ample code of duty'.²⁶⁶

Father Roche, Continent-educated and having held several posts abroad, including the presidency of an Irish College, is as markedly different in character and in demeanour to his own curate as is the Church of Ireland's Lucre to Clement. M'Cabe, despite his lack of refinement and explosive temperament, represents a considerably more benign face of religion than does Lucre. While Lucre is a man

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 393.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 169, p. 181.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

who devotes his time and energy to promoting his own interests within Ascendancy society, M'Cabe is a champion for a Church denied its rightful status within Irish society. M'Cabe may have had that regrettable priestly habit which Carleton deplored, of resorting to the use of the whip when religious argument failed, but the description of him as one whose 'vast strength, which had been much improved by a strong relish for athletic exercises, at which he was unrivalled', and as being of 'a naturally courageous and combative temperament', is so strongly suggestive of Carleton's account of his own youthful self as to indicate not only an enthusiasm for, but a close, if unconscious, identification with, his character.²⁶⁷

If Carleton's emotional affinity is with the Catholic curate, his reasoned opinions are those expressed through the words of the Reverend Clement. Clement, prompted to voice his moral reservations about the practice of aggressively seeking converts to Lucre, becomes the fictional mouthpiece for a lengthy authorial diatribe of the kind that skews most, if not all, of Carleton's longer narratives. Clement's observation that 'if Roman Catholic disabilities had been removed at the proper time, they would long since have been forgotten', suggests a startling *volte-face* by an author who eighteen years previously had offered his services to the home secretary in the cause of thwarting Catholic Emancipation. Carleton now transfers the burden of blame to British rule, and to the impact of those repressive penal laws which had become finally defunct as a result of the 1829 legislation which he himself had opposed. This change of heart, while undoubtedly expedient, and in part due to the influence of his Young Ireland friends, can also be partly accounted for, if not by a lessening of his well-developed sense of grievance, then certainly to a change in its focus. His resentment of the Catholic Church was a thing of the past, and had been

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 171-72, p. 178.

supplanted by annoyance at an English government which, through most of the 1840s, refused him the literary pension to which he believed he was entitled.

Having once attacked elements in the priesthood for furthering dissent, Carleton is now enjoining the Protestant clergy to look to the example of their Catholic brothers.

Let them find the best arguments for Protestantism in the lives of its ministers, and of all who profess it. Let the higher Protestant clergy move more among the humbler classes even of their own flocks – let them be found more frequently where the Roman Catholic priest always is – at the sick bed – in the house of mourning, of death, and of sin [...] – let them not draw their revenues from the pockets of a poor people who disclaim their faith, whilst they themselves denounce and revile that faith as a thing not to be tolerated.²⁶⁸

To Lucre's accusation that his views condemn him a 'liberal', Clement responds that he is a Christian. As such, he declares:

I cannot think that a Roman Catholic man sincerely worshipping God – even with many obvious errors in his forms, or with what we consider absurdities in his very creed – I cannot think [...] that such a man, worshipping the Almighty according to his knowledge, will be damned. To think so is precisely the doctrine of exclusive salvation, with which we charge Popery itself.²⁶⁹

Carleton, who was later to claim in his autobiography that as a Catholic youth he had found the doctrine unacceptable, is now attacking that same dogmatic certainty – albeit not explicitly declared – within an element of the Church of Ireland.

Acknowledging the virtues of the Catholic clergy while condemning the evangelical fundamentalism within the Established Church should not be taken as meaning that Carleton was giving wholehearted and uncritical support to the Catholic Church. Rather, he was asserting that complacency, and corruptibility, are not exclusive to a particular Church, and insisting that the certainties embedded in

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

doctrine are less important than those precepts derived from Scripture, sincerity in religious practise, and the compassionate response to human need.

Carleton was to make this last point equally emphatically, and more comically, in his novel set in the early 1830s, *The Tithe Proctor, a Novel; Being a Tale of the Tithe Rebellion in Ireland*, published three years later. Father Anthony Casey, a determined and outspoken opponent of the tithe system, is, despite his antagonism towards the Established Church, so moved by the plight of the local Church of Ireland clergyman that at dead of night he embarks on a surreptitious errand of neighbourly goodwill. Carrying a bag of oatmeal and a fitch of bacon to the family of this neighbour, made near-destitute by the withholding of tithes, he is disconcerted to encounter a local farmer, Con M'Mahon, an equally committed resister, who unknown to him, is on the same undeclared mission. Unable to outpace his unwelcome companion, the priest is ultimately obliged to resort to Jesuitical argument to explain the very obvious burden he carries, and justify his as yet undeclared intention of providing succour to the enemy.

'Hem – why, you know, Con, that we're commanded to love our enemies, and it was upon *this* ground that I always taught you to make a distinction, as I say, between the tithes and the parsons themselves. And, by the way, now, I don't know but it would be our duty,' he proceeded, 'to render the same parsons, now that they're suffering, as much good for evil as possible. It would be punishing the thieves by heaping, as the Scripture says, coals of fire upon their heads.'²⁷⁰

Thus encouraged, M'Mahon readily confesses his determination to inflict his own burden upon the suffering parson, in the form of the weighty bag of potatoes he is carrying.

By the mid-1840s Carleton himself has become, in Lucre's condemnatory description of his curate Clement, 'so far gone in latitudinarianism' as to remind his

²⁷⁰ William Carleton, *The Tithe Proctor* (London and Belfast: Simms and M'Intyre, 1849), p. 213.

readership of the New Testament message that devotion to God is most sincerely demonstrated through love of one's neighbour.²⁷¹ Once disinclined to express criticism of the Established Church, by the time he wrote *Valentine M'Clutchy* he was attacking 'a class of men', common to all religious denominations, 'whose passions in everything connected with religion and politics were intolerant and exclusive'.²⁷² In the 1820s he could himself have been counted as one of that class. Yet even in his early anti-Catholic works he had made the point he was to reiterate in *Valentine M'Clutchy*, that religious devotion and social obligation were indivisible. In 'Father Butler', the Jesuit who snares Butler for the priesthood had maintained that obedience was an imperative, 'the first mark of a Christian', while Butler, voicing the author's own view, had challenged this, suggesting that 'the laws of God' equate with 'the welfare of society'; no distinction should be made between 'a temporal and a spiritual duty'.²⁷³ It is significant that this early intimation of his later tolerance percolates through the otherwise fiercely didactic, anti-Catholic tenor of the story.

²⁷¹ Carleton, *Valentine M'Clutchy*, p. 186.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 117.

²⁷³ Carleton, 'Father Butler', pp. 73-75.

CHAPTER 4

MAKING IT NATIONAL: CARLETON AS *SENACHIE*

Having gained some notoriety attacking the Catholic clergy in the late 1820s, Carleton had gone on to establish himself as a sketch and tale writer (one might say *the* Irish sketch and tale writer) in the 1830s. Towards the end of that decade he also turned his hand to the novel. Writing into, and beyond, the 1840s, he entered upon a literary situation more complex than that encountered by those writers, John Banim and Gerald Griffin, whose status he regarded as comparable with his own.²⁷⁴ While both Banim and Griffin had been obliged to look to London rather than Dublin as a publishing base, Carleton was in a more fortunate position. The first appearance of Carleton's *Traits and Stories*, published by William Curry in the year after Catholic Emancipation was finally achieved, marked the beginning of a new, and all too brief season of literary optimism in Ireland. From the late 1820s, a new sense of national identity was emerging, and an interest in cultural and political affairs which extended beyond Ireland. And, as Hayley says, 'while looking outward the Irish wished to project themselves outward, to give expression to a personality of which they could be proud'.²⁷⁵

Carleton, then, was an early contributor to, and beneficiary of, that period of national confidence. The buoyant publishing trade gave him an advantage, denied to his literary predecessors, of being able to identify himself fully with Ireland, as an author who resided, and published, in his own country. The impact of the 1830 edition of *Traits and Stories*, and the impetus it gave to the Dublin publishing industry, was considerable. But both the mood, and the thriving book trade, had, by mid-century, been reversed by the psychological, social and economic impact of

²⁷⁴ Letter from William Carleton to Dr. Corry, 19 January 1863, reproduced in O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, 293.

²⁷⁵ Hayley, 'A Reading and Thinking Nation', p. 33.

famine. By that time, Banim (1798-1842) and Griffin (1803-1840) were both dead. The Great Hunger may have been a catalyst for social and economic changes already underway in Ireland, but its seemingly apocalyptic nature gave an added poignancy to Carleton's earlier sketches of peasant life. While it was to secure for him a position as a famine writer, it also saw his decline as a novelist. In a letter of 1863 Carleton wrote:

Banim and Griffin are gone, and I will soon follow them – *ultimus Romanorum*, and after that will come a lull, an obscurity of perhaps half a century, when a new condition of civil society and a new phase of manners and habits amongst the people – for this is a *transition* state – may introduce new fields and new tastes for other writers, for in this manner the cycles of literature and taste appear, hold their day, displace each other, and make room for others.²⁷⁶

As Carleton had repeatedly stated, he was living in a transitional period, and an extended one at that. The Irish language was in a 'transition state', a consequence of centuries of English domination. It was a process which had seen the gradual but inevitable replacement of the Irish language by the English; writing in 1842 Carleton observed that the use of Irish in his native area of Tyrone had declined markedly in the previous quarter-century.²⁷⁷

The shift from the Irish to the English language, and from a primarily oral tradition to a written one, was a transition about which Carleton was, if regretful, also ambivalent. After all, he was making a living, if not a not very successful one, writing in English. And although in 1839 he was emphatically defending his loyalty to Ireland – 'In that country has been published every line that has appeared from my pen, and in no publication beyond its green girdle have I ever written' – his statement

²⁷⁶ Letter from William Carleton to Dr. Corry, 19 January 1863, reproduced in O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, 293.

²⁷⁷ Carleton, *Traits and Stories*, I (1843), p. ii.

was disingenuous;²⁷⁸ the previous year he had been negotiating, unsuccessfully, to gain an entry to the London market with *Fardorougha the Miser*, and had offered to write for *Bentley's Miscellany*. A letter from Carleton to the London publisher Richard Bentley, widely ignored by critics, shows Carleton asking for an advance of seventy pounds for the book. Bentley had only offered fifty. Carleton offered an inducement, a sketch entitled 'Rickard the Rake' which, like *Fardorougha*, had appeared in the *Dublin University Magazine* the previous year. Having made the proposal, he continues:

I hope you will not hesitate to comply with the proposition. In short the advance of so small an amount as fifty pounds I could not accept – nor *will not* – and unless you come up with the seventy the negotiation is at an end – the truth is, I would listen to no such terms at all were it not that I am anxious to get into the London market – I know that I have the stuff in me and please God I will in the course of this winter produce three vols [sic] on Irish life that will at least neither *disgrace* nor *misrepresent* the country – as has been done by some of my countrymen not a thousand years ago.²⁷⁹

The tone may be characteristically high-handed, but the inducements offered to the publisher suggest financial desperation and a willingness to produce new material for an English publication; in a post-script Carleton also suggests he write a humorous piece for the recently launched and highly popular *Bentley's Miscellany*. (See Appendix I.i. for full text.)

Carleton believed that not only Ireland's future, but also his own career, and certainly his economic well-being, were dependent on close political and cultural links with England. Three years later, in 1842, he was trying to obtain from the

²⁷⁸ Carleton, promotional material for 'The Chronicles of Ballymacruiskeen', William Carleton, in *Fardorougha the Miser* (Dublin: William Curry, Jun., 1839; repr. New York and London: Garland, 1979), unpaginated.

²⁷⁹ Letter from William Carleton to Richard Bentley, 25 October 1838, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign Campus, Rare Books and Special Collections Library, Richard Bentley Collection. Carleton's emphasis. Carleton corresponded with Bentley again, in 1841, about the possibility of contributing to *Bentley's Miscellany*: see O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, 51-52.

British government the pension previously granted to the late John Banim.²⁸⁰ In 1841, before Banim's death, Carleton's close associate Caesar Otway had already written, anonymously, in the *Dublin University Magazine* that 'pensions have been bestowed upon others who have done not half as much for the people of Ireland as Carleton has done; he has been left to the proverbial "changes and chances" of a literary life'.²⁸¹

For Carleton, the figure that most obviously represented a fading Ireland was the ancient custodian of Irish culture and heritage, the *senachie* – the genealogist, the professional recorder of family and traditional history – with whom he strongly identified. Carleton, coming as he did from an Irish-speaking peasant community, still had a firm foothold in the past. His success as a writer, or at least his own idea of success, necessitated a re-engagement with that past to establish some degree of cultural continuity. His shift from the sketch and the tale to the weightier (literally and figuratively) full-length work can be interpreted as an attempt to recover the elevated status of the ancient *senachie* through the contemporary medium of the realist novel.

In his sketch, 'Tom Gressiey, the Irish Senachie', Carleton's affectionate portrayal of the *senachie* of his youth is doubly regretful. The true, original *senachie*, a product of an Irish cultural confidence long in decline, was long gone. The English political and cultural hegemony which brought about the reduction in fortunes of the old Catholic landowning elite saw a parallel decline in the status of 'the herald and historian of individual families, the faithful genealogist of his long-descended

²⁸⁰ See O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, 58-59.

²⁸¹ Caesar Otway, 'Our Portrait Gallery', No. 15: 'William Carleton, author of *Fardorougha the Miser*, etc.', *Dublin University Magazine*, 17 (January-June 1841), 66-72 (p. 72).

patron'.²⁸² And by this time too, the written word, and the English language, had so marginalized the storyteller's art that his debased successor was also a fading figure of the past.

Neither the transition state of society [...] nor the scanty diffusion of knowledge among the Irish, allowed the Senachie to produce any permanent impression upon the people; and the consequence was, that as the changes in society hurried on, he and his audience were carried along with them; his traditionary lore was lost in the ignorance which ever arises when a ban has been placed upon education; and from the recital of the high deeds and heroic feats of by-gone days, he sank down into the humble chronicler of hoary legends and dim traditions, for such only has he been within the memory of the oldest man living.²⁸³

Increasing education had removed 'many gross absurdities', but at a price.

The practical advantages of education and science, 'the hard creations of sterner but more salutary truths' were clear.²⁸⁴ Ignorance was damaging (and none felt more keenly on this matter or pronounced on its undesirable social consequences more than Carleton), but the passing of that peasant culture in which it was embedded was to be regretted. Ireland's great past was long gone, and the language of education, and of future progress, and of the work of Carleton himself, would be English. But whatever his expressed regrets for the idealised, distant past, and whatever his own ambitions, Carleton's emotional attachment was to the peopled landscape of his childhood, and to the storyteller of his own early days, 'the dim and diminished reflection of him who filled a distinct calling in a period that has long gone by'.²⁸⁵

²⁸² William Carleton, 'Tom Gressiey the Irish Senachie', in *Tales and Sketches Illustrating the Character, Usages, Traditions, Sports and Pastimes of the Irish Peasantry* (Dublin: James Duffy, 1851), p.178. *Tales and Sketches* was first published by James Duffy in 1845, and then in an illustrated edition in 1846. Several of the works included had made their first appearance in the short-lived *Irish Penny Journal* (1840-41).

²⁸³ Carleton, 'Tom Gressiey', p. 179.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

It was an attachment reinforced by family pride and by personal dependency. Carleton acknowledged a debt to the knowledge of his uneducated father, a man of simple faith and beliefs, and excellent powers of recall, who clearly had the attributes of the lowly *senachie* of his day. His knowledge of tales, legends and historical anecdotes, was unrivalled, and with ‘all kinds of charms, old ranns, or poems, old prophecies, religious superstitions, tales of pilgrims, miracles, and pilgrimages, anecdotes of blessed priests and friars, revelations from ghosts and fairies, was he thoroughly acquainted’. ‘And’, claimed Carleton, ‘so strongly were these impressed upon my mind, by frequent repetition on his part, and the indescribable delight they gave me on mine, that I have hardly ever since heard, during a tolerably enlarged intercourse with Irish society, both educated and uneducated – with the antiquary, the scholar, or the humble *senachie* – any single tradition, usage, or legend, that [...] was perfectly new to me or unheard before, in some similar or cognate dress’.²⁸⁶

Carleton, claiming a position, if not as *senachie*, then as one who was as intimately familiar with his world and with his repertoire, had written this in August, 1842, in his introduction to the definitive edition of *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry*. Thomas Davis, less averse to metaphor, was more explicit. Three years later, enthusiastically reviewing another collection, Carleton’s *Tales and Sketches, Illustrating the Character, Usages and Traditions, Sports and Pastimes*, for the *Nation*, Davis considered that Carleton’s familiarity with both the practical and, more importantly, emotional aspects of peasant life, and the vitality with which he transposed that knowledge to print, allowed him a unique claim. The debased *senachie* of Carleton’s childhood was for Davis no ‘dim and diminished reflection’ of

²⁸⁶ Carleton, *Traits and Stories*, I (1843), pp. viii-ix.

one who had had a higher calling. As represented by Carleton, he was a figure of supreme significance who invested the past with life.

In others of his works he [Carleton] has created ideal characters that give him a higher rank as a poet [...]; but here he is a genuine Seanachie, and brings you to dance and wake, to wedding and christening – makes you romp with girls, and race with the boys – tremble at the ghosts, and frolic with the fairies of the whole parish.²⁸⁷

Carleton refers to his own role, as mediator between the spoken and the written word, in one of the *Tales and Sketches*:

Those who peruse it [the tale] are not to imagine that I am gravely writing it in my study; but that, on the contrary [sic], they are sitting in the chimney-corner, at an Irish wake, and that some droll *Senachie*, his face lit up into an expression of broad farcical humour, is proceeding somewhat as follows: [...]²⁸⁸

That Carleton describes the *senachie* as an indispensable figure at the wake and the funeral, and that his duties at those events customarily included ‘repeating *ranns* [...] together with the *De profundis* or *Dies Irae* over the corpse’, seems, at first consideration at least, appropriate.²⁸⁹ But if Carleton found himself presiding at the death of an Irish oral tradition, his role was to be instrumental in giving it an afterlife. The shift from story telling to story writing was more than a means of preserving an Irish past. The transposing of an Irish-language public, oral art form to a literary one directed at the individual reader was, ultimately, to produce in Ireland a distinctively cadenced, if – ironically – frequently backward looking, Hiberno-English literature. Carleton, of course, did not, and could not, have the prescience to properly appreciate that future direction of Irish writing. He could, in 1842, opine that Ireland would ‘in a few years’ be producing ‘a native literature as lofty and generous, and beneficial to

²⁸⁷ Thomas Davis, ‘Habits and Character of the Peasantry’, p. 210.

²⁸⁸ William Carleton ‘Moll Roe’s Wedding; or, the Pudding Bewitched’, in *Tales and Sketches*, pp. 222-23. Carleton is not consistent in his italicising of the word ‘senachie’. Transcriptions given here are as in the original versions.

²⁸⁹ ‘Tom Gressiey’, p. 181.

herself, as any other country in the world can boast of'.²⁹⁰ That was his optimistic view, before he was confronted by own physical and literary decline, and before the social, economic and cultural disruption of the Famine forced him to a revision. Carleton had envisaged having a role in his country's present, and a directing hand to the future, rather than being effectively consigned to its past. As Barbara Hayley has detailed in her examination of the various editions of *Traits and Stories*, Carleton's intimate knowledge of the peasantry of his own Ulster locality was a foundation upon which he was able to create 'a voice of Ireland and for Ireland'.²⁹¹ Ulster, with its particular economic circumstances and relatively large Protestant population, was hardly representative of Ireland as a whole. Paradoxically, it is precisely because of this regionalism that Carleton is representative. For all the traditional readiness of Irish men to respond to economic pressures by taking to the road (a route taken, somewhat defiantly, by Carleton himself), the peasant way of life was – self evidently – one based on local loyalties and on an intimate attachment to the land. Carleton's gift was his ability to encompass the whole within the specific, and to create out of a regional identity a national representation.

By the time of Davis's laudatory essay on him in 1845, Carleton's reputation was well established, both in Ireland and in Great Britain. By 1833, the author of *Traits and Stories* was being acclaimed throughout England, Scotland and Ireland. Extracts from seventeen favourable reviews which had appeared in England, Scotland and Ireland were included in the first edition of *Traits and Stories* (Second Series), published by Wakeman. The *Glasgow Courier* rated the anonymous author with Maria Edgeworth, and the *Edinburgh Literary Gazette* and the *Sheffield Iris* both declared that neither Edgeworth, nor the Banims could surpass the power of his

²⁹⁰ Carleton, *Traits and Stories*, I (1843), vii.

²⁹¹ Hayley, *Carleton's Traits and Stories*, pp. 392-93.

writing. *Blackwood's Magazine* referred to the writer as 'a jewel', and the *New Monthly Magazine* announced: 'These animated sketches of Irish character bear the stamp of realities upon them – the visible parent of the authentic. The level narrative and dramatic scenes are equally effective, and bespeak the hand of a master alike observant and executive.'²⁹²

Carleton was not alone in presenting the peasantry to a reading public. The tales and anecdotes of such writers as Anna Maria Hall, the wife of an editor and journalist, and Sir Jonah Barrington, politician and judge, were told from the perspective of the outsider; the view was essentially that from the Big House. That was the case too with Maria Edgeworth's late eighteenth century account of gentry decadence and decline, *Castle Rackrent* (1800), despite the oblique slant given by its family retainer first-person narrator, Thady Quirk. The off-stage, or more precisely, off-page, manoeuvrings by Thady's ambitious and scheming son are outside the novel, and beyond the Big House. Edgeworth's skilful management of her plot means, of course, that she need not venture from that residence; restricted by her class and education, she *could* not.

The brothers John and Michael Banim, although closer to Carleton in background (their father was a Kilkenny farmer and small shopkeeper), were socially and educationally more elevated. So too was the Limerick writer Gerald Griffin. The writer whose circumstances were closest to Carleton's was the short story writer John Keegan, from Queen's County (now County Laois), who like Carleton, was a contributor to the *Nation*. If Carleton was a self-declared *son* of an Irish peasant, Keegan claimed to be 'an Irish peasant, born and reared in an Irish cabin, and

²⁹² Reviews preceding main text, in Carleton, *Traits and Stories*, 2nd Series (1833), I, 3 of 4 unpaginated pages.

educated in an Irish hedge-school'.²⁹³ But he was not an Irish speaker, declaring himself 'ashamed of my ignorance of that magnificent language', and so was distanced from an Irish cultural past in a way which Carleton was not.²⁹⁴ D. J. O'Donoghue, in his introductory memoir to a collection of Keegan's work, made clear his reservations about the author's ability. He nevertheless considered that his tales, as 'the work of a self-educated peasant, and especially of the Ireland of the past, [...] deserve to have their place in literature'.²⁹⁵ O'Donoghue's comments on Carleton's status, made in his introduction to the 1899 edition of *The Black Prophet*, are rather more generous. Declaring him 'a peasant all of his life', and one who 'never looked anything else' (a description that Carleton would not have entirely appreciated), he continues, 'No writer has so intimately described Irish life – no other has ever known the people so thoroughly'.²⁹⁶ Carleton was not only the more able writer; whereas Keegan's work was highly localised, Carleton was intent on fashioning from the regional picture a national one.

Carleton, for all his psychological insecurities and problems of identity, did not underestimate his own literary significance. In 1847, agitating for the pension which the British government had previously allowed John Banim, he had written in defence of his claim to the Whig politician, Lord Morpeth, who from 1835 to 1841 had been Chief Secretary for Ireland. Carleton was clearly well satisfied with his own eloquent prose, and the positive response it elicited from Morpeth.²⁹⁷ Describing this

²⁹³ Keegan's description of himself is in autobiographical information included in his tale 'The Banshee'. See *Legends and Poems by John Keegan*, ed. by J. Canon O'Hanlon, with memoir by D. J. O'Donoghue (Dublin: Sealy Bryers and Walker, 1907), pp. 123-43 (p. 125).

²⁹⁴ Keegan was obliged to ask advice on the use of the Irish language of the publisher and bookseller John Daley. See letter from Keegan to John Daley, 11 June 1846, in *John Keegan: Selected Works*, ed. by Tony Delaney (Crosspatrick: Galmoy Press, 1997), p. 102.

²⁹⁵ D. J. O'Donoghue, 'Memoir of John Keegan', in *Legends and Poems*, p. xix.

²⁹⁶ William Carleton, *The Black Prophet; A Tale of Irish Famine*, with introduction by D. J. O'Donoghue (London: Lawrence & Bullen, 1899; repr. Shannon: Irish University Press, 1972), p. xvi.

²⁹⁷ Carleton probably had good reason to be delighted. Duffy was of the opinion that Morpeth's support furthered Carleton's cause more than 'any combination of Irish rank or capacity'. See Charles

letter to Charles Gavan Duffy, he wrote, ‘I don’t think ever I wrote so powerful production as the letter I sent him – One of the expressions was – “*I have risen up from an humble cottage and described a whole people*”’.²⁹⁸ Carleton, who had ‘risen up’ from the masses could claim an overview denied to others. In his introduction to the 1843-44 edition of *Traits and Stories*, whilst taking care to place himself at one remove from his background, he could confidently assert his unique credentials as an authority ‘on the condition and character of the peasantry of Ireland’.²⁹⁹ Indeed, he implies, that distance from his origins, his shift from the labouring to the literary classes and the perspective it allowed, enhanced his authority.

It may be necessary [...] to give my readers some satisfactory assurance that the subject is one which I ought well to understand, not only from my humble position in early life, and my uninterrupted intercourse with the people as one of themselves, until I had reached the age of twenty-two years, but from the fact of having bestowed upon it my undivided and most earnest attention ever since I left the dark mountains and green vales of my native Tyrone, and began to examine human life and manners as a citizen of the world.³⁰⁰

That Carleton was a ‘citizen of the world’ was certainly true in one very specific sense. He had made a major contribution to the establishment of a national cultural identity, which, in the 1840s was one aim (the other, not shared by Carleton, was for Irish political autonomy) of the Young Ireland movement. But the quest for a national identity, particularly acute in a British-dominated Ireland, had a broader context. Carleton’s reputation within Britain and Ireland was considerable, but his

Gavan Duffy, *My Life in Two Hemispheres*, 2 vols (London: Fisher Unwin, 1898) I, 222. Lord Morpeth, George William Frederick Howard (1802-1864), took a keen interest in Irish affairs, and had been chief secretary for Ireland 1835-41. He lost his Yorkshire (West Riding) parliamentary seat in 1841, regaining it in February 1846. In 1848 he entered the House of Lords as seventh Earl of Carlisle, and in 1855 Palmerston appointed him Lord Lieutenant for Ireland.

²⁹⁸ Letter from William Carleton to Charles Gavan Duffy, reproduced in Duffy’s autobiography. See Duffy, *My Life*, I, 222. Carleton gives the full text of Morpeth’s letter, dated 8 May 1847, in his letter to Duffy.

²⁹⁹ Carleton, *Traits and Stories*, I (1843), p. vii.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

work was also being read in Europe. A French translation of *Valentine M'Clutchy* was serialised in *l'Univers* in 1845, and a German version of *Traits and Stories* had been published in 1837, several years before Carleton produced his definitive edition.

The fact of Carleton's translation into French and German is a reminder that his themes and intentions were echoes of a wider interest in popular manners and speech characteristic of the early decades of the nineteenth century and extending well beyond the British Isles. The growth of interest in folk tradition, lore and music, nostalgia for the past, and the exalting of the authenticity of peasant life over against the artificiality of polite society carried with it the risk of idealisation. In England, it is Wordsworth who is the most celebrated and most passionate advocate of that strain of Romantic thought which sought to strip literary language of artifice and insisted upon the lives of simple men and women as the most unalloyed embodiment of the general truths of human nature. But an upsurge of literary interest in rural life and the moral lessons to be learnt from it extended far beyond his work. It may be properly seen as a European cultural phenomenon, rather than one peculiar to the British Isles – and it carried with it the germ of a debate about what really were the facts of rural existence and how these should be represented.

It is as important to locate Carleton within this wider field of interest in rustic manners and speech as it is to associate him with the Irish literary revival of the 1830s. The sentiments expressed in Carleton's observation that 'The elements of the human heart, [...] and the passions that make up the general business of life, are the same in high and low, and exist with impulses as strong in the cabin as in the palace',³⁰¹ while they do not exalt rustic life, have an affinity with those egalitarian sentiments Wordsworth voiced in the 'Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*' of 1800. But in

³⁰¹ William Carleton, 'Buckram-Back the Dancing-Master', in *Tales and Sketches*, p. 22. 'Buckram-Back' first appeared in the *Irish Penny Journal* in August 1840.

both background and in his sense of the realities of peasant life, Carleton is closer to his English near-contemporary, the poet John Clare, whose reception, like his own, was in part conditioned by the cultural interest in the unadorned nature of rural experience. More than two decades after the 'Preface' first appeared, and while Mary Mitford was producing a sanitised, reassuring view of the English country scene in *Our Village*,³⁰² Clare, self-taught and decidedly lowlier by birth than Carleton, was witness to another, mutable, and less comfortable reality.³⁰³ Indeed, it can be argued that Wordsworth's view of common life as being characterised by directness, immediacy of language and a close association with nature, of being responsive to elemental experience, finds its truest expression not within the Romantic movement, but through Clare's peasant responsiveness. As emotionally tied to the scene of his childhood and youth as Carleton, Clare combined a sophisticated understanding of poetic effect with clear-sighted observation and simplicity of diction.

In the context of prose fiction, the debate about the actuality of rural life and how it should be represented was most explicitly presented in George Eliot's *Westminster Review* article of July 1856, 'The Natural History of German Life'. Here Eliot, herself on the brink of a career as a novelist, examined the distance between the real and the ideal, between realistic and romanticised accounts of the rural scene. The representation of 'our peasantry' in art, she complained, was too dependent upon the influence of an idyllic literature which conformed more to the preconceptions of a cultivated urban elite, comfortably distanced from rural life, than to any objective reality.

³⁰² The sketches of country life which composed Mitford's *Our Village* first appeared in the *Lady's Magazine* in 1819, before being published in five volumes between 1824 and 1832. Several other editions were produced in the nineteenth century.

³⁰³ Clare's father was a thresher, and Clare himself was a casual labourer and limeburner.

Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot. All the more sacred is the task of the artist when he undertakes to paint the life of the People. Falsification here is far more pernicious than in the more artificial aspects of life. It is not so very serious that we should have false ideas about evanescent fashions – about the manners and conversation of beaux and duchesses; but it *is* serious that our sympathy with the perennial joys and struggles, the toil, the tragedy, and the humour in the life of our more heavily-laden fellow-men, should be perverted, and turned toward a false object instead of the true one.³⁰⁴

By ‘our peasantry’ Eliot of course, meant the English, not the Irish, rural classes. Her sharp observation that ‘selfish instincts are not subdued by the sight of buttercups, nor is integrity in the least established by that classic rural occupation, sheep-washing’, was a dismissal of fanciful notions held about country life on this island.³⁰⁵ The point to be made here is that no such caution against painting too rosy a picture of rustic life was necessary for the Irish scene. Ireland was far from lacking picturesque landscape, or picturesque characters (of which, no doubt, Carleton was a real-life example) but the cultural differences between England and Ireland, and consequent English distrust of the Irish as a people, made Irish peasant life and character less amenable to idealisation. Eliot asked that the public should feel not for the ‘sentimental peasant’, but for the reality, ‘the peasant in all his coarse apathy’.³⁰⁶ That idealisation of the peasantry which Eliot attacked did not extend to the rural Irish, stereotypically regarded as culturally, morally and intellectually inferior, in whom deviousness and indolence on the one hand, and a childlike simplicity on the other, might be seen as opposite sides of the same coin.

³⁰⁴ George Eliot, ‘The Natural History of German Life’, in George Eliot, *Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings*, ed. by A. S. Byatt and Nicholas Warren (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 110-11. First published in the *Westminster Review*, July 1856.

³⁰⁵ Eliot, ‘Natural History of German Life’, p. 110.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

Eliot uses the term 'peasant', in an English context, advisedly. Her comments on England are a prelude to a discussion of Riehl's observations on the German peasantry, and of his views on the organic nature of society. As Eliot acknowledged, the use of the term 'peasantry' in a contemporary English context, was by now anachronistic. It might still be used to describe the labourer and the farm servant, but the peasant subsistence farmer, who was hardly a social remove from his servants, and who, with his family, worked alongside them, and ate with them, had effectively disappeared. By 1856, similar changes, but more painfully, and abruptly, wrought, had been visited upon Ireland.

In what is clearly an attack on Benthamite ideas, Eliot, 'interpreting and illustrating' Riehl,³⁰⁷ observes that social questions should not be 'merged in economical science' or be the subject of unfounded theorising which gave scant regard to the relationship of the individual and his environment.³⁰⁸ Societies and their histories could not, she maintains, be divorced from their essentially human aspects, the mentalities and the motivations of those who composed them, or indeed, from their languages. The vitality of language arises not through any rational construction, but by its evolving, by its reflecting the historical processes which formed it. The past conditions the present: the disengagement of a society from its historical elements undermines its vitality. These conservative sentiments call to mind Carleton's attempt to salvage from the Irish disengagement from history, and from language a sense of the past that would have instructive relevance for his own time, and for the future.

Carleton was preoccupied with the past at a time when a new, progressive spirit of scientific and scholarly investigation was beginning to inform literature

³⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 127n.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 111-12.

throughout Europe.³⁰⁹ From 1830, precisely the time that Carleton was presenting his first colourful pictures of Irish peasant society in tales such as ‘Denis O’Shaughnessy Going to Maynooth’ the broad tendency in the theory and practice of fiction in Europe was towards a new paradigm of investigative realism, which mirrored science in its spirit, approach and claims to truth. While Carleton himself might be deemed to be, at his best, an intuitively ‘realistic’ writer, he was not equipped to tap into the growing intellectual debate on the nature of realism in fiction. Carleton the teller, bearing his legacy of the past, possessed what might be termed an instinctive feeling for the ‘authentic’. But he lacked the intellectual grounding to properly link himself to wider theoretical developments. Carleton’s apparent crisis of confidence in the mid nineteenth century, notably evident in *The Squanders of Castle Squander*, is generally attributed to the impact of the Great Famine. Famine certainly provided the catalyst, but Carleton’s inability to respond to changes taking place within a wider European context, at a fundamental level, has as much, if not more, significance.

The European literary scene was not a uniform one. In Russia, where a westernised intelligentsia’s interest in a peasantry bound into a feudal serfdom was connected to a desire for social and political reform, Ivan Turgenev, a member of that intelligentsia, was presenting, in the late 1840s and early 1850s, sketches of peasant life that were both sensitive and unsentimental, and highly influential – to the authorities, alarmingly so.³¹⁰ At the other side of Europe, in the different geographic and cultural context of Ireland, the problems associated with a neglectful, frequently absentee, landowning class, which seemingly cared more for English society than for

³⁰⁹ This European cultural exchange is suggested in George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* (1872); Casaubon’s failure to appreciate recent developments in German theological investigation attest to his own limitations as a researcher.

³¹⁰ Turgenev’s earliest sketches were first published in the Russian Journal *The Contemporary* between 1847 and 1851, and were published in book form in 1852. The author was consequently arrested and exiled to his estate of Spasskoye. See Ivan Turgenev, *Sketches from a Hunter’s Album*, ed. by Robert Baldick, Betty Radice and C. A. Jones (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967).

the proper management of Irish estates or for the Irish tenantry, had been an oft-repeated literary theme – a theme frequently used to represent the relationship between the two nations of England and Ireland.³¹¹ In 1838, Anna Maria Hall's response to the accusation that in her works she neglected the gentry was to retort that they were now indistinguishable from the English; for Irish authenticity, 'original character', one had to look to the peasantry.³¹²

A decade later, at the time when Turgenev was writing his sketches, Ireland was to be preoccupied with a more immediate social and political reality, the consequence of natural disaster and human mismanagement, with what was, for many peasant communities, the catastrophic impact of famine. In England, meanwhile, as social problems associated with increasing momentum of industrialisation were deflecting literary attention from the rural to the urban context, the social impact of increasing Irish immigration had other repercussions. Ireland's presence within the English literary scene was less comfortably accommodated than it had been, as Carleton was to find to his cost. Furthermore, the shift from the sketch to the novel, now in its ascendancy, overshadowed the significance of a shorter genre that was arguably the most appropriate for the literary portrayal of the Irish lower classes.

It was through the sketch and the tale that Carleton's initial reputation was made. Increasingly though, metaphorically as well as literally, the novel was the weightier work. Literary aspirants might gain initial recognition through shorter works but their reputations, if they were to be secured at all, could only really be established by means of the novel. Favoured by the novice, the literary amateur, the

³¹¹ Lady Sydney Morgan's *The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) (London: Richard Phillips, 1806), and Maria Edgeworth's *The Absentee* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999), are two such works. Both books were initially published in London, the former by Richard Phillips in 1806, and *The Absentee* by J. Johnson in 1812.

³¹² Anna Maria Hall, *Lights and Shadows of Irish Life*, 3 vols (London: Henry Colburn, 1838, repr. London: Garland, 1979), I, pp. vi-vii.

traveller, the sketch was the genre within which any examination of the peasantry could be most comfortably accommodated. It was judged to be a form proportionate to a social class not blessed by 'character' in the sense that the polite classes were. Within its reassuringly limited space they could be allowed to occupy a literary foreground, which, in the novel, was more frequently the preserve of figures on higher rungs of the social scale. For anglicised observers of the Irish scene, the peasantry were frequently objects of moral concern or of humour. When Jonah Barrington describes the end result of a man's attempt to spear a salmon with the pike end of a scythe as 'An Irish peasant cutting his own head off by mistake' (one of his companion's ears was also removed in the process), his use of the word 'mistake' suggests a practical error on a par with the verbal bull – a comic blunder to which only the simple, untutored Irish could be capable.³¹³ However incapable he was, it seems the peasant should have credit at least for keeping his implement in good working order.

Thirteen years later, in 1840, Anna Maria Hall, with more serious literary intent than mere entertainment, indicated her desire 'to exhibit and illustrate those peculiarities in the Irish character which appear to be the root of evils in their condition' as well as to 'show the brighter as well as the darker side of the picture, by delineating the virtues which are [...] as prominent and distinguishing parts of Irish nature', and expressed a wish that her 'Cheap Publication', that is, her *Stories of the Irish Peasantry*, should 'be placed by the higher class within reach of the lower'.³¹⁴ Whatever claims of virtue might be made for the peasantry, their estate was not one that could be aspired to. The traffic, of course, was firmly in the other direction – that

³¹³ Jonah Barrington, *Barrington's Personal Sketches of His Own Times*, 3 vols (London: Colburn, 1827-32) II (1827), 124-27.

³¹⁴ Anna Maria Hall, *Stories of the Irish Peasantry* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1850; repr. New York and London: Garland, 1979) p. 3. The quotation is from the dedication of the first, 1840 edition of the book, 'To the Landlords and Tenants of Ireland', which also appears in the 1850 edition.

in which Edgeworth's fictional Jason Quirk, and, in a less dubious context, William Carleton himself, was heading.

Carleton's literary reputation was founded upon an intimate knowledge of the Ulster peasantry, and he was fiercely jealous of it. His introduction to the 1843 edition of *Traits and Stories*, written in August 1842, contains an acknowledgment of the contribution to the literature of his country of various Irish authors. In it, he singles out Anna Maria Hall for particular commendation for her portrayals of Irish womanhood, whose 'touching charm, blending the graceful and the pensive [...] reminds us of a very general but peculiar type of Irish beauty'.³¹⁵ Mrs. Hall's facility evidently did not extend beyond the purely descriptive. Somewhat ungallantly, given the warmth of this previous praise, and given that they had both contributed to *Popular Tales and Legends of the Irish Peasantry* (1834) eight years earlier, in his tribute to the deceased John Banim in the *Nation* (more an attack on other writers than a eulogy to Banim), he is less than complimentary about her ear for dialogue. If Banim could not reproduce peasant speech, he at least 'does not give us for the conversation of our countrymen and countrywomen a monstrous and sickening repetition of the same emasculated verbiage, studded here & there with a bit of Irish phraseology, *stolen from writers who knew Irishmen & their language thoroughly*'—clearly that is, from himself.³¹⁶ O'Donoghue tells of Carleton's response to an observation, made to him, that his pictures of Irish life were more reliable than Mrs Hall's: 'Why, of course they are! Did she ever live with the people as I did? Did she ever dance and fight with them as I did? *Did she ever get drunk with them as I did?*'³¹⁷ There is no attribution, so it may be apocryphal. It probably is not. This

³¹⁵ Carleton, *Traits and Stories*, I (1843), p. iv.

³¹⁶ William Carleton, 'National Gallery, No. 5: The Late John Banim', *Nation*, 1.50 (23 September 1843), 794-95 (p. 794). My emphasis.

³¹⁷ O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, 182n. O'Donoghue's emphasis.

‘boisterous’ response (as O’Donoghue termed it) is certainly in keeping with Carleton’s strenuous defence of his reputation as the unrivalled authority on the peasantry.

Like Hall, who is often wagging a figurative finger, and whose sketch titles are frequently completed with an exclamation mark, Carleton was capable of propounding a moral lesson to the point of tedium. *Parra Sastha; or, The History of Paddy Go-Easy and His Wife Nancy* (1845), in which the determination and diplomacy on the part of a newly wed wife in educating her husband and his sisters in personal, agricultural and domestic economy prove highly effective, is a notable example. Unlike Hall though, his easy familiarity with his subject also enabled him to be morally and socially subversive, if not always comfortably so. In a tale from *Traits and Stories*, ‘Phil Purcel the Pig Driver’, the final, explicit, condemnation of the resourceful Phil and his type, ‘one of that knavish class of men called “jobbers”, a description of swindlers certainly not more common in Ireland than in any other country’, is strangely at variance with the collusive tone which is maintained until the last two paragraphs.³¹⁸ By contrast, in ‘Condy Cullen; or, the Exciseman Defeated’, a tale included in *Tales and Sketches*, Carleton, as he states, may be appreciative of the more or less equal contest of wits ‘between Law and that mountain nymph Liberty, or between the Excise Board and the Smuggler’,³¹⁹ but the narrator’s sympathies, and the reader’s, remain firmly with the mountain nymph and the potheen distiller, Condy.

Hall’s portrayals of the peasantry may have been sympathetic, but they were drawn by one whose social superiority placed her, as a commentator on the peasantry, in a position which was at once less ambivalent, and less interesting than that of Carleton. Hall could be – and, indeed, in a moralising age, saw it as her duty to be –

³¹⁸ Carleton, ‘Phil Purcel, the Pig-Driver’, I (1843), 427.

³¹⁹ Carleton, ‘Condy Cullen; or, The Exciseman Defeated’, in *Tales and Sketches*, p. 276

unequivocally didactic. In Patrick J. Murray's words, she was 'a great deal too practical, and eternally shaping her plot and her characters to make Irishmen see what they ought to be, rather than to let us see what they are'.³²⁰ Her two contributions to a collaborative work, *Characteristic Sketches of Ireland and the Irish* (1845), 'Philip Garraty; or, "We'll See About It"', and 'The Irish Agent', are unsubtle lessons in moral education for both the peasantry and landowners. In the same compilation, Carleton's 'The Abduction; or, an Irish Runaway Marriage', in which the resourceful Alley Sheridan thwarts the intent of her determined and practical mother to marry her to a well-heeled suitor, and takes the man of her own choice, has a different tone. Not only the fictional widow Sheridan, but also contemporary economic and social theory, is cheerfully confounded. 'In defiance of Malthus', the fictional couple have thirteen children in as many years, and furthermore, 'are happy'.³²¹

Such an outcome is not one with which Mrs. Hall would, or could, have presented to her readership. Hall's own tale of marriage for love, 'Too Early Wed', published in *Stories of the Irish Peasantry*, is one of improvidence rather than resourcefulness. The consequences of youthful impatience are predictable. Fine feelings, 'crushed by circumstances that must ever crush those who, without any provision, *too early wed!*', are not enough.³²² With her husband forced abroad by poverty, and with a sickly young child and an infant too weak to survive, the hapless heroine expires on the final page.

Carleton had commenced writing his *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry* using a formula which, after the first five tales, had been abandoned as too restrictive.

³²⁰ Patrick Murray, 'Traits of the Irish Peasantry', p. 388.

³²¹ William Carleton, 'The Abduction', in William Carleton, Samuel Lover and Anna Maria Hall, *Characteristic Sketches of Ireland and the Irish* (Dublin: P.D. Hardy and Sons; London: R. Groombridge and Sons, 1845), pp. 125-200 (p. 200). 'The Abduction' first appeared as 'Alley Sheridan, or, an Irish Runaway Marriage' in the *National Magazine and Dublin Literary Gazette* in November 1831, and then in *Popular Tales and Legends of the Irish Peasantry* (1834).

³²² Anna Maria Hall, 'Too Early Wed!', in *Stories of the Irish Peasantry*, p. 16. Hall's emphasis.

A quiescent authorial role, as the supposed recorder of conversations and stories emerging from a series of convivial gatherings around the hearth of Ned M'Keown, was, understandably, not one with which Carleton was happy. He wished to leave himself more room, he said, for, 'description and observation', as well as, no doubt, for his own uninterrupted *senachie's* voice.³²³ He did return to that early convention, though, in a story that appeared in the Christmas edition of the *Illustrated London News* in 1850. 'Black and all-Black. A Legend of the Padereen Mare', was 'Related on a Christmas Eve, by an Old Senachie'.³²⁴ That *senachie*, Paddy Phats, a man 'full of fun and drollery, and a perfect miser in everything relating to the truth', was given to inventive repartee with which he both amused and outwitted his friends. As Paddy's final anecdote, 'Black and all-Black', progresses, he, the fictional narrator, recedes as Carleton progressively assumes the narrative role. The author is ultimately the *senachie*, finally urging 'every one who hears me, and can afford it' to 'show mercy and kindness to those that are friendless and without food'.³²⁵ This is 1850, and Carleton is writing for an English publication. This last line of the tale can only be read as a veiled plea on behalf of those Irish whose lives have been devastated by famine. The fictional story-telling session that Carleton presents to his readership is an element of the social fabric of his youth, and belongs to the past, but it ends with an injunction, if a mild one, to contemporary society.

There is no significant disjunction here, contextual or stylistic, between the body and conclusion of what is an amusing tableau produced for the Christmas season. This was by no means always the case. The considerable talents of oral narrative that Carleton brought to his tales are evident, here as elsewhere. The

³²³ William Carleton, 'Battle of the Factions', in *Traits and Stories*, I (1843), p. 144.

³²⁴ William Carleton, 'Black and all-Black: A Legend of the Padereen Mare', *Illustrated London News*, 21 December 1850, pp. 494-95.

³²⁵ Carleton, 'Black and all-Black', p. 495.

narrative of fictional prose though, is normally more complex, and often less direct, than that of oral communication. Even with the genre at which he excelled, the synthesising of roles, of narrative functions and voices within his text was at times a problem for Carleton; the relationship of the author to the narrator was one which he had difficulty defining. Carleton's assurance sometimes falters; his third person narrator, present in the text but beyond the action, is at times succeeded by that heavy authorial presence which, in his novels, was to become so intrusive. His problem had become that of knowing *whose* story he was telling, and why, and of delineating his own position within, or without, the text.

These problems of narrative differentiation were linked to his uncertainty over his literary role. To his own satisfaction, and to the satisfaction of many of his contemporaries, he may have, in his own words, 'described a whole people', but that people was the peasant populace of the two decades spanning the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. By the mid nineteenth century, with the literary genre of the sketch in decline, and with the post-Romantic interest in the peasantry that had helped sustain the literary careers of Irish writers such as Griffin and the Banim brothers, as well as Carleton, waning, Carleton needed to reposition himself, to find a new direction. The publisher Maxwell's refusal of a second book by Carleton indicates an unarticulated dissatisfaction with the first, *The Squanders of Castle Squander* – by any standards, a poor book – but his observation that Ireland was now so easily accessible that the English did not care to read about it was undoubtedly true, as writers on Irish topics were to find to their cost.

Ireland was all too accessible, and the Irish all too visible. In that famine and post-famine period, that country, with which England had a complex and uncomfortable relationship, held little literary appeal. Following a failed 1848 Irish

rebellion, and with an Irish peasantry increasingly, and problematically, resident in Britain, there was little to promote enthusiasm for Ireland in the host population. The failure of Anthony Trollope's *The Kellys and the O'Kellys* (1848) was seen by his publisher Colburn as 'evidence that readers do not like novels on Irish subjects as well as on others', and his proposed handbook for Ireland remained uncompleted after John Murray returned his manuscript, unopened, several months after receiving it.³²⁶ It was a clear indication that literary attention was directed elsewhere. Both Maxwell's brusque advice to Carleton, that he should remove himself to Lancashire and write about life there, and the rather more tactful suggestion from Dr. R. S. MacKenzie, negotiating with the publisher Colburn on Carleton's behalf in London in 1852, that the author might reverse a literary convention, and bring an Irish hero to England to give his impressions of *English* life, embody the same message.³²⁷

By mid-century, Carleton's attempts to re-engage with the past, to secure a position of literary continuity and, through the novel, one of literary authority, were, then, highly problematic. The already unstable social and cultural foundations of his work, of both his tales and sketches and of his novels, had become even more precarious. Not only had Irish topics lost their appeal, but also the literary form to which Carleton's talents were best suited was being superseded. When, in 1838, Carleton had written *Fardorougha* to prove to a sceptical world that he capable of writing a novel, he had no real choice. He had extended himself as far as he could within the tale and the sketch; more could only be repetition, a re-tilling of the same, though at that time, still fertile, ground. Without being properly aware of it, Carleton had seized the initiative and moved with the times, something which, a decade later, in the 1850s, he was unable to do.

³²⁶ Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953) pp. 64-65, p. 67. The *Autobiography*, first published posthumously in 1883, had been completed by Trollope in 1876.

³²⁷ O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, 176-77.

In his *Edinburgh Review* article of 1852, Patrick Murray regretted that he who had produced ‘the truest and fullest’ picture to be had of the peasantry, should, in *The Squanders of Castle Squander*, be ‘leaving that field in which he stands without equal among the living or the dead’.³²⁸ Murray’s hope, ‘to meet him soon, reclaimed and “himself “again”” [sic] was to remain unfulfilled.’³²⁹ Much later, Anthony Trollope was to refer dismissively to the novelist for whom the craft had become ‘a trade’: ‘He still writes, but he writes because he has to tell a story, not because he has any story to tell.’³³⁰ He might have been describing Carleton, with whose work he was certainly familiar.³³¹ By the mid-1850s Carleton was himself aware that his time, and his talent, were passing. Nearing his sixty-second birthday, he wrote to the young literary biographer W. J. Fitzpatrick, declaring that he intended abandoning novel writing, in order to write his autobiography, a task which he had hardly begun to address when he died thirteen years later. ‘My best days and my best powers are gone. I am not now in the prime of intellect nor of manhood.’³³²

That confusion of authorial and narrative roles which was to become spectacularly apparent in the wake of the Famine, in *The Squanders of Castle Squander*, and which so dismayed Murray, was already evident in tales in the acclaimed *Traits and Stories*. Carleton’s literary discomfiture in the tale ‘Phil Purcel’, already discussed, is a case in point. In ‘Phelim O’Toole’s Courtship’, too, in which the comic account of Phelim’s ‘courtships’ provides a vehicle for an attack upon Ribbonism, there is a disjunction between the comedic and the didactic. In a masterly

³²⁸ Murray, ‘Traits of the Irish Peasantry’, p. 389, p. 403.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 403.

³³⁰ Trollope, *Autobiography*, p. 198.

³³¹ See T. H. S. Escott, *Anthony Trollope: His Public Services, Private Friends and Literary Originals* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1913), pp. 53-54; Michael Sadlier, *Trollope: A Commentary* (London: Constable, 1945), pp. 143-44.

³³² Letter from William Carleton to W. J. Fitzpatrick, 18 February 1856, reproduced in O’Donoghue, *Life*, II, 234.

introduction, Carleton describes Phelim's prospective material inheritance, legitimately acquired, in terms which suggest a cultural legacy distinguished by a propensity for violence:

Phelim O'Toole [...] was heir to a snug estate of half an acre, which had been the family patrimony since the time of his grandfather, Tyrrell O'Toole, who won it from the *Sassenah* at the point of a reaping-hook, during a descent once made upon England by a body of 'spalpeens', in the month of August. This resolute little band was led on by Tyrell, who, having secured about eight guineas by the excursion, returned to his own country, with a coarse linen travelling-bag slung across his shoulder, a new hat in one hand, and a staff in the other.³³³

This stylistic assurance Carleton finds difficult to maintain. The narrative progression through the wayward Phelim's background, childhood and ill-spent youth, to his simultaneous 'courtships' of three women and eventual exposure, and routing, is effectively managed. The shift, in the last two pages, to his imprisonment and transportation for his complicity in organised violence, and to the murder of his betrayer, is accompanied by an awkward change of tone. Carleton tacitly acknowledged this inability to retain control of his material in a final authorial comment. The last, explanatory, paragraph, in which the likes of Phelim are condemned as a class who 'constitute the shame and reproach of the country', ends, 'We have kept Phelim's Ribbonism in the back-ground, because its details could excite only aversion, and preferred exhibiting his utter ignorance of morality upon a less offensive subject, in order that the reader might infer, rather than to witness with his mind's eye, the deeper crimes of which he was capable.'³³⁴

This is, of course, a less than satisfactory explanation; the volume of tales which includes 'Phelim O'Toole's Courtship' also contains 'Wildgoose Lodge', in

³³³ Carleton, 'Phelim O'Toole's Courtship', in *Traits and Stories* (1844) II, 188.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

which Carleton has no qualms about allowing his first person narrator to describe in detail the atrocity perpetrated at the house of that name by a group of Ribbonmen, including himself. In 'Phelim O'Toole's Courtship' it is not his own authorial restraint that Carleton has to justify, but his failure to maintain a consistent moral stance. In this sense at least, Wildgoose Lodge works because the two are not in disjunction; Carleton sees no need for corrective redirection. 'Phelim O'Toole's Courtship' and 'Phil Purcel' are ultimately unsatisfactory because the ideological value systems presented in and through the texts are at variance with those of the author, or at least, with those that the author adopts as being appropriate to his status as a writer.

'Wildgoose Lodge' has been pronounced unsatisfactory for another reason. Terry Eagleton has observed that it shows that 'linguistic instability' which characterises much of Carleton's work. He observes that although the narrator's 'intrusion of himself as Hiberno-English-speaking participant' in the atrocity is clearly intended to guarantee his credentials as witness to the act, the difference in register between the peasant speech of the narrator's past persona and the standard English of his present, reformed self produces 'an unaccountable linguistic dissonance'.³³⁵ The 'dissonance' that Eagleton perceives, though, has more complex origins than he suggests. Carleton's shift in register is also symptomatic of an unconscious attempt to balance the supposed 'authenticity' of the oral account with the authority of the more formal textual account, to ensure that the peasant storyteller is also the literary figure.

³³⁵ Eagleton, p. 209.

Karl Marx, who encountered Carleton's *Traits and Stories* for the first time in the original English³³⁶ in 1879, wrote approvingly of him, in German, to Friedrich Engels: 'Carleton is neither a good stylist, nor a good organiser of his material, but the truth of his descriptions make him original. As the son of an Irish peasant [farmer], he knows his material better than any Lever or Lover.' Carleton, though, was an exhausting, if rewarding, read. Marx had read volume 1, but the second volume would have to wait for another time. 'It consists of "unconnected tales" that depict Irish peasant life from now this angle, now that, and is therefore not suited to being read in one sitting. For precisely this reason, it's a book one needs to acquire and own for oneself, in order to regale oneself as and when from now this vessel, now that one.'³³⁷

Two significant facts emerge from Marx's comments. Firstly, his observation reinforces a point made earlier in this chapter, on the position allocated to the peasantry in literature. The attention span of an educated readership both unschooled in the dialogue (or what approximated to the dialogue) of the peasantry, and lacking any real intimacy with their social milieu, was limited. Marx, whose social background was closer to Samuel Lover's and to Charles Lever's than to Carleton's, and for whom English was a second language, was certainly no exception.³³⁸ Secondly, the fact that, hitherto, Marx was familiar with Lover and Lever but not with Carleton (and assumed the same for Engels) might suggest that, in the short term at

³³⁶ Marx presumably read the 1843-44 'New Edition' book version.

³³⁷ The original reads: 'Es sind unconnected tales, worin das irische Bauernleben bald von dieser, bald von jener Seite illustriert wird, also nicht dazu gemacht, in einem Zug konsumiert zu werden. Ist eben deswegen ein Buch, das man sich anschaffen und besitzen muss, um à fur et mesure sich bald mit dieser, bald mit jener Schüssel zu regalieren. Carleton ist weder ein guter Stilist, noch ein guter Komponist, aber die Wahrheit seiner Schilderungen bildet seine Originalität. Als irischer Bauernsohn kennt er sein Thema besser als die Levers und Lovers.' Letter from Karl Marx to Friedrich Engels, 14 August 1879, reproduced in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, 41 vols (Berlin: Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus, 1969-75), 34 (1973), 90-91.

³³⁸ Lover was from a stockbroking family, and Lever's father was a building contractor. Marx was the son of a lawyer.

least, the works of these two were surviving the test of time better than those of Carleton.

These two points are not unrelated. These contemporaries of Carleton (Lover was born in 1797, and Lever in 1806) produced representations of Ireland and Irish life which were less taxing, if, to Marx's scrutinising gaze at least, considerably less rewarding. Carleton's tales, often heavily dialogic, and frequently convoluted, might have been designed to be recounted rather than to be read. Barbara Hayley rightly observes that the different dialects used, 'not just as a wash of local colour but to differentiate between his characters', are often more illustrative of those characters than are the physical descriptions he gives. She has pointed to the sometimes awkward transition from the oral medium to the written in the *Traits and Stories*, and to the author's shift from a preoccupation with an accurate representation of the 'sound' of peasant speech to an acceptable representation of it in print. Even in its final form, though, a tale such as 'Shane Fadh's Wedding', consisting of 'speech within speech within speech' – Hayley's description of Carleton's layered multiplicity of voices, author, fictional narrator and the characters described by the latter – might more comfortably engage the ear than the eye.³³⁹

Given the direction of Marx's own interests, it is to be expected that he should be more impressed by Carleton's authority as a witness to the lives of the peasantry than by his literary skills. Ironically, that lack of style and of organisation which he notes critically is to some extent at least, evidence of the very authority he praises. It is a demonstration of Carleton's adherence to the *senachie's* discursive method. Examples abound. In 'The Abduction, or, An Irish Runaway Marriage', having introduced his subject, Carleton immediately takes an extended detour into family

³³⁹ Hayley, *Carleton's Traits and Stories*, p. 35.

history and relationships, before, ten pages later, returning, assuredly, to his point of departure, and to his heroine's considerable attributes.³⁴⁰ In what is effectively a twelve-page preface to his *Traits and Stories* tale 'The Geography of an Irish Oath', Carleton, in a manner as intentionally and elaborately comic as the Irishman's verbal contortions are inventive, describes the pledges of one who is all too often 'a kind of smuggler in morality, imposing as often as he can upon his own conscience'.³⁴¹ In 'Phelim O'Toole's Courtship', Carleton is almost a third of the way into the tale before any element of wooing appears. Having initially introduced his main character, he then proceeds to detail the family history, the 'auspicious' circumstances of Phelim's birth to a couple long childless, and his childhood. In 'Shane Fadh's Wedding', a *Traits and Stories* tale in which Carleton assumes the role of passive onlooker and allows his character Shane Fadh the primary narrative role, the fictional listeners themselves become impatient at the tale's lack of progress. 'But what has this to do with you, Shane? [...] Sure we wanted to hear an account of *your* wedding, but instead of that, it's Dick Cuillenan's history you're giving us.'³⁴² The interjection serves both to remind the reader of the wider fictional context of the tale, and to give assurance that this delay is intentional, a necessary prelude to the story.

Carleton's uncomfortable position as mediator, presenting himself as both an intimate of the peasantry and of the educated reader, is widely recognised, and, as evidenced in the textual changes to the various editions of the *Traits and Stories*, has been addressed in considerable detail by Barbara Hayley.³⁴³ The self-conscious act of committing any account of peasant life to print was, in its very nature, one which could only distance the author from his roots, and was unavoidable. And in some

³⁴⁰ Carleton, 'The Abduction', pp. 125-36.

³⁴¹ Carleton, 'The Geography of an Irish Oath', *Traits and Stories*, II (1844), 7.

³⁴² 'Shane Fadh's Wedding' (1843), 54.

³⁴³ See Hayley, *Carleton's Traits and Stories*, p. 392.

senses, Carleton's position was considerably more comfortable than that of some writers. Whatever the dialogic concessions Carleton was obliged to make in the interests of accessibility, he was constructing his tales of the peasantry on a secure base, with considerably more assurance than other writers. A comparison with Gerald Griffin is instructive. Griffin's first book, *'Holland-Tide'; or, Munster Popular Tales*, which appeared in 1827, a collection of tales appropriate for telling on All Hallows' Eve, is supposedly recounted at social gathering at the home of a 'respectable farmer in the west of Munster' the previous year (the deliberate dating adding a touch of authenticity). Unlike Carleton three years later, Griffin commences by representing himself as one of the group.³⁴⁴ The diffidence with which Griffin draws up his hearthside seat is in contrast to Carleton's assurance in allowing Ned M'Keown and his companions, initially at least, to sit alone; Carleton was more adept at maintaining sustained peasant dialogue than was Griffin. Unlike Carleton, Griffin deliberately, and almost apologetically, is obliged to disconnect the original oral account from his written form before he commences.

In a short time all were hushed into a most flattering silence, and the following tales passed round the circle, lulling some to sleep, keeping others awake, each finding its own particular number of indulgent, gratified, and attentive auditors, though no single one, perhaps, succeeded in pleasing all.

Whether such may be the lot of the narratives among a more extensive and less considerate audience remains to be seen. *Avowing the source from which his materials were taken, the collector thinks himself entitled to tell the stories after his own liking.*³⁴⁵

It seems, though, that the stories were not all told by Griffin. Nor were they told entirely to his liking. Daniel Griffin, in his biography of this brother, writes that 'two

³⁴⁴ Gerald Griffin, "'Holland-Tide'", in *'Holland-Tide': or, Munster Popular Tales* (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1827, repr. New York and London: Garland, 1979), p. 15.

³⁴⁵ Griffin, "'Holland-Tide'", p. 15. My italics.

or three' of the seven tales in *'Holland-Tide'* were contributed by a friend to whom Griffin had appealed for help in making up the volume, others being rejected, as too much in the style of the Anglo-Irish folklorist Thomas Crofton Croker, whose widely-read, but not universally acclaimed, *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland* first appeared in 1825. He tells how, when, in a favourable review of *'Holland-Tide'*, the tale 'Little Jack Edy' (the actual title is 'The Persecutions of Jack Edy') was compared – approvingly – to Croker's work, Griffin's response was an anguished one.³⁴⁶ Wolff observes that his words 'I told – these tales were like Crofton Croker's' might suggest that this tale of peasant superstition, incorporating an unarticulated suggestion that acquaintance with the fairy folk might be related to alcohol consumption, was not written by Griffin, but by the unidentified contributor.³⁴⁷ Nevertheless, textually, the tale is not obviously out of keeping with Griffin's writings; possibly Griffin modified the text. It is two other stories, 'The Brown Man', a disturbing tale of supernatural malignity and cannibalism, and 'The Unburied Legs', in which the severed legs of a murdered man seek his torso, which, with their abruptness of style and inattention to topographical detail, are most at variance with Griffin's usual way of writing.

The indignity of being compared to Croker was not an experience that Carleton, whose vivid portrayals of peasant life had the secure foundations of personal experience, would suffer. Furthermore, Croker's reputation as a collector and synthesiser of Irish folklore was tarnished by plagiaristic habits – a fact which, if Griffin was aware of it, must have made his suffering over *'Holland-Tide'* the more acute. A letter to Carleton from an Irish journalist resident in London, Dr. William Cooke Taylor, a contributor to various magazines, including *The Athenaeum*,

³⁴⁶ Daniel Griffin, *The Life of Gerald Griffin Esq.* (London: Simkin and Marshall; Dublin: Cumming; Edinburgh: Bell and Bradfule, 1843), pp. 252-53.

³⁴⁷ See Wolff's introduction to *'Holland-Tide'*, p. x, p. lvi n.).

illustrates the suspicion with which Croker was regarded within certain London literary circles. Taylor, responding to an appreciative letter from Carleton for a favourable review of the latter's work, writes that 'no better proof of [your] merit could be given than the anxiety of Dilke [the editor and proprietor of *The Athenaeum*] for the success of your works'.³⁴⁸ Then follows a disparaging observation on Croker. Alluding to Carleton's tale 'Neal Malone' in which that diminutive tailor searches for a worthy opponent upon which to demonstrate his pugilistic skills, Taylor wrote:

Be assured that Crofton Croker will not be 'blue-mowlded for want of a batin'. I know the little miscreant well, and have before exposed his trafficking with other men's wares. [...] I find in my note-book the following entries:—

'Dec. 2nd, 1830. — Read M.S.S. entitled "My Village," [sic] offered for publication through Leckie, a publisher of Dublin.' 'Dec. 20th, 1830. — Heard from Whittaker that Croker asked him to publish a work called "My Village," [sic] of which he declared himself the author.'³⁴⁹

Whereas Carleton was deliberately to transcend Irish regional differences in order to present an archetypal Irish, peasant national character, Griffin, in contrast, was very much a regional writer, remaining determinedly attached to his native area, the south-west of Ireland, particularly the area around the Shannon estuary. Griffin's social background too, differed from Carleton's. His mother, a woman of some cultural interests, was from old gentry stock. His paternal grandfather had been a prosperous farmer, and his father, although less successful, was a farmer and brewer. Griffin then, despite some decline in family fortunes, was a product of the Irish Catholic middle class. It shows in his writing. Although Griffin portrays his peasants with facility, he has not quite Carleton's sustained vitality and earthiness, nor his

³⁴⁸ Undated letter from William Cooke Taylor to William Carleton, reproduced in O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, 24.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25. See also pp. 22-25; the context of this observation suggests it is a response to a comment on Croker by Carleton. It is likely that Carleton had referred to Croker's tardiness in producing a promised review of *Traits and Stories* in *Fraser's Magazine*. This had appeared only after some pressing by Carleton.

assurance in spinning a story. He is, however, far more adept at giving accounts of middle-class Irish life; fictionally he moves between the gentry and the peasantry with considerably more ease than does Carleton.

It is not in Griffin's volumes of tales, but in his first novel, *The Collegians* (1829), published only a year after *'Holland-Tide'*, that the ebullience of his depictions of the peasantry approaches Carleton's, most notably in the questioning of Poll and Philip Naughton at the investigation into the death of Eily O'Connor, the unacknowledged low-born wife of Hardress Cregan, her social superior.³⁵⁰ His account of the magistrate's examination of the witnesses is memorable not simply for his skilful presentation of the evasions of the reluctant witnesses, but for the comedic revealing of social divisions through the opposing, and balanced dialogues; in the verbal contempt directed by an Irish speaker at the clerk who, thinking it *'genteel'* to know only English, declines to interpret; and in the wearily dispassionate tones of the magistrate, Warner. The mock relief of the latter's response to the garrulously evasive Poll's ready admission to a single fact, that she is Phil Naughton's wife, "Aye, now we're upon smooth ground. [...] What shall we do with this communicative person?" – addressed to a Captain Gibson, 'whose face was purple from suppressed laughter' – is as textually significant as is Poll's volubility.³⁵¹ Phil, her husband, incapable of subterfuge, takes refuge in obtuseness, and the Irish language. On being questioned through an interpreter about the unfortunate Eily, he responds by saying he is a poor man who labours for a living.

'That's no answer. Repeat the question once more, and tell him I shall commit him for trial if he will not answer it?'

³⁵⁰ See chapter 39 of Gerald Griffin, *The Collegians* (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1992). *The Collegians* was first published in London by Saunders and Otley in 1829.

³⁵¹ Griffin, *Collegians*, pp. 255-56.

Again the question was put and listened to with the same plodding, meditative look, and answered with a countenance of honest grief, and an apparent anxiety to be understood [...]. So earnest was his manner that Mr. Warner really believed he was returning a satisfactory answer [...].

‘He says,’ [sic] continued the interpreter, that when he was a young man, he rented a farm from Mr. O’Connor, of Crag-beg, near Tralee.’³⁵²

This is bathos that Carleton, whose dialogic boundaries were entirely defined by his peasant youth, could never achieve.

The Collegians is based upon an historical event, the murder of a young woman in the west of Ireland in 1819, and the plot might be read as a metaphor for the neglect of the obligations owed to the peasantry by the controlling, Protestant elites: the two collegians of the title, one of whom is Hardress Cregan, are graduates of Trinity College. When Griffin has Hardress endure both Foxy Dunant’s inept scissoring with tailoring shears and a lengthy monologue on the various types of potato, the account, a diversion from the storyline almost worthy of Carleton, carries a barb.

‘There’s no piatie that eats better, when you have nothen’ but a bit o’ the little one (as they say) to eat with a bit o’ the big. No piatie that eats so sweet with point.’

‘With point?’, Hardress repeated, a little amused by this fluent discussion of the poor hair-cutter, upon the varieties of a dish, which, from his childhood, had formed almost his only article of nutriment; and on which he expatiated with as much cognoscence and satisfaction, as a fashionable gourmand might on the culinary productions of Eustache Ude. ‘What is point?’³⁵³

The pathetically comic limitations of the one-sided conversation, and the reference to the supposed practice of the poor Irish, of pointing potatoes being eaten

³⁵² Ibid., p. 257.

³⁵³ Ibid., p. 193.

at the fitch hanging from the roof, and savouring this imaginary accompaniment, evidence the author's concern about the restrictions, dietary and otherwise, of peasant life. An uncomfortable reality is presented, as a gift might be, to the unwary reader. In one of his *Holland-Tide* tales Griffin observes that 'the selfishness of our nature is such, that we are alarmed and put on our guard, in proportion to the violence of the appeal which is made to us; and must be taken by surprise, before our benevolent emotions can be awakened'.³⁵⁴ It is a point that Carleton, whose novels frequently display a predilection for the sustained assault through extensive authorial intrusions, could have usefully taken to heart. Here, Foxy Dunant secures the reader's conscience as determinedly as he keeps Hardress in the chair.

The Collegians, in which he moves comfortably between the different social strata, is Griffin's greatest literary achievement. His abilities are not so evident in his shorter works. As one critic, Barry Sloan, has remarked, 'Griffin's tales are observed where the Banims' and later Carleton's are lived'.³⁵⁵ Carleton's energetic dialogue may have been beyond his pen, his prose may be at times tiresomely overblown (the 'young gentleman's pair of velocipedes [...] were so vigorous in the execution of the trust confided to them'),³⁵⁶ and the somewhat arch classical allusions liberally scattered through his texts may be wearying, but at his best, Griffin has a particular sensitivity which the other lacked, and did not require. Griffin's tales are 'observed' in more than one sense. The canine display of exuberance, and then of terror, in 'The Hand and Word', and the typically feline comportment of the eavesdropping cat in 'Owney and Owney-Na-Peak' are examples.³⁵⁷ Both tales are contained in *Holland-Tide*, that volume dedicated to stories of murder and the supernatural appropriate to

³⁵⁴ Gerald Griffin, 'The Hand and Word', in '*Holland-Tide*', p. 259.

³⁵⁵ Barry Sloan, *The Pioneers of Anglo-Irish Fiction 1800-1850* (Gerrards Cross: Smythe, 1986), p. 64.

³⁵⁶ Gerald Griffin, 'The Aylmers of Bally-Aylmer', in '*Holland-Tide*', p. 26.

³⁵⁷ See Gerald Griffin, 'The Hand and Word', pp. 263-66; 'Owney and Owney-Na-Peak', in '*Holland-Tide*', p. 363.

the festival; Griffin's recording of a sentient world other than the human is not limited to the fairy realm or to that which lies the other side of the grave.

Carleton, as a delineator of peasant character was as unparalleled in Ireland as Turgenev was later to become in Russia. But it is Griffin, not Carleton, who has an eye for the kind of peripheral, but significant detail, which characterises Turgenev's work. It is not found to any extent in Carleton's fiction. In his tale 'The Singers', Turgenev, writing of the oppressive heat of a summer's day, records:

Glossy-feathered rooks and crows hung their beaks and gazed miserably at those who passed by [...]. Only the sparrows kept their spirits up and, spreading their feathers, chirruped away more fiercely than ever, squabbled round the fences, took off in flights from the dusty roadway and soared in grey clouds above the plantations of green hemp.³⁵⁸

The opening tale of *'Holland-Tide'*, 'The Aylmers of Bally-Aylmer', in which a son ultimately discovers that his father, believed murdered, is alive, shows a similar attention to the natural, and seemingly inconsequential detail which forms the background to human affairs. The description of a sudden winter storm, 'the heavy whirring of the wind, as it swept over the whitening plain, the pattering of the snow and hail against the window panes', reflects the confusion the hero experiences in meeting the supposed, and evidently distressed, killer. But Griffin's concerns are less with pathetic fallacy than with the requirements of realistic representation. Absorbed in his own thoughts, his character gazes out upon the confusion wrought by the changing weather, hearing

the cackling of poultry as they ran with expanded tails and disordered plumage right before the wind, to the shelter of the nearest turf-rick, the short, dissatisfied grunt of the hog as he stumped it sturdily

³⁵⁸ Ivan Turgenev, 'The Singers', in *Sketches from a Hunters Album*, ed. by Robert Baldick, Betty Radiche and C. A. Jones (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1967), p. 147.

beneath the window towards the piggery [...], and in the intervals of the driving gusts, the solitary cry of a house-sparrow, at finding himself compelled to quit the exposed farm-yard, before his little crew was half stored with its thimbleful of the scattered grain, and retire supperless to roost for the night.³⁵⁹

That sensitivity so apparent in Griffin's writing is associated with a degree of dislocation. 'The Half Sir', one of three tales composing *Tales of the Munster Festivals* (1827) is one of displacement and alienation, of a man educated above his class, but without the social accomplishments, or money, to move with ease at that higher social level. Griffin it seems, had some sympathy with that group 'hanging like an ill-favoured chain between the links of simplicity and refinement' between the peasantry and the established gentry.³⁶⁰ His own position, socially, had some similarities to that described. Griffin's portrayals in 'The Half Sir', are sympathetic, even empathetic. His overt authorial presence is relatively restrained; the scene presented is eloquent enough. A peasant girl, lying ill in bed, will not have her hair cut off as it would 'spoil her for a corpse'. Her bed sheets cannot be changed because should she die, the only spare pair will be needed for her wake. Social requirements, and the personal dignity adherence to those requirements confers, regardless of class, take precedence over physical need. Hamond, the 'half-sir' of the title, confronted by this realisation, is made acutely aware not only of the depth of peasant poverty, but of his own distance from that world.³⁶¹

There is plainly a strong autobiographical element to Hamond's character. His alienation, like Griffin's, appears to be as much temperamental as social. Daniel Griffin, in his biography of his brother, refers to 'the retiring and diffident manner before strangers' apparent in childhood, which was to mark Griffin's adult life.

³⁵⁹ Gerald Griffin, 'The Aylmers of Bally-Aylmer', p. 89.

³⁶⁰ Gerald Griffin, 'The Half-Sir', in *Tales of the Munster Festivals*, 3 vols (London: Saunders and Otley, 1827, repr. New York and London: Garland, 1979), I, 235.

³⁶¹ Gerald Griffin, 'The Half-Sir', II, 80-81. The story extends over vols I and II of the collection.

Gerald's disposition, he later observes, was to become 'one which required much watching'.³⁶² Gerald plainly had schizoid tendencies. That acute sensitivity, which marked his life as much as his work, did, however, have positive aspects. As a youth, Griffin had a fishing companion, 'Little Kilmartin', who, probably suffering from cerebral palsy, was widely regarded within his community as a simpleton. Griffin, who, it seems, enjoyed Kilmartin's company and was prepared to put some effort into communicating with him, insisted that his mental faculties were obscured rather than limited.³⁶³ A darker side to Griffin's sensitivity was often more apparent. Solitary, often suspicious of others' motives, he was, it seems, as ready to take offence as was Carleton. In the early 1820s, when Griffin was struggling to make his name as a writer in London, even John Banim, who befriended him there, and gave much emotional support, was rebuffed.³⁶⁴ Griffin's comments on a London editor who, having not only accepted and paid for work which the author had offered free, then entertained him at his country home, are indicative of his difficult nature.

He professed the highest admiration for me, for which I did not care one farthing; but that at first it led me to suspect he had some design of cheating me at the end; such is the way of the world; but I do so much for him now that I have in some degree made myself necessary.³⁶⁵

Griffin, nine years younger than Carleton, was establishing himself as a writer in the 1820s, at a time when the Dublin publishing trade had not recovered from the loss of the reprint trade after the extending of the Copyright Act to Ireland in 1801. Griffin needed to try his luck in London, where the market had more buoyancy. Although Carleton had begun writing anti-Catholic pieces for Otway's *Christian Examiner* in 1828, the direction of his career was not properly established until the

³⁶² Daniel Griffin, p. 22, p. 135.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

³⁶⁵ Letter from Gerald Griffin to his parents, 12 October 1825, reproduced in Daniel Griffin, p. 140.

1830s.³⁶⁶ As he tempered his anti-Catholic invective and presented a more congenial face to his own country, and to England, the recovery of the Dublin publishing industry enabled Carleton, unlike Griffin and Banim, to remain in Ireland whilst accessing Irish and English markets. That he could distance himself from ‘distinguished fellow labourers’, and claim never to have been a ‘literary absentee’ – as much a matter of circumstance as of judgement – was a sensible marketing ploy designed to reinforce his authority, and his peasant credentials.³⁶⁷

And Carleton fully understood the importance to his reputation and career of presenting his works as Irish, and of allowing regional identity to be subsumed in a presentation of the national. The reworking of dialogue in *Traits and Stories*, already alluded to, is the most obvious example of Carleton’s efforts in this direction. As the outstanding literary representative of his country and his people, he wished this, his final, definitive version of *Traits and Stories*, the 1842-44 ‘New Edition’, published both in parts and as two volumes in Dublin by William Curry, and London by William S. Orr (himself an Irishman), to be thoroughly Irish in *all* its aspects.

That this was his intention is explicitly, and colourfully, indicated in a letter, uncovered in the course of this research, which was sent by Carleton to William Orr. Barbara Hayley had discovered evidence of its existence (the communication was described by her source as ‘a long and most important one’), but, although she had a professional link with the institution in whose possession it remains, she was unable to trace it.³⁶⁸ It concerns the illustrations for this edition, and although marked by those refractory tendencies that characterised his professional dealings, it also

³⁶⁶ ‘A Pilgrimage to St. Patrick’s Purgatory’, ‘The Broken Oath’, and ‘Father Butler’ were written in 1828.

³⁶⁷ Carleton, promotion for ‘Chronicles of Ballymacruiskeen’.

³⁶⁸ Hayley, *Carleton’s Traits and Stories*, pp. 413-14n. Hayley’s acknowledgements of help in the researching of her book include one to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where the letter is held. See p. viii.

indicates other, more positive aspects of his personality and behaviour – his attention to the detail of his texts, his enduring affection for his background, and his passionate determination that a truly representative picture of peasant life be recorded in his works. It also contains clear evidence of his view that presenting a national, rather than a regional picture of Ireland was of overriding importance. The addressee is unnamed, but both the text and context of the letter indicate that it forms part of a lengthy correspondence between Carleton and Orr; Carleton refers to earlier letters, and a letter from Orr to Carleton on this same subject, predating this one by two weeks, is reproduced in O'Donoghue's biography of Carleton.³⁶⁹ Written the month after publication of the parts version of the 'New Edition' had begun, the letter is dated 5 September 1842.³⁷⁰ (See Appendix I.ii. for the full text of the letter.)

Hayley has observed that this edition was presented as more than a mere collection of tales; it was to be regarded as an authoritative and scholarly work.³⁷¹ The illustrations were clearly intended to accord with its status. Carleton, not a man to underestimate his own literary standing, was plainly aware of the fact. O'Donoghue notes that he 'took a keen interest in the illustrations [...] and was anxious that there should be nothing disfiguring in them'.³⁷² But O'Donoghue himself was clearly not cognisant with the full circumstances. The extent of Carleton's interest, and the depths of his dissatisfaction with the artists employed by the publisher are only fully revealed here.

³⁶⁹ See O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, 54-55.

³⁷⁰ The edition appeared in twenty-three parts between August 1842 and June 1844. It was also produced as two volumes, the first appearing late 1843 and the second, early 1844.

³⁷¹ Hayley, *Carleton's Traits and Stories*, p. 275.

³⁷² O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, 55.

Of the illustrators, two, including Henry MacManus, who had approached Carleton for his support in obtaining a commission for the work, were Irish.³⁷³ The other contributing artists, the most notable of whom was Hablot Knight Browne, the illustrator Phiz, were English. Carleton, though, was unhappy with the artistic arrangements. From Orr's letter to Carleton of 22 August 1842, reproduced by O'Donoghue, several facts can be deduced. Carleton had been sent the proofs of the preface to *Traits and Stories*, and had objected to a particular illustration, which Orr agreed to remove.³⁷⁴ The author had also complained that he had been denied an opportunity to meet the artist Browne; Orr informs him that Browne's visit was not to James McGlashan, a partner in Orr's sister publishing house in Dublin, as Carleton believed, but to the novelist Charles Lever.³⁷⁵ Finally, it appears, Carleton had expressed misgivings about the use of English illustrators for this most Irish of works, and had demanded to see the story illustrations before publication.

Orr's exasperation is apparent. His seemingly placatory remarks carry the implicit suggestion that Carleton would do well to look to his own organizational failings before making unreasonable demands on his publisher. There was little likelihood of a meeting being arranged between Carleton and Browne, for Browne, it seems, was 'an unmanageable creature, *almost as much as yourself*'. Given publishing deadlines, compliance with the author's demand to see the illustrations for his work would be difficult; Orr observes that 'artists, *like authors*, like to leave everything to the last minute'.³⁷⁶

³⁷³ See letter from Henry MacManus to William Carleton, 30 May 1842, reproduced in O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, 53.

³⁷⁴ By 'Preface' is presumably meant the 'General Introduction' to this edition of *Traits and Stories*.

³⁷⁵ Browne illustrated Lever's works.

³⁷⁶ William S. Orr to William Carleton, 22 August 1842, reproduced in O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, 54-55. My emphasis.

On the last point though, Carleton clearly had his way. As his letter to Orr makes clear, he did see at least the illustrations for two of the tales, 'Shane Fadh's Wedding' and 'Larry M'Farland's Wake'. A catalogue of complaints from start to finish, the letter begins with acerbic observations on the incorrect placing of the plates, and ends with a threat by the author to break off contact with the publisher. His annoyance, in part at least, is undoubtedly justified, though the tone of his letter is less than diplomatic. Writing in anger, Carleton appears, unconsciously, to draw upon that same oral tradition and declamatory mode which informs such humorous works as 'Geography of an Irish Oath'.³⁷⁷ The result is both illuminating and unintentionally comic.

His opinion of the plates themselves is forcefully presented. Not a man to restrain his feelings, Carleton devotes the greater part of this lengthy letter to a sustained attack on Browne, who, he maintains, has failed completely to capture the fundamental essence of his texts. That Carleton had not succeeded in engineering a meeting with the illustrator, although the latter had met with Lever, may well have contributed to his sense of injustice; it would certainly be typical of him to take umbrage at a perceived slight, particularly one which involved Lever, with whom he had been on bad terms for several years. The fact that Lever had recently taken up the editorship of the *Dublin University Magazine* would have done nothing to allay Carleton's dislike of his fellow author; until Lever left that post in August 1846 that journal was effectively closed to him as an outlet for his work.³⁷⁸

Justifiably describing the plate for 'Larry McFarlane's [sic] Wake' as 'extremely tame and *unfaithful*', Carleton wrote:

³⁷⁷ 'Geography of an Irish Oath' is included in Carleton, *Traits and Stories*, II (1844).

³⁷⁸ Bad feeling had existed between the two since 1836, when Carleton, who regarded Lever as a writer inferior to himself, had wrongly accused the other of plagiarism. See Boué, p. 84, pp. 91-92.

If you look into the whole 'Wake' you will not find that either he or she ever drank a drop of whisky *under their own roof*, with the exception of that treat which Art Roe Sheridan gave them in page 93 – Phiz ought to get McManus [sic] over who understands Irish life to look at his sketches before he etches them or he ought to look a little more closely into the letter press – in the second plate they ought to be at the end of a meal and I have not described Larry as having two pigs – but one – he was much too poor for that –³⁷⁹

Carleton's annoyance at such negligence is understandable. Larry and his wife would be unable to afford two pigs, and Larry, whose fortunes were in decline, could not afford whisky. An examination of the text reveals that if Larry *does* provide whisky it is when he is at market to negotiate for 'a slip of a pig or a pair of brogues'. On such an occasion, on encountering an old acquaintance he will buy him a dram 'merely to let the other see that he was still *able* to do it' – and will continue to do so until the money for the transaction is spent, afterwards returning home the worse for wear.³⁸⁰ Carleton is presenting an amusing moral tale; but he is also recording a way of life, and that record is being undermined by the English illustrator's ignorance of, and indifference to, Irish peasant culture.

The fact that the artist responsible for this particular illustration happens to be, not Phiz, but Thomas Sibson (1817-44), undermines Carleton's argument somewhat; but Carleton was not a man to let the facts get in the way of his temper. His fury continues unabated. Browne's illustration for 'Shane Fadh's Wedding' is, he says, 'as bad as bad can be – ill selected and worse executed', and 'inferior to Brooke's from which it is taken from first to last'. In fact, Carleton declares, he has never seen 'so cool and wholesale a plagiarism'.

So help me heaven but he has covered by a single wedding party a space of country equal to, if not greater in extent than the plain on

³⁷⁹ Letter from William Carleton to William S. Orr, 5 September 1842, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign Campus, Rare Books and Special Collections Library, Call no. 823C19tr 1842 pt.1-25.

³⁸⁰ Carleton, 'Larry M'Farland's Wake', in *Traits and Stories*, I (1843), 93.

which was fought the great Battle of Waterloo by which the Duke of Wellington liberated all Europe; and Brooke did the same feat before him.³⁸¹

The 'Brooke' to whom Carleton refers is the Irish artist William Henry Brooke (1772-1860), who had produced a sketch 'The Battle of Waterloo' in 1826. Brooke had also illustrated earlier editions of *Traits and Stories*, most notably, the second edition, 'Second Series', 1834 edition. Carleton, generally more appreciative of those of his countrymen employed in the visual arts than of those competing in his own literary field, held him in the highest esteem.³⁸²

Carleton's confidence in Browne's competence to deal with Irish topics is not restored by the second plate for 'Shane Fadh's Wedding', 'Mat O'Flanagan dropping Billy Cormick in the well'. Carleton's feelings are graphically, and pugnaciously, indicated.

Of Flanagan dropping Billy Cormick in the Well I can only say that if I had the worthy artist in the same place I would teach him what the natural grip and attitude for such an action is – Why he holds him in his fingers as if poor Billy had the Cholera and that he feared to touch him – Is Browne a Cockney because if he is it must account in some measure for his ignorance of these matters.³⁸³

Carleton, familiar from his youth with the more energetic aspects of peasant life, knew the impossibility of the hold demonstrated in Phiz's drawing.³⁸⁴ The unlikely grip might make for maximum comic impact, but Carleton was not prepared to have accuracy sacrificed to illustrative effect, particularly by one who appeared to know nothing of life outside London.

The author's irritation at what he regards as indifferent workmanship is equalled by his frustration at having the scenes he considers more appropriate for

³⁸¹ Letter from Carleton to Orr, 5 September 1842.

³⁸² See Hayley, *Carleton's Traits and Stories*, p. 258. Carleton was also a great admirer of the sculptor John Hogan; see O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, 263-73.

³⁸³ Letter from Carleton to Orr, 5 September 1842.

³⁸⁴ See Carleton, *Traits and Stories I* (1843), pp. xv-xvi.

illustration completely overlooked. To properly address the text 'would require mind and trouble and it appears that Mr. Phiz wishes to slip through the matter as easily as possible'.³⁸⁵ For Carleton the book represents not only a practical but an emotional investment; for the artist with a deadline to meet it is merely a commission. Carleton's annoyance is understandable. Over twelve years, as the spokesman for the Irish peasantry, he had revised his tales to present a definitive work on Irish life and culture. That work deserved to be illustrated by those whom he considered properly equipped to depict it. He had valued immensely Brooke's contributions to the 1834 edition of *Traits and Stories*; his disappointment that this, the final, definitive edition, should be ruined, as he thought, by the casual work of uncommitted English illustrators (one in particular) and the indifference of his publisher, must have been acute.

The overt reasons for Carleton's anger give, though, a less than complete picture. Carleton had wanted this edition of *Traits and Stories*, with which he identified himself so intensely, to be a 'national' work in its totality. Although he never expressly articulates the fact in this letter, it is clear that he considered that a series of tales such as this, written by one with his credentials, deserved Irish, and only Irish illustrators. Orr's earlier letter to Carleton indicates that the author had already expressed some misgivings about the wisdom of commissioning English artists. When, at Carleton's request, Orr had agreed to remove the minor illustration to the introduction of the 'New Edition', he had informed the author that it was by Franklin, who was Irish. He had added, pointedly, '*but that you must admit does not make an artist*'.³⁸⁶ Carleton certainly tried to promote the interests of the illustrator MacManus, despite having taken offence at MacManus's *Traits and Stories*

³⁸⁵ Letter from Carleton to Orr, 5 September 1842.

³⁸⁶ Letter from Orr to Carleton, 22 August 1842, p. 54. My emphasis.

frontispiece illustration of his birthplace.³⁸⁷ Objecting, with several exclamation marks for good measure, that Harvey's tail-piece illustration to 'Shane Fadh's Wedding' showed 'Dr Primrose the good Vicar of Wakefield' inappropriately 'palmed upon us as an Irish Friar', he asks Orr, 'Do like a good fellow leave *that* out – and get McManus [sic] to put something in its place – but at all events, *out with it*'. He continues, 'I think if you give McManus [sic] anything like liberal encouragement you will find a great deal of new and unbroken ground in him. It is true he does not deserve this at my hands' (no doubt a reference to that artist's offending picture) '– but that is no reason why I should not speak what I think and give merit its due'.³⁸⁸ That MacManus was Irish undoubtedly had a bearing on Carleton's opinion of his capabilities, and on his readiness to give him credit; in a footnote to the *Traits and Stories* tale 'Battle of the Factions', he informs the reader that the tail-piece engraving, of a potato plant, 'represents the real cork red', as described in the text, 'drawn from the life itself by Mr. MacManus'. This is, then, the authentic item, drawn by an Irish artist, in Ireland, no doubt with Irish soil still clinging to its roots.³⁸⁹

The most revealing, and certainly the most intriguing reference in Carleton's lengthy letter to Orr, is to the artist Daniel Maclise (1806-70). Towards the end of the letter he comments

McLise [sic] I am told is high – I believe the highest as a printer among you. I am proud of this – although I once gave him a wiper which he well deserved. The only thing I ever saw of his was an engraving of his 'Snap Apple Night', which is badly named. Why not call it Hal' eve or Holy eve and thus make it national! It is a scattered picture – without unity of parts, harmony of composition or significant story but full of loose unregulated power notwithstanding –³⁹⁰

³⁸⁷ See Carleton, *Autobiography*, p. 17.

³⁸⁸ Letter from Carleton to Orr, 5 September 1842.

³⁸⁹ Carleton, 'Battle of the Factions' (1843), 126n.

³⁹⁰ Letter from Carleton to Orr, 5 September 1842. Maclise (originally McLise or McClise) adopted the anglicised form of his name in 1835.

Without access to the missing letters in this correspondence (Carleton refers in this letter to ‘the last eight or ten’ others written by himself) it is impossible to make full sense of this observation. Maclise, a highly regarded and versatile (not to say eclectic) Irish artist and illustrator working in London, is not listed as one of the illustrators of this edition of *Traits and Stories*, or of any of the earlier editions.³⁹¹ Maclise had produced illustrations for S. C. and Anna Maria Hall’s *Ireland, Its Scenery and Character* (1841), and Anna Maria Hall’s *Sketches of Irish Character* (1842) and his drawings had provided the basis for the illustrations, by Brooke, of the 1826 edition of Crofton Croker’s *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland*. Carleton, whose work was considered to have greater authenticity than Croker’s, and who certainly regarded his contribution to Irish literature as more valuable than Anna Maria Hall’s, would, no doubt, have been gratified to have Maclise as a contributor. But, given that this correspondence was taking place at and around the time of publication of the ‘New Edition’ of *Traits and Stories*, it is unlikely that Orr himself would be suggesting other prospective artists to an associate who was proving so difficult to satisfy as Carleton. It is possible, but unlikely, that Carleton, a month after publication of the part edition has begun, is suggesting that Maclise should be approached to provide illustrations for the later parts. For him to make a request in such oblique terms would certainly be out of character.

Carleton’s view of Maclise’s ‘Snap Apple Night’, though, leaves little room for confusion. Carleton’s comments on composition are of little relevance; he might justifiably claim to know what was required to complement his own work, but he was not a discerning art critic. But the comment ‘Why not [...] make it national!’ is

³⁹¹ Maclise’s etchings were not used in any edition of *Traits and Stories* until 1872, when a one-volume edition with three plate illustrations appeared. See William Carleton, *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry*, ‘New Edition’ (London: William Tegg, [1872]). By that time both author and artist were dead. At least one of the illustrations had not originally been intended for Carleton’s book, having appeared in another work in 1836.

highly revealing. Maclise, who had left his home city of Cork in 1827 to make a career in London, is evidently using a local term for All-Hallows' Eve to describe this 1833 painting of Irish life; the term 'Snap Apple Night' appears to have originated in the west and south-west of Ireland.³⁹² Carleton, who had painstakingly created out of a regional folk identity a national one, felt justified in criticising the use of a term that restricted the observer's view to one of Munster life rather than presenting a broader concept of Irish tradition.

On 15 October 1842, the organ of Young Ireland, *The Nation*, made its first appearance. Carleton was writing this letter six weeks or so before the first issue appeared in mid-October, and ten weeks before he made, on what was probably a pretext, his initial approach to the *Nation*.³⁹³ With the pages of the *Dublin University Magazine*, now under Lever's editorship, effectively closed to him, Carleton needed another outlet for his work, and another source of income. His views on the promotion of an English language Irish cultural identity, if not his views on Ireland's political future, may have been in harmony with those of the *Nation's* founders, but, as this letter confirms, any ideas he held on an inclusive Irish culture were distinctively his own, and not surprisingly, served his own ends. Carleton, to be successful, had to present a picture of his country accessible both to a literate Irish society, and to the world beyond. He clearly succeeded. Contrary to his own predictions he was not entirely forgotten. Fifteen years after his death, in 1884, an

³⁹² See Mangaire Sugach, 'Two months that divided the old Celtic pagan year' in 'Odds and Ends', *Limerick Leader*, 14 December 2002, < <http://www.limerick-leader.ie/issues/20021214/scoighe.html> > [accessed 8 September 2004] (para. 12 of 19). This feature refers to the term as being still in usage amongst the older population. See also letter from Dr. Thomas Croke to Michael Cusack of the Gaelic Athletic Association, 18 December 1884, reproduced as 'A letter from the Prophets', *Gaelic Athletic Association Newsletter*, 3 February 2004, < http://www.boards.ie/vbulletin/archive_index.php/t-138991.html > [accessed 8 September 2004] (para. 4 of 7). In this letter Thomas Croke, Archbishop of Cashel, bemoans the passing of traditional Irish pastimes and celebrations, including amongst their number 'snap-apple night'. Croke was born in Co. Cork.

³⁹³ Carleton approached the *Nation*, asking them to deny a rumour supposedly circulating at the time, that he was the publication's sole contributor, when in fact nothing written by him had appeared in its pages.

unattributed article in the *London Quarterly and Holborn Review* on Turgenev compared Carleton's position as an Irish writer to that enjoyed by Sir Walter Scott for Scotland, giving him similar, if less elevated, status to that of the Russian Ivan Turgenev, 'with whom he has a good deal in common'. Whatever his limitations as a writer, is as true of Carleton as of Turgenev that his 'excellence, when he is brought into comparison with even the best of his compatriots, is, that he gives us not "types", but actual typical people, whom he has met and known'.³⁹⁴ Presenting the peasant voice of Ireland, Carleton had, in more than one sense, made it national, and achieved recognition in an international context.

³⁹⁴ 'Ivan Serguievich Tourgenieff', *London Quarterly and Holborn Review*, 3.1, 38-55 (p. 55).

CHAPTER 5

CARLETON, HIS CHARACTER AND HIS CHARACTERS

Carleton produced two autobiographical records, one at the beginning of his literary career, and the other in the closing stages of his life. The first was the fictionalised description of his pilgrimage, as a youth, to Lough Derg. The other was his uncompleted autobiography. The earlier of the two accounts, in its later versions ‘The Lough Derg Pilgrim’ was originally entitled ‘A Pilgrimage to St. Patrick’s Purgatory’.³⁹⁵ Carleton’s first sketch for the *Christian Examiner*, it was written at Caesar Otway’s behest. Otway, who had himself visited the Lough Derg site and afterwards attacked it in print, was, not surprisingly, delighted to find an aspiring writer, a lapsed Catholic with a strong antipathy to the Church of Rome, prepared to give a first-hand, unfavourable account of his experiences as a pilgrim there.³⁹⁶ Despite his high regard for his protégé, Otway clearly considered that the critical tone of the tale needed reinforcing. The opening paragraphs of the 1829 version (composing five pages in all), ‘The Lough Dearg Pilgrim’, are also contained in the introduction of the first, 1828 version, and constitute a diatribe against the Catholic Church’s supposed acceptance of penance as a substitute for penitence. They are disconnected in both tone and style from the autobiographical account that follows, and, like passages in other of his early works, owe far more to Otway than to

³⁹⁵ The 1839 version and the 1842 ‘New Edition’ version are entitled ‘The Lough Derg Pilgrim’, but the 1829 edition is called ‘The Lough Dearg Pilgrim’.

³⁹⁶ Otway’s account had appeared in his *Sketches in Ireland*. See Caesar Otway, *Sketches in Ireland Descriptive of Interesting and Hitherto Unnoticed Districts in the North and South* (Dublin: William Curry Jnr, 1827), pp. 149-51.

Carleton.³⁹⁷ In the final 1842 version of the tale Carleton replaces this earlier preamble with one which is clearly entirely his own.³⁹⁸

This being a humorous as well as an informative account of his experience, comic aspects of both the journey and of his own character are, of necessity, exaggerated; the author's dual intentions, to present himself as a supremely authoritative commentator on the Catholic station at Lough Dearg and to do it with some wit, are clear. 'The Lough Dearg Pilgrim' is memorable as much for the author's self-deprecating account of himself as a youth whose vanity is only matched by his naivety as for its descriptions of the Lough Derg site itself. As is apparent from the liveliness of the writing, this first commission for Otway was undertaken with enthusiasm. Peopled with characters ranging from the devoutly religious to the deeply unscrupulous, from the penitent to the thief, it also gives the first indication of where both Carleton's talents, and his affections, lay. This is the Ulster Catholic peasant landscape of Carleton's youth, and at its centre is Carleton himself.

Like all autobiographical accounts, this should be read with a degree of circumspection; no individual is an impartial judge of his own past motives and actions. However, this narrative is quite clearly a fictionalised one, and as a consequence, is relatively transparent. The distancing of author from first person narrator is most obvious in Carleton's account of his family circumstances. The narrator declares his name to be 'B-'; 'B-'s father is living, although his mother is not. In Carleton's case, his mother was the surviving parent; his father had died, probably when the author was in his mid-teens. This departure from truth is undoubtedly made in the interests of narrative continuity; allusion has already been

³⁹⁷ In the first, 1828 version, the passages referred to is preceded by two paragraphs which are omitted from the second, 1829 version.

³⁹⁸ In the 1829 version, the first four pages are undoubtedly Otway's. See Carleton, 'The Lough Dearg Pilgrim', pp. 201-06. In the final, 'New Edition' of 1842-44, Carleton introduces the tale with an account of the occasion on which Otway asked him to write the sketch.

made to the sacerdotal ambitions nursed by the elder Carleton (or the elder 'B-') on behalf of his son, and no doubt Carleton considered it apposite to indicate that he was still alive.³⁹⁹

Carleton, whose view of the world was decidedly solipsistic, and who was inclined to nurse resentments, was not disposed to depict his later experiences in the engaging style he employed to describe his early pilgrimage. If that account was slightly, but unambiguously fictionalised, the *Autobiography*, like all such works, presents other distortions. Given that he had been in the business of producing fiction, it is not entirely surprising that here, writing towards the end of his life, Carleton should impose upon his past the structures of the novel. Reflecting on the course of events, he observes, 'I have often thought that man's life is divided or separated into a series of small epics; not epics that are closed by happiness, however, but by pain'. The particular stage of his life to which he refers specifically at this point, however, has a more agreeable conclusion; he had just acquired a wife. 'Here was I now, according to the usual sense and meaning of the epic, left after a life of awful struggles and heart-breaking trials, in a state of perfect happiness.'⁴⁰⁰ This bliss was short-lived. Carleton frequently found himself financially embarrassed, and although his problems were by no means all of his own making, his often-repeated grievances against his country, and his railings against particular individuals, became tiresomely predictable. In the introductory paragraph of the *Autobiography* he states his intention of giving an account of the tribulations he had endured and wrongs he had suffered, particularly in his later life.⁴⁰¹ His incomprehension, at finding himself, notwithstanding his literary reputation, unable to live comfortably, is palpable. To encounter adversity on his journey was acceptable; for him to have reached his

³⁹⁹ Carleton, 'The Lough Dearg Pilgrim', pp. 281-82.

⁴⁰⁰ Carleton, *Autobiography*, p. 198.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

destination and found it an uncomfortable place flew in the face of natural justice, and the conventions of literature as he understood them. But in this final work at least, his resentments, voiced elsewhere, remained largely unaired. The book remained uncompleted, ending abruptly with Carleton still a young man, still to make the acquaintance of Otway, and still to be launched on a literary career.

Carleton's account of his pilgrimage to Lough Derg and his unfinished life story, two portraits of the artist as a young man, not only mark the beginning and the end of his literary life, but also indicate his strength as a writer, and his greatest limitation. In his introduction to the 1843 edition of *Traits and Stories* he claimed an advantage which he says 'perhaps few other Irish writers ever possessed', that of knowing the peasantry he depicted. 'And this', he emphasises, with a not entirely convincing modesty, 'is the only merit which I claim'.⁴⁰² He lacked any secure literary foothold in the present. For Carleton, security, and a sense of self-identity, lay in the past. He knew the tales of giants, fairies and heroes and villains of the oral tradition that had nurtured him. He could record the practical details of peasant life, and draw, with considerable facility, the figures of his childhood and youth, characters and types drawn from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. His education, although somewhat haphazard, had familiarised him with the feats of the mythical heroes of the classical world. The other influences on his perception of the world, and of himself, the few literary works available within a community that had little need of them, did not extend beyond eighteenth-century texts.

By his own account, Carleton's perception of himself as a young man setting out to find, if not a fortune, than at least a vocation, was influenced by his early, uninformed reading. An avid enthusiast for any literature that came his way, at about

⁴⁰² Carleton, *Traits and Stories*, I (1843) p. xvii. Carleton's emphasis.

the time of his visit to Lough Derg he was both delighted, and frustrated by the discovery of an incomplete edition of Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*. Slightly later, an even greater impression was made by another picaresque novel: Alain-Rene LeSage's *Adventures of Gil Blas of Sautillane*, which, in his ignorance he believed to be an autobiographical account, awoke in him, he says, a strong desire for adventure. This was perhaps fortunate, as he showed little enthusiasm for any work available to him locally; a fact which, soon after he had finished reading the book, resulted in his being unceremoniously expelled from his sister's home into an indifferent world by a brother-in-law whose patience and goodwill he had finally exhausted.⁴⁰³ So began the travels that ultimately led him to Dublin. If the circumstances in which he found himself at that time were not always to his liking, it mattered little. Having the confidence of youth, and the example of Gil Blas before him, he took the view that 'the world was wide, and had room enough for higher and better chances'.⁴⁰⁴

Carleton may have envisaged himself as a picaresque hero setting out on the highways of life, but there are other aspects to his representation of himself. His youthful persona, in the *Autobiography* at least, displays many of the attributes of the 'hero' of the Irish Celtic tradition with which, given his own father's fund of stories, he must have been familiar: the 'epics' to which he refers in his autobiography are as likely to be the those of ancient Irish literature as those of Europe. Eilis Dillon Mercier, in a paper included in *International Aspects of Irish Literature*, lists the typical characteristics of such a figure.

Ideally, he should have beauty and strength, gigantic size [...]. He must have more wit than his opponents and be capable of assuming dignity when his deepest principles are in question. However, he may

⁴⁰³ Carleton, *Autobiography*, p. 71, p. 110-11. Carleton, *Traits and Stories*, 1 (1843), pp. xvi-xvii. This was Carleton's second such experience. A short time previously he had been ejected from his brother's home for the same reason.

⁴⁰⁴ Carleton, *Autobiography*, p. 130.

play the fool for a while if it suits him [...]. He cares especially for the poor and defenceless and he will appear in the nick of time to lend his weight when all seems to be lost [...]. Other patterns include stories of his having been marked out from his youth as an exceptional person, instantly recognisable as being above the ordinary. Sometimes he himself has some foreknowledge of his future, and has dedicated himself to it from an early age, and he forges ahead to his appointed destiny, knowing what is likely to be his fate.⁴⁰⁵

Carleton, having had his sacerdotal ambitions thwarted, may have had little idea of any 'appointed destiny', but he was determined that wherever it lay it was not in the parish of Clogher, and it did not involve manual labour. Within the circumscribed society in which he moved, he had been considered, after all, to be a youth of exceptional promise. Even the circumstances of his entry into the world, it seems, had been regarded as significant. That he was born a full five years after the sibling closest to him in age was seen by some in his community as an indication that he, the youngest child of the family, was destined for great things. But as Shrove Tuesday, the day Carleton gives as his birthday, was considered inauspicious, this optimistic view of his prospects was not held by all; to enter the world at the commencement of Lent, some believed, might indicate a troubled future. These predictions, while dismissed by Carleton as the product of peasant superstition, could nevertheless be seen, he says, as having 'shadowed forth' his life.⁴⁰⁶ Physically, it seems, there were few to rival him. He was, he claimed, 'one of the finest and best made young men in the parish'.

I was then in the very bloom of youth – six feet high – with, it was said, a rather handsome and intelligent set of features – my early fame at all athletic exercises was still unrivalled, and, in fact, I was looked upon as a kind of local phenomenon in my way.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁵ Ellis Dillon Mercier, 'Folk Memory as History – the Irish Tradition', in *International Aspects of Irish Literature*, ed. by Toshi Furomoto and others (Gerrards Cross: Smyth, 1996), pp. 1-13 (p. 2)

⁴⁰⁶ Carleton, *Autobiography*, pp. 17-18.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 88. See also p. 56, p. 85, pp. 99-100, pp. 104-06.

As to his personal qualities, by his own account, he was not lacking in courage, being prepared to defend the weak and vulnerable, by force if necessary. His autobiography contains an account, which he insists could be authenticated by a number of people present, of his physical confrontation with a tyrannical father in Maynooth, in the period of his early wanderings. The man's 'anti-natural cruelty' towards his children finally provoked the young Carleton to give him a resounding taste of his own medicine, to the satisfaction, he claims, not only of those present, but also of the general populace of the town. His defeat of a notorious local bully ensured that his reputation 'shot up with a brilliancy that filled Maynooth from one end to the other'.⁴⁰⁸

This sense of himself as an 'heroic' character, distanced, at an early age, from his community, is also evident in the account he gives of his experiences at Lough Derg. The Lough Derg adventure is an educative journey for a youth who is capable of appreciating, if only retrospectively, that practices tolerated, and even encouraged by the Catholic Church are no more than sops to a superstitious peasantry. This, and his readiness to challenge priestly authority and defend the vulnerable, heedless of his own long-term interests, all serve to indicate his moral integrity, his intellect, and his courage. But the tale, in which comic elements figure highly, is one in which its hero is not so much prepared to play the fool as to have his foolishness exposed. Carleton who at this period was wont to maintain 'a lofty dignity' unsuited to his years and experience, and whose preferred style of speech, like that of his fictional Denis O'Shaughnessy, was, he declares in his autobiography, 'as fine a specimen of the

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 151-54.

preposterous and pedantic as ever was spoken', was to find his initiation into the ways of the world, and the Catholic Church, a salutary experience.⁴⁰⁹

Carleton's youthful self, as described in the *Autobiography*, is markedly similar in character to the narrator of the Lough Derg tale. Prior to Otway's tampering, the Lough Derg pilgrimage almost certainly commenced with Carleton's self-deprecating account of himself as an ostentatiously devout individual whose family's ambitions for him reinforced the natural vanity of youth. At this period of early religiosity, Carleton, it seems, brought as competitive an attitude to devotion as he did to his leaping and wrestling.

I had often out-prayed and out-fasted an old bachelor uncle, who lived with us; a feat on which few would have ventured; and I even arrived at such a pitch of perfection at praying, that with the assistance of young and powerful lungs, I was able to distance him at any English prayer in which we joined. But in Latin, I must allow, that owing to my knowledge of pronunciation, and to some twitches of conscience I felt on adventuring to imitate him by leaping this impediment, he was able to throw me back a considerable distance in his turn; so that when we both started for a *de profundis*, I was always sure to come in second.⁴¹⁰

His depiction of his family's attitude is no less mischievous. His father, elsewhere depicted as a simple man of 'unaffected piety and stainless integrity of principle',⁴¹¹ is, it seems, not so unversed in the ways of the world that he cannot appreciate the material advantages that, with luck, might accrue from a priestly vocation. In a passage present in the 1828 and 1829 versions and removed from later editions, the narrator describes how his youthful devotion, and his Latin learning, 'rubbed up my father's knowledge of calculation, when he enumerated what the

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.

⁴¹⁰ Carleton, 'The Lough Derg Pilgrim', pp. 206-07. Carleton's 'knowledge of pronunciation', is, of course, as the context indicates, inferior to his uncle's'. In the definitive 'New Edition' version Carleton makes this explicit, referring to 'my imperfect knowledge of [Latin] pronunciation'. See Carleton, 'The Lough Derg Pilgrim' (1843), 241.

⁴¹¹ See Carleton, *Traits and Stories*, I (1843), p. viii; Carleton, *Autobiography*, p. 18.

income of a bishop might amount to, under the present dynasty; but should emancipation pass, [...] why the Palace of the Protestant bishop of –, would be, he would add, smiling placidly, no uncomfortable residence for me'.⁴¹² His prospects being so high, he was in great demand as a godfather, a duty he undertook, he writes, 'with unusual condescension'.⁴¹³ Such attention from family and friends, and such expectations placed upon him, prompted him to prepare for his pilgrimage to Lough Derg.

Not that I considered myself a sinner, or by any means obliged to go from *that* motive; for although the opinion of my friends, as to my talents and sanctity, was exceedingly high, yet, I assure you, it cut but a very indifferent figure, when compared with my own on both these subjects.⁴¹⁴

Having ascended to the heights of spiritual vanity, he was destined for a descent – also described in the *Autobiography* – both bathetic and literal. That the pilgrimage necessitated a boat journey was a matter of concern to one who, physical prowess notwithstanding, was nervous of travelling over water. Despite the assurances of a 'satirical and heathenish' acquaintance, a person rather less impressed by his intellectual and devotional talents than others in the community, that he 'would never die by drowning' (an observation, 'B-' somewhat disingenuously observes, that was imparted with a grin 'that I was never rightly to understand'), he considered that precautions were necessary.⁴¹⁵ Intent on being in a position to emulate the example of a pilgrim priest, the single survivor of a capsized craft on Lough Derg, whose faith

⁴¹² Carleton, 'The Lough Dearg Pilgrim', p. 207. That this passage does not appear in later versions of this story is presumably because the reference to Catholic speculation about the collapse of the Church of Ireland might offend non-Catholic readers. The bishopric referred to is clearly that of Clogher.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 207-08.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 209. The wording in the *Autobiography* is almost identical. See Carleton, *Autobiography*, p. 90.

had supposedly enabled him to walk, Christ-like, across the lake to his island destination, he made preparation at his father's water-filled marl pit.

At this point my heart beat high with emotion, my soul was rapt up to a most enthusiastic pitch of faith, and my whole spirit absorbed in feelings, where hope – doubt – gleams of uncertainty – visions of future eminence – twitches of fear – reflections on my expertness at swimming [...] and on the depth of the pond – had all insisted on an equal share of attention.

Placing his confidence on a large lily pad,

and having stimulated myself by a fresh Pater and Ave, I advanced, my eyes turned up enthusiastically to heaven [...] and lest I might give myself time to cool from this divine glow, I made a monstrous stride, planting my right foot exactly in the middle of the treacherous water-lilly [sic] leaf, and the next moment was up to my neck in water. Here was devotion cooled.⁴¹⁶

Approaching his mid-thirties, and distanced from his boyhood and youth as he was from the peasantry amongst whom he had spent his first quarter century, he presents this immature, posturing persona with the same combination of detachment, understanding and affection that characterises his depictions of other peasant types. His egotism was no more than might be expected of any boy of his background whose scholastic successes, however limited in a broader context, placed him above his peers. Such a one, if his parents had the means to support him, would be destined to become, if not priest, then at least a clerk or a hedge-schoolmaster.⁴¹⁷ Excused the manual chores normally expected of one his age in order that he might improve those academic skills on which his family and acquaintances were ill-equipped to judge him, like the fictional Denis O'Shaughnessy, he was likely to become rather too impressed by his own learning. While Carleton had personally experienced the role of 'young priest', his wider knowledge of the society in which the prospective cleric

⁴¹⁶ Carleton, 'The Lough Dearg Pilgrim', pp. 209-10. See also, Carleton, *Autobiography*, pp. 90-91.

⁴¹⁷ Carleton refers to this in 'The Hedge School', in *Traits and Stories*, I (1843) 273.

moved was also first hand, a matter upon which his reputation rested. His complaint, in the introduction to the 1843 edition of *Traits and Stories*, that from the time of Shakespeare the Irishman had invariably been presented as ‘a broad grotesque blunderer’, an impulsive fool incapable of mastering the English language, was a wrong that he himself was intent on redressing.⁴¹⁸ While Carleton incorporated elements of caricature into some, though by no means all, of his fictional and semi-fictional representations, he successfully negotiated that broad area reserved for the ‘stage Irishman’. His success is not surprising. He was, as is evident from his starring role as Lough Derg Pilgrim, implicated in their foibles.

Whereas the young Carleton had envisaged himself in heroic mode, responding to the world’s challenges, in ‘Neal Malone’, the final tale of the definitive edition of *Traits and Stories*, he utilises the idea of the warrior leader, a figure of considerable importance to the Irish psyche, to produce a decidedly antithetic hero. Neal, the diminutive tailor whose pugnacious inclinations, constantly thwarted, are in inverse proportion to his stature, is some considerable distance from having the ‘beauty strength, [and] gigantic size’ required of a legendary Irish figure. The absurdity of his position is reinforced by his distance from the illustrious beings he would emulate. While his credentials appear impeccable, his forebears, ‘up, probably, to Con [sic] of the Hundred Battles himself’, being all fighting men, he, to his chagrin, is restricted to flourishing his scissors ‘as if he were heading a faction’.

His presence was the signal for peace; for, notwithstanding his unconquerable propensity to warfare, he went abroad as the genius of unanimity, though carrying in his bosom the redoubtable disposition of a warrior; just as the sun, though the source of light himself, is said to be dark enough at bottom.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁸ Carleton, *Traits and Stories*, I (1843), p. ii.

⁴¹⁹ Carleton, *Traits and Stories*, II (1844), 416, 417. ‘Conn of the Hundred Battles’ was a legendary Connacht warrior leader of the 2nd century A.D.

The ebullience with which not only Neal Malone, but also other of the *Traits and Stories* figures, are described, indicates a close and continuing relationship between characters and author, and with the Ireland that he had so determinedly put behind him. When Carleton describes the pig driver, Phil Purcel, as being ‘a singular character, for he was never married’, and continues, ‘but not withstanding his singularity, no man ever possessed, for practical purposes, a more plentiful stock of duplicity’, his playful contortions of language allow him to identify with that duplicity, as well as to display his storyteller’s wit.⁴²⁰

In a later collection, one that merits more attention than it receives, *Tales and Sketches of the Irish Peasantry*, the relationship of author to the characters he draws is somewhat different to that suggested by *Traits and Stories*. Appearing four years after the definitive edition of *Traits and Stories*, its sketches supplement those earlier tales. The figures included, ranging from the fiddler and the dancing master to the midwife, cover a broad spectrum of Irish peasant occupations as they had existed forty or fifty years previously.⁴²¹ The author commences by detailing the particular qualities of each profession, and then provides an appropriate illustration. Introducing Rose Moan, the Irish midwife, Carleton remarks:

We could mention several that are certainly marked with great precision, and that stand out in fine relief to the eye of the spectator, but none at all, who, in richness of colouring, in boldness of outline, or in firmness of force, can for a moment be compared with the Midwife. The Fiddler, for instance, lives a life sufficiently graphic and distinct; so does the Dancing-master, and so also does the Match-maker, but with some abatement of colouring. As for the Cosherer, the Senachie, the Keener, and the Foster-nurse, although all mellow-toned, and well individualised by the strong power of hereditary usage, yet do they stand dim and shadowy, when placed face to face with this great exponent of the national temperament.⁴²²

⁴²⁰ Carleton, ‘Phil Purcel’, I (1843), p. 407.

⁴²¹ The 1851 edition of *Tales and Sketches*, illustrated and with a second title page, and additional title, but textually identical to the 1846 edition, is used here.

⁴²² Carleton, ‘Rose Moan, the Irish Midwife’, in *Tales and Sketches*, p. 113.

In his *Autobiography*, Carleton, stressing the veracity of his first tale for Otway, was to liken his description of the visit to Lough Derg to a 'coloured photograph'.⁴²³ With photography still a relatively new and intriguing phenomenon, the simile provided an apt linking of past and present, of suggesting Carleton's own role in investing life into his record of an earlier time. The metaphorical context here, in this extract from *Tales and Sketches* is artistic rather than photographic, but the fundamental message is the same. These 'well individualised' figures, many of them personalities known to the author, taken together make up a composite representation of national life and character.

Carleton's reputation was shaped out of his personal knowledge of the realities of peasant life in Ulster. By the late 1830s, already an established writer, Carleton recognised the emphasis to be placed on what, arguably, was, even then, becoming the touchstone of fiction in its extended forms, the delineation of character. Although no intellectual theorist, Carleton recognised the direction in which literature was tending, and determined to consolidate his position as a writer of national and international importance. In the late 1820s Griffin had commented that the reading public was hungry for reality, and would settle for nothing less. He had responded by ensuring, or attempting to ensure, that his stories accurately reflected the culture of the area of which he wrote, and to describe, with some precision, the geographic locations that formed the background to his plots.⁴²⁴ A decade later, in the preface to the book edition of his first novel, Carleton indicated that he too, understood that same requirement, and furthermore, was capable of supplying it. When he wrote 'It is indeed surprising to think how easy a thing it is to give to truth the appearance and

⁴²³ Carleton, *Autobiography*, p. 91.

⁴²⁴ Daniel Griffin, pp. 198-99.

impress of fiction', he was referring both to events – the story, he indicates, is based on an actual occurrence – and to his eponymous character, Fardorougha.⁴²⁵ He is concerned not with verisimilitude, but with veracity. While he was never to properly address the broader implications of realism, he did have the sympathetic appreciation of human nature and of human fallibility necessary for that important component of the realist novel, convincing psychological depiction. Those social, economic and, not least, psychological insecurities which defined his life and limited him as a novelist also served him a sympathetic recorder of human frailty. His most accomplished portrayals are of those who, if not existing on the fringes of society, are distanced from their peers; individuals who, through a combination of circumstance and temperament, are psychologically flawed, and are regarded with some circumspection within their own social environments.

That Carleton reportedly criticised Dickens' inability to produce convincing characters suggests that in this area at least, he considered himself superior to his acclaimed English contemporary. Whether these views were expressed before or after Dickens had failed to respond to his overtures in the mid-1850s is not known, but it is certainly possible, given his defensiveness about his own interests and reputation, that Dickens' coolness towards him reinforced any unfavourable judgment he was inclined to make. While, in Carleton's opinion, Dickens was 'fertile, varied and most ingenious', his literary inventiveness did not extend to the depiction of personality. 'There does not appear a fine, sensible, Englishman in all his works. His women are dolls and make-weights. The character of Pickwick is a compound of Uncle Toby and the Vicar of Wakefield.'⁴²⁶

⁴²⁵ Carleton, *Fardorougha* (1839), p. viii.

⁴²⁶ O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, 158. Carleton's resentment of Dickens is discussed in chapter I.

His contempt for Pickwick is somewhat unfair; *Pickwick Papers*, after all, makes no claims to be other than a light-hearted account of the adventures and misadventures of Pickwick and his friends. His more general point, however, that whatever the overall merits of Dickens' work, his characterisations are unconvincing, has to be taken more seriously. Similar criticisms of Dickens were made, and continue to be made, by others. In 1856 George Eliot voiced reservations about the depth of Dickens' characterisations in her essay 'The Natural History of German Life'. Observing of 'one great novelist' who had the gift of depicting the external traits of urban populations with great facility, she wrote that 'if he could give us their psychological character [...] with the same truth as their idioms and manners, his books would be the best contribution Art has ever made to the awakening of social sympathies'. Rarely, she said, does he pass 'from the humorous and external to the emotional and tragic, without becoming as transcendent in his unreality as he was a moment before in his artistic truthfulness'.⁴²⁷

If to be psychologically convincing was one touchstone of realism, contemporaneity was another – and it was in this last respect that Carleton himself might be found wanting. While individual subjects were not always well drawn, and while he was certainly capable of descending into sentimentality, he could not, in any broad sense, be accused of neglecting the 'psychological character' of the Irish peasantry; he was too close to them, socially and emotionally, for that. But whereas Dickens, in *Oliver Twist* and his succeeding novels, and even arguably, in his early *Sketches by Boz*, was addressing contemporary social ills resulting from rapid urbanisation in England, Carleton was presenting an earlier reality, the Irish rural scene of the world he had known thirty years or so previously. Carleton's dislocation

⁴²⁷ Eliot, 'Natural History of German Life', p. 111.

was not from his peasant characters, but from the circumstances of contemporary Ireland. As a sketch writer whose declared aims were firstly, to record the passing Irish scene, and secondly, to counter the long-standing and pervasive English misconceptions about the Irish psyche, this was immaterial. As a novelist, however, Carleton was working, rather less successfully, to different requirements. It is only in *The Black Prophet*, ‘a tale of Irish famine’, serialised in 1846 and produced as a book the following year, that he can justifiably claim to have produced a narrative which, although set almost three decades earlier, was directly relevant to the circumstances of the time.⁴²⁸

Yet, for all these differences, Dickens and Carleton also had much in common. Given the similarities of style and of characterization in some of their works, given their shared gift for dialogue, and given that some of the faults he saw in Dickens’ character depictions could be found in his own, Carleton’s criticism of the English writer seems unwarranted. It is possible that his dismissal of Dickens is, in part, precisely because of their commonality; a commonality which no doubt made Dickens’ indifference towards him, a writer whose status in Ireland approached that which Dickens enjoyed in England, the more wounding.

In *Valentine M’Clutchy*, an ebullient style, the incorporation of comic scenes into what is, anyway, a highly episodic work, and the ready use of caricature, suggest the influence of Dickens’ early works. While *Valentine M’Clutchy*, an account of political and social injustice promoted under the auspices of religion, is a fundamentally different product to *Pickwick Papers*, to which Carleton referred in his observation on Dickens alluded to earlier, the title page description of the novel’s contents, as ‘including ‘the pious aspirations, permissions, vouchsafements, and other

⁴²⁸ Carleton makes this claim in his preface to the book, written in February 1847. Carleton, *Black Prophet*, pp. vii-viii. This is discussed in more detail in chapter 6.

sanctified privileges of Solomon M'Slime', reads remarkably like Dickens' announcement, published in the *Athenaeum*, that the forthcoming *Pickwick Papers*, was a work 'containing a faithful record of the perambulations, perils, travels, adventures, and sporting transactions of the corresponding members [of the Pickwick club]'.⁴²⁹

Descriptive comic names for fictional characters were not new, of course; writing in 1842, Carleton himself alludes to 'the Captain O'Cutters, O'Blunders and Dennis Bulgruderies of the English stage', and to Sheridan's Sir Lucius O'Trigger.⁴³⁰ But that it is in *Valentine M'Clutchy* that he first adopts the practice is an indication that it has been suggested by his reading of Dickens. *Pickwick Papers* has, amongst others, Mr. Tupman, an ardent connoisseur of the female form, the prospective dueller Dr. Slammer, at whose hand a bemused and alarmed Mr. Winkle seems likely to meet his end, and the dubious attorneys Messrs. Dodson and Fogg, and representing the gentry, the Snipes and the Clubbers. *Nicholas Nickleby*, an exposé of the scandalous conditions then existing in some educational establishments, has, of course, the sadistic schoolmaster Whackford Squeers. *Valentine M'Clutchy* has the bailiff Darby O'Drive, determined on improving his chances of promotion in this world and in the next, the hypocritical evangelist M'Slime, the avaricious cleric Lucre, and, not least, the rapacious M'Clutchy. Standing in somewhat less colourful opposition are those devoted to promoting the common good, the clergymen Clement and Roche, men of different faith professions but the same moral and religious outlook.

Like many of Dickens' characters, a number of Carleton's are defined almost entirely through their speech. Of Denis O'Shaughnessy, the hero of Carleton's tale,

⁴²⁹ Advertisement from the *Athenaeum*, March 26, 1836, reproduced in Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers* (New York: Signet, 1964). *The Pickwick Papers* first appeared in monthly parts from the spring of 1836, and was published in book form the following year.

⁴³⁰ Carleton, *Traits and Stories*, I (1843), p. ii.

Barbara Hayley writes, 'Denis's language *is* Denis'.⁴³¹ Denis, as was his creator, is intended for the priesthood, and also like him, has adopted the language he considers to be appropriate to his status. While Carleton's ear for peasant dialect was undoubtedly one of his great strengths, it was not always consistently applied. Terry Eagleton, commenting on Carleton's 'linguistic instability', observes that although he successfully satirizes the inflated language and speech patterns of the hedge school master which he himself had enthusiastically employed in his youth, his often inconsistent use of standard English to denote moral or intellectual superiority of particular individuals results in awkward dialogue modes, and as a consequence, unconvincing character depictions.⁴³² The fictional narrator of 'Wildgoose Lodge', as Eagleton observes, speaks Hiberno-English as a participant in the planning and execution of the murderous plot he describes, although his narration, as a reformed Ribbonman, is conducted in Standard English. The result, as Eagleton states, is 'an unaccountable linguistic dissonance'. Although Eagleton omits to mention it, this inconsistency, noted by Barbara Hayley, had been recognised as early as 1830. The editor of the *Dublin Literary Gazette*, in which the story had first appeared as 'Confessions of a Reformed Ribbonman', had observed somewhat dryly that 'our ribbonman went to school after his reformation'.⁴³³

Dialogue presented in Standard English in Carleton's work is indeed frequently suggestive of a character's moral rectitude, aligning his or her outlook with the author's perspective, and by implication, with the reader's also. However, this is not invariably the case. Melissa Fegan has pointed out that Eagleton confounds his own argument by confusing two of the characters in *The Black Prophet*, attributing to the low born and virtuous Condy Dalton the more elevated speech of the morally

⁴³¹ Hayley, *Carleton's Traits and Stories*, p. 109.

⁴³² Eagleton, pp. 208-10.

⁴³³ See Hayley, *Carleton's Traits and Stories*, p. 73, p. 404n.

corrupt squireen Dick Henderson.⁴³⁴ This is not the stylistic failure on Carleton's part that Eagleton believes it to be; far from having introduced a discordantly artificial speech pattern, Carleton has ensured that the language Henderson employs when describing the attributes of the lovely woman before him is more than correspondent with his class; his inflated speech, addressed to the girl's father, is insolent, and an indication of his libertine nature, and of the worthlessness of his character.

If dialogue represents one aspect of Carleton's variable control of his material and his medium, his portrayal of women represents another. Carleton's female characters are usually virtuous, and occasionally flawed, as Eagleton observes. His attitude to women generally, in his personal dealings as well as in his fiction, is one of benevolence. Although he is prepared to engage in gentle mockery of his father for his simple religiosity, his mother is spared any comic treatment. While he readily slights male family members – his brother for his hypochondriacal tendencies, his sister's husband for his unsympathetic (and not unreasonable) treatment of him – with the exception of his wife's mother, whose sharp manner and (perhaps more significantly) poor opinion of him as a son-in-law he resented, the women in his life fare almost as well as their fictional sisters.⁴³⁵ Carleton's young heroines tend to be as lacking in depth, and as 'make-weight', as any of the idealised dolls he took exception to in Dickens' novels. Many have a disconcerting tendency to forget their origins, and, despite their peasant status, display only intermittent traces of dialect in their speech. Invariably tall and shapely, they have a habit of reacting to adversity as one literary convention dictates that genteel Victorian ladies should, by collapsing insensible.

⁴³⁴ Fegan, p. 135.

⁴³⁵ See Carleton, *Autobiography*, pp. 62-63, p. 97, pp. 101-03, p. 212.

Kathleen Cavanagh, a heroine of *The Emigrants of Ahadarra*, is one such, although (despite almost expiring of a broken heart) she does at least remain on her feet for the length of the novel. Published in 1848, the book addresses the insecurity of tenant farmers under an invidious and destabilising system of land-ownership and the resultant emigration from Ireland, and centres on the love for each other of Kathleen and Bryan M'Mahon. A plot to defame Bryan, engineered by a dissolute rival, Hycy Burke, leads Kathleen to reject Bryan, despite her affection for him. The scheme, in which a disreputable trio of tinkers, the Hogan brothers, are implicated, is ultimately exposed, and as a consequence the M'Mahons' fortunes are reversed.

As virtuous as she is beautiful, Kathleen is sweet-tempered, sensible, and passionately attached to her Catholic religion. So perfect a creature physically is she that her creator appears to have considerable difficulty in finding adjectives adequate enough to describe her. Indeed, his own authorial narrative becomes as inflated as that which he puts in the mouth of the disreputable Dick Henderson of *The Black Prophet*.

Kathleen Cavanagh was considerably *above* the middle size, her figure, in fact, being of the tallest; but no earthly form could surpass it in symmetry, and that voluptuous fullness of outline, which, when associated with a modest and youthful style of beauty, is [...] most fascinating and irresistible. The whiteness of her unrivalled skin, and the gloss of health which shone from it were almost dazzling. [...] Her full bust, which literally glowed with light and warmth, was moulded with inimitable proportion, and the masses of thick brown hair that shaded her white and expansive forehead, added incredible attractions to a face that was remarkable not only for its simple beauty in its finest sense, but for that divine charm of ever-varying expression which draws its lights and shadows, and the thousand graces with which it is accompanied, directly from the heart. Her dark eyes were large and flashing, and reflected by the vivacity or melancholy which increased or overshadowed their lustre, all those joys and sorrows, and various shades of feeling by which she was moved, whilst her mouth gave

indication of extraordinary and entrancing sweetness, especially when she smiled.⁴³⁶

Kathleen, whose sole fault appears to be an over-zealous adherence to moral principle, stands in marked contrast to another female character in the same book, Kate Hogan. Whereas Kathleen approaches the Platonic ideal rather than the real, this cannot be said of Kate. Yet even Kate, ‘a hardened, reckless creature, scarcely remarkable for any particular virtue that could be enumerated, and formidable from that savage strength and intrepidity for which she was so well known’, possesses that sympathetic understanding which Carleton believes to be an essentially female attribute. ‘Her heart [...] was not *all* depraved; and indeed, it is difficult to meet a woman in whose disposition, however corrupted by evil society, and degraded by vice, there is not to be found a portion of the angelic essence still remaining.’⁴³⁷

This is Carleton’s one brief excursion into sentimentality in his portrayal of her. A considerably more interesting figure than Kathleen, Kate’s mentality needs little explanation. Although Carleton lacks the authorial assurance to refrain from commenting on her behaviour, she is a convincing enough character to speak for herself. Neglect and maltreatment by their husbands having done much to shorten the lives of the other Hogan spouses, at least according to local hearsay, Kate, the wife of Bat Hogan, is the only surviving adult female member of the tinker clan. In this group of four adults and various ‘young unlicked savages’, the only rules which hold are those of the pack.⁴³⁸

Kate, then, is presented within the context of a brutal and brutalising environment, as both victim and aggressor. When she determines to undermine the scheme in which the men of her family are involved, it is initially for no higher a

⁴³⁶ Carleton, *Emigrants of Ahadarra*, p. 16.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 245, p. 184.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

reason than resentment at being excluded from their confidence. Her longstanding affiliation with them is immaterial; she is a woman, and as such, they see no need to consult her. When she discovers that their plan has been to ruin Bryan M'Mahon, a nobler sentiment, sympathy for Kathleen, whose suffering as a consequence of their actions, is, again, a matter of indifference to them, reinforces her indignation, and her resolve. As a woman, and one who has suffered, if only indirectly, at their hands, Kathleen's position is not dissimilar to her own. Her hostility towards the brothers rapidly becomes overt defiance, an assertion of both her identity and her position within the group.

And Kate is as formidable an adversary as any man. Furthermore, her attributes are not only physical; she has a weapon her husband and his brothers lack; a woman's verbal skills. As culinary provider, slaughterer and cook, her language is colourfully appropriate. Challenged by the dominant brother, Philip, her response, made with her knife to hand, is a spirited one. 'I'll have this customer here greased in your puddins, my buck, and when the win's out o' you, see what you'll be worth – fit for Captain James's hounds; although I dunna but the very dogs themselves is too clane to ait you.'⁴³⁹

Earlier, when in defiance of his drunken threat, she repeatedly defies his command to drink the toast he has proposed to the downfall of Bryan M'Mahon, her language is as ferocious as the assault which she ultimately inflicts upon him.

'What!' exclaimed Hogan, or rather roared again [...], 'what, you yalla mullotty, do *you* dar to refuse?'

'Ay, do *I* dare to refuse! – an' I'd see you fizzin' on the devil's fryin' pan, wher you'll fiz yet, afore I'd dhrink it. [...]

'Drink it', he shouted, or I'll brain you.' [...]

'Drink it, I say agin', shouted Philip. Kate made no reply, but, walking over to where he stood, she looked closely into his eyes, and

⁴³⁹ Ibid., p. 244.

said with grinding teeth – ‘Not if it was to save you from the gallows, where you’ll swing yet; but listen.’ [...] ‘Here’, she exclaimed, her voice now all at once rising or rather shooting up to a most terrific scream – ‘here’s a disgraceful death to Hycy Burke! And may all that’s good and prosperous in this world, ay, and in the next, attend Bryan M‘Mahon, the honest man! Now, Philip, my man, see how I drink them both.’ And, having concluded, she swallowed the glass of whiskey, and again, drawing her face within an inch of his she glared right into his eyes.⁴⁴⁰

Carleton’s most ambitious attempt at female characterisation is that of Sarah M‘Gowan in *The Black Prophet*. *The Black Prophet* preceded *The Emigrants of Ahadarra*, appearing serially in the *Dublin University Magazine* between May and December 1846, and afterwards in book form in 1847. As its subtitle, ‘A Tale of Irish Famine’ suggests, and as its lengthy dedication, to the Prime Minister, Lord Russell, makes explicit, the novel was primarily intended to focus attention on the distress in Ireland resulting from the potato crop failures of the first two seasons of what became known as the Great Famine. For the background to his plot, set a quarter of a century previously, Carleton drew on his knowledge of the shortages of 1817 and 1822 and of ‘other subsequent years’. Carleton was clearly aware that the growing enthusiasm for realism did not extend to an unremitting, if fictionalised, account of starvation. ‘Let not the reader imagine’, he reassured his public in the book’s preface, ‘[...] that the principal interest of this Tale is drawn from so gloomy a topic as famine.’ Rather, he declared, it was predicated on ‘the workings of those passions and feelings which usually agitate human life and constitute the character of those who act in it’.⁴⁴¹

Carleton then, while reassuring his public, is also claiming for this work a dual authenticity. It addressed both general and particular issues, that is, the extraordinary suffering in Ireland at that time, and the factors influencing personality and individual

⁴⁴⁰ Carleton, *Emigrants of Ahadarra*, pp. 179-80.

⁴⁴¹ Carleton, *Black Prophet*, p. viii.

behaviour. Regrettably, this supposed engagement with both historical and psychological realism is undermined by an improbable storyline. While Carleton writes in his preface that ‘the strongest imagery of Fiction is frequently transcended by the terrible realities of Truth’, in *The Black Prophet* the unrealities of his fiction overwhelm the realities of the truth he wished to address.⁴⁴² The imposition of an elaborate and melodramatic plot upon the canvas of famine undermines rather than reinforces the account of a population facing starvation: it owes more to the receding power of the gothic, a persistent mode in Irish literature, than to the emerging power of European realism.⁴⁴³ A significant factor in this textual awkwardness was Carleton’s sense of his role as Ireland’s foremost literary spokesman. This understanding, which had inclined him in the direction of the novel, and which now prompted him to address the current situation there, was a factor in distancing him from his past, and from the peasantry he was presenting. Inevitably, the didactic postures he increasingly felt compelled to adopt in his writing compromised his spontaneity and his wit, and consequently, the vitality of his characters. In this, an improbable tale of conspiracy, murder, and (until the final pages of the book) hidden identities, the characters tend towards fictional stereotypes, conditioned by the plot rather than engaging with it.

His introductory description, in the opening pages of *The Black Prophet*, of the temperamentally unpredictable Sarah, the daughter of the sinister prophecy man of the title, Donnel Dhu M’Gowan, gives an early indication of the book’s melodramatic tone. Sarah, responding to verbal provocation by a stepmother who treats her at best, with indifference, and at worst, with contempt, attempts to kill her.

⁴⁴² Ibid., p. viii.

⁴⁴³ For an account of the significance of the Gothic in nineteenth-century Ireland, see Kiberd, *Irish Classics*, p. 383.

Her dark and finely-pencilled eyebrows were fiercely knit, as it were, into one dark line; her lips were drawn back, displaying her beautiful teeth, that were now ground together into what resembled the lock of death; her face was pale with overwrought resentment, and her deep-set eyes glowed with a wild and flashing fire that was fearful, whilst her lips were encircled with the white foam of revengeful and deadly determination; and what added most to the terrible expression of her whole face was the exulting smile of cruelty which shed its baleful light over it, resolving the whole contest, as it were, and its object – the murder of her stepmother – into the fierce play of some beautiful vampire that was ravening for the blood of its awakened victim.⁴⁴⁴

Despite this unpromising, lurid start, Sarah represents, if not Carleton's most accomplished, then certainly his most ambitious attempt at characterisation. Dark-haired, black-eyed, and unpredictable, she is by far the most intriguing of the book's two heroines. The other, Mave Sullivan, with her fair beauty and equable temperament, is, in a text distinguished by oppositions, good and evil, selflessness and crude self-interest, a foil to Sarah, and little else. She is as lifeless a figure as Kathleen Cavanagh of *The Emigrants of Ahadarra*. If Sarah herself has any degree of similarity with another of Carleton's female characters, it is with Kate Hogan. In the *Emigrants of Ahadarra* the dynamics within the Hogan family group, and the personalities involved, are given colour not through Carleton's authorial explanations, but by his allowing them the freedom to reveal themselves through direct speech. The Hogans though, are secondary, if important, figures, and could be presented through what effectively constituted a series of entertaining sketches of the type at which Carleton excelled. Sarah, in *The Black Prophet* is more problematic.

A considerably more complex personality than Kate, she is also a more significant figure than her father, the eponymous villain of the book, Donnel Dhu, whose unredeemed malignity places him beyond the normal concerns of human existence and whose concocted prophecies have a disturbing tendency to be realised

⁴⁴⁴ Carleton, *Black Prophet*, p. 7.

in ways he does not intend. Flanagan writes that Donnel Dhu, ‘a grim and sinister figure who [...] seems to have been summoned forth by the times’, is the strongest link between Carleton’s inadequate, conventional plot and the rich potential of his famine theme.⁴⁴⁵ In a strictly dramatic sense this is true; the darkness of the prophet’s character does indeed correspond with the darkness of the times. Nevertheless, it is not, as Flanagan states, Donnel Dhu who most engages Carleton’s imagination. Constrained by the weight of his symbolic function, Donnel Dhu hardly exceeds the role of stereotypical villain. It is not his dark temperament that most exercised Carleton, but the troubled nature of his daughter, Sarah, whose ‘great neglected spirit’ more powerfully and subtly intimates the unfolding Irish tragedy.

It is she who supplies the real link between the melodramatic plot and the famine theme. It is through Sarah, who understands emotional deprivation, that Carleton makes his strongest appeal on behalf of those in dire physical need, and attacks those who, relatively untouched by hardship, are indifferent to the suffering in their midst. When a destitute woman with her children is turned from the door by her stepmother and told that there is no food to spare, Sarah is moved to protest on their behalf.

You tell the poor woman that there’s nothing for her. Don’t you know that’s a lie. It may be very well to tell a lie to them that can bear it – to a rich *bodagh*, or his proud lady of a wife – although it’s a mean thing, even to them; but to tell a lie to that heartbroken woman an’ her poor childre – her childre – aren’t they her own? – an’ who would spake for them if she wouldn’t? If every one treated the poor that way, what would become of them? Aye, to look in her face, where there’s want an’ hunger, and answer distress wid a lie – it’s cruel – cruel!⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁵ Flanagan, *Irish Novelists*, pp. 319-20.

⁴⁴⁶ Carleton, *Black Prophet*, p. 115.

Socially isolated, introspective, starved of affection by her father, and with no prospect of a relationship with the man she loves, Sarah's despair at what she believes to be the futility of her existence mirrors the bleakness of the times. 'Want of all hope in this world has made, an' will make me a devil – ay, an' oh! What a different girl I might be this day!'⁴⁴⁷ Quick to rouse to anger and to physical violence and having, according to her stepmother, the darkness of her father's soul upon her own,⁴⁴⁸ she possesses, too, an almost naive honesty as well as a scrupulous moral integrity, and a deeply compassionate nature. Eagleton considers that such divergent qualities in a woman, were, for Carleton, 'strictly unthinkable'; the fact that she evades his 'pious stereotyping' is, he maintains, an indication that the complexity of his social understanding is at variance with his moral simplifications.⁴⁴⁹ It is not, as Eagleton suggests, that Sarah eludes his conscious control, but rather, that his conception of her character exceeds his ability to present her. Uncomfortably caught between the conflicting requirements of melodrama and realism, she appears as much a victim of the demands of an elaborate plot which forces her into improbable acts of self-sacrificing nobility, as of her own fractured personality.

Sarah herself repeatedly looks to the formative experiences of her childhood, and the lack of maternal affection and guidance, for an explanation of her difficult and, as she believes, unlovely nature. 'If she had lived, it's a different life maybe I'd lead, an' a different crature I'd be to-day, maybe; but I never had a mother.'⁴⁵⁰ The disappearance of her mother in early childhood, the significant event of her life, leaves her with a profound appreciation of the mother-child relationship, and a painful understanding of suffering.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 296.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴⁴⁹ Eagleton, pp. 212-13.

⁴⁵⁰ Carleton, *Black Prophet*, p. 97.

Nevertheless, her ambivalent relationship with the father in whom she sees the worst aspects of her own character is equally, if not more important. Sarah wants – indeed, needs – to believe the best of him. The account of Sarah pleading with him to admit to at least a residual feeling of human affection, and his ultimate rejection of her appeal, and, by implication, of her, is the most convincing exchange in the book. It is only at this late point, with three-quarters of the book written, that Carleton, in indicating the prophet's psychological vulnerability, suggests an emotional complexity to a character who until now has been presented as implacably evil. When Donnel Dhu admits to having once cared for the wife, Sarah's mother, who he insists, betrayed him with another man, Sarah desperately and repeatedly seeks confirmation that this betokens an aspect to his character long suppressed.

The Prophet turned round, and fixing his eyes upon his daughter, they stood each gazing upon the other for some time. He then looked for a moment on the ground, after which he sat down upon a stool, and covering his face with both his hands, remained in that position for two or three minutes.

His eventual response is enigmatic.

When I was an innocent child I was a villain. When I was a light-hearted affectionate boy, playing with my brothers and sisters, I was a villain. When I grew into youth, Sarah, an' thought every one full of honesty an' truth, an' the world all kindness, an' nothing about me but goodness, an' generosity, an' affection, I was, of coorse, a villain. When I loved the risin' sun – when I looked upon the stars of heaven with a wonderin' and happy heart – when the dawn of mornin' and the last light of the summer evening filled me with joy, and made me love every one and everything about me – the trees, the runnin' rivers, the green fields, and all that God –ha, what am I sayin'? – I was a villain. When I loved an' married your mother, an' when she – but no matter – when all these things happened, I was, I say a villain; but now that things is changed for the betther, I am an honest man!⁴⁵¹

⁴⁵¹ Carleton, *Black Prophet*, pp. 297-98.

This declaration of ‘honesty’, however, does not indicate a change of heart in response to Sarah’s appeal, but a reaffirmation of the position he has long maintained. ‘Don’t I say’, he repeated, with a cold and bitter sneer, ‘that I am an honest man?’ An ‘honest man’, then, is one freed from the self-deception which putting trust in others necessitates; he is one who has rejected any engagement with the common concerns of humanity. Sarah’s hopes for her father and for herself are finally crushed. ‘Ah’, she replied, ‘that’s gone too then – look where I will everything’s dark – no hope – no hope of any kind.’⁴⁵²

Carleton is caught between schematic moralising, using female characters as ciphers, and doing justice to the complexities of character and conduct in those female types into whose lives he has real insight. He is compelled to mete to Sarah that fate common to flawed heroines of Victorian fiction, and in doing so allow a happy ending for her rival in beauty and in love. Her end is a tragic, but noble one. She dies of typhus fever, sacrificing her own life by tending to the stricken family of the man she desires.

Sarah’s father, Donnel Dhu M’Gowan was not the only prophecy man amongst Carleton’s characters. He had described another such individual, one who bore only a superficial resemblance to Donnel Dhu, in a sketch, ‘Barney M’Haigney, the Irish Prophecy Man’. Appearing in June 1841 in the short-lived *Irish Penny Journal*,⁴⁵³ it was later included in his *Tales and Sketches* volume. While Carleton clearly had reservations about a figure in Irish rural life whose survival had been predicated upon the gullibility of the peasantry, one whose ‘antiquated nonsense’, he said, ‘did them no good’, he nevertheless felt able to conclude his sketch with an

⁴⁵² Ibid., p. 298.

⁴⁵³ The *Irish Penny Journal* appeared between 4 July 1840 and 26 June 1841.

anodyne reference to Barney's 'inoffensive life'.⁴⁵⁴ At the time he was writing, in the early 1840s, Barney and his brotherhood had had their day. Notwithstanding such unsettling predictions as the downfall of Protestantism and the collapse of English dominion over Ireland – neither of which events, had they come to pass, would have found favour with Carleton – the prophecy man's preposterous calculations, being confined to the annals of history, could be subjected to gentle ridicule. 'How can a mind thus engaged descend to those petty subjects of ordinary life, which engage the common attention? How could a man hard at work in evolving out of prophecy the subjugation of some hostile state, care a farthing whether Loghlin Roe's daughter was married to Gusty Given's son or not? The thing is impossible.'⁴⁵⁵ No such concessions could be made for another, rather more prominent figure of the Irish scene. The rural extortionist, the miser hoarding grain in order to maximise his profits in times of hardship, although in decline, remained too uncomfortably a figure of the present to find his way into as entertaining a collection as *Tales and Sketches*. Even a writer as renowned for the accuracy of his character sketches as Carleton, had, on occasion, to temper realism with discretion.

It is into another genre, that of the novel, that the miser can be admitted. In *The Black Prophet*, in which Carleton is addressing the dire situation facing much of the populace of his country, Darby Skinadre is presented as a man whose likeness 'will be at once recognised by our readers as that of the roguish hypocrite, whose rapacity is the standing curse of half the villages of the country, especially during seasons of distress, or failure of crops'.⁴⁵⁶

In appearance he was lank and sallow, with a long, thin, parched-looking face, and a miserable crop of yellow beard; [...] added to this

⁴⁵⁴ Carleton, 'Barney M'Haigney, the Irish Prophecy Man', in *Tales and Sketches*, p. 220.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

⁴⁵⁶ Carleton, *Black Prophet*, pp. 58-59.

were two piercing ferret eyes, always sore and fiery, with a tear standing in each, or trickling down his fleshless cheeks; so that [...] he looked very like a man in a state of perpetual repentance for his transgressions, or, what was still further from the truth, who felt a most Christian sympathy with the distresses of the poor.⁴⁵⁷

Skinadre stands amidst those poor whose lives are held in the balance of his unfavourably weighted scales.

There stood Skinadre, like the very Genius of Famine, surrounded by distress, raggedness, feeble hunger, and tottering disease, in all the various aspects of pitiable suffering, hopeless desolation, and that agony of the heart which impresses wildness upon the pale cheek, makes the eye at once dull and eager, parches the mouth, and gives to the voice of misery tones that are hoarse and hollow. There he stood, striving to blend consolation with deceit, and, in the name of religion and charity, subjecting the helpless wretches to fraud and extortion.⁴⁵⁸

Skinadre, as Barry Sloan observes, 'is presented as a man already fully committed to his vice rather than one who is increasingly consumed by it'.⁴⁵⁹ He is an embodiment of those negative aspects of human nature which are thrown into sharp relief by unhappy social circumstances, in this case circumstances which recurred in Ireland with unfailing if unpredictable regularity. No more than a stereotype, Skinadre, is a pale successor to Carleton's other fictional miser, Fardorougha. It is Fardorougha who is increasingly consumed by, and reduced to helplessness, by that same vice.

In his introduction to the 1848 edition of his first novel, *Fardorougha the Miser*, Carleton wrote that his friends had considered his talents unsuited to such a work, and had believed that 'there was more of memory than imagination' in his writing. 'He is a fine fellow in his way – that is, at a *short* story or so – but he wants

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 57.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 59.

⁴⁵⁹ Sloan, *Pioneers of Anglo-Irish Fiction*, p. 229.

invention, and has not strength of wing for a long-sustained flight.’⁴⁶⁰ The words, of course, are Carleton’s, and are as indicative of his own views on the relative merits of the tale and the novel as they are of his literary acquaintances’ opinions of his talents. Having proved himself in what he considered to be an inferior form, he was determined to advance in a new direction. *Fardorougha* was a success, and met with considerable and well deserved acclaim. The reservations of the author’s friends, however, were not without foundation. Carleton certainly had difficulty in organising a plot, and he certainly lacked application; *Fardorougha* was initially published serially in *The Dublin University Magazine* between February 1837 and February 1838, but for six months of that period his contributions were missing, an omission which, Carleton admitted in the preface to the book edition of 1839, had resulted in much of the ‘force and connection’ of the story being lost.⁴⁶¹ But in terms of characterisation at least, as his depictions of the eponymous miser in this book, and of Sarah in *The Black Prophet* indicate, it was not imagination Carleton lacked, but the confidence to translate his understanding to the page.

His repeated pointing to events and individuals he has transcribed from life is an indication of this lack of assurance. Given his desire to counter any suggestion that he was over-reliant on memory, his insistence, in the 1839 edition, and again, in the 1848 edition, on detailing the historical credentials of his characters betrays a degree of uncertainty on his part on what constituted ‘authenticity’, and what his approach to the novel, and to realism, should be. Whether the details he supplied on the supposed prototypes in the 1839 and 1848 editions are entirely reliable – and they were not – is, in a sense, immaterial. More significant is the fact that Carleton felt compelled to

⁴⁶⁰ William Carleton, *Fardorougha the Miser: or, the Convicts of Lisnamona* (London: Simms and M’Intyre, 1848) p. xv.

⁴⁶¹ Carleton, *Fardorougha* (1839), p. vii.

justify his fiction in such a manner. 'Invention' it appears, was a requirement of plot, but was a rather less desirable when applied to the creation of a character.

The majority of the '*dramatis personae*', in *Fardorougha*, he wrote in the preface to the first, 1839 edition, were based on people he had known. While Honor Donovan, the miser's wife, 'was no creature of the imagination', neither was she based on a single person. She represented a type, being, he declared, 'a likeness faithful and true to the virtues of thousands whose glowing piety, meek endurance, and unexampled fortitude have risen triumphant over some of the severest trials of domestic life'.⁴⁶² In the introduction to the 1848 edition of the book, however, Carleton modified this statement, declaring that his own 'sacred and beloved mother' had provided the inspiration for his character.

There was where I found the sublime devotion, the fortitude, the resignation, the purity of heart and of purpose; the affection at once tender and strong; and where I might have found many more virtues than ever were yet depicted in a fictitious personage.⁴⁶³

The 1848 introduction is a lengthy one. Mary Moan, the Clogher midwife, whose first appearance was as 'Rose Moan, the Irish Midwife' in the *Irish Penny Journal* in 1841, was the inspiration for her namesake in *Fardorougha*. The villain of the book, Bartle Flanagan, was based, he says, on a former schoolfellow. While the hero, Connor Donovan, *Fardorougha*'s son, was his own creation, Una, Connor's sweetheart, was, he claimed, based on a girl with whom he had been infatuated, and to whom he had never spoken, in the county of Louth. Una is a typical Carleton heroine, one whose combination of unalloyed virtue and beauty might indeed suggest that her prototype had never been allowed to descend from the pedestal upon which an

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, p. ix.

⁴⁶³ Carleton, *Fardorougha* (1848), p. xiv.

adoring and distant admirer had placed her. But if she was drawn from any living being, it is unlikely to have been a young woman in Louth. It is more likely that her inspiration was the unobtainable Anne Duffy with whom Carleton later admitted to having been besotted as a youth, and with whom he never exchanged words until, when returning briefly to the Clogher area in the autumn of 1846, he visited her, and to his immense delight, discovered that his undeclared adolescent passion had been reciprocated.⁴⁶⁴

On his finest fictional figure, the eponymous miser himself, Carleton expounded at length. In 1839 he had stressed that *Fardorougha* was both original and more than a fictional creation. He had, he wrote, ‘never met any thing similar in books’, a statement probably intended to deflect any suggestion that his character was derivative: Honoré de Balzac’s study of avarice, *Eugénie Grandet*, had been published a few years previously, in 1833, and shortly after Carleton wrote these words, a review in the *Athenaeum* was comparing his novel, favourably, with that work, declaring Carleton’s *Fardorougha* ‘in all probability [...] truer to reality’ than Balzac’s *Père Grandet*.⁴⁶⁵ Carleton’s own inspiration for the miser, he indicated, was not taken from the fiction of others, but from a recognisable character. His 1839 comment on *Fardorougha* is well known and widely accepted at face value. ‘I knew the original well; and many readers in the county of Louth will at once recognise the little withered old man, who always wore his great coat (cothamore) about his shoulders, and kept perpetually sucking in his cheeks while engaged in conversation.’⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶⁴ Carleton tells of this youthful passion in his autobiography, and in letters to Charles Gavan Duffy and to a daughter, written when he revisited the Clogher area in the autumn of 1846. See Carleton, *Autobiography*, pp. 54-58; Duffy, *My Life*, I, 221; O’Donoghue, *Life*, II, 88-89.

⁴⁶⁵ Carleton, *Fardorougha* (1839), p. vii. ‘*Fardorougha the Miser*’, *Athenaeum*, No. 613 (27 July 1839), 563-64 (p. 564).

⁴⁶⁶ Carleton, *Fardorougha* (1839), p. vii, p. viii.

Carleton may indeed have known the original well, but only by sight and by reputation, and he did not resemble the person described here. The shrivelled figure in his oversized coat existed only in the author's imagination, and in the pages of this first novel. In 1848 Carleton wrote a rather different, and highly detailed account of the man who provided the inspiration for Fardorougha. As he makes clear in this second introduction to his novel, the Louth miser had certainly existed, and Carleton had heard accounts of his distress at losing his savings when the county treasurer absconded with 'the hard-earned gains and savings of half the industrious portion of the county', a story he incorporated into the plot of the novel.⁴⁶⁷ This man was not personally known to the author, and was not the inspiration for the fictional figure. The 'genuine prototype' for Fardorougha, Carleton now claimed, was a man from the Clogher area, not long dead, whose habits he describes in some detail. Following his demise, perhaps, Carleton felt at liberty to identify, if not to name him. Probably out of deference to the man's 'respectable' son, he chose to call him by the pseudonym Ned Maguire. 'Maguire, as in the [fictional] narrative, had had no family until about the thirteenth or fourteenth year after his marriage, and I distinctly remember the amusement which the somewhat ludicrous struggle between love for his child and attachment to his money used to afford the public.'⁴⁶⁸ The unanticipated arrival of a son had reinforced in Maguire a long-standing trait, and his habitual reluctance to part with money became an obsession.

Fardorougha Donovan (the name translates as 'blind man', or 'dark man') is, as Carleton indicates, an individual struggling with competing claims on his affections, and attempting to reconcile his overwhelming attachment to money with love for his child. The plot of the book is as awkwardly managed and unremarkable

⁴⁶⁷ Carleton, *Fardorougha* (1848), p. ix.

⁴⁶⁸ Carleton, *Fardorougha* (1848), p. xii.

as the representation of its central character is impressive. Set against a background of agrarian unrest and Whiteboy violence, it centres on the circumstances of the miser's son, Connor Donovan, and the girl he wishes to marry, Una O'Brien, the daughter of a prosperous farmer. Connor is implicated in an agrarian crime by his father's labourer, Bartle Flanagan, who wishes to secure Una for himself. Flanagan's father has been ruined by Fardorougha, and he himself forced into the position of labourer. One consequence of this is that his hopes of securing the girl he desires by legitimate means have been destroyed. The harsh treatment he and his family have suffered provides both a reason, and a justification, for the suffering that he, in turn, is determined to inflict on the persecutor's family. While Fardorougha himself is to some extent responsible, if only indirectly, for his son's predicament, this aspect of the storyline remains undeveloped. The eventual outcome though, is a happy one, for Connor at least. Connor's persecutor is hanged, and Connor, who has been wrongly convicted and transported to Australia, where he has been followed by his parents, returns with them to Ireland, and marries Una.

The comment of Fardorougha's servant, in the book's opening pages, 'let Fardorougha alone 'for knowin' the value of a shillin'! – they're not in Europe can hould a harder grip of one', could well be a half-reference to Balzac's Felix Grandet.⁴⁶⁹ Carleton would not have read *Eugénie Grandet*, but its appearance may have inspired Carleton to examine his own fund of knowledge to produce his own Irish version of the miser. There are, apart from the obvious one of parsimony, superficial similarities between the two characters. Both Felix Grandet and Fardorougha have deeply religious, uncomplaining, and virtuous wives, and both have a single child. As a novel, however, *Fardorougha* has neither the organisation, nor

⁴⁶⁹ Carleton, *Fardorougha* (1992), p. 3.

the scope, of *Eugénie Grandet*. Balzac's vision was considerably grander than Carleton's; that *Eugénie Grandet* was incorporated into the series of works which Balzac entitled *La Comédie humaine* testifies to that fact. Balzac was instrumental in developing the idea, fundamental to realism, that ordinary lives represented the locus of historical change. His sense of historical progression allowed him to relate the provincial scene to the cosmopolitan, personal circumstance to public life, in a way that was beyond the literary scope of a haphazardly educated Irish peasant's son. Grandet represents an emerging European entrepreneurial class; Fardorougha, represents a declining class of peasant extortionists, and is firmly placed in an unreformed Irish rural economy. Grandet, the cooper become, through careful husbanding, a substantial landowner and wine producer, calculates and invests; Fardorougha, a modest tenant farmer become usurer, hoards the goods and money he has acquired.

For Balzac, Grandet's avarice represents a magnified version of a universal human concern: all men are implicated in his folly. 'Where is the man', asks the narrator, 'who does not want something, and how can anyone get what he wants in society without money?' In a shift to narrative part ironic, part free indirect speech (a form which Carleton exploited only in his comic writing), he outlines the miser's mentality. 'To get the better of others, surely that was to give oneself the right always to despise those weaklings who let themselves be devoured here on earth.'⁴⁷⁰ For Felix Grandet, money provides not only the material and psychological security he lacked in his youth, but also power over those others who might otherwise despise him. Grandet might deny his household the common necessities of life, but he has no reason to pretend poverty to the world. Fardorougha denies his prosperity even to

⁴⁷⁰ Honoré de Balzac, *Eugénie Grandet*, trans. by Sylvia Raphael (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 88.

himself. Confronted by the imminent arrival of his child, and terrified by the possibility that the future will bring more mouths to feed, he voices his anxiety to his servant. 'I'm poor, Nogher, I'm poor, and here's a family comin'.'⁴⁷¹ Fardorougha is motivated not by any desire for control over others, but by overwhelming and insatiable craving for security. While Honor Donovan had found consolation for her childlessness through the material security their combined stringency afforded them, her husband's need was of a more fundamental nature. While the birth of Connor served to soften, even transform, Honor's character, it reinforced in Fardorougha an innate trait. 'He [...] loved his wealth through the medium of his son, and laid it down as a fixed principle that every act of parsimony on his part was merely one of prudence, and had the love of a father and an affectionate consideration for his child's future welfare to justify it.'⁴⁷²

This rationalisation of his position becomes impossible to sustain when he is required to make a financial investment in Connor's future. The fiction he has until now been able to maintain, that his stance involves no conflict of interests, can no longer be upheld, and has an adverse effect upon his mental state. Psychologically, he finds it impossible to relinquish his hold on a portion of his own wealth in order to provide a settlement for his son's marriage, even though, in economic terms alone, the match would be a good one.

I've had it and felt it hangin' over me this many a long day, that I'll come to starvation yit; an' I see, if you force me to do as you wish, that it 'ill happen [...] I'm an unfortunate man wid such a fate before me; and yet I'd shed my blood for my boy – I would, an' he ought to know I would; but he wouldn't ax me to starve for him – would you, Connor, avich machree, would you ax your father to starve? I'm unhappy – unhappy – an' my heart's breakin'.⁴⁷³

⁴⁷¹ Carleton, *Fardorougha* (1992) p. 6.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

The emotional crisis Fardorougha is undergoing becomes alarmingly apparent when, with no option open to him but to approach Una's parents, Bodagh O'Brien and his wife, he is reduced to pleading with them to allow the union of their families without any cost to himself. When it is made clear to him that such an arrangement is unthinkable, and there will be no marriage, the miser, impotent in the face of their opposition, becomes increasingly distraught.

'Why, why won't there?' he screamed – 'why won't there I say? Haven't *you* enough for them until *I* die? Would you see your child breakin' her heart? Bodagh, you have no nathur in you – no bowels for your *colleen dhas*. But I'll spake for her – I'll argue wid you till this time tomorrow, or I'll make you show feelin' to her – an' if you don't – if you don't –'⁴⁷⁴

Fardorougha, with no avenue now open to him, is totally disorientated. When finally persuaded to leave the O'Briens' house, he 'first turned out of the walk to the right, then crossed over to the left, and felt surprised that a wall opposed him in each direction'.⁴⁷⁵

The dual blows of his son's arrest and the loss of his money further undermine his already fragile reason. Without legal representation Connor will almost certainly end his life on the gallows. When Fardorougha finally brings himself to the point of writing an order to the county treasurer to release the sum required to pay the attorney, his fears, that he will be ruined, are realised. He has become, as the attorney coolly informs him, what he wished the world to believe him to be, a poor man. It is not, however, any payment for Connor's defence that ruins him. He is already without the means to pay the legal costs, or any others; his banker has absconded with his funds and is beyond the reach of the law.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 74.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 75.

In George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, Mrs. Cadwallader, the parson's wife, observes that 'miserliness is a capital quality to run in families; it's the safe side for madness to dip on'.⁴⁷⁶ Mrs. Cadwallader's statement reflects not the preoccupations of the hapless Mr. Brooke, whose political aspirations she is discussing, but her own. Having, she considers, married somewhat beneath her station, and her resultant economic position not being entirely to her satisfaction, she seizes upon any small opportunity to improve it. Mrs. Cadwallader's economies, though, are at a far remove from those of Fardorougha. The Irish miser's regard for money is a destructive rather than an empowering trait, one that ultimately places him somewhat beyond the safe side of madness. Unlike Balzac's Felix Grandet, or, for that matter, George Eliot's eponymous character Silas Marner, Carleton's miser is one in both senses of the word. Doubly a miser, he is not only consumed by avarice, but is a man made wretched by his passion.

A reviewer of Eliot's *Silas Marner*, writing in the *Dublin University Magazine* in 1862, commented that a 'more genial artist would have made all hearts yearn with compassion towards the lonely, blighted, hope forsaken outcast' who turns to money as a substitute for human affection.⁴⁷⁷ The pleasure Marner takes in his carefully hoarded savings is an understandable, even rational response, to unfavourable circumstances. Unlike Fardorougha, he is a man set apart not by his obsession, but by his situation. Solitary by temperament, and from 'an unknown region called "North'ard"', he is an outsider, regarded with respect but some circumspection within the conservative rural community in which he finds himself. The pleasure he takes in his carefully hoarded earnings, the single consolation of his drab existence, becomes a substitute for human contact, and the theft of his money leaves him bereft. Gold,

⁴⁷⁶ George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. by David Carroll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 47.

⁴⁷⁷ 'A Batch of Last Year's Novels', *Dublin University Magazine*, 59 (January-June 1862), 396-409 (p. 400).

though, is displaced in his affections by his love for the child he discovers on his hearth, ‘a soft, round, fair thing, with soft yellow rings all over its head’, the orphaned Eppie.⁴⁷⁸

Fardorougha’s difficulties are more profound. For him there can be no happy ending, no redeeming relationship with his child, however loving the connection between them, and no proper resolution of his difficulties. As his son is born, consumed by anxiety and half-recognising his vice, Fardorougha prays to God to set his heart right, ‘if it’s wrong’. Yet, on his death bed, prematurely aged by his anxieties, and convinced that he is dying ‘in a strange grave, an’ in a far land’, he remains incorrigible, preoccupied with the need for ‘makin’ a bargain’ the right way’, and insisting that Connor should strike an advantageous deal with the priest who will say masses for his soul.⁴⁷⁹

Carleton himself was no stranger to financial insecurity, or to its emotional cost. In his autobiography he describes the conflict of emotions, the mixture of elation and anxiety for the future, experienced at the birth of a first child.⁴⁸⁰ That initial apprehension, common in itself, is no doubt more persistent in an author whose limited income failed to meet both his expectations and his needs. ‘The miser’s insanity’, observes Melissa Fegan, ‘is no far cry from the anxiety of a writer on the edge of destitution.’⁴⁸¹ It is not to diminish the intensity of Carleton’s desperation to suggest that Fegan’s judgement does less than justice to his imaginative reach. In Fardorougha, struggling to accommodate his love for his son with the irreconcilable demands of ‘the lank devil of the avaricious – the famine-struck god of the miser’, he

⁴⁷⁸ George Eliot, *Silas Marner, the Weaver of Raveloe*, ed. by Terence Cave (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 109.

⁴⁷⁹ Carleton, *Fardorougha* (1992) p. 7, p. 227.

⁴⁸⁰ Carleton, *Autobiography*, pp. 213-14.

⁴⁸¹ Fegan, p. 149.

succeeds in creating a figure who is debased but not dehumanised.⁴⁸² It is not Fardorougha's natural affection for his son which engages the reader's sympathy, but his irrational fear. Fardorougha, haunted by the premonition that he will die 'a dog's death behind a ditch – my tongue out wid starvation and hunger' is very much a figure born of Ireland, and of Carleton's intimate knowledge of the peasantry.⁴⁸³ While *Fardorougha* is far from being a great novel, its central character stands as Carleton's greatest creative achievement. In *Fardorougha* he produced both a national type, and a human archetype, and by doing so, transcends the limitation of not being able to engage with contemporary Ireland.

⁴⁸² Carleton, *Fardorougha* (1992), p. 13.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

CHAPTER 6

LOSING THE PLOT: CARLETON'S DECLINE

Carleton, as Harold Orel rightly observed, emerged at a critical moment in the development of Irish literature. 'Behind his back, an oral tradition, the acknowledged presence of an audience, an emphasis on colourful incident and verbal exaggeration; ahead of him, the more formal cadences of written prose, the weight of English literary tradition, the importance of style and formal design'. Orel's comment on Carleton's novels, 'His subject matter was always topical, his moral position always strongly stated', is less accurate.⁴⁸⁴ While Carleton's moral position was often too emphatically declared, his subject matter was by no means invariably topical, and in his later works, rarely so. It is generally acknowledged that after the mid-nineteenth century, Carleton produced little work, and no novels, of any literary significance. O'Donoghue, summarising what was, overall, Carleton's weighty contribution to the nineteenth century Irish cultural scene, felt obliged to begin on a negative note, stating that 'to be perfectly candid, no writer has given to the world work more essentially unfit to live than are Carleton's weakest efforts'.⁴⁸⁵

The vast majority of those 'weakest efforts', books published in the 1850s and 1860s, have, in Flanagan's words, 'no proper place in literary history', a view echoed by practically all other commentators on Carleton.⁴⁸⁶ Of these post-Famine books, the only one that is memorable, more because of its startling descent into textual incoherence than because of any literary merit it can claim, is *The Squanders of Castle Squander*. This appeared in 1852, first in the *Illustrated London News*, and

⁴⁸⁴ Harold Orel, *The Victorian Short Story: Development and Triumph of a Literary Genre* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P. 1986), p. 14, p. 17.

⁴⁸⁵ O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, 350.

⁴⁸⁶ Flanagan, *Irish Novelists*, p. 329. The one dissenter to this view is David Krause, who is of the opinion that Carleton's final book, *Redmond Count O'Hanlon* is one of his best works. See Krause, pp. 290-300.

then in a two-volume edition published by J. R. Maxwell, who subsequently declined to publish more of Carleton's work. For the most part, these later novels, in which he largely abandoned the peasantry and turned to the gentry for his subject matter, were of no more relevance to contemporary Ireland than was his early novelette in which he had first depicted a social group with which he had little familiarity, *Jane Sinclair*.

The appearance of *Willy Reilly and His Dear Cooleen Bawn* in 1850, declared O'Donoghue, signified that 'the reign of simplicity and naturalness in Carleton was over'.⁴⁸⁷ In *Willy Reilly* Carleton looked for his material to the mid-eighteenth century, and to the iniquitous restrictions on land inheritance and ownership imposed upon Catholics through the now redundant Penal Laws. Notwithstanding its apparent lack of literary significance, it had considerable popular appeal. A sentimental tale based on a well-known Ulster ballad, it was the most widely read of Carleton's books throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. After appearing in the *London Independent* in December 1850 and January 1851, it was published in three-volume form by Hope and Co. in 1855, and before 1900 had appeared in more than thirty editions.

Red Hall; or, The Baronet's Daughter, which had also been completed in 1850, was published by Saunders and Otley in 1852, and was republished under Carleton's original title by James Duffy in a one-volume edition, shortened, at the publisher's insistence, in 1857. Initially conceived as *The Black Baronet; or, the Chronicles of Ballytrain*, it is notable only for being the cause of the author's prolonged dispute with the publisher McGlashan.⁴⁸⁸ *The Evil Eye; or the Black Spectre* was briefly serialised in 1848, in the first three issues of the short-lived

⁴⁸⁷ O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, 199. The book ran to at least thirty editions in the nineteenth century.

⁴⁸⁸ The book had been originally intended for publication by McGlashan. McGlashan had been a partner of William Curry. After the latter's death in 1846 he became proprietor of his own company and rapidly became the leading Irish publisher.

militantly nationalist *Irish Tribune*, before being withdrawn by the author.⁴⁸⁹ Carleton later completed it, and it was eventually published by Duffy in 1860. It had little to commend it. A Gothic tale inspired by peasant superstition, with a labyrinthine plot liberally injected with sinister portents, it is at a far remove from Carleton's first novel, *Fardorougha*. That it was still in circulation in the 1890s, declared O'Donoghue, made it a menace to its author's reputation.⁴⁹⁰ That it was published in book form at all is indicative of the reputation that Carleton, in old age, still enjoyed. 'The Rapparee', a tale set in the seventeenth century, appeared in Duffy's *Hibernian Magazine* in 1860, before being published, as *Redmond, Count O'Hanlon, the Irish Rapparee: An Historic Tale*, again by Duffy, in 1862. *The Double Prophecy; or the Trials of the Heart*, which Carleton completed in 1856, was also published in the *Hibernian Magazine* in 1861, and as a book in 1862. Carleton's final novel, *The Red-Haired Man's Wife*, completed in 1867, was never published in its original form. While much, if not most, of the posthumous version that did appear was the work of another party, enough of Carleton's writing remains for it to be apparent that even in its initial form it was no more than an indifferent love story, and a poor final effort. That much of the original manuscript was destroyed by fire provides an apt, if sad, epitaph to Carleton's literary decline.⁴⁹¹

Carleton had embarked upon his career as a writer at a time when the novel had yet to achieve its ascendancy as the dominant literary form. That said, the works

⁴⁸⁹ Only five numbers of the *Irish Tribune* appeared, between 10 June and 8 July 1848. Carleton's preparedness to write for an organ with whose aims he had no sympathy might be interpreted as a veiled threat to the British Government which, as yet, had not granted him a pension. It is more likely indicative of Carleton's financial need, and of his naivety. See Wolff, p. 112.

⁴⁹⁰ O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, 279.

⁴⁹¹ *The Red-Haired Man's Wife* appeared in the *Carlow College Magazine* in 1870, and as a book in 1889. A brief publisher's preface to the book refers to 'a serious mishap' which befell the original manuscript and so impeded its publication, but the publishers, clearly wishing to capitalise on Carleton's reputation, play down the fact of the book's dual authorship. O'Donoghue gives a fuller account of the matter. See the publisher's preface to William Carleton, *The Red-Haired Man's Wife* (Dublin: Sealy, Bryers & Walker; London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1889); O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, 321.

of Sir Walter Scott in particular, whom Carleton admired intensely, and whose position as a national writer he undoubtedly wished to emulate, had done much, in the first two decades of the century, to elevate the novel's status.⁴⁹² Initially viewed as little more than a somewhat dubious, morally subversive genre, one primarily directed at a female readership, by the early nineteenth century the possibilities it presented as a vehicle for moral education were becoming increasingly appreciated. But for Carleton, who from the late 1830s was concentrating his efforts on enlarging his reputation through the medium of the novel, it appears that crude didacticism often proved less taxing than engaging with the structural planning and textual synthesising necessary to produce a work of fiction that was both morally educative and artistically convincing.

The reasons for Carleton's literary decline are complex. Unfavourable social and economic conditions in Ireland, and the writer's individual circumstances and temperament, are implicated to a greater or lesser extent in his limited success in mastering the novel. O'Donoghue suggests that complacency was a factor; that having been assured in the summer of 1848 that he would receive the government pension for which he had long campaigned, Carleton became increasingly careless of the quality of his work.⁴⁹³ It is more likely that any negative effect this had on his work was because, in confirming his position as a national figure, it reinforced his tendency to unsubtle didacticism. In his book *Writing the Irish Famine*, Christopher Morash suggests that the calamitous conditions in Ireland in the late 1840s were

⁴⁹² While Carleton makes no mention of having read Scott's work, it is inconceivable that he would not have done so, given Scott's towering reputation. O'Donoghue reproduces a letter Carleton wrote to the aspiring young biographer, W. J. Fitzpatrick, in which he wrote that he had read J. G. Lockhart's *Life of Scott*. Carleton, it seems, liked to think that he bore a physical resemblance to the Scottish author. See O'Donoghue, II, 231, 232, 280.

⁴⁹³ O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, 123. If O'Donoghue's estimate is correct, the pension, of £200 per annum, more than doubled Carleton's income. That the Carleton family moved to a larger, more prestigious address indicates that Carleton felt both his financial position, and his status, to be more secure. See O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, 135, 72.

strongly implicated in Carleton's deepening uncertainty about his role that his work betrays. Discussing Carleton's contribution to Famine literature, he refers to the writer's having been beset by a 'crisis of authenticity arising out of the Famine', and to his distance, in experiential terms, from the starving rural poor described in *The Black Prophet*. This alienation from his subject, the peasantry, a dislocation startlingly exemplified by the narrative collapse of *Castle Squander*, he suggests, ultimately destroyed his career as a 'peasant' writer. For Carleton the famine of the late 1840s marked 'the end of writing'.⁴⁹⁴

Famine apart, engaging with broader and subtler literary developments within an Irish context was, for any writer, problematic. In a country in which, as Kiberd says, the past was never properly past, and 'kept erupting into the present',⁴⁹⁵ verisimilar realism – particularly with an emphasis on the contemporary – which became, from the 1830s, the dominant literary mode in Europe and Britain, found little to nurture its development. In nineteenth century Ireland, where the social and political climate was not conducive to any harmonious literary progression, Irish writers were deprived of the necessary cultural preconditions for literary realism. Gothic, with its emphasis upon instability and unpredictability, and upon the powerlessness of the individual, had a resonance within Ireland that ensured its dominance throughout most of the nineteenth century. In this respect, the views of Eagleton, touched on in chapter one's survey of critics of Carleton, merits extensive quotation.

The realist novel is the form *par excellence* of settlement and stability, gathering individual lives into an integrated whole; and social conditions in Ireland hardly lent themselves to any such sanguine reconciliation. [...] It might be objected that Britain in the nineteenth

⁴⁹⁴ Morash, *Writing the Irish Famine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 177-79.

⁴⁹⁵ Kiberd, p. 383.

century was hardly an oasis of tranquillity either; but its rulers were equipped with an ideology of enlightened progress which was generally lacking in Ireland. Classical realism depends on the assumption [...] that there is a well-formed narrative implicit in reality itself, which it is the task of realism to represent. The disrupted course of Irish history is not easily read as a tale of evolutionary progress, a middle march from a lower to a higher state; and the Irish novel, from Sterne to O'Brien is typically recursive and diffuse, launching one arbitrary narrative only to abort it for some for some equally gratuitous tale, running several storylines simultaneously, ringing pedantically ingenious variations on the same few plot elements.⁴⁹⁶

If Irish social and political life was not conducive to the development of a native realist tradition, then, within that environment, Carleton's circumstances were peculiarly unpropitious. A national scene riven by social, political and religious divisions, and dominated by the claims of political nationalism, was not fertile ground for the production of fiction characterised by analytical detachment. In a country that was arguably removed from the mainstream of cultural developments in England and Europe, engaging with literary shifts from which he was intellectually removed was doubly problematic for a writer whose reputation had been made by exploiting the very social origins that now distanced him from progressive literary movements.

As Charles Gavan Duffy, the editor of the *Nation*, to whom Carleton paid weekly visits 'for a friendly talk', indicates, the writer's difficulties were of a psychological as much as a practical nature. Carleton, he wrote, 'had seldom occasion to write except when the task of supporting a large family on the meagre profits of books published in Ireland proved impossible without the aid of his friends'. 'To live by literature in a country where literature is the luxury of a class, not the recreation of a people, was a hard task, and when the middlemen of literature scarcely

⁴⁹⁶ Eagleton, *Heathcliff*, p. 147.

exceeded two or three', Duffy continued, 'the sensitive, immethodic man of letters stood at a painful disadvantage'.⁴⁹⁷

What Duffy means by a 'sensitive, immethodic man of letters' bears further explication. Financial problems, and the claims Carleton allowed his children and grandchildren to make on his time, and on his purse, certainly meant that his situation was far from ideal, and inimical to the sustained concentration and planning necessary for the production of longer works of fiction.⁴⁹⁸ Yet Carleton's inordinate devotion to his family and seeming reluctance to see his children achieve full independence, suggests that their presence was a distraction from his underlying problems as much as a cause of them. Those 'immethodic' ways to which Duffy referred, exacerbated no doubt by an immoderate consumption of alcohol, stem primarily from the fact that having only a limited grasp of what his fundamental difficulties as a writer were, and having even less idea about any means of resolving them, he avoided engaging with them. His reputation had rested upon his ability to present an authentic picture of Irish peasant life through his sketches, but he was unable to adapt that talent to the novel in any systematic and sustained way. The Great Famine did indeed mark the end of writing for Carleton, as Morash said, but that it did was hardly more than coincidental. Famine or not, it is unlikely that after the 1840s Carleton would have produced any fiction of note. The 'crisis of authenticity' that he underwent resulted as much from an inability to engage with the complex requirements of realism as from his estrangement from those social groups that had been the fount of his inspiration.

⁴⁹⁷ Duffy, *My Life*, I, 220-21.

⁴⁹⁸ Letters from Carleton to George Henry Moore and Charles Gavan Duffy, written in 1856 and 1863 respectively, indicate the degree to which he was continually in debt as a result of supporting his children and their families. Letter from William Carleton to George Henry Moore, 31 December 1856 (National Library of Ireland), reproduced in Boué, pp. 353-54; letter from William Carleton to Charles Gavan Duffy, 1 June 1863, reproduced in Boué.

The major problem for Carleton was not that he had exhausted the peasantry as a subject, but that he had exhausted his ability to exploit the novel as a genre.

While in his sketches and stories he had succeeded in fashioning from the Tyrone scene of his childhood a broader picture of Irish life, one that had a resonance not only within his own country but also beyond its shores, his novels were ultimately compromised by his inability to incorporate broader concepts into a local frame of reference. Lacking a theoretical framework upon which to build, he had neither the confidence nor the linguistic resources to fulfil the promise he had shown in his best works. His observation, in the preface to the first book edition of *Fardorougha*, that it was a surprisingly easy matter to give to truth the appearance of fiction, indicates his inadequate understanding of what he was attempting. Confusing authenticity and veracity, he was unable to distinguish between reality as a source and realism as an outcome. In *Fardorougha* he had felt it necessary to justify both characters and plot by declaring that they were heavily influenced by actual individuals and by verifiable events. It was not a habit he ever abandoned.

Nearly two decades after his first novel had appeared, in his 1857 preface to *The Black Baronet*, Carleton's exhaustive justification of his text indicates his continuing confusion over his role as a novelist. On the one hand he feels compelled to begin by declaring 'The incidents upon which this book is founded seem to be extraordinary and startling, but they are true', and names his source. On the other hand, he also feels obliged to insist upon his autonomy as a novelist, and his right to adapt the truth to the requirements of fiction. His defensive assertion that the author must be 'the *sole*, though probably not the *best* judge' of how actual events might be fashioned into a fictional work might suggest a belated recognition that McGlashan's

objections to the book were not entirely unfounded.⁴⁹⁹ However, given that the preface also includes a detailed account of McGlashan's unreasonable behaviour towards him, it is equally likely that this remark is directed at his public, and is an appeal to them to demonstrate their approval of the work, and of him, by reading it. This same defensiveness is also apparent in a letter of 1850, written to McGlashan in the early days of their dispute over the copyright ownership of *The Black Baronet*. In it Carleton cites the acclaim that his earlier works had received as evidence that this most recent work represented a sound financial proposition. His protest suggests a need to reassure both his publisher, and himself, of his capabilities. 'I am not a young author making his first effort, but a man whose literary reputation is established sufficiently to act as guarantee for the merit of the work.'⁵⁰⁰

It plainly was not guarantee enough. Finding an uncompleted draft not to his liking McGlashan had insisted upon major revisions to the book, which was by that time completed. When McGlashan demanded that, should the author wish to withdraw from the agreement, he should pay the publication expenses already incurred, a placatory Carleton repeatedly attempted to negotiate a compromise, but was repeatedly rebuffed. Maintaining that he owned the copyright for the novel McGlashan nevertheless refused to publish it or to pay the author the sum agreed, but threatened him with legal action should he dispose of the book to another company.

While McGlashan's stance was morally questionable, his objections to the book on literary grounds were undoubtedly sound. *The Black Baronet* is not an impressive work. A central narrative, in itself unsatisfactory, is undermined by the author's insistence on presenting a contemporary, or near contemporary Irish situation

⁴⁹⁹ Carleton, *The Black Baronet; or, The Chronicles of Ballytrain*, in *The Works of William Carleton*, 3 vols (New York: P. F. Collier [1880?]-83), I, 322- 611 (p. 319). Carleton's emphasis.

⁵⁰⁰ Letter from William Carleton to James McGlashan, 17 June 1850, reproduced in O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, 145.

to the reader. Accounts of famine circumstances, only tenuously linked to the action, do nothing to enhance the plot's credibility. The novel's structural deficiencies, the author's neglect of the social background against which the story unfolds, and the overall unsuitability of the theme, in McGlashan's view, made its publication an uneconomic proposition. Refuting these criticisms, Carleton declared that any neglect of the cultural environment in which his narrative is set is because he deemed such detail unnecessary. Having shown, he claimed, by writing *Fardorougha*, that he could produce a novel, he was now intending to prove to those who still doubted his capabilities and believed that his subject range was limited to the peasantry, that his range was less circumscribed than they supposed. He had written *The Black Baronet*, he said, to show 'that human nature was the same in both high and low life', and consequently, had 'dealt with principles, feelings and passions more than with mere manners'. Defending the convoluted and bewildering plot, to which McGlashan had also objected, he wrote that the ultimate outcome, 'though natural, cannot be guessed at until the very close, and there is a mystery maintained up unto the last page'.⁵⁰¹

It is clear that by 'natural', Carleton presumably meant that the final outcome of his story was one that accorded with natural justice: virtue emerged triumphant and the wicked reaped their just deserts. But in as far as the resolution of the plot and the ultimate explanation of its complexities defy credibility, the ending is far from 'natural'. While Carleton claimed to have taken his inspiration from life, from the circumstances of a society family as recounted to him by a named source, neither the convoluted tale he actually produced, nor the characters presented within it, are notable for any close resemblance to reality. Indeed, aspects of the plot, and the traits of certain of the characters suggest that the novel may owe more to Dickens' *Nicholas*

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., p. 144. Correspondence from McGlashan to Carleton is no longer in existence, but his objections can be deduced from Carleton's own letters.

Nickleby than to Carleton's observation of the immediate world about him. The action centres on a villainous father's attempt to force his resisting daughter into a socially prestigious marriage. The wealthy Thomas Gourlay, the eponymous baronet, determines on securing higher social status for his family by marrying his beautiful and virtuous daughter Lucy to the dissolute Lord Dunroe, son of Lord Cullamore. When Gourlay threatens suicide should she not comply with his wishes, Lucy, in great distress, finally capitulates. In the final chapter, as the marriage is about to take place, not only are Gourlay's dastardly plans exposed, but the true circumstances and identities of various members of the two families to be conjoined are revealed. An inadvertently bigamous marriage contracted by Cullamore, a plot by Gourlay to have his nephew kidnapped and murdered, the mysterious kidnapping of Gourlay's own son, and the confusing of the identities of those two cousins, are all exposed. The prospective bridegroom, shown to be the illegitimate son of Cullamore, has no claim to the title he holds. The man to whom it rightfully belongs is the son of Lord Cullamore's brother; he is, by predictable coincidence, the man whom Lucy loves. Gourlay's kidnapped nephew, who had escaped death only to be incarcerated in a series of lunatic asylums, is revealed to be Gourlay's own son, and Lucy's brother. He, however, confronted by the sight of the man he knows not as a father but only as his persecutor, collapses, apparently dead. Gourlay, not only having had his plans come to nothing and his reputation ruined, is also faced with the appalling fact that he has caused the death of his son and heir, and disappears to commit suicide. Meanwhile, the son experiences a Lazarus-like recovery.

If, as he indicated in his letter to McGlashan, shifting his focus from the peasantry to the gentry was intended to show his versatility, it did no more than demonstrate his limitations. In his preface to the 1857 edition of *The Black Baronet*,

Carleton stressed that his intention had been to show the influence of the passions of 'love, ambition, and revenge', upon human affairs, and to give a credible account of both events and characters.

To contrive the successive incidents, by which the respective individuals on whose characters they were to operate should manifest their influence with adequate motives, and without departing from actual life and nature, as we observe them in action about us, was a task which required a very great study of the human mind when placed in peculiar circumstances.⁵⁰²

But more importantly, his work had a moral aim:

I trust that I have succeeded in the purity and loftiness of the moral, which was to show the pernicious effects of infidelity and scepticism, striving to sustain and justify an insane ambition; or, in a word, I endeavoured

'To vindicate the ways of God to man.'⁵⁰³

Such grandiose statements, proclaiming as they do that through his fiction he expounds upon the most fundamental aspects of human experience, simply show the author's inability fully to recognise the connection between universality as a goal with realism as the means of achieving it. Of the latter, Carleton had little conception. His intentions, being only half-formulated, could not be translated into satisfactory fiction. Not properly comprehending the possibilities that lay just beyond his grasp, he only half-perceived his own failure. These attempts at self-promotion are intended to convince not only his public, but himself also, of the value of his work and of his own status. Although he was not prepared to recognise the fact, Carleton, his confidence in the peasantry as prime subject matter exhausted, was at a loss as to which direction he could take. As his lengthy explanatory introductions to many of his novels indicate, he never achieved the personal confidence, and the literary sophistication, to

⁵⁰² Carleton, *Black Baronet*, p. 320.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 321. The final line is a misquotation of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, book 1, line 26, in which Milton requests divine aid in his literary task. '[W]hat is low raise and support;/That to the height of this great argument/ I may assert eternal providence,/and justify the ways of God to men.'

produce complete self-explanatory fictional texts. It was not widening his subject range, as he claimed to have done by writing *The Black Baronet*, but attending to the structural organisation of his novels, and, more importantly, developing a more disciplined approach to addressing the reader, which would have enhanced his already considerable, and well-deserved reputation. As it was, his work became increasingly marred by that unsubtle didacticism and structural instability which had been a feature of even those novels, *Fardorougha*, *Valentine M'Clutchy* and *The Emigrants of Ahadarra*, in which his abilities as a writer are more prominently displayed.

In *Valentine M'Clutchy*, for instance, a novel which, in terms of energy and satirical wit has much to commend it, Carleton's extensive use of the epistolary convention makes for monotonous stretches of text that sit uneasily against those sections interpreted through the omniscient narrator's ironic eye. Most problematic, though, is Carleton's failure to distinguish between the position of authorial narrator and the role of his fictional letter writer, the mysterious visitor to the Cumber area, Evory Easel, who is engaged in correspondence with a character ultimately revealed to be the absentee landlord Lord Cumber. Easel, it finally transpires, is Cumber's brother, as morally scrupulous as the other is negligent. Concerned at his brother's neglect, he has remained incognito in order that he might uncover the true state of the Cumber Estate and its tenants. Carleton introduces this epistolary section by insisting that as author, it is his privilege to 'to give his [Easel's] dialogue an Irish turn, and to fill up an odd chasm here and there, occasioned by his ignorance of circumstances which have come to our knowledge through personal cognizance [sic], and various other sources'.⁵⁰⁴ Chasms there are, and Easel's dialogue is given such an 'Irish turn' by the liberality with which the direct speech of other characters is incorporated into

⁵⁰⁴ Carleton, *Valentine M'Clutchy*, p. 229.

his testimony, that his position as fictional narrator is seriously undermined. While the conventions of the epistolary form frequently require the reader to suspend disbelief where direct speech is incorporated into the narrative, the liberties Carleton takes, particularly in his having Easel fill the gaps in his own knowledge, are so blatant that the supposed correspondence is effectively subsumed into the omniscient narrator's account of events. That Carleton himself was acutely conscious that this section of his novel was highly unsatisfactory is clear from his final, defensive explanation. He concludes with a further direct address to the reader, in the form of a ponderous pronouncement on his autonomous right to tamper with his own text.

We must here exercise the privilege which, at the commencement of this correspondence, we assured our readers we should reserve to ourselves – we allude to the ability which we possess, from ampler and clearer sources of information – to throw into Mr. Easel's correspondence, in their proper place, such incidents as he could not have possibly known, but which let in considerable light upon the progress of his narrative.⁵⁰⁵

This insistence upon the author's right to incorporate anomalous sections into a text is not a satisfactory substitute for a more careful organisation of the fictional theme. Carleton's convoluted phrasing, intended to lend authority to his declaration, serves only to highlight the novel's structural deficiencies, and to reinforce the awkwardness of his position.

Carleton's lack of subtlety in addressing the reader is most disconcertingly demonstrated when he is airing personal animosities in order to justify his own position. While in *The Black Baronet* he confined his expression of resentment of McGlashan's behaviour to the novel's preface, in *Valentine M'Clutchy* the grievance preoccupying him at the time of writing intrudes, with an implicit appeal to public

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 266.

sympathy, into the novel itself. Where his own circumstances were concerned, Carleton had little sense of discernment as to the degree to which they could, or should, be incorporated into his text. An epistolary section containing correspondence between the negligent Lord Cumber, his agent Val M'Clutchy, and Solomon M'Slime, allows him the opportunity to declare his complaint, related to his failure to obtain a government pension, and furthermore, to present it in such a transparent form that it hardly passes as fiction. M'Clutchy's praise of the dubious skills of an influential contact named Browbeater, made in a letter to Cumber, is only tenuously linked to the plot, but enables Carleton to launch a thinly veiled attack upon an official at Dublin Castle who, rightly or wrongly, he believes to have been instrumental in thwarting his application for a civil list pension. The true identity of 'Browbeater', the exact nature of his relationship with Carleton, whether he had any influence over the decision made, is unknown. Carleton's initial application for the pension had been refused in November 1843, yet one month later he had confidently informed a relative that he had 'reason to suppose' that it would be granted, probably within three months but certainly within one year.⁵⁰⁶ It is likely that this supposition was based on information imparted to him by his Dublin Castle acquaintance. Whatever its origins, his optimism had certainly evaporated before he finished writing *Valentine M'Clutchy* in 1844.

While Carleton is not explicit about the suspected contents of any report made about his circumstances, it is clear from the text that he believed they centred on what O'Donoghue referred to as his 'too convivial habits'.⁵⁰⁷

I am in correspondence with Counsellor Browbeater at the Castle, who [...] is [...] a creature after my own heart. We are both engaged in

⁵⁰⁶ Letter from William Carleton to his cousin, John Carleton, 8 December 1843, reproduced in O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, 63.

⁵⁰⁷ O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, 135.

attempting to bring the Spy System to that state of perfection which we trust may place it on a level with that fine old Institution, so unjustly abused, called the Inquisition. [...] For instance, it was only the other day that he prevented a literary man with a large family from getting a pension from the Premier, who between you and me, my Lord, is no great shakes; and this was done in a manner that entitles him to a very lasting remembrance indeed. The principle upon which he executed this interesting and beautiful piece of treachery [...] was well worthy of imitation by every man emulous of office; it was that of professing to be a friend to the literary man, whilst he acted the spy upon his private life, and misrepresented him to the Minister. [...] How few like him could transfuse the spirit of the Tipperary assassin into the moral principles of the Castle, *for useful purposes*?⁵⁰⁸

Having thus been introduced into the plot, Browbeater, if not forgotten, is dispensed with, until the novel's concluding paragraph. The final lines of the book are reserved for a further assault on the author's supposed betrayer, when Carleton, with evident satisfaction, summarises the progress, or rather, lack of progress, of the said official's career.

That Carleton allows a personal resentment to intrude so blatantly into his text is indicative of his deep psychological need to constantly reaffirm his status, not only to his public, but also to himself. It exemplifies too, his inability to perceive that the simple transposing of facts – or facts as he himself perceived them – to fiction in such an unsynthesised manner might have a detrimental impact upon the quality of his work. While the general ebullience and humour of *Valentine M'Clutchy* more than compensates for any such personal indulgences and organisational lapses, with the exception of *The Tithe Proctor*, his later works have few redeeming qualities.

By 1849, when he wrote *The Tithe Proctor*, Carleton's undisciplined approach to the organisation of plot and narrative control was even more evident. Nevertheless, despite its flaws, *The Tithe Proctor* does have much to commend it. But written while Ireland was still in the grip of famine, at the time when the

⁵⁰⁸ Carleton, *Valentine M'Clutchy*, pp. 400-01. Carleton's emphasis.

nationalist James Fintan Lalor was engaged in organising agrarian campaigns of violence, it was, as Flanagan remarks, ‘so harsh and uncompromising an attack upon insurrectionists that he was never quite forgiven for it’.⁵⁰⁹ The novel’s relevance to contemporary Ireland was limited. Carleton claims to have based his story upon an event of 1808, the murder by Whiteboy activists of a tithe proctor named Boland, and his family, who lived near Kiltteely, in County Limerick. He transposes the action to a relatively recent period of unrest, the Tithe Wars of the early 1830s, and superimposes an unremarkable love story upon this framework. The book is an exposition of the relationship between socio-political injustice and violence; the levying of Church of Ireland tithes upon a Catholic populace who owed it no allegiance had provided fertile soil in which secret societies were able to flourish. While at the time Carleton was writing the anomalous position of the Church of Ireland continued to be a cause of resentment, following the Tithe Rentcharge Act of 1838, by which tithes were converted into charges made upon landlords rather than tenant farmers, violent agitation such as that Carleton describes was effectively ended.

Typically, Carleton devotes much of *The Tithe Proctor*’s preface to affirming the historical veracity of the original account. The greater part of his preface consists of an ‘annexed “Narrative”’, which he is at pains to authenticate.

It is indeed, rarely, that ever a document, at once so authentic and powerful, has been found prefixed to any work of modern Irish Fiction – proceeding as it does [...] from the pen of a gentleman whose unassuming character and modesty are only surpassed by the distinction which his name has already gained in one of the most difficult but useful departments of our native literature.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁹ Flanagan, *Irish Novelists*, p. 322.

⁵¹⁰ Carleton, *Tithe Proctor*, p. v.

This 'Narrative' describes Boland's murder, and the related events that preceded, and followed the crime. Much of it is reminiscent of the account Carleton had given of the atrocity committed at Wildgoose Lodge, and much of it is repeated, almost verbatim, in the main text of *The Tithe Proctor*. The 'trial' of Boland, conducted in his absence by a Whiteboy 'court' at the village of Kiltteely, is described in some detail, followed by a graphic account of the elimination of the tithe proctor and most members of his family, and the abduction of his two daughters, one of whom became deranged, and, says Carleton, 'was subsequently taken into the "protection", as it is called, of a certain banker of Limerick, who shot himself, in that city, to my own knowledge, in 1815'. Finally, the circumstances that led to a number of those involved in the trial being identified are explained.

The identity of Carleton's source, if there was indeed a source, remains a matter for investigation. Stylistically, this 'annexed' record bears Carleton's unmistakable imprint, and the attributes with which he credits his supposed informant suggest that he himself could be the person of 'unassuming character and modesty' to whom he refers. The concluding sentence, of both the 'narrative' and the preface, indicates otherwise. In a final unambiguous declaration of the veracity of the account given, it is stated that its writer 'knew well, and was at school with, the secretary of the Court of Kiltteely Hill'.⁵¹¹ Clearly, then, the reader is encouraged to believe that the 'narrative', which composes most of the preface is a highly credible account, much of it originating with a member of the Whiteboy clan which had committed the atrocity; if not an active participant in the atrocity (and he may well have been), this nameless individual had certainly been present at the clandestine meeting at which sentence was passed on Boland.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., p. xvi.

It seems unlikely that any such first-hand account was given directly to Carleton himself. While it is just possible that, assuming he existed, this 'secretary of the Court' was of an age to have been at school with Carleton, given that he was probably a local man, and given that Carleton received his limited schooling in the Clogher area, it is less than probable. If Carleton had indeed received an account of the events relating to the murders, it was from another party, the mysterious literary man of some reputation to whom he had initially referred.

The probability is, of course, that he had received no such account. If that is the case, then the description Carleton gives of that person must reflect his opinion of himself; there being, other than on the page, no intermediary source, and probably no 'secretary of the Court' who had volunteered first-hand information. In other words, the authentication upon which the veracity of the preface account is predicated is almost certainly a fabrication. The preface then is a fictionalised account of events, and effectively an extension of the novel itself.

Attestation to veracity in an introductory statement is not uncommon in literature. One of those narrative procedures which together constitute what Ian Watt has referred to as 'formal realism', and which are so frequently found in the novel that they can be considered typical of the form itself,⁵¹² it was a convention which had a particular appeal to Irish writers, short story writers as well as novelists. When addressing a readership unfamiliar with Irish culture and conditions, they frequently felt it necessary to authenticate their fiction in such a way. Gerald Griffin, for instance, intent on reinforcing his credibility as a dispassionate and authoritative commentator on the west of Ireland, constructs an introduction to the *Tales of the Munster Festivals* which is a story in itself. Waiting for a boat on the Shannon

⁵¹² Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), pp. 34-35.

estuary, his fictional narrator becomes involved in a conversation with an elderly man of some learning, with whom he debates the educative role of the tale as a genre for a readership unfamiliar with the life and traditions of the west of Ireland. His adversary is unenthusiastic, and the narrator is given a salutary reminder, one he takes to heart, that he should present a fair picture of his country to the world: 'Give us our lights, if you will not overlook our shadows.'⁵¹³

Frequently, if it was not indicated that it was the experience of the narrator himself which was to be described, then it was declared to be that of a reliable acquaintance of the narrator. It is arguably the case that this need to declare the teller's credentials was reinforced by an Irish story-telling tradition – in other words, it was a convention readily borrowed from a not too distant oral tradition. The opening sentence of John and Michael Banim's tale 'The Furze Cutters', exemplifies this:

For the following narrative we are indebted to a fine old rebel – we beg his pardon, – to a fine old farming gentleman we should have said, who about forty years ago, *was* a rebel, but who now, by virtue of a royal pardon, safe in his possession, is allowed technically to call himself a loyal subject in something of the same way in which, by the agency of a special license, and an obliging priest, ladies of previously equivocal claims to perfection, are at last legally permitted to call themselves 'honest women'.⁵¹⁴

John Banim's introduction to his story 'The Fetches' takes the form of a letter sent from Abel O'Hara to his brother Barnes O'Hara, explaining how he came by his information. Similarly, his novel *The Nowlans* opens with a letter describing how the

⁵¹³ Gerald Griffin, *Tales of the Munster Festivals*, , p. xx.

⁵¹⁴ John and Michael Banim (The O'Hara family), 'The Furze Cutters', *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* (April 1842), 231-36 (p. 231).

writer-narrator had become acquainted with the family whose story is recounted in the body of the book.⁵¹⁵

Whereas Griffin and the Banims are adhering to a literary convention, in Carleton's case the nature of his declaration of veracity suggests rather more. To employ his creative powers in such a way, constructing an elaborate provenance for his account to reinforce its authenticity, thereby blurring the boundaries of invention and reality, might suggest a sophisticated understanding of the possibilities which the novel presents to the writer. But it could equally well indicate a naïve approach to the proper balance between fictional artifice and realistic effect – to the extent that the authenticating introduction has the ring of truth while the narrative itself is confused and implausible. Carleton's need for a strong historical underpinning of his fiction is certainly understandable. The past conditions the present, and nowhere were there more constant reminders of that than in mid nineteenth-century Ireland. But Carleton's particular need to authenticate the historical basis of his fiction, and his consequent reliance, or in this case, supposed reliance, upon textual sources, suggests that his confidence as a novelist remained fragile. The ambiguities within the preface are not indicative of any attempt by Carleton to explore new literary possibilities, but rather the opposite. They stem from his insecurities as a writer. Verification could be equated with certainty, and Carleton, whose need for security was an acute emotional as well as practical need, feared abandoning it.

Carleton's anxieties were compounded by the psychological burden his status as a writer imposed on him. As a national figure, and as the acknowledged authority on Irish life and culture, Carleton regarded it as his moral duty to pronounce upon the social ills that had, and continued, to deface Irish society. Declaring and

⁵¹⁵ John Banim, 'The Fetches', in John and Michael Banim, *Tales by the O'Hara Family*, 3 vols (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1825, repr. New York and London: Garland, 1978), II, 111-34; John Banim, *Nowlans*, pp. 3-14.

authenticating his source material was, as he saw it, a means of legitimising his writing, and affirming his status. Whatever his underlying uncertainties as a writer – indeed, perhaps because of them – he had few reservations about arrogating to himself an instructive role. In the tone of an Old Testament prophet reprimanding an errant nation, directing her in the paths of righteousness he declared his intention. ‘I endeavour to paint Ireland, sometimes as she was, but always *as she is*, in order that she may see many of those debasing circumstances which prevent her from being what she *ought to be*.’⁵¹⁶

Not all of his countrymen were impressed by his approach. O’Donoghue’s description of *The Tithe Proctor* as being ‘a vicious picture of the worst passions of the people, a rancorous description of the just war of the peasantry against tithes’, a book in which ‘some of the vilest types of the race are there held up to odium, not as rare instances of villainy, but as specimens of humanity quite commonly to be met with’, while not entirely fair, was one shared by many of his compatriots.⁵¹⁷ His view appears to be based as much upon opinions Carleton expressed in his preface – ‘the most outrageous part of the book’, O’Donoghue wrote – as upon the content of the novel itself.⁵¹⁸ Whereas in the novel Carleton depicts past events, in the preface he also concerns himself with the present. The recipients of much of Carleton’s ire in the preface are those leading campaigners for Repeal, who having reinforced ‘the long curse of agitation’, in Ireland, must therefore take considerable responsibility for that ‘degeneracy of character’ which is both a cause and a consequence of violence.⁵¹⁹ His condemnation of the peasantry, while excoriating, is selective: ‘a very few guilty

⁵¹⁶ Carleton, *Tithe Proctor*, p. vi. Carleton’s emphasis.

⁵¹⁷ O’Donoghue, *Life*, II, 119-20.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.121.

⁵¹⁹ Carleton, *Tithe Proctor*, p. vii.

wretches are', he writes, 'quite sufficient, however unjustly, to blacken and degrade a large district'.⁵²⁰

These men implicated in violence in *The Tithe Proctor* are not the local ruffians of the type described in 'Wildgoose Lodge', but seemingly 'respectable' members of society; as Carleton was plainly aware, the agrarian unrest of the early 1830s had involved participants from a wider social spectrum than had previous outbreaks of violence.⁵²¹ While the 'Captain', the dominant figure of the clandestine trial described in 'Wildgoose Lodge' was the local schoolmaster and clerk to the priest, and a figure of some standing, those he and his henchmen controlled included 'some of those most malignant and reckless spirits in the parish'. All are plied with whisky before the 'trial' commences.⁵²² The 'Wildgoose Lodge' trial, conducted in a Catholic Chapel, is a sacrilegious parody of the Mass, with the 'Captain' arrogating to himself the authority of the priest. The Kiltely Hill 'Court of Right' is a parody of a court case. There is no consumption of whisky on this occasion, and while the outcome of the 'trial' is predetermined, the process is an orderly one. Those attending at Kiltely Hill present a somewhat different picture to those involved in the Wildgoose Lodge meeting.

This ruin was full of respectably dressed men, and at one end of it, on chairs, and at a table, provided for the occasion, sat twelve of the most respectable of them, and a portly important-looking gentleman on an elevated chair at the end of the table. Two or three candles were burning, and some slips of paper were on the table. [...]

The judge then desired that the case be gone into. Whereupon a middle-sized, well-set young man, about six-and-twenty years of age, whose name we know, [...] now brought his chair forward to the table [...] and unrolling a roll of paper, read in a low, solemn, but audible

⁵²⁰ Ibid., pp. vi-vii.

⁵²¹ Those involved in agrarian protest in the early 1830s included strong farmers, who had suffered financially after the passing of the Tithe Composition Act of 1823, under which pasture, as well as cultivated land, was subject to tithes.

⁵²² Carleton, 'Wildgoose Lodge' (1844), pp. 351-52.

tone of voice, a series of charges preferred by the said Captain Right against the said Michael Boland and his sons.⁵²³

The problem with *The Tithe Proctor*, in O'Donoghue's eyes, is not one of veracity but of political acceptability. The representations of violence it contains gave too uncomfortable a view of the reality of Irish life for it to be condoned. 'It might have been one of his best books but for the insensate violence which defaces and destroys it. Some of his censures on his countrymen may be just enough', he allows, 'but they are gratuitous, quite uncalled for, and entirely out of place in a novel.'⁵²⁴ O'Donoghue, then, is conceding that while the picture Carleton gives is not a complete travesty of truth, it is not one that should be presented to the world. For such an authoritative commentator on peasant life to be describing the brutality of which the peasantry was capable was, for O'Donoghue and many of his compatriots, both politically and artistically unacceptable. It constituted a betrayal of the Irish people.

In fact, Carleton's criticisms were directed more widely than O'Donoghue was prepared to acknowledge. The causes of endemic violence did not lie entirely with those who promoted, or were directly involved in it. His depiction of those whose disregard for the well-being of the peasantry, and who were beneficiaries or promoters of injustice, is equally damning. As Flanagan observes, some of Carleton's countrymen had failed to recognise that the depiction of the eponymous tithe proctor, Matthew Purcel,⁵²⁵ whose unfeeling, oppressive and rapacious management ultimately led to his downfall, 'is etched in acid', and Purcel's absentee employer, the Church of Ireland rector Jeremiah Turbot, in residence at his living for only two

⁵²³ Carleton, *Tithe Proctor*, p. x. See also pp. 240-42 for the account given in the novel itself.

⁵²⁴ O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, 120.

⁵²⁵ It is indicative of Carleton's lack of organisation that in chapter 1 of the novel the tithe proctor is introduced as Dennis Purcel, and by chapter 2, has become Matthew Purcel, and, briefly, Michael Purcel.

weeks in each year, is portrayed as ‘a monster of greed and silly vanity’.⁵²⁶ Furthermore, Carleton leaves no room for doubt about the culpability of the Established Church itself. It was, he explains, ‘an overgrown, proud, idle and indolent Establishment, bloated by ease and indulgence, and corrupted almost to the very core by secular and political prostitution’. Even after reforms were instigated in the period of the Second Reformation, still ‘the bloated mass of mammon hung about her, prostrating her energies, secularising her spirit, and [...] oppressing the people out of whose pockets it was forced to come’.⁵²⁷

Confronting the reality of violence was, like his insistent verifying of his source material, a means of authenticating his fiction. Violence, in any form, he found intolerable, a means which could not be justified by any end. Flanagan, commenting on *The Tithe Proctor*, observed that ‘Carleton, the old Ribbonman, knew the horrors of such warfare too thoroughly to countenance them’.⁵²⁸ While Carleton certainly appreciated the destructive effects of conflict, his experience of it was slight. The ‘warfare’ he had known was limited to the occasion of his family’s humiliation at the hands of a group of Orangemen, and to his witnessing, in his youth, a massive Lammas fair ‘party fight’ at Clogher, ‘the greatest battle that ever took place in the North of Ireland between the two parties’, an organised affair involving Orangemen and Ribbonmen.⁵²⁹ There is nothing to suggest that his commitment to Ribbonism was anything other than nominal; becoming a Ribbonman was a necessary rite of

⁵²⁶ Flanagan, *Irish Novelists*, p. 322. William Bradley’s view, expounded at some length, and with considerable attention to Carleton’s text, is in accordance with Flanagan’s. See William Bradley, ‘*The Tithe Proctor* – a Revaluation’, *Carleton Newsletter*, 3.4 (4 April 1973), 28-30.

⁵²⁷ Carleton, *Tithe Proctor*, p. 98, p. 100.

⁵²⁸ Flanagan, *Irish Novelists*, p. 322.

⁵²⁹ Carleton, *Autobiography*, pp. 38-39, p. 82.

passage for a Catholic youth in rural Ireland, and, as Carleton indicates, one that it was unwise to refuse.⁵³⁰

The violence described in the final chapter in the book, although given in considerable detail, lacks impact; Carleton, in his eagerness to authenticate, had, through his preface, anticipated what is, anyway, too laboured a climax. The horrifying reality of violence emerges not through ghoulish descriptions of the inflamed Whiteboy mob bent on destruction, ‘the red turbid blaze of the burning building lighting them into the similitude of incarnate devils, let loose upon some hellish mission of destruction and blood’, or even through Purcel’s improbable soliloquy on his past misdeeds and vanities as he confronts the certainty of an immediate death which allows him, as a Catholic, no opportunity of repentance and salvation.⁵³¹ The melodramatic imagery to which Carleton was increasingly to resort was too highly coloured to communicate a truly convincing sense of the horror of human brutality. The terrible aspects of violence are far more powerfully expressed at an earlier point in the novel where that other, more confident Carleton, the writer of *Traits and Stories*, re-emerges to present an elderly peasant character giving a lengthy account of how retribution was meted out in the days of his own youth, ‘before the union’, when he himself was actively involved in the Whiteboy movement. Billy Bradley, seated with a group of younger men who are involved in the plot to murder Purcel, recounts his part in the torture and murder of a tithe proctor many years previously. With unconcealed enthusiasm, Bradley describes to his audience how that proctor was seized, and taken to the site of the grave already prepared for him. Before being buried, still alive, in the thorn-lined hole, he was stripped naked, and ‘carded’,

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 76-78.

⁵³¹ Carleton, *Tithe Proctor*, pp.254-55, pp. 252-53.

flayed by his tormentors with live tomcats wielded by their pitched tails, until he was ‘scarified into griskins’.

‘God! How the unfortunate divil quivered and writhed and turned – until the poor wake crature, that at first had hardly the strength of a child, got, by the torture he suffered, the strength of three men; for indeed, afther he broke the cords that tied him, three, nor three more the back o’ that, wasn’t sufficient to hould him. He got the gag out of his mouth, too, and then, I declare to my Saviour his scrames was so awful that we got frightened, for we couldn’t but think that the voice was unnatural an’ sich that no man ever heard. We set to, however, and gagged and tied him agin, and then we carded him, first down, then up, then across by one side, and after that across by the other. Well, when this was done, we tuk him as easily an’ as purtily as we could.’

‘D–n your soul, you ould ras- ras- cal’ said the person they called Ned, ‘You wor – wor all a parcel o’ bloody d—n, hell fi- fi- fire, cowardly villains, to- to- thrat – ate any fellow crature – crature in sich a way. Why didn’t you shoo- shoo- oot him at wanst, an’ not put- ut him through hell’s tor- tortures like that, you bloody-minded ould dog!’

To tell the truth, many of them were shocked by the old carder’s narrative, but he only grinned at them, and replied –

‘Ay, shoot – you may talk about shootin’ Ned, avick, but for all that life’s sweet.’⁵³²

Although these words are but a short extract from what is a lengthy account, the whole is so horrifying not only because the reader is confronted with the brutality of the act, and with the mental and physical agony of a *particular* victim, but also because of the pleasure Bradley has taken, and continues to take, in inflicting suffering. Carleton is not depicting an event which can be conveniently confined to the past, but one which registers – chillingly – as perennial. This may be an event which, historically, belongs in the context of late eighteenth-century unrest, but it is described to a fictional group of men who are about to perpetrate a similar crime in the 1830s. Bradley’s enthusiasm for his subject is more than that of a man nostalgic

⁵³² Ibid., pp. 161-62.

for the days of his own youth, for the times when the Whiteboys ‘did handle the proctors in style’.⁵³³ His satisfaction stems too, from his ability to manipulate the circumstances of the present; from the fact that through his unsparing detail of torture perpetrated in the past, for all his physical infirmity, he remains capable of savouring the memory of inflicting torment – and, by re-telling the story, of inflicting torment on his vulnerable young listener. Carleton is presenting a picture of the brutalising effect of violence, and, as he sees it, the intractability of Ireland’s problems. This truly is the local raised to the level of the universal and the transmutation of the facts of historical experience into realism.

Gerald Dawe, discussing Carleton’s literary decline, observes that *The Tithe Proctor* demonstrates Carleton’s increasing reliance upon sensationalism and rhetoric as substitutes for ‘a realistically fashioned world in which the effects of violence, sectarianism, hunger and social deprivation are described’.⁵³⁴ While Carleton did, in his later works, appear incapable of presenting a ‘realistically fashioned world’, in *The Tithe Proctor*, as Bradley’s narrative demonstrates, he was still capable of writing which, while profoundly disturbing, cannot be described as sensational. That it is so disturbing is precisely because the behaviour it depicts is credible. In this particular scene at least, there is no recourse to the conventions of the Gothic, and no need for any justifying explanation. Carleton, displaying his old confidence, has no need of the rhetoric that disfigures much of his work.

Nevertheless, taken overall, *The Tithe Proctor* is far from being a satisfactory work of fiction. Carleton’s repeated, stylistically awkward pronouncements on Ireland’s troubles, already wearily familiar, are more evident, and so more

⁵³³ Ibid., p. 160.

⁵³⁴ Gerald Dawe, *Stray Dogs and Dark Horses* (Newry: Abbey Press, 2000), p. 105. Melissa Fegan, in her study of Carleton, discusses in some detail Carleton’s preoccupation with horror and violence. See Fegan, pp. 157-61.

disrupting of what is anyway a disorganised narrative. It is a telling commentary on the book that its preface receives more attention than does the novel itself. It is certainly more coherent. The storyline has two strands. One concerns the efforts of a character known by the pseudonym Buck English to eliminate Purcel, the tithe proctor, and the other presents the tribulations undergone by Francis M'Carthy in his efforts to win Julia Purcel and save her family. Buck English is motivated not only by the desire to rid the world of an unfeeling tyrant, but also by revenge. His overtures to Purcel's daughter Julia having been rejected, he wants retribution. Meanwhile, M'Carthy finds his relationship with Julia under strain; it has been suggested to her that he is a Whiteboy. This seemingly preposterous idea is given credibility when, having been delivered into the hands of a Whiteboy group, he succeeds in escaping, disguised as one of their number, and is seen, with his face blackened, by Julia. Meanwhile, the social situation deteriorates, with organised resistance to paying tithes, initially passive, becoming violent. Ultimately, when Purcel's home is attacked, M'Carthy, again disguised as a Whiteboy, succeeds in saving Julia, her sister and other members of the family, but not without considerable help from the Cannie Soogah, the 'jolly pedlar'. A mysterious individual who has an uncanny ability to appear at moments of crisis, the Cannie Soogah is finally revealed as the twin of Buck English. With his brother, who, it transpires, had aided M'Carthy in his earlier flight from the Whiteshirts, he had repeatedly attempted to thwart English's schemes.

The Tithe Proctor's qualities are almost entirely obscured by the intricacies of a plot so convoluted as to be virtually unintelligible. While Carleton certainly anticipated an ending that demonstrated the triumph of natural justice, he appears to have had only a vague idea of where, in the interim, his meanderings were taking

him, and his reader. The author leaves his reader with the impression that he was also in the dark – and a good deal of the action is conducted under cover of night – about the exact identities of some of the characters he has created, or what their roles are within the plot. Telling a tale and making it up might work well in the sketch born out of an oral tradition, but the novel requires a higher level of control and organisation. The blackened faces of Whiteboy activists are highly convenient disguises, and not only within the framework of the text; the author is plainly struggling to resolve his own fiction.

This lack of coherence presages the almost total textual collapse that occurs in *The Squanders of Castle Squander*. Beginning as a big house novel in the manner of Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent*, from which Carleton took his inspiration, *Castle Squander* charts the decline in fortunes of a negligent and incompetent landlord and his family. Carleton's inability to formulate a plot line, though, is evident from the beginning. Prospective story lines are aborted almost at conception. The fictional narrator, Randy O'Rollick, the ne'er-do-well opportunist of chapter one who bears a distinct resemblance to *Castle Rackrent*'s absent character Jason Quirk, has by chapter three (of a total of thirty-nine) metamorphosed into a family tutor genuinely concerned for the moral well-being of his Squander charges. The young Dick Squander's designs upon O'Rollick's sister that are concerning O'Rollick in chapter three seemingly evaporate; no further reference to them is made. James, the one Squander brother who is portrayed as having some degree of moral integrity, and whom Carleton clearly originally conceived as the saviour of the family's fortune and name, is abandoned to a university education in chapter four, and, corrupted by success, never reappears. By the mid-point of the novel Carleton has given up practically all pretence of maintaining a fictional first person narrative and the text

collapses into an unstructured diatribe on the necessity for political, economic and agricultural reform. This is most startlingly displayed when he inserts into the text a lengthy section from another of his own novels, *Valentine M'Clutchy*, describing the eviction of a family, 'to stand', he writes, 'for the general diorama of what has taken place within the last six or eight years, when extermination became the habit of the country'.⁵³⁵ His own voice effectively extinguishes that of his fictional narrator.

Melissa Fegan has summarised *Castle Squander* as a work 'that charts the destruction of fifty years of Irish literature, beginning with an Edgeworthian comic framework, and ending with a literary nervous breakdown'.⁵³⁶ That ultimate 'literary breakdown', was related to both Carleton's unrelieved financial difficulties, and to those Famine circumstances which he was struggling both to describe and to explain. Both are referred to in an undated letter he sent to Charles Gavan Duffy. Describing himself as 'all but distracted', he railed against the country which, he believed, had used him so badly, and expressed the fear that, temporarily at least, he would have to abandon the writing of *Castle Squander*.

Only may the curse of God alight doubly on Ireland and may all she has suffered be only like the entrance to Paradise compared to what she may suffer. You know not how intensely I long to be able to shake the dust of my feet against her and to leave the bitterest legacy of curses behind me that were ever conceived by a human heart or uttered by a human tongue.⁵³⁷

Famine, though, was no more than a catalyst, an event that exposed the limitations of Carleton's literary comprehension, and threw into stark relief his vulnerability as a writer. Carleton's failure was primarily a failure of personal confidence. *Castle Squander* was written in the immediate aftermath of the Famine,

⁵³⁵ Carleton, *The Squanders of Castle Squander* (London: Henry Lea, 1852), pp. 349-59.

⁵³⁶ Fegan, p. 157.

⁵³⁷ Letter from William Carleton to Charles Gavan Duffy, 10 Feb 1850 (National Library of Ireland, MS 5756, fols 257-60), reproduced in Boué, pp. 352-53.

and was the only one of his novels in which contemporary, or near-contemporary events were explicitly presented within the plot itself. That contemporaneity was itself a hallmark of realism lends a degree of irony to that failure. Carleton's intention, no doubt, had been to suggest that in the half-century that had passed since *Castle Rackrent* had appeared Ireland's economic and social difficulties had not been properly remedied; that the famine was in part a consequence of negligence, and of previous and continuing neglect on the part of landowners and government alike. In *The Black Prophet* Carleton had aimed to expose the realities of famine, but the action in that novel had been presented against events in the second decade of the century. *The Black Prophet* had been written in the early days of Famine, at a time when the full enormity of that event could be neither anticipated, nor comprehended. At that time Carleton had no reason to suppose that the hardships it brought would be other than of relatively short duration. In the way of such events, it was likely that it soon would be forgotten. By the time *Castle Squander* was appearing, erratically (to the consternation of the editor), in the *London Illustrated News* in the early months of 1852,⁵³⁸ it was painfully apparent that this last calamity was too momentous an event for it to be transposed in fictional form to an earlier period of Irish history. The task he set himself, though, of presenting an account of such recent events, proved to be beyond his capabilities. The Famine was too close, and its social impact over half a decade too intense, for it to be incorporated into a fictional setting. Its legacy was already too profoundly disturbing. Always unable to draw satisfactory boundaries between fiction and reality, here he hardly makes the attempt.

There was, though, another, even more significant factor which contributed to Carleton's failure. The famine of the 1840s was remarkably well documented.

⁵³⁸ See O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, pp. 174-75.

Carleton, ever uncertain of his fictional bearings, and always inclined to compensate by declaring his non-fictional sources, was too able to seek refuge in the multiplicity of authoritative texts which were published. That these were already in the public domain did not deter him from forcing upon his readership information that was already at its disposal. The result, for his writing, is disastrous. Correspondents to *The Times* commenting on the condition of Ireland and the state of Irish poor houses are commended on their research. Extracts from parliamentary reports and detailed statistical accounts are presented with little regard for the resulting disruption to textual continuity. Information about the number of holdings under receivership and the degree of land-sub-division in Ireland, originating with the Court of Chancery, and the effects of the Encumbered Estates Act of 1849, all transposed from the *Dublin University Magazine*, as well as details from Irish Agricultural Returns, are reproduced in such an unsynthesised manner that the fictional narrative is effectively extinguished.⁵³⁹

That Carleton's personal familiarity with famine conditions was extremely limited was also a significant factor in this literary collapse. Whatever intimacy Carleton had been able to claim with the peasantry did not extend this far. He was certainly no stranger to financial distress and, at the time he was struggling to write *Castle Squander*, and beyond, he was plainly under deep psychological strain. His experience of the acute physical hardship known by many tied to the land, however, was non-existent. Even as an observer, his familiarity with the horrors he described was limited. In *The Black Baronet*, he makes no claim to first-hand experience, simply referring to appalling scenes 'which might have been witnessed, and were

⁵³⁹ Carleton, *Castle Squander*, p. 378, pp. 256-7, pp. 261-63, pp. 386-89, p. 363.

witnessed' between 1847 and 1850, the year in which he was writing.⁵⁴⁰ Earlier, in his preface to *The Black Prophet*, Carleton had referred to his having witnessed, in 1817, 1822, and 'other subsequent years', scenes of suffering such as those he depicts in that novel. His statement does not ring true. For a man normally so determined to authenticate his narratives, on this matter he is uncharacteristically, and suspiciously, unwilling to elaborate.

Morash suggests that the fact that Carleton omits any mention of the famines of 1817 and 1822 in his autobiography constitutes 'an eloquent testimony of silence to his distance from the world of the starving in rural Ireland'; the experience of those who so suffered lay beyond the bounds of representation.⁵⁴¹ Even allowing for the selectivity of a work which is essentially picaresque, Carleton's silence on the subject of famine in the *Autobiography* is probably because it made little impact upon his life, or indeed, upon his consciousness. While Ulster certainly experienced severe food shortages in 1817, there is scant evidence that as a youth in Tyrone Carleton had seen much in the way of the hardship they caused.⁵⁴² His one specific allusion to famine at this period is in his tale 'The Lough Derg Pilgrim', when he explains the condition of an elderly man and his young son, who, despite their having 'a peculiar air of decency', were 'thin and emaciated'. 'It is right to mention here', he continues, 'that this pilgrimage was performed in a season when sickness and famine prevailed fearfully in this kingdom'. A footnote gives the year as 1817.⁵⁴³ By 1822, the other year to which he specifically refers in *The Black Prophet*, he was almost certainly resident in Dublin.

⁵⁴⁰ Carleton, *Black Prophet*, p. viii; Carleton, *Black Baronet*, p. 425.

⁵⁴¹ Morash, *Writing the Irish Famine*, p. 178.

⁵⁴² Charles McGlinchey (1861-1954), said of his home area in Donegal, 'I often heard that the Dear Summer of 1817 was a worse famine in many ways than the famine of 1847'. McGlinchey, p. 119.

⁵⁴³ Carleton, 'The Lough Derg Pilgrim' (1843), 265-66. This account is discussed more fully in chapter 2.

Carleton's own experiences of the effects of the famine of the 1840s were limited to its economic repercussions, particularly those which impacted upon the publishing industry. Carlyle, visiting Ireland in 1849, observed that while destitute Irish were to be seen elsewhere in Ireland, in Dublin they were hardly more evident than in London at that time.⁵⁴⁴ In 1850, Carleton, writing to his daughter Mary Anne from London where he was seeking a publisher, remarked on the unhealthy appearance of the city's populace.⁵⁴⁵ The implied comparison is with the residents of his own country's capital; it seems the suffering rural Irish were not present in such numbers in Dublin that they were imprinted on his consciousness.

And earlier, in letters to Charles Gavan Duffy and to his family in Dublin, written when he made a nostalgic journey to his home area in the autumn of 1846, after completing *The Black Prophet*, he makes no mention of famine conditions. This is not surprising. Extreme hardship was not uniformly felt over the country, or even within a general area. While no part of Ireland escaped the effects of famine, and in Ulster the southern counties suffered most, mortality was highest in Ireland's poorer, western counties. Furthermore, it was only in October 1846, at the time Carleton was writing, that the catastrophic nature of this latest famine was becoming apparent, and starvation began to take a toll in lives.⁵⁴⁶ Carleton himself merely mentions the unremitting 'gloomy wet weather' which was spoiling his enjoyment. While he was disturbed by the appearance of his brother, eighteen years his senior, who he had not seen since he had left home as a young man, there is no suggestion that the latter's poor physical condition was other than the result of old age and extreme religious

⁵⁴⁴ Thomas Carlyle, *Reminiscences of My Irish Journey in 1849* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1882), p. 70.

⁵⁴⁵ Letter from Carleton to his daughter Mary Anne, 6 October, 1850, reproduced in O'Donoghue, *Life*, II, 150.

⁵⁴⁶ See Elliott, p. 313; Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Ireland's Great Famine: An Overview': Working paper, Centre for Economic Research, University College Dublin (Dublin: University College Dublin, 2004), p. 14, p. 4, p. 6.

devotion; he had, writes Carleton, ‘fasted and prayed himself off the earth’.⁵⁴⁷ Melissa Fegan’s statement that on this visit (which she mistakenly places in 1847) he found the Clogher Valley deserted is incorrect. While the scattered community of Ballyscally had disappeared, eliminated by a landlord who gave a higher priority to the aesthetics of landscape than to the well-being of his tenants, the general area, at least as Carleton describes it in the *Autobiography*, remained remarkably well-populated.⁵⁴⁸ Given that famine-related evictions became a feature of Irish rural life from late 1847 onwards, it is unlikely that the disappearance of Ballyscally was facilitated by the calamity engulfing Ireland.

Fegan observes that Carleton repeatedly emphasises the distance between those involved in the experience of famine, the inability of the outsider to empathise with the sufferer being exacerbated by the dehumanising effects of starvation upon the victim of famine. Carleton himself, she speculates, found his early encounters with such suffering ‘too awful to relate or remember’.⁵⁴⁹ It is far more likely that his reluctance to give any personal account of the shortages of the early-nineteenth century has a simpler cause. Carleton’s silence on the matter of his own experience was not because of any reluctance on his part to speak out, but because he had nothing to contribute.

After all, he has no compunction about using other factual sources to verify narratives intended to show the shocking condition to which, *in extremis*, human beings are reduced. At one point in *The Black Baronet* a Swiftian illustration of the

⁵⁴⁷ Letters from William Carleton to his wife Jane, 15 October 1846, and to his to his daughter Sizzy (Jane) (undated), reproduced in O’Donoghue, *Life*, II, 86-87, 87. Carleton, *Autobiography*, pp. 58-59. The dating of these letters, reproduced by O’Donoghue, is confirmed by the mention of this visit in a letter from Carleton to the poet William Allingham, written in November 1846. Letter from William Carleton to William Allingham, 19 November 1846 (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign Campus, Rare Books and Special Collections Library, Allingham Collection). (See appendix I.iii. for full text.)

⁵⁴⁸ Carleton, *Autobiography*, pp. 58-59. While in the *Autobiography* Carleton speculates that the year of his visit to the Clogher area was 1847, his letters show the year to have been 1846.

⁵⁴⁹ Fegan, pp. 153-54.

dehumanising effects of hunger and disease is authenticated by a footnote declaring that the account of cannibalism it contains is based upon a reported court case of 1846, one which also forms the basis of an account given in *Castle Squander*.⁵⁵⁰ In *The Black Baronet*, the young Lord Dunroe, debased not by want, but by a life of profligacy, expresses his contempt for an Ireland whose circumstances are to him, merely confirmation of his country's distance from the fashionable world in which he moves.

'Don't the Irish refuse beef and mutton, and take to eating each other? What can be said of a people who, to please their betters, practise starvation as their natural pastime, and dramatize hunger to pamper their most affectionate lords and masters, who, whilst the latter witness the comedy, make the performers pay for their tickets?' [...]

'I think I recollect one of their bills of performance, which runs thus: "On Saturday, the 25th inst., a tender and affectionate father, stuffed by so many cubic feet of cold wind, foul air, all resulting from extermination and the benevolence of a humane landlord, will in the very wantonness of repletion, feed upon the dead body of his own child – for which entertaining performance he will have the satisfaction, subsequently, of enacting with success the interesting character of a felon and be comfortably lodged at his Majesty's expense in the jail of the county.'⁵⁵¹

This, however, is more than a nineteenth-century variation upon Swift's *A Modest Proposal*. Swift's essay, written in 1727, had been directed at a system in which the cost of absenteeism and poor land management had been borne by the peasantry.⁵⁵² More than a hundred years later little had been done to remedy the situation. Heavily ironic Carleton's description might be, but as he himself was all too painfully aware, by 1850 the plight of many of the Irish poor was beyond satire.

⁵⁵⁰ Carleton, *Castle Squander*, pp. 383-85.

⁵⁵¹ Carleton, *Black Baronet*, p. 430.

⁵⁵² Jonathan Swift, *A Modest Proposal: for Preventing the Children of Poor People in Ireland from Being a Burden to Their Parents or Country; and for Making Them Beneficial to the Publick*, in *The Writings of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Robert A. Greenberg and William Bowman Piper (New York and London: Norton, 1973), pp. 502-09.

This is not the first account of cannibalism to be described in *The Black Baronet*. Describing scenes of appalling horror based upon accounts given by ‘public officers’, Carleton recounts how, weak from hunger and disease, individuals might be found ‘tearing the flesh from the bodies of the carcasses that were stretched beside them’, and claims that ‘fathers have been known to make a wolfish meal upon the dead of their own offspring’. He concludes, ‘We might, therefore, have carried on our description up to the very highest point of imaginable horror, without going beyond the truth’.⁵⁵³

Carleton, it might be supposed, has already reached the ‘highest point of imaginable horror’. Imaginable the horror might be, but the author will leave nothing to the imagination. In *Castle Squander*, packs of emaciated dogs invade hallowed ground to feed upon the recently dead dragged from their shallow graves.

Legs and arms stripped of the flesh and bearing about them the unnatural marks left by the bloody fangs of some hungry mastiff, were scattered about. Some had been dragged into the neighbouring fields, as might be learned by the eager and interrupted howl of the half-gratified animal, as he feasted upon the revolting meal. In a different field might be seen another wolfish hound, with a human head between his paws, on the features of which he was making his meal.

*Now, all these frightful pictures were facts of that day, and were witnessed by thousands!*⁵⁵⁴

Scenes of starvation were indeed witnessed, and cases of cannibalism, and of dogs devouring cadavers, similar to those Carleton describes were described in both the Irish and English press, from where, no doubt, he took his inspiration.⁵⁵⁵ First-hand accounts of starvation, such as those of visitors to Ireland, cited by Fegan, are far

⁵⁵³ Carleton, *Black Baronet*, p. 425.

⁵⁵⁴ Carleton, *Castle Squander*, p. 298. Carleton’s emphasis.

⁵⁵⁵ See, for instance, ‘Answers to Correspondents’, *Nation*, 5, (15 May 1847), 504; ‘Ireland (From Our Own Correspondent)’, *The Times*, 26 March 1847, p. 7.

more horrifying than Carleton's macabre descriptions.⁵⁵⁶ For Carleton, as a writer, the 'highest point of horror' to which he refers was a nadir. In his desperate attempts to justify his narratives, to emphasise the shocking reality of what Ireland suffered, he has no recourse to his own experience, and can find no way to engage with the personal, human aspects of such degradation. The ultimate consequence of extreme deprivation is dehumanisation of the individual, and the fullest representation of this condition is beyond Carleton. Resorting to the imagery of nightmare, Carleton seems incapable of doing more than present a general scene of debasement and horror; the individual is all but eliminated from his accounts. There is no equivalent in Carleton to the description of silent hopelessness, removed from the public gaze, that is found in Trollope's 1860 novel, *Castle Richmond*. The 'last stage' for Trollope's victim of famine is one in which emotion, and personality, are eliminated. But it is her very anonymity, her isolation, and her experiential distance from the unwary and unprepared observer who leaves her to die, which give the truly appalling face of famine.⁵⁵⁷

Carleton's impotence as a writer in the face of such circumstances is not simply because of the intensity of human suffering and debasement, but because of its scale. Any fictionalising of such a visible reality was both redundant, and unwelcome to the public. His increasingly frantic appeals to the presumed reader betoken a desperation which is as much a need for reassurance about his credibility as writer as it is a passionate, if impotent cry on behalf of the suffering. The seeds of Carleton's failure had been present in his very success. His vitality was expressed through the anecdotal account, through his talent for portraiture, and through his ability to produce

⁵⁵⁶ See Fegan, pp. 93-95.

⁵⁵⁷ Anthony Trollope, *Castle Richmond*, 2nd edition (London: Chapman and Hall, 1861), pp. 330-35.

the literary equivalent of what he had termed 'a coloured photograph'.⁵⁵⁸ Those representations, though, were pictures of the past, and were now replaced by lurid daubings. Deane observed that 'Carleton's one theme – Irish national character, as evinced in the Irish peasantry – finds its only appropriate form in the tale and, in the larger frame of the novel, tends towards those melodramatic exploitations which he, among others, had been so eager to replace.'⁵⁵⁹ Carleton's engagement with realism, had, by mid-century, been abandoned for the imagery of the Gothic. It is ironic that it is not through the artist's depictions of horror in *Castle Squander*, but through its structural incoherence and its consequent collapse as a fictional work that it represents the chaotic reality that Carleton was attempting to present. Even if Famine had not emerged as an unwelcome catalyst, his considerable talent would have faltered. Emotionally, and as a writer, he was reliant upon the world he had known in his youth. It is hardly surprising that he moved with less confidence within the reality of the present. Time, and circumstance, and the acclaim he received as the historian of the peasantry, had increasingly distanced him from his inspiration, and he could find no other. But while ultimately his career as a novelist was undermined by his inability to impose a reassuring structure upon the chaotic reality of recent history, the evidence of his earlier work suggests that his abilities as a novelist were inferior to his talents as a storyteller. His success would have been no more than a limited one. He had neither the education nor the enabling confidence to develop a coherent voice.

A century after the Great Famine, Sean O'Faolain, discussing the interplay of personality, ability and circumstance upon the writer's work, observed:

No Irish writer, living in a country where circumstances are particularly complicated and difficult for every type of artist –

⁵⁵⁸ Carleton, *Autobiography*, p. 91.

⁵⁵⁹ Seamus Deane, 'Irish National Character 1790-1900', in *The Writer as Witness: Literature as Historical Evidence*, ed. by Tom Dunne (Cork: Cork University Press, 1987), pp. 90-113 (p.106).

complicated by religion, politics, peasant unsophistication, lack of stimulus, lack of variety, pervasive poverty, censorship, social compression, and so on – can fail to make this observation, or see the force of it once it is pointed out to him. All about him he can see talent fail or flourish because men are unlucky – or is it skilful or unskilful? – in [the] art of self-management. Which may be why Irish writers are far less interested in the technique of writing than in the conditions of writing, though inclined to think exclusively in terms of their own local conditions and to imagine them unique. It is the one theory about which they are as consciously and deeply concerned as French writers are about all sorts of intellectual ideas, including this one.⁵⁶⁰

William Carleton is the very type of the Irish cultural exceptionalism, which O’Faolain describes. He was a writer whose temperament, personal lot and cultural situation combined to make vivid and memorable the work he produced in the form in which he excelled – and re-combined to thwart him when he attempted to work against the grain of the abilities and circumstances that made him what he was. The pathos of Carleton’s personal literary fate – that of a man diminished in authorial stature by his inability to recognise his limitations – takes on an added intensity by its being symptomatic of his country’s own malaise at a tragic moment in its history. If Carleton’s fate and reputation as a writer do not hinge on Ireland’s Famine, they bear, nevertheless, the unmistakable marks of its troubled history.

⁵⁶⁰ Sean O’Faolain, *The Short Story* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1972), pp. 23-24. First published in 1948.

CONCLUSION

When Carleton died in 1869, shortly before his seventy-fifth birthday, he was unable to walk, his eyesight and his hearing had failed, and he struggled to make himself understood; by tragic irony, the cancer of the tongue that killed him rendered this raconteur, the man who had placed the peasantry of his country before the world, unable to speak. A photograph of the elderly Carleton, taken three or four years before his death, portrays a white-bearded sage, a figure whose appearance suggests an individual from a previous age. (See Appendix II.i.) An imparter and custodian of an oral tradition, his right hand is raised in instruction, or in emphasis, as if addressing the viewer. The words he speaks, however, have been committed to print; in his left hand, which rests on his knee, he holds a book, in all probability a volume of his *Traits and Stories*.⁵⁶¹ Another, earlier portrait presents the author in a very different light. Painted by John Joseph Slattery, and now held in the National Gallery in Dublin, it shows a man whose place, far from being in Ireland's past, is very much in his country's present. (See Appendix II.ii.) Here, the author, in respectable middle age, stands, statesman-like, quill in hand, his arm resting in easy possession on a weighty volume, holding the viewer in a steady gaze. This is far from being a portrait of Carleton as the last of his type, the *senachie*, but is a portrayal of a man whose position is firmly fixed in contemporary Ireland, one whose status is acknowledged, and whose place in history is assured.

Together, these contrasting depictions of authority suggest the paradox which Carleton has always presented for critics. Carleton, not without justification, is seen as a writer caught between past and present, a figure painfully ill-equipped to redirect his talent from history to contemporaneity. While the later photograph does not

⁵⁶¹ The photographic portrait, by Margaret Allen, is reproduced opposite the title page in O'Donoghue, *Life*, II.

reveal it, the sage expounding to his audience has become, literally and metaphorically, unsighted; he is a dark man, for whom the literary road has become un-negotiable, for him at least, a track devoid of waymarks. Three years earlier, in a letter to Charles Gavan Duffy lonely and deeply troubled, he wrote that he had produced nothing for two years.⁵⁶² ‘My career, my dear Charles, is nearly closed.’⁵⁶³ While the earlier portrait suggests a man confidently at ease, and at the peak of his powers, it almost certainly dates from a period when Carleton was already in decline, his best work already behind him.⁵⁶⁴ And notwithstanding his desire to achieve a reputation as a novelist, the work upon which his arm, and his authority rests, is his *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry*. Both of these images suggest authority – and both are lent a poignancy by the insecurities which underlay them.

The hold that these insecurities came to take can be charted in a number of ways, but most clearly by comparing the humour, the confidence, and the overall sense of elation which characterise the preface to the 1833, Second Series of *Traits and Stories* with the disillusionment, and resentment, at what he perceived to be his country’s neglect of him expressed in his personal letters of the 1850s and 1860s. In the former case, Carleton’s delight at the reception the First Series had received is palpable.

It was [...] the brisk sale of the First Series, joined to a vacancy in the Author’s purse, which he felt rather anxious to have filled up, that induced him to bring out the present work. He hopes it may succeed as well as the other; but that it may succeed better, is a wish due to the worthy and liberal publisher who brings it out.

The Author was pressed by many of his friends to dedicate this book to some Great Man; but as he had only a month’s notice to look about

⁵⁶² Letter from William Carleton to Charles Gavan Duffy, 1 June 1863, reproduced in Boué, p. 356.

⁵⁶³ Ibid., p. 357.

⁵⁶⁴ The exact date of the painting, which was purchased from Carleton’s family, is unknown, but it probably dates from the early 1850s. Slattery entered the Dublin Society’s School of Art in 1846, and exhibited at the Royal Hibernian Society between 1852 and 1858. After that, nothing more is heard of him.

him, he found himself rather at a loss for time to discover any one worthy of that character – except the Castle Porter. The Public is the only Great Man at present, whose patronage is worth any thing to a writer.⁵⁶⁵

It is a very different Carleton who wrote to Charles Gavan Duffy, by that time resident in Australia, in June 1863. Socially isolated, fearing imprisonment for debt, a bewildered Carleton expressed his feelings to one who, he said, had ‘had the full force of my affection and friendship’.

I have written this with many tears and have been obliged to wipe my almost blind eyes and my spectacles often. If there be anything that touches and melts a man of genius – and who knows better than yourself that the world has bestowed that epithet upon me – it is the consciousness that he is appreciated and understood by those who possess that gift themselves. Ireland is an ungrateful country. I am at this moment as much neglected as if I had never held the first place in the literature of that country.⁵⁶⁶

As if to impart some reassurance to himself, he reminds Duffy that his works had been translated into European languages.⁵⁶⁷

It was Carleton’s fate to be beset by issues of recognition and identity – his own and those of national culture. It has been the purpose of this thesis to select and explore those aspects of his life and work which lay bare the problematic aspects of his personal affections and affiliations, his achievements, and his thwarted potential. Critics have been quick to label Carleton, not only for what he actually wrote, but also hypothetically, sometimes speculating on what he might have achieved, had he been the product of different circumstances, or a different age. The critic Declan Kiberd, for one, is of the opinion that

Had Carleton been born as early as Wordsworth, he might have written in the poetic form; had he been born as late as Trollope, he would certainly have achieved a greater mastery of the novel – for each of

⁵⁶⁵ Carleton, *Traits and Stories*, 2nd Series (1833), I, pp. v-vi.

⁵⁶⁶ Letter from Carleton to Charles Gavan Duffy, 1 June 1863, reproduced in Boué, p. 357.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

these was the prestige mode of its period. As matters stood, Carleton became a master of the lyric anecdote, the story representing a trait of peasant culture'.⁵⁶⁸

To suggest this is to simplify Carleton's position. It is to underestimate both his actual contribution to literature and the extent to which his individual insecurities and limitations restricted his achievement. If one is going to speculate about what Carleton might have been, it is better to look to concrete examples of his writing at its finest, rather than to indulge in mere supposition.

Carleton's true, but ultimately unrealised potential can be exemplified by two fragments of his work already described in this thesis: his account of the brutalising effect of violence more chilling than the violent act itself, suggested through Billy Bradley's recollections in the novel *The Tithe Proctor*; and his description, in the *Autobiography*, of his chancing upon the decomposing body of a hanged murderer on the road he travelled in County Louth as a young man – a discrete story, if he had thought to make it one, of a day, a summer, and of lives, corrupted through violence, and its aftermath. These two episodes in themselves exemplify fully the reasons for adopting both literary and historical perspectives on Carleton. Although they are embedded in works of fiction, they realise, with graphic force, the true nature of historical process, and justify, in microcosm, the way in which this thesis has sought to align literary and historical perspectives on Carleton's work. Both dramatise forces at work in Irish history, and at the same time represent the impact which those forces make upon the literary imagination.

Carleton's great weakness was a tendency to over-write. Nevertheless, as these extracts show, when he did exercise restraint, his use of the power of implication was masterly. Whether, given a different education and different

⁵⁶⁸ Kiberd, *Irish Classics*, pp. 272-73.

circumstances, he would have utilized this talent and not felt it necessary to essay the novel form is a matter of conjecture. But conjecture based on the qualities of Carleton's writing at its most sophisticated is arguably more fruitful than speculation which simply annexes his potential to the dominant genres in periods not his own. If by virtue of his ability, latent and realised, Carleton's best work has affinities with any genre and period outside his own, it is with the great age of the Irish short story, the twentieth century. There is more justification for supposing that, had Carleton been writing in the 1930s rather than the 1830s he might, like Sean O'Faolain (himself no outstanding novelist), have appreciated the possibilities that the short story presented. Carleton was not the only nineteenth-century writer whose talents were arguably dissipated by a felt obligation to use too extended a form. It is questionable whether Carleton, whatever the circumstances in which he wrote, would have achieved transcendent greatness. Nevertheless, he is a writer whose legacy is to be found in the work of other Irish authors, not least that of James Joyce.⁵⁶⁹ But his achievement is more than just a matter of influence and example. His limitations, after all, are but one side of a coin. The factors that inhibited his talents also conditioned his successes. Carleton's achievement was to describe, in an idiom well adapted to the task, a society whose culture was half-hidden from the urbanised, literate world into which he rose. His stories of the peasantry were written to preserve the memory of a fading culture to which he was attached but about which he was unsentimental. It is those stories that are his enduring monument.

⁵⁶⁹ See Paul Muldoon, *To Ireland, I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 25-27.

APPENDIX I

i. Letter from William Carleton to the London publisher Richard Bentley (Special Collections Library, Urbana-Champaign Campus, University of Illinois)

Dalkey

Dublin – October 25th. 1838.

Sir

I have no objection to put the Miser to the issue of a sale – but I cannot do it upon so small an advance as fifty pounds – That sum would be of no service to me in life – Let the advance be seventy and you may put the work to press. I will also give you along with the Miser – another sketch which excited great attention in the University Mag. called ‘Rickard the Rake’. This will be peculiarly appropriate as an accompaniment [to] the Miser which developes [sic] in a good degree the principles of Ribbonism in Ireland – of which system Rickard the Rake is a personation.

Rickard is indeed a sketch of great truth and would give much importance to the work – independently of making the vols fuller – I hope you will not hesitate to comply with this proposition. In short the advance of so small a sum as fifty pounds I could not accept – nor *will not* – and unless you come up to the seventy the Negotiation is at an end – the truth is I would listen to no such terms at all were it not that I am anxious to get into the London Market – I know I have the stuff in me and please God I will in the course of this winter produce three vols on Irish Life that will at least neither *disgrace* nor *misrepresent* the country – as has been done by some of my countrymen not a thousand years ago. May I beg for a speedy reply? –

I am Sir with respect

Your obedient servant

W. Carleton

Appendix I, cont.

P.S. I will ere long send you over a short piece of Irish humour for your Miscellany.

If it be a thing that we agree you might commission Mr. Cumming in your reply to this to advance me the money upon his having the negotiation first regularly and in the proper terms drawn up.

W. C.

Appendix I, cont.

ii. Letter from William Carleton to the London publisher William S. Orr
(Special Collections Library, Urbana-Champaign Campus, University of Illinois)

Clontarf – Sept. 5th 1842

My dear Sir

I received a proof of the forthcoming illustrations for Shane Fadh's *Wedding* from MaGlashan [sic], and of which I think the less that is said the better. But before I proceed to give my opinion of them, let me ask in the name of that spirit of Blundering which I have disclaimed on the part of my Country how it comes that the illustrations of Larry McFarlane's [sic] *Wake* happen to be prefixed to Shane Fadh's *Wedding*, and those of Shane Fadh's *Wedding* to Larry McFarlane's [sic] *Wake*? For the latter must be the case without any doubt. I say how does this come about? Or whose fault is it? – Whoever may be to blame all I can say is that this mode of proceeding wont [sic] do – and what is more, it ought *not* to do. As to the illustrations of No.2 there is – for a wonder – something of *humanity* in them – and they would do well enough if they were in the proper place. The first is really good, but I would rather he had selected the scene where Larry strikes the child and the mother abuses him – for the second – In fact as the latter stands there is no point of interest in it – On the contrary it is exceedingly tame and *unfaithful* – for if you look into the whole 'Wake' you will not find that either he or she ever drank a drop of whisky *under their own roof* – with the exception of the treat which Art Roe Sheridan gave them in page 93 – Phiz ought to get McManus [sic] over who understands Irish life to look at his sketches before he etches them or he ought to look a little more closely into the letter press – In the second plate they ought to be at the end of a meal and I have not described Larry as having two pigs – but one – he was much too poor for that –

Appendix I, cont.

With respect to Shane Fadh's Wedding there is no use in mincing the matter – it is as bad as bad can be – ill-selected and worse executed – It is inferior to Brooke's from which it is taken from first to last – the only difference being that they are galloping in a different direction. I have seldom seen so cool and wholesale a plagiarism. So help me heaven but he has covered by a single wedding party a space of country equal to, if not greater in extent than the plain on which was fought the great Battle of Waterloo by which the Duke of Wellington liberated all Europe; and Brooke did the same feat before him –

Of Flanagan dropping Billy Cormick in the Well I can only say that if I had the worthy artist in the same place I would teach him what the natural grip and attitude for such an action is – Why he holds him in his fingers as if poor Billy had the Cholera and that he feared to touch him – Is Browne a Cockney because if he is it would account in some measure for his ignorance of these matters. The truth is they are vague and vapid – feeble and without character – and if continued in will do anything but good – Why not select better scenes for illustrations? Why not take the wedding party when at dinner with the priests and the friar bantering each other – and the fellow carrying the pudding with a handsaw? – But this would require mind and trouble and it appears to me that Mr. Phiz wishes to slip through the matter as easily as possible.

Again – More grievances – What the devil brought Dr Primrose the good Vicar of Wakefield into the Tailpiece of Shane Fadh's Wedding? Ay and the vicar of Wakefield drunk too! and palmed upon us as an Irish Friar!!!! Do not be surprised [sic] I tell you if the villain that perpetrated that iniquity be found dead in his bed

Appendix I, cont.

some fine morning – and if he be let Wakley or whoever the Coroner may be – return this verdict and no other – ‘Strangled by the ghost of Goldsmith’ – Do like a good fellow leave *that* out – and get McManus [sic] to put something in its place – but at all events *out with it* – I think if you give McManus [sic] anything like liberal encouragement you will find a great deal of new and unbroken ground in him. It is true he does not deserve this at my hands – but that is no reason why I should not speak what I think and give merit its due. McClise [sic] I am told is high – I believe the highest as a printer among you. I am proud of this – although I once gave him a wipie which he well deserved – The only thing I ever saw of his was an engraving of his ‘Snap Apple Night’, which is badly named. Why not call it Hal’ eve or Holy eve and thus make it national! It is a scattered picture – without unity of parts, harmony of composition or any significant story but full of loose unregulated power notwithstanding – [Sketch of a pointing hand here] I wrote to you in every letter for the last eight or ten to send me a copy of the list I gave you containing the order in which I wish every story to be published – but you never have once noticed my request – or even alluded to to [sic] the matter although it is much more your interest than mine – I now tell you that if you do not send me this list in your next letter I will never consider any communication you may or shall make to me –

Ever yours as you shall deserve it,

W. Carleton

Appendix I, cont.

iii. Letter from William Carleton to the poet William Allingham
(Special Collections Library, Urbana-Champaign Campus, University of Illinois)

Dublin Nov. 19th 1846

2 Clontarf Crescent

Dublin.

My dear Sir

My apology for leaving your letter so long unanswered is simply this – it did not reach me until a couple of days ago – I went to the North – to Tyrone – my native country – and to Clogher – my native place – and while there your letter came to my place in the Crescent where it lay along with many others until my return. Of course your poetry is now too late – but if you will send up something that will not possess an interest depending upon the occurrence of a festival I shall leave nothing undone on my part to get it into the W. Magazine. Do not look upon this as any thing but a mere acknowledgment of your kind Communication for which and the invitation it contained I feel much obliged – I shall write to you when more at leisure and state my opinion of your poetry – and that opinion I may say now will be in the main favourable.

Believe me to be

My dear Sir

very faithfully yours

W. Carleton

William Allingham Esq.

APPENDIX II

Portraits of William Carleton

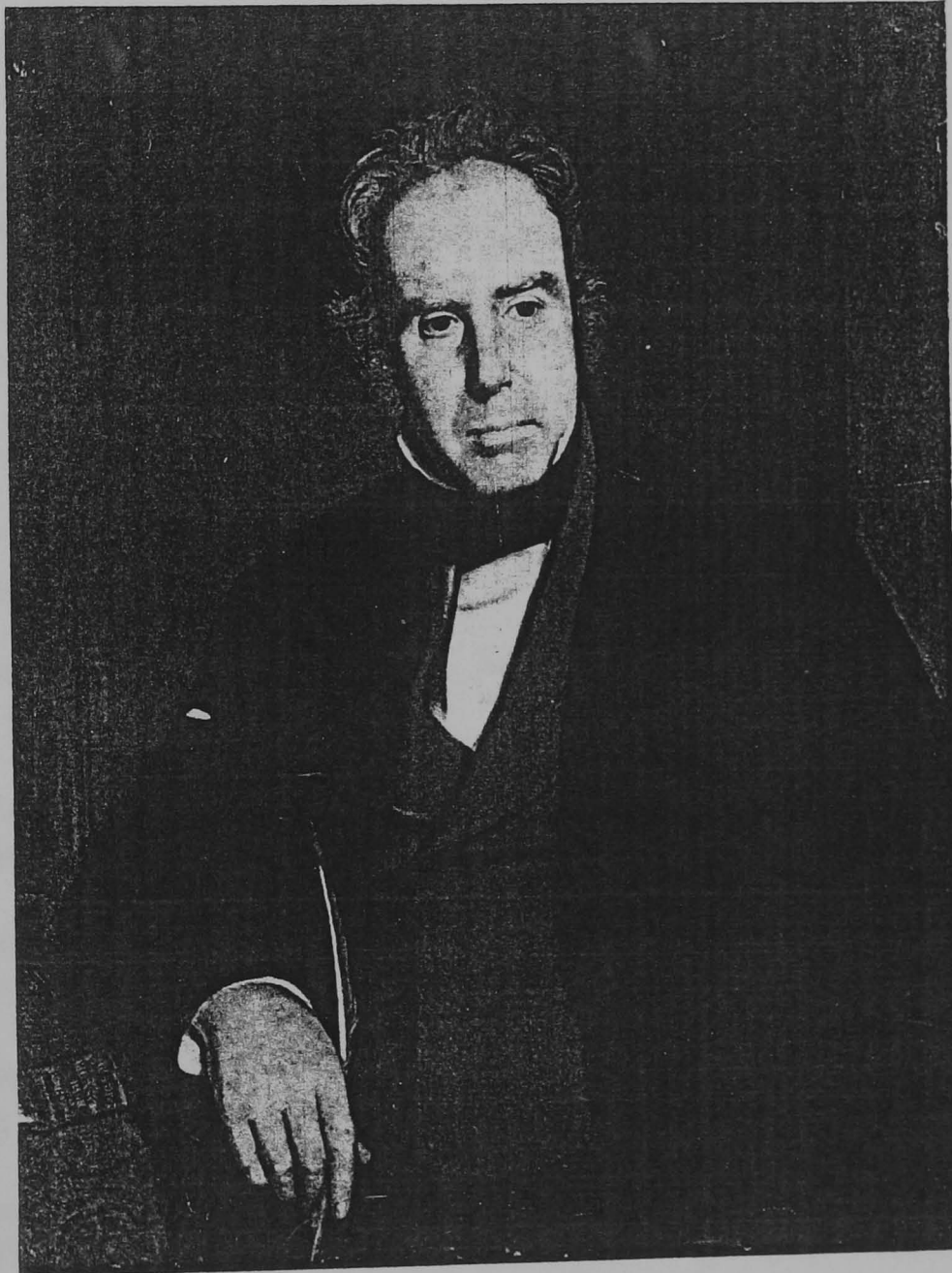
- i. William Carleton, aged 72: from a photograph by Margaret Allen.



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Appendix II, cont.

- ii. William Carleton in middle age: from the portrait by John Slattery, National Gallery of Ireland.



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