

## THE ANGLO-IRISH THREAT IN THACKERAY'S AND TROLLOPE'S WRITINGS OF THE 1840s

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BARRY LYNCH, the Anglo-Irish villain of Anthony Trollope's *The Kellys and the O'Kellys*, obsessively fantasizes the death of his sister, Anty. Resenting Anty's equal claim to the family property, he dreams of the day she will leave it all to him. When Barry hears that she plans to marry, thus placing her possessions forever beyond his reach, the narrator describes his state of mind in terms almost demonic:

If, at this moment, there was a soul in all Ireland over whom Satan had full dominion – if there was a breast unoccupied by one good thought – if there was a heart wishing, a brain conceiving, and organs ready to execute all that was evil, from the worst motives, they were to be found in that miserable creature, as he stood there urging himself on to hate those whom he should have loved – cursing those who were nearest to him – fearing her, whom he had ill-treated all his life – and striving to pluck up courage to take such measures as might entirely quell her. (Trollope, *The Kellys and the O'Kellys* 60; ch. 5)

It is no mere coincidence that the sister whose destruction Barry seeks is Catholic. Children of a mixed marriage between a Catholic woman and a Protestant man, the brother and sister have each been raised in the tradition belonging to the parent of the same sex, producing a family divided along gender lines to mirror the religious and cultural divide that splits their nation. The brother's persecution of his sister replays on an individual level the history of oppression that the Anglo-Irish Protestant Ascendancy, established through England's colonial exploits, enacted against the native Catholic Irish throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Anty's eventual liberation from his power through marriage to a prosperous Catholic farmer seems to prophesy a future of native Irish empowerment. Such an auspicious termination to Anglo-Irish misdeeds offers a reassurance urgently desired by the English reading public at the end of the 1840s, when the greed-driven policies of Ireland's ruling class seemed more likely to culminate in ruin for both the colony and the colonizer.

When Trollope depicts a member of the Protestant Ascendancy as a virtual agent of Satan, he mobilizes an English national anxiety with more complicated roots than simply an altruistic concern for Ireland's underprivileged Catholic majority. Commentators on Irish conditions throughout the 1830s and '40s identified pernicious consequences for England stemming from Anglo-Irish rapacity toward their social inferiors. One particularly insistent critic of the Ascendancy was the radical English MP George Poulett Scrope, the author of

multiple essays accusing the landlords of Ireland (who were overwhelmingly Protestant) of exposing Britain to danger and expense through their callous treatment of their predominantly Catholic tenantry. According to Scrope, the Anglo-Irish were driving their tenants to the verge of starvation with rents and evictions, provoking them either to emigrate to England, where they supplanted English workers, or to retaliate violently, requiring English military force to suppress them (*Plan* 60-63). In Scrope's eyes, the only solution was to institute an extensive Poor Law compelling the Anglo-Irish to support all of Ireland's destitute, instead of making them a burden on the resources of England (*How Is Ireland to Be Governed?* 36-39). Vehement arguments emerged on the opposite side, especially from the political economist Nassau W. Senior, who claimed that the cost of supporting all the poor would destroy Ireland's economy and result in an utterly bankrupt nation demanding to be fed at English expense ("Proposals" 272-74; "Relief" 267-68). Yet hostility toward the Anglo-Irish exercised a decisive effect on British policy, particularly toward the end of the 1840s, when the English began to resent the cost of providing aid for victims of the Great Irish Famine (Gray, "Triumph" 31-33). Parliament passed an extensive Irish Poor Law Bill in 1847, and Charles Trevelyan, who oversaw its implementation, proclaimed triumphantly that it had taught the Anglo-Irish to rely on themselves rather than on the British government (188-91).

Although English essayists produced reams of commentary on Irish topics during this period of intense anxiety over Anglo-Irish activity, Anthony Trollope and William Makepeace Thackeray were alone among English novelists in giving prominence to Irish characters and scenes in their fiction of the 1840s. Thackeray followed his 1843 travel narrative entitled *The Irish Sketch Book 1842* with *The Luck of Barry Lyndon*, the 1844 novel whose eponymous anti-hero is Irish. In addition, his two great (and emphatically English) novels of the decade, *Vanity Fair* (1847-48) and *Pendennis* (1848-50), involve significant Irish characters. Trollope set his first two novels – *The Macdermots of Ballycloran* (1847) and *The Kellys and the O'Kellys* (1848) – in Ireland, where he lived while writing them.

None of these texts claims to analyze Irish conditions and propose measures for their improvement, as non-fictional writing on Ireland purported to do; on the contrary, Thackeray and Trollope distance their works from contemporary debates by taking an earlier period for their setting and, for the most part, avoiding politically charged commentary. In the face of these strategies of dissociation, literary critics have addressed Thackeray's and Trollope's treatment of contemporary English-Irish relations only in general terms, often through the lens of the authors' personal experiences with Ireland and Irish individuals (see especially Brewer and Klotz on Thackeray and Corbett and Tracy on Trollope). My purpose in this essay is to demonstrate that these texts also enter a broader conversation and engage with popular English fears regarding the Anglo-Irish. The novels construct relationships among Anglo-Irish, native Irish, and English characters that implicitly critique the interactions of the three groups.

The gendering of such representative characters is central to the novels' critiques, since it marks power differentials among the groups and shapes readers' expectations of their behavior to one another. By strategically assigning the English, the native Irish, and the Anglo-Irish to masculine and feminine positions in their fiction, Thackeray and Trollope raise issues of inequality and exploitation, especially as perpetrated by the Ascendancy. In their fictional use of relations between the sexes to evaluate Ireland's ruling class, Thackeray and Trollope follow a precedent set by Anglo-Irish writers earlier in the century such as Maria Edgeworth and Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan, whose novels focus on the marriage

choices of Irish landlords as indicators of their competence to rule. Yet the English authors significantly alter the narrative strategy they have received from their predecessors. Whereas Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) and Edgeworth's *The Absentee* (1812) show members of the Ascendancy forging mutually supportive relations with the English and the native Irish, Thackeray and Trollope consistently depict predatory Anglo-Irish men and women engaged in exploiting English or native Irish characters. With these hostile representations, they delve into English fears of the Anglo-Irish, simultaneously demonstrating how well-founded those fears may be and indicating how the English themselves may have contributed to the conditions they deplore. Nevertheless, Thackeray and Trollope ultimately neutralize English antipathy toward the Protestant Ascendancy and promote complacency with the status quo by appealing to their culture's common sense regarding the interactions of men and women.

The dialogue between fiction and nonfiction that took place in English debates over Ireland in the 1840s is most visible in the case of Thackeray's *The Irish Sketch Book 1842*, a text that straddles the boundary between the novel and the political essay and thereby invites conversation between the two genres. This ambiguous generic identity becomes apparent in the first few pages of the text, which report a double authorship: the name of Mr. M. A. Titmarsh appears on the title page, but the signatory of the dedication is W. M. Thackeray. Thus the *Sketch Book's* readers may choose for themselves whether the narrative proceeds from a fictional character or reports an actual person's experiences in Ireland. Titmarsh/Thackeray exploits the strengths of both fiction and essay in the *Sketch Book*, providing some of the reassuringly straightforward conclusions of political writing without its tedious documentation and analysis of facts. His narrative consists of brief episodes that he experienced or heard about while traveling through Ireland, and he periodically seizes on one of these stories as an opportunity for drawing general conclusions about the Irish situation.

Several contemporary readers accepted the *Sketch Book* as an authoritative account of Irish conditions, even incorporating its findings into their own nonfictional essays. For example, in his 1848 pamphlet *A Plea for the Rights of Industry in Ireland*, Scrope appeals to the *Sketch Book* for evidence that the British government should assist the Irish poor in taking ownership of property that the landlords are failing to cultivate (33). Working from a very different perspective, J. W. Croker discusses the *Sketch Book* in his 1849 "Tours in Ireland" among more factual reports on Irish agriculture, industry and education, with the purpose of demonstrating that the horrific conditions existing in Ireland are caused by the ignorance and indolence of the Irish lower classes rather than by the faults of those who rule them – either the Anglo-Irish or, at one step further removed, the British government. By defending those two groups in the same essay, Croker invites identification between his English readers and the agents of British colonialism on the other side of the Irish Sea.

Yet Titmarsh/Thackeray's travel narrative differs from a political essay in refusing to tailor all its anecdotes in such a way as to support a univocal perspective regarding Ireland, and thus the very passages that Croker cites provide the grounds for a much more complicated view of the case than the one he is promoting. For instance, in "Tours in Ireland" (508), Croker quotes a long passage from the *Sketch Book* to illustrate the barbarity of the native Irish tenantry toward their landlords. Here is an abbreviated version of the passage:

Look yonder at those two hundred ragged fellow-subjects of yours; they are kind, good, pious, brutal, starving. [. . .] There stand the men; they are only separated from us by a few paces; they are as fond

of their mothers and children as we are; [...] they are Christians as we are; but, interfere with their interests, and they will murder you without pity. (Thackeray, *Sketch Book* 94–95; ch. 8)

The passage coincides with Croker's perspective insofar as it asks English readers to place themselves imaginatively in the position of the murdered Anglo-Irish. Yet, before reaching that point, the text constructs a physical proximity between the English observer and the Irish observed that parallels their moral proximity. Since they share the same natural and spiritual affections, readers are impelled to consider what aspects of the Irish situation might drive these people, so much like themselves, to violence. The sentence immediately following the passage quoted by Croker offers an explanation that contradicts the essayist's argument: "It is not revenge so much which these poor fellows take, as a brutal justice of their own" (Thackeray, *Sketch Book* 95; ch. 8). The claim that the Irish lower classes must take "their own" extralegal justice implies that they do not receive justice under the ordinary administration of their nation's laws, and thus lays the guilt for their crimes at least partially at the feet of those who govern them. The English find themselves positioned in three places at once: they are simultaneously the victims of the murdering Irish poor, their tyrannous rulers, and their sympathetic observers. Thackeray and Trollope repeatedly subject their readers to such a multiplicity of competing perspectives as they confront Ireland's social disorders.

In the passage quoted above, as in many of the texts I will be discussing, the moral stature of male characters depends at least in part on their treatment of the women around them: in this case, their fondness for their mothers provides one evidence of their moral equality with the English. Yet the women's own conduct appears irrelevant. Another scene from the *Sketch Book* offers a paradigm for the kind of relationship I will be examining throughout this essay, as it scrutinizes the behavior of both male and female characters in its exploration of English-Irish relations:

One of the villas the guide pointed out with peculiar exultation; it is called by a grand name – Waterloo Park, and has a lodge, and a gate, and a field of a couple of acres, and belongs to a young gentleman, who, being able to write Waterloo Park on his card, succeeded in carrying off a young London heiress with a hundred thousand pounds. The young couple had just arrived, and one of them must have been rather astonished, no doubt, at the "Park." But what will not love do? With love and a hundred thousand pounds, a cottage may be made to look like a castle, and a park of two acres may be brought to extend for a mile. (Thackeray 232; ch. 20)

On one level, this passage depicts a predatory Irish man exploiting a vulnerable English woman whose youth, sex, and great wealth make her an attractive target for fortune hunters. As a landed gentleman, and especially as one whom an English gentlewoman will agree to marry, the owner of Waterloo Park is most likely a member of the Ascendancy. He certainly fulfills two stereotypes of the Ascendancy parasite: not only does he obtain English wealth for himself, but he sets the example for the native Irish also to rely on English resources. The guide who narrates the story reveals his own ethnic affiliations by repeating the superstitious tales of Catholic priests (Thackeray, *Sketch Book* 232; ch. 20). His "peculiar exultation" at showing Waterloo Park and telling of its owner's marriage suggests that securing a rich English woman as a wife is not merely a success for her husband but also something of a shared triumph for the locality, or even for the country. When Titmarsh/Thackeray depicts a native Irish guide glorying in the lucrative marriage of an Anglo-Irish gentleman, he hints

that divisions within Irish society are less significant than the divide between Ireland and England. The Irish forget their differences when they see a possibility of profiting at English expense.

Comparing this scene with the plot of *Barry Lyndon* brings out its full ambiguity, revealing that it offers more than a simple indictment of Irish rapacity toward the English. For *Barry Lyndon* expands this brief episode from the *Sketch Book* into a major strand of the plot, in which Barry's abuse of his English wife and her property impels her English relatives and the force of English law to intervene. In the *Sketch Book*, however, such intervention appears unnecessary. The narrator finds little cause for concern in the plight of the London heiress, asserting that "love and a hundred thousand pounds" can make up for the deficiencies she discovers in her new home. Of course, the passage implicitly suggests the possibility that the Englishwoman may not actually love the Irishman: she may have married him for his property as much as he married her for her money. But her deception and disappointment do not make her an object of sympathy: on the contrary, as a wife she must appear to love her husband, whether she feels love or not, and must surrender her fortune to him, as the marriage laws require. These details in the tone of the narration – its lack of moral outrage, its complacency with the arrangement – carry large implications for the relationship between England and Ireland. While admitting that the Irish may profit at English expense, the passage hints that England had no business entering into a Union with Ireland if she did not intend to share her resources with her poorer partner.

Published serially a year after *The Irish Sketch Book*, Thackeray's novel *The Luck of Barry Lyndon* shows less sympathy for the Anglo-Irish, portraying them as a composite of English and Irish qualities that combines the worst of both. Yet certain textual details work against this indictment by gesturing toward English responsibility for the degraded condition of the Irish, which has come full circle to harm those who produced it.

Growing up in Ireland as a Protestant with genteel pretensions, Redmond Barry (who later becomes Barry Lyndon) imbibes the sense that to be Irish is to be inferior and learns to claim an English identity for himself on the grounds of being born in London while his parents were hangers-on at the English court. At the same time, however, he resents the English for past wrongs (as he perceives them) done to his family and present humiliation at their hands. Thus, his life career is driven by the contradictory impulses of trying to become like the English and revenging himself on them. Although they seem antithetical, the first effort facilitates the second, since Barry can use the marginal position he gains among the English aristocracy to procure an English wife, whose person and property he then abuses in reprisal against her nation.

Thackeray uses Barry's family history to create a hybrid character whose blend of native Irish and Anglo-Irish characteristics make him a figure for an Ireland that is unified by preying on England. Although Barry's family originated in England, they arrived in Ireland in the fourteenth century, before the major English invasions and plantations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. According to Barry, the family suffered dispossession at the hands of the later English settlers. In fact, he justifies his pursuit of Lady Lyndon's property as a recovery of his own rightful inheritance, of which his ancestors supposedly were defrauded by an Englishman named Roger Lyndon two centuries before. Barry's own footnote to his family history undermines his charge against the English, however, by revealing that his ancestor was illegitimate and thus had no legal claim on the Barry estate. Nevertheless, Barry asserts that his ancestor was cheated by "the English courts [...] as has ever been

the case where English and Irish were concerned" (*Luck* 2; part 1, ch. 1). This episode indicates that the Irish sense of entitlement to English property is as groundless as it is persistent.

Thackeray discredits another common basis for Irish grievances against English rule when he has Barry describe still another confiscation of family property, this one occurring in the eighteenth century. According to Barry, his uncle lost his estate as a result of the punitive laws against Catholics instituted by the Protestant Ascendancy; but Barry does not complain over this confiscation, since he himself has benefited from it. Barry's father joined the Church of Ireland and gave evidence against his Catholic older brother in order to acquire his estate and enter the ruling class of Ireland. To be Anglo-Irish, as far as this novel shows, is thus to be either the agent of an oppressive regime or an opportunist willing to play by its rules for personal gain.

The version of the history between England and Ireland that Thackeray presents in *Barry Lyndon* significantly opposes the historically based arguments that political writers of the 1830s and '40s were using to support their recommendations for British policy toward Ireland. Essayists as fundamentally at odds as Scrope and Senior agreed in maintaining that the penal code against Catholics and other oppressive legislation from the eighteenth century had helped create Ireland's social and economic problems by perverting the habits of the Irish people. Their proposed resolutions were, admittedly, totally inimical: while Scrope advocated a poor law that would entitle the lower classes to a greater share in the nation's wealth, Senior prescribed a more careful supervision of the poor to guard them against their own self-destructive tendencies (Scrope, *Letters* 69–80; *Plan* 6–7; Senior, "Ireland" 198–215, 242–48, 254–55). Despite such differences, however, both arguments were based on a common acknowledgment of English guilt in facilitating the Ascendancy's injustices and of English responsibility to reverse their effects. While *Barry Lyndon* illustrates their concern that long-term oppression has warped the Irish character, it militates against their claim that better laws will bring reform. From Barry's narrative, readers can safely conclude that British policy is irrelevant to Irish conditions, since, whether the laws governing Ireland are just or unjust, the Irish will manipulate the situation to exploit each other.

While Barry inherits the legacies of both the old and the new Irish ruling classes, his strategy for obtaining Lady Lyndon and her property associates him with Ireland's lower classes. Following the example of peasant secret societies, he intimidates Lady Lyndon into marrying him through violent acts against those nearest her, performed in the names of Captain Fireball and Captain Thunder. From the time of Barry's courtship in the 1770s through the date of the novel's composition in the 1840s, Irish tenants and laborers were organizing secret societies run by fictive captains to protect themselves against the activities of landlords and employers who threatened their livelihood, as Scrope documents in his pamphlet *How Is Ireland to Be Governed?* (6–25). In Scrope's writings, even the violent crime of the native Irish provides a basis for English hostility toward the Anglo-Irish, since Scrope blames the Ascendancy for driving those below them in the social order to commit outrages in the mere effort to survive. Thus, the Anglo-Irish are responsible for subjecting the entire United Kingdom to the danger of civil unrest and the expense of police and military to suppress it. Thackeray's text condenses this scenario: the Anglo-Irish anti-hero does not simply incite secret society practices but engages in them himself and directly victimizes an English citizen. The fact that his victim is a woman makes Barry's crime all the more terrible: while he would like to represent his actions as a heroic effort to reclaim what is rightfully his

from a more powerful nation, his readers inevitably see him as a coward taking advantage of the weak.

Behind this damning portrait of the Anglo-Irish, however, lurk indications that Barry's depravity may be a product of English policy, not as it has affected his family in the past, but as it directly impinges on his present life. In *Thackeray and Slavery*, Deborah A. Thomas argues that, having experienced service in the brutal Prussian army as a form of slavery, Barry later passes on to others, and especially to his wife, the humiliation and cruelty he has suffered (32–38). I want to draw attention to the fact that Barry's narrative locates his initiation into brutality during his enlistment in the British army and before his Prussian service. As a new recruit, Barry is threatened with caning, a discipline that relegates him to a feminized position under the phallic authority of the English officers. He responds by asserting his own power where he can in similarly sexualized ways. Recounting his triumphs in battle, Barry claims a "very close acquaintance" with one enemy soldier, explaining, "I drove my bayonet into his body," and comments on the "small," "slender" figure of another combatant, saying, "a blow from my pig-tail would have despatched him, I think, in place of the butt of my musket, with which I clubbed him down" (Thackeray, *Luck* 51; part 1, ch. 5). Although Barry uses his weapons symbolically to reestablish his masculine potency over other men, he implies that his acts of sexual domination go beyond metaphor in relation to women. Barry tells of entering a farmhouse where "the old woman and her daughters served [the soldiers], trembling, to wine." Barry and his companions became drunk, and, he equivocally reports, "the house was in a flame presently. (52; part 1, ch. 5)" Since Barry chooses this scene to illustrate his horror at the depravity of soldiers, readers are invited to see more in it than simply a housefire. His scruples over abusing women have dissipated by the time of his marriage, however, when he openly confesses to adapting the tyrannical military discipline he himself underwent earlier for controlling Lady Lyndon (219; part 2, ch. 3).

In *Bardic Nationalism*, Katie Trumpener points out that late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century novels dealing with relations between England and its closest colonies, Ireland and Scotland, regularly depict service in the British army as a means of forging unity among individuals from various parts of the United Kingdom (217–18, 261–70). In *Barry Lyndon*, Thackeray deliberately reverses that emphasis, depicting British military service as a place where men from the colonies suffer from strategies of victimization that they in turn can impose on those with less power in the social order. While the dominant nation may exploit its colonies, such exploitation can rebound on vulnerable members of English society, such as women. Thus, Thackeray not only gives the English reason to fear the Anglo-Irish, but even harnesses any guilt they might feel at their treatment of Ireland in the service of that fear, warning that their injustice will return on their own heads.

Thackeray never again approached debates over Irish issues as closely as he did in *The Irish Sketch Book* and *Barry Lyndon*. Since the Great Irish Famine raised English anxiety over Ireland to agonizing heights shortly after the publication of those texts, he may have felt the urgency of soothing his readers with more reassuring visions of the Irish people. *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis*, both written during the Famine, entirely exclude the native Irish, who bore the worst of the suffering. In addition, they distance their Anglo-Irish characters from contemporary Ireland, where conditions might be taken to indict them of callous inhumanity to their social subordinates. In these later novels, British military service no longer degrades the Anglo-Irish but allows them to assimilate, however awkwardly, into middle-class English

society, where their only connection to Ireland is through memories of past grandeur – most of it obviously fabricated. *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis* neutralize the threat of the Anglo-Irish by focusing on female characters, for whom caregiving seems more natural than exploitation. Although the plot of the Irish fortune-hunter trying to marry an English character for money reappears in both novels, it no longer poses a serious threat: George Osborne and William Dobbin both escape from the thralls of Glorvina O'Dowd in *Vanity Fair*, and Pen from Emily Costigan in *Pendennis*, without anyone being seriously harmed. These predatory Irish females are innocuous compared with their male counterparts in the *Sketch Book* or *Barry Lyndon*, since their motherly and daughterly roles take precedence over their pursuit of self-advancement. Despite the appeal she finds in Pen's love, Emily gives up her engagement to him when she learns the smallness of his fortune and continues the work by which she supports her father as well as herself. The Englishman she eventually marries, old enough to be a second father to her, also depends on her emotionally as her father does financially. Similarly, Peggy O'Dowd, the mastermind engineering Glorvina's designs on Osborne and Dobbin, holds no grudges against Amelia, who defeats her on both counts, but instead acts as a mother to the young Englishwoman and to her husband Major O'Dowd's entire regiment as well. Thus, in the midst of the Famine, these novels represent the Anglo-Irish through portraits of generous women who give to others, and especially to the English, at least as much as they receive.

Published during the years that *Vanity Fair* was being serialized (1847–48), Anthony Trollope's first two novels, *The Macdermots of Ballycloran* and *The Kellys and the O'Kellys*, differ from Thackeray's Irish writings in removing the English from the scene almost entirely and focusing on the conflicts among social groups within Ireland. While the action of each novel centers on an exploitative relationship between an Anglo-Irish Protestant man and a native Catholic Irish woman, however, their behavior to one another carries implications for how English readers understand conditions in Ireland and shapes their responses to its people. The first of these novels, *The Macdermots*, suggests the need for English intervention to protect the native Irish from a vindictive and paranoid Ascendancy. *The Kellys*, on the other hand, follows with a more consoling vision for English readers as it depicts the two groups banding together to exclude the source of disunity among them and thus achieve peace without outside help.

In *The Macdermots*, the relations between the Anglo-Irish and the native Irish take the form of a seduction: Captain Myles Ussher, a Protestant revenue officer, impregnates Feemy Macdermot, the daughter of an impoverished Catholic landlord, with no intention of marrying her. Like *The Irish Sketch Book* and *Barry Lyndon*, Trollope's text uses relationships between men and women to address the distribution of wealth across the United Kingdom, although in this case the predatory male character does not seize wealth but instead withholds it from a woman who has a moral claim on it. When Ussher makes Feemy pregnant without sharing his property with her through marriage, he deprives her of her only means to procure the support she so badly needs: finding a husband. On an allegorical level, this aspect of the plot corroborates the arguments of polemicists like Scrope who traced Irish miseries back to Anglo-Irish exploitation of the native Irish populace.

Furthermore, the experiences of Feemy's brother Thady uphold Scrope's contention that the Catholic majority in Ireland is not adequately protected under Ascendancy rule. Thady is unique in the novel as the only Catholic in the local land-holding class. One night, he finds Ussher dragging Feemy to a carriage and strikes out with a stick at the man he believes is



abducting his sister against her will. The blows kill the revenue officer, and Thady is put on trial for murder. The narrator makes clear that Thady's violence was performed in defense of his sister, and that he never intended Ussher's death. Nevertheless, when Feemy dies in childbirth before she has a chance to testify on her brother's behalf, a mainly Protestant jury condemns Thady to be hanged.

During the trial, the attorneys on both sides play on the jurors' fears in making their cases. Mr. O'Malley, speaking in Thady's defense, conjures them, "Fancy each of you that you see the form of her you love best in the rough grasp of a violent seducer!" (Trollope, *Macdermots* 411; ch. 32). But even the threat to female chastity and the integrity of the family evoked by the figure of the seducer cannot compete with the paranoia that Mr. Allewinde, the prosecuting attorney, feeds through his oblique and ominous address to the jury. "You are probably all aware that the prisoner is from that rank of life to which the greatest number of yourselves belong," Allewinde states, "and you cannot but see that the fact of his being so, greatly increases the magnitude of his presumed crime" (388; ch. 31). If Thady's jury is composed predominantly of other landlords, then he is being tried by members of the Protestant Ascendancy, who share his rank but not his religion. In their eyes, the danger to the family that Ussher represents pales in comparison with the danger to the entire social order that they see in Thady. His Catholic and native Irish pedigree locates him on the margins of landlord society and places him in dangerous cultural proximity to the common people. Therefore, the Anglo-Irish readily believe that his violence against Ussher stems from involvement with a peasant secret society in which he has conspired to assassinate the revenue officer. Allewinde's speech implies that Thady's guilt consists, not simply in murder, but in disloyalty to his own class. He urges them to eschew sympathy for Thady if they "value the peace of [their] country – the comfort of [their] hearths – the safety of [their] houses – and the protection of [their] property," indicating that Thady's condemnation is necessary to preserve the whole Ascendancy way of life (388; ch. 31). The jurors prove their agreement with his view by finding Thady guilty, and the judge commends their verdict on the grounds that it will discourage "such illegal societies as that to which the prisoner too evidently belonged," which do "irreparable injury [. . .] in the country" (433; ch. 34). Thus, in the courtroom Thady's case is interpreted (inaccurately) by many as a battle against the spread of lower-class disaffection to those in the upper classes whose religion and genealogy ally them to a certain extent with the poor.

While the role of the woman in this novel is largely passive, her presence incalculably strengthens the text's implicit critique of the Anglo-Irish. Since the facts of the case as revealed by the narrator undercut the prosecution's charges against Thady, the arguments of the defense attorney stand unopposed in readers' minds, although not in the jury's. Readers experience the full force of Mr. O'Malley appeal as he evokes the horror of seeing a female relative "in the rough grasp of a violent seducer." This defense of Thady mobilizes an assumption of women's sexual vulnerability that is central to the patriarchal order of gender relations. As a man, and especially as the de facto head of his family, Thady has a duty to protect his female relations for the sake of the family's integrity as well as their personal safety. Thus, the injustice of Thady's condemnation emerges more starkly than if he were simply being denied the right of an individual to self-defense. The Ascendancy deprives him of his life, it is true, but first it strips him of his position of authority over his family, requiring that he stand by, quiescent, while their racial and cultural identity is compromised through Anglo-Irish sexual predations. The ruling of the jury against Thady sets a precedent for imposing on native Irish

men the sexual defenselessness usually attributed to women as a step toward annihilating the native Irish ethnicity.

The view of *The Macdermots* that I offer here contradicts one aspect of Mary Jean Corbett's generally insightful discussion of the novel that appears in *Allegories of Union in Irish and English Writing, 1790–1870*. Corbett takes issue with those critics who “read the novel's seduction plot as a gendered allegory of English-Irish colonial relations,” arguing that “neither Thady's crime nor Ussher's seduction of Feemy is represented as ‘political’” (124–25). Corbett is right to point out that the narrator sharply distinguishes Thady's motives in killing Ussher from the political motives attributed to him at his trial, making clear that he was not participating in the conspiracy of a peasant secret society. Yet this distinction does not empty the plot of political significance, but instead complicates the political scene. As a native Catholic landlord, Thady repudiates identification with both the native Catholic lower class and the Anglo-Irish landlords. The narrator can use Thady's plight to arouse readers' indignation against the Ascendancy without appearing to condone the lawlessness of secret societies. In this way, *The Macdermots* breaks the tension experienced by English onlookers, such as the narrator of Thackeray's *Irish Sketch Book*, between sympathy for the victims of Anglo-Irish oppression and horror at the retribution they exact. By representing a peaceful and submissive native Irish sufferer, Trollope's novel offers English readers the possibility of entering the political debates over Irish conditions in opposition to the Ascendancy yet not in favor of rebellion.

Although it may demonstrate the existence of wrongs in Ireland as clearly as any polemical essay, *The Macdermots* expresses much less confidence in the possibility of a solution. The paranoid vindictiveness that the Anglo-Irish display at Thady's trial seems inevitable in the face of the brutal attacks they sustain from secret societies. Only two months before, the novel reveals, tenants stopped an evicting landlord in the midst of surveying his estate and hacked off his foot with an axe. As long as the Anglo-Irish are threatened with such extralegal intimidation, they are likely to stretch what powers the law allows them in retaliation against those they perceive as their enemies. The violence of secret societies, on the other hand, appears ineradicable given the desperation of the lower classes. For instance, Trollope's narrator reveals that Joe Reynolds, a leader of one society, has taken to lawlessness because it is impossible for him to prosper in any other way (*Macdermots* 92; ch. 9).

While such conditions might drive readers to consider Scrope's plan of distributing Ireland's wealth more equitably, the novel offers scant hope for its success. Even Joe recognizes that his landlord, Thady, is little better off than he himself (89; ch. 9). Given the insolvency of Ireland's ruling class, where can the nation find the resources for its renewal? *The Macdermots* gestures toward an answer when it depicts an Irish laborer's family living in squalor as their rents are funneled to a nobleman in England who is celebrated for his philanthropy in that country (80–83; ch. 9). This brief scene challenges the English to recognize their own complicity in Ireland's wrongs: they condone the exploitation of the Irish poor when it is perpetrated by respected members of their own society rather than by half-foreign landlords on the other side of the Irish Sea.

Trollope's text also provides an implicit critique of the agenda promoted by Scrope's opponent, Senior, showing the emptiness of his hope that the Catholic clergy might reform the poor. Senior repeatedly argued that the British government should endow priests like the novel's Father John McGrath with an income that would free them to oppose the lawlessness they deplored yet could not speak against because of their financial dependence

on their parishioners (*Letter to Lord Howick* 67–68; “Ireland” 212–21; “Relief” 249–51). Although *The Macdermots* shows Father John wheedling donations from the guests at a wedding he performs, the priest is as fearless as Senior could hope in opposing secret societies. Nevertheless, he can influence only those such as Thady who are already predisposed to submit to the law, while those committed to rebellion disregard the clergy’s authority as well as the landlords’. In the end, *The Macdermots* confronts English readers with the intractability of Irish ills. The antagonistic groups appear trapped in a futile cycle of retribution that will not end unless interrupted from the outside; yet it is difficult to say what kind of intervention could stop the cycle productively.

Trollope’s second novel, *The Kellys and the O’Kellys; or Landlords and Tenants*, presents a more reassuring view of Irish society, in which the Anglo-Irish and the native Irish are able to resolve their difficulties by working together. This novel introduces a new category of villain positioned between the upper and the lower classes: the middleman, a large tenant who makes his living, not by farming, but by subdividing his property among small farmers who pay very high rent. To exclude the middleman and to redistribute the wealth of society for their mutual benefit thus is a joint challenge for both landlord and tenant.

The action of *The Kellys and the O’Kellys* is set in 1844 and hence (like the other novels I am discussing) predates the Great Irish Famine. Nevertheless, Trollope’s demonization of the middleman, a figure who reappears in his more explicit discussions of the Famine, suggests that he is not oblivious to this new crisis. In 1849–50, Trollope joined the ranks of polemical writers on Irish issues by publishing a series of letters in the *Examiner* to defend the British government’s response to the Irish Famine. The second of these letters blames the destitution of the Irish lower classes, which made them so vulnerable to starvation and disease, on the rapacity of both the landlords and the middlemen, who tried to raise themselves to the same social position as the landlords (“Letters” 77–79). Trollope’s retrospective novel about the Famine, *Castle Richmond* (1860), singles out middlemen as the former “scourge of Ireland” and claims that the past devastation has at least benefited the country by altogether eliminating this class (67–68; ch. 7). *The Kellys and the O’Kellys* offers a fantasy of the Ascendancy and the native Irish uniting to expel the middleman and thus establish an economic system strong enough to weather even the Famine.

In Barry Lynch, the villainous middleman of *The Kellys*, Trollope appears to be rewriting Thackeray’s anti-hero Barry Lyndon. The similarity between their names betokens other parallels: their unbounded social ambitions, their cruelty to the women close to them, and their eventual French exile to escape their creditors. Lynch also resembles Barry Lyndon through having ties to both the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy and the Irish Catholic middle class. While Lynch’s mother is a Catholic, his father is a Protestant who tries to establish himself as a landholding gentleman by dishonestly acquiring leases. The fact that Simeon Lynch cheats a local nobleman to gain his land, however, effectively precludes his ever being accepted into genteel society. Like the middlemen Trollope castigates in his second letter to the *Examiner* and in *Castle Richmond*, Simeon’s son Barry is eager to be considered a gentleman. But his lack of social graces and his known tyranny over his sister, combined with his family history, make him an outcast.

The Protestant Barry’s persecution of his Catholic sister Anty, which I discuss at the beginning of this essay, makes for the neatest and most transparent allegory of Irish social conflicts available in the work of Trollope or Thackeray, as it mirrors Anglo-Irish efforts to keep the native Irish in a state of political, social and economic powerlessness. After Simeon’s

decease, Barry's primary concern is to prevent Anty from marrying, in the hope that her early death may enrich him. When Anty becomes dangerously ill, Barry tries to bribe Dr. Colligan into letting her die, offering in return to evict his cottier tenants and lease the land cheaply to the doctor. This association of eviction with murder is not unique to *The Kellys*; in fact, the link was frequently made by those political writers who blamed Ireland's landlords for widespread suffering among the poor (Donnelly 164–66; Scrope, *Plan* 7–13). By identifying Barry as the character who wants to evict and murder, Trollope focuses blame away from the landlords and onto the middleman instead.

Another way Barry shares in the guilt of Irish landlords is through his surname. In a letter to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in early 1848, for example, the Prime Minister, Lord John Russell, refers to the mass evictions carried out during the Famine as “the Lynch Law of the landlord” (qtd. in Gray, *Famine* 191). Yet this name brings on Barry's head the weight of lower-class crime as well, since the term “Lynch law” was also used to denote the violence of peasant secret societies defending what tenants perceived as their property rights (e.g., Scrope, *Plea* 47, 48). As a middleman, Barry Lynch is simultaneously a tenant to a large landlord and a landlord to smaller tenants. His intermediate position makes him an ideal figure to carry the responsibility for the wrongs committed by both classes, much like Barry Lyndon in Thackeray's novel. Whereas the conflation of upper- and lower-class violence in *Barry Lyndon* makes all the Irish appear lawless and threatening to the English, however, the effect in *The Kellys and the O'Kellys* is to exonerate the landlords and tenants by concentrating guilt on the middleman alone.

*The Kellys* follows *Barry Lyndon* once again by ending with the ostracism of the scapegoat. The characters who drive Barry Lynch away with threats of prosecution represent a cross-section of respectable Irish society: an Anglo-Irish aristocratic landlord, Frank O'Kelly; a clergyman of the Church of Ireland, Mr. Armstrong; a Catholic professional, Dr. Colligan; and a prosperous Catholic tenant farmer, Martin Kelly. Barry's erroneous expectation that the Protestants might take his side against the Catholics suggests that, however unjust the Anglo-Irish may have been in the past, a new elite has emerged that is committed to seeing justice done. Thus, in Trollope's revision of Thackeray's storyline, rapacity is limited to one Irishman only, and his eventual exclusion makes Ireland as safe, civilized, and prosperous as England.

With Barry Lynch's banishment, two marriages redistributing Irish wealth can take place. The property that Barry has been trying to withhold from his Catholic sister goes to enrich a member of the native Irish tenantry when Anty marries Martin Kelly. And in a parallel union the Anglo-Irish landlord Frank O'Kelly marries an Ascendancy heiress, Fanny Wyndham, thereby securing the means to improve his property and assist his tenants financially with employment. It is significant that Frank gains the wealth he needs to fulfill his responsibilities as a landlord shortly after the departure of a character whom the novel associates closely with landlord guilt. Throughout the text, hints appear that Frank's extravagance endangers the welfare of his tenants, making him a prime target for condemnation along with Barry. Yet the basis for such a judgment against Frank disappears with Barry, who takes with him all the evil that the English attribute to the Anglo-Irish, leaving Frank to represent a benevolent landlord class. Thus, Barry's removal not only brings prosperity on both sides of Ireland's social divide but also improves the relations between them.

Both Frank and Martin follow the lead of Barry Lyndon in marrying heiresses for their own enrichment; yet their marriages carry none of the same moral complications as

his. Whereas Barry Lyndon's abusive union with an English woman shows the Irish to be bankrupt in moral as well as financial terms, Frank's and Martin's marriages to Irish women demonstrate that Ireland possesses the resources to meet its own deficiencies, if those resources are distributed wisely. Since Trollope's narrator makes no effort to conceal the mercenary motives of the suitors, they would seem to duplicate Barry Lyndon's rapacity if not for the love they inspire in the women they pursue. Barry Lyndon admits, or even boasts, that he intimidates Lady Lyndon into marrying him; Anty and Fanny, on the other hand, are eager for marriage. In Anty's case, the mere kindness of Martin and his family is a paradise after the mistreatment she has received from her brother, while Fanny goes to the length of defying both her guardian and social convention by pursuing her lover when he appears to have abandoned her. In this way, the female characters' enthusiasm for matches that are not to their financial advantage validates the novel's imagined solution to Irish problems.

In spite of the economic and amatory considerations that appear to justify the ending of *The Kellys*, this conclusion raises again the specter of Irish lawlessness that it tries to set at rest. The coalition of Anglo-Irish and native Irish that expels Barry Lynch relies on intimidation to effect social reform. Its tactics have no legal basis, as Frank O'Kelly acknowledges after the deed has been accomplished, and thus bear an unsettling resemblance to the "brutal justice of their own" violently enforced by secret societies (Thackeray, *Irish Sketch Book* 95; ch. 8). Such united action, regulated solely by the discretion of a small group of Irish individuals, was bound to trouble contemporary English readers, who had little faith in Irish public opinion as a guide to responsible conduct. Much as Thady Macdermot, in Trollope's previous novel, occupies a distrusted marginal position among Irish landlords on account of his ethnicity and religion, the Anglo-Irish raised English suspicions because of their location on the social and economic as well as geographical outer edge of the United Kingdom. Their cooperation with the native Irish had found its most prominent historical expression in the United Irish Rebellion of 1798 and thus was associated in the English imagination with disorder instead of peace.

Surveying Thackeray's and Trollope's representations of Ireland throughout the 1840s, as I have done, reveals a shared tendency to back away from the difficult issues that the English perceived in the Irish situation. Their earlier texts – *The Irish Sketch Book* (1843), *Barry Lyndon* (1844), and *The Macdermots* (1847) – all depict fraught interactions between male and female characters as a means of exploring the ambiguities that beset any understanding of relations among the Anglo-Irish, the native Irish, and the English. Their later novels, on the other hand – *Vanity Fair* (1847–48), *Pendennis* (1848–50), and *The Kellys* (1848) – appeal to women's love for the solution of national and international conflicts. Yet their consoling scenarios depend on significant elisions and suppressions of Irish concerns and thus seem ill-equipped to banish the widespread English nightmare visions of a rapacious Irish ruling class tyrannizing over a violent and desperate people. The disturbing qualities of these texts may help to explain the paucity of English fiction on Irish topics from the 1840s, since authors who engaged closely with Irish characters and conditions could hardly offer the reassurances their Victorian readers wanted. What they portrayed was too disquietingly complicated for an English public of the 1840s to assimilate; for, at the very least, they recognized contradictions that their audience would altogether have preferred to avoid.

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