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REALISM AND THE IRISH VICTORIAN NOVEL

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'*Country Races of a Typical Sort*', by EO Somerville c.1890

SAMENVATTING

Deze thesis onderzoekt de aard van Realisme in negentiende-eeuwse Ierse fictie. De nadruk ligt hierbij op het testen van de algemeen aanvaarde vooronderstelling dat Realisme opvallend afwezig was in de Ierse werken van die periode. De negentiende eeuw kende een grote toename in geletterdheid doorheen alle klassen en vormde op die manier een ideaal beginpunt voor het ontstaan van een nieuwe markt, zowel voor auteurs als uitgevers. Vooral in het Engeland van die periode werd dit duidelijk. Er speelde zich ook verschuivingen in stijl en literaire smaken af waarbij Realisme zichzelf als het meest populaire vooropstelde. De Ierse schrijvers trachten ook deze nieuwe voorwaarden van fictie tegemoet te komen maar vonden het moeilijk om Ierland nauwkeurig voor te stellen aan een buitenlands publiek. Zij namen vaak toevlucht tot karikaturale en overdreven beschrijvingen ten kosten van het klassieke realisme in de stijl van bijvoorbeeld George Eliot. Dit leidde tot de aanklacht dat Ierse Victoriaanse fictie geen realistische werken noch realistische auteurs vertoonde. De literatuur over dit Realisme levert, vanuit een ideologisch en pragmatisch oogpunt, een antwoord op de vraag wat dit precies is en houdt bovendien rekening met zijn dubbele aard als literaire stijl en theoretische kijk op het schrijven zelf. Wanneer men dit toepaste op de Victoriaanse roman in Groot-Brittanië, ontdekte men dat deze werken een combinatie waren van publiek-georiënteerde bemiddelende literatuur. Als men de Ierse Victoriaanse roman bekijkt, wordt het duidelijk dat Ierse auteurs leden aan een identiteitscrisis veroorzaakt door de dichotomie van hun onderwerp (Ierland) en hun markt (vooral Engeland). Bijgevolg was zijn evolutie niet zo duidelijk als die van de Engelse realistische roman. Bovendien werd de Ierse roman van die tijd behandeld op een andere manier dan zijn Engelse tegenhanger. De Ierse roman werd namelijk strenger beoordeeld en vaak bekritiseerd op zijn representatie van het Ierse leven en niet op zijn artistieke bijdrage als een literair werk. Er zijn verschillende redenen voor deze alternatieve manier om Ierse realistische fictie te benaderen: de verschillen in sociale en politieke context; de rol van de Kerk in het Ierse leven en de invloed die deze heeft op de kunst en de ideologie van het realisme; de manier van schrijven in één cultuur en het voorstellen van deze cultuur aan een andere. Deze redenen dragen allen bij tot de vorming van een literair realisme dat verschilt van dat van het Engelse buurland. Dit brengt de vraag met zich mee of de vergelijking van Ierse en Engelse literatuur billijk is. Desondanks bieden Somerville en Ross's *The Real Charlotte* een mogelijk tegenargument voor critici die geen klassiek realisme in de Ierse Victoriaanse fictie zien en integendeel, een analyse van dit boek vindt bewijzen van bepaalde karakteristieken van het klassieke realisme. Tenslotte, hoewel er veel onderzoek naar dit gebied uitgaat, kan er nog steeds verder onderzoek gedaan worden om een betere basis voor toekomstige analyses te vormen. Deze onderzoeksgebieden incorporeren meer gedetailleerde analyses van de context waarin het werk ontstond (waaronder ook de economie van de literatuur en het schrijven van die periode), en een onderzoek van literatuur van andere naties dan Engeland waardoor mogelijke rijkere vergelijkingen gecreëerd kunnen worden.

This thesis contains 146,323 characters.

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Irish fiction of the nineteenth century is a tricky animal, and Irish realism even trickier. Much of the research into Irish fiction of the period appears to concentrate on seeking an Irish version of George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, and having difficulty in finding one, then setting out to explain its absence.[1] Such research however seems to focus almost exclusively on textual analyses without examining the broader issues and contexts of publication: the analysis of realism is not merely about text. The research also compares Irish fiction to that of English fiction without taking into sufficient account the differences in society, politics, history and economics between the two. In these respects, it is easy to see why Irish nineteenth-century realism appears to be a missing element in Ireland's literary history.

Approaches such as these do, however, raise the question of whether or not there was realism in Irish writing of the time, or even an Irish version of realism as distinct from the classic English version proffered by the likes of Eliot and Austen. An immediate problem is one of chronological distance or time. As Murphy puts it:

> The contemporary reader can still relate to the world of Jane Austen, for example, because the internal and external struggle of the individual to negotiate the social and economic mores of society and to forge a subjectivity in the process seems as relevant today as it was in Austen's otherwise very different English society, whose specific circumstances can be ignored. The contemporary reader, however, cannot so easily relate to an Irish world where the central conflict, that between landlords and tenants, is an almost purely external one and best understood in terms of a particular set of historical circumstances.[2]

Although Murphy's comment about landlord and tenants seems quite specific, this was an issue which drove Irish society, politically, economically, and artistically for most of the nineteenth century (and which features heavily in the case study, *The Real Charlotte*). The relationship between landlords and tenants reflected that of master and servant; the

[1] Kelleher[b]: n.p.
[2] Murphy: 49

oppressive English régime used land and land laws to control and discriminate against their Irish underlings; and the struggle for reform of legislation occupied politicians for decades. Naturally, this discrimination and its attendant reformative struggles found its way into Irish literature. It is also a good example of the way in which Ireland differed greatly from its dominating neighbour. Furthermore, Irish writers of the nineteenth century used their fiction to plead with their English audiences to support greater independence for their western offshoot isle. Irish writers were also writing for a foreign audience which again shaped their narratology and style. These factors arguably make it more difficult to assess Irish fiction, particularly from an English perspective given the intimacy – and hopefully not a bias – with national history which normally only a native can hold.

Bearing all this in mind, it is therefore the intention of this thesis to disprove the commonly held perception that there was no realism in Irish fiction of the nineteenth century. The existence of Irish realism in the period is assessed by an assessment of EO Somerville and Martin Ross's *The Real Charlotte* from 1894, near the end of the century and near the end of Anglo-Irish dominance of Irish life.

Much has been written on the subject of literary realism in general, but far less has been written on realism in Irish fiction, especially in the nineteenth century. Even less has been written on the more contextual aspects of Irish writing and realism at the time. An initial examination of the literature would appear to show that factors such as the printing industry, markets and marketing, audiences and politics in and of literature have received far less attention on the western side of the Irish Sea than the eastern. This thesis will review the main writings and criticism of realism in general, of which much has been written, and then examine the Victorian novel, again about which there is much to be read. Although it seems that less has be written on the subject, realism in Irish fiction will be reviewed and analysed for its ideas and contributions to the overall aim of this research. At this stage Irish nineteenth-century fiction can be assessed for the presence or absence of realism. It is intended to review the literature outlining the scarcity or indeed absolute lack of realism in Irish fiction of the time, and to suggest reasons why this literature may be accurate or not. The equity of making literary comparisons will also be examined. At this stage it is appropriate to introduce a case study for analysis, which in this instance is *The Real Charlotte*.

An examination of *The Real Charlotte* will demonstrate the presence or absence of realism in the novel, and if realism is arguably and demonstrably present, then realism is arguably and demonstrably present in nineteenth-century Irish fiction. Finally, some concluding remarks will be presented.

Although the literature is replete with commentary on nineteenth-century realism and to some extent Irish realism, it still seems that there is much to do. It is hoped here to establish the presence of such realism. By also looking at issues other than the actual text, it is hoped that a broader perspective can be gained which may provide a deeper understanding or even simply a different angle on the presence (or possible absence) of realism in Irish fiction of the period. Finally, the research here should provide sufficient to be able to identify areas of further research for the topic of Irish realist fiction of the nineteenth century.

Chapter 2 looks at the general background to reading and literacy in the nineteenth century. It examines changing tastes and the creation of a market for realist fiction, as well as the problems for Irish writing in how it was to represent Ireland to an English audience. Chapter 3 reviews the literature on realism as a theory and a practice. It identifies common aspects of realist writing of the nineteenth century and reviews criticism of realist writing from the nineteenth to the twenty first centuries. Chapter 4 assesses the English Victorian novel. It notes the rise in the middle classes and the consequent shift in Victorian literary expectations. The Victorian novel is also seen as an act of compromise. The Irish Victorian novel is dealt with in Chapter 5, examining its inherent confusion of identity of production and consumption, as well as highlighting the differences between Irish and English realist fiction. In the next chapter, broader issues such as the role of the church and economics are looked at in the context of realist writing in nineteenth-century Ireland. The question of the equity of comparison is also examined, as is criticism of Irish writing of the time. The issue of whether or not realism was missing from Irish fiction is also addressed. Chapter 7 notes the main aspects of realism in fiction and applied these to The Real Charlotte in order to assess their presence or absence in the novel. Finally, Chapter 8 provides some concluding remarks on realism in nineteenth century Irish fiction, and some suggestions for further research on the topic.

CHAPTER 2 – GENERAL BACKGROUND

The nineteenth century comprises the ten decades in which the novel, as we know it today, peaked, matured and arguably became the most popular of cultural art forms to date. There are many reasons for this increase in popularity, both in terms of quantity and quality of the novel, but one of the main ones was the rise in mass literacy and the concurrent shift in literary preferences in Britain, Ireland and throughout Europe.

LITERACY AND TASTE

Prior to c.1800, "mass literacy had been at best a dream project, championed across Europe by progressive Enlightenment intellectuals, whose plans were realised only in the family circles of an international bourgeoisie".[3] As the early nineteenth century progressed, however, mass literacy rates across the classes began to rise rapidly, creating in their wake a new reading market hungry for literary satiation. This was both an artistic and economic vacuum which was soon filled by authors, publishing houses and critics eager to cash in upon the reading public and also keen to make a name for themselves amongst a new caste of literates.

Alongside this increase in reading ability came a reassessment of the idea of literature, and the question of what constituted literature became a regular topic of discussion amongst the middle classes. Before the turn of the nineteenth century, literature had had a sense of encompassing both reading ability and reading experience. It generally included any and all printed works, not merely that which could be classified as creative: history writing, philological disquisition, political analysis, biography and literary criticism all had belonged to that generic and large field of *belle-lettres*.[4] Now came a palpable shift in the meaning of literature, as it became an apparently objective category of printed words *of a certain quality* [my italics],[5] "narrowed down to cover those areas which had hitherto been known as the poetic genres: fiction, poetry and drama".[6] The result is that from the start of the nineteenth century, the definition and concept of literature is taken to designate a limited field, "so that

[3] Lyons: 90
[4] Loeber *et al.*: 25
[5] R Williams: 25
[6] Loeber *et al.*: 15

(for example) the works of Thomas Hardy might be said to belong to literature, while those of Ian Fleming quite likely might not".[7] What exists, therefore, is a critical analysis of texts, dividing them into 'good' and 'bad' literature according to some unwritten rules and guidelines. It is interesting to note that the definition of 'good' literature had transcended the mere economically successful, i.e. those books which sold the most copies, and leapt blindly into that of subjectivity. Literary quality was thus in the text, not in the reader.

> With this shift came three related tendencies: first, a shift from 'learning' to 'taste' or 'sensibility' as a criterion of literary quality; second, an increasing specialisation of literature to 'creative' or 'imaginative' works; third, a development of the concept of 'tradition' within national terms, resulting in the more effective definition of a 'national literature'.[8]

Also noteworthy is the declining influence of the Church and the Universities over literature at this time, especially in terms of what was produced and where the printing and publishing was done, and the commensurate shift towards a link between literature and class. Indeed, the rise of the middle classes saw an increasing influence of their ideas of taste (as distinct from those of the Church or academia) over literature, and the connection was then made between class membership and notions of good taste: this resulted in the links between class and literature moving from those of production to those of consumption.[9]

Rates of literacy also increased in Ireland, due in many respects to the impact of legislation establishing a national school network in 1831, a system which was deliberately designed to provide for the joint education of both Catholic and Protestant children in the English language. (In time, the Churches, especially the Catholic Church, convinced successive governments that the schools were in fact denominational and that therefore they should be under the control of the Churches.) This co-education coincided with campaigns by groups such as the Kildare Place Society to encourage literacy, and the virtual collapse of the Irish language alongside the growth in bookshops and publishers, and led to English being the

[7] Lyons: 97
[8] Berlin: 5
[9] Berlin: 6

preferred linguistic medium for many Irish writers.[10] Indeed, many critics and commentators, of both religious denominations, saw English as the proper language for an Irish literary tradition, and there were few if any calls for a co-existing Irish language literature.[11]

The Irish novel too comes to prominence in the nineteenth century, and the immediate impact is one of discord with earlier forms of Irish writing, particularly non-fiction.[12] Not everybody was enamoured with Irish fiction of this time. The early- to mid-twentieth century Irish writer, Frank O'Connor, wrote that the nineteenth-century novel was "incomparably the greatest of modern art forms…greater perhaps than any other popular literary form since Greek theatre".[13] This is indeed high praise from a successful writer in his own right, but O'Connor, in listing his great writers, fails to mention even one Irish nineteenth-century author. There is an obvious discrepancy then between the rise in popularity of the novel in Ireland (connected to, among other factors, increased literacy rates), and the perceived quality of such works. Indeed, although there were significant literary breakthroughs, such as the novels of Edgeworth and Griffin, for example, who commenced the process of founding a distinct Irish (or latterly, Anglo-Irish) literary tradition of fiction, the general consensus has traditionally been that these authors did not herald a great literary "golden age" for the Irish novel.[14]

This lack of continuity in Irish writing between the rise of the novel and the literary forms which preceded it was not isolated. Irish life in general, but particularly in Dublin, had been shaken by the Act of Union of 1800 (enacted on January 1st, 1801) which merged the Kingdom of Great Britain with that of Ireland, creating the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Although there are continuing arguments over the economic impact of the Act of Union, events such as the transfer of the Irish Parliament from Dublin to Westminster had a significant psychological impact on the middle classes in Ireland: for the minor gentry, the professional classes, the bankers and well-to-do merchants, Dublin was the centre of social and intellectual life.[15] The dissolution of the Irish Parliament left no reason

[10] see Eagleton[a]: 114
[11] Loeber *et al.*: 22
[12] Vance: 119
[13] Cahalane: 50
[14] *ibid*: 46
[15] Beckett: 135

for considerable numbers of landowning parliamentarians to remain in Dublin and many left to return to their estates both in Ireland and in Britain. With such vestiges of power gone, the urban middle classes were left in a sociological vacuum, the institutions around which they had revolved, particularly for their social lives, now being in exile, and so they looked to other activities for opportunities for both betterment and enjoyment.

This vacuum had a noticeable impact for the future of Irish literature, and in particular fiction and the creation of the distinctive form of the Irish novel. Although Dublin had ceased to be the meeting-place of a parliament – indeed it was "dead" without it[16] – it was somewhat optimistically felt that it could still be a meeting place for those interested in literature and scholarship.[17] This wasn't to be, however, and "[m]ore than ever before urban intellectuals and landed gentry alike [began to] look to London for professional and social opportunities".[18] This transfer to London impacted significantly on what would be and was written.

Recognising the economic gap in the English reading market, Irish authors saw an opportunity to earn an income and also to represent Ireland in a literary context, both as individuals and through their narratives, such that, according to Murphy,[19] the market for Irish fiction in the early nineteenth century was essentially an English one. It took a considerable period of time, but "between 1825 and 1830, the Catholic middle classes of Ireland had found their voices in fiction as well as in politics".[20] The problem was that although the nineteenth century was the period in which the realist novel flourished,[21] many Irish authors' version of what was realism and what was apologetic and exploitative writing[22] was confused. It is on the representation of reality, however, which is retrospectively how they have consistently been assessed: "they have all been judged (and mostly judged as wanting) according to how they portray Irish society".[23] In other words, post nineteenth-

[16] Vance: 120
[17] Beckett: 135
[18] Vance: 120
[19] Murphy: 50
[20] Deane[a]: 99
[21] Ermarth: 499
[22] Deane[a]: 99
[23] Cahalane: 50

century critics have seen fit to analyse Irish novelists' literary outputs in terms of their mimetic capabilities and skills.

REPRESENTING IRELAND

Although Catholic Emancipation had been promised alongside the Act of Union by the Prime Minister, Pitt the Younger, it hadn't occurred for constitutional reasons raised mainly by King George III. Pitt resigned on the issue, and it went into abeyance for several decades. The passing of the Catholic Relief Act of 1829 finally brought a semblance of equal rights for Catholics residing in the United Kingdom (including Ireland, of course) and brought them in from the "penal cold to the warm glow of the constitutional fireside", as Deane puts it.[24] More importantly, it allowed for the professional development of Catholics among the ranks of the civil service and judiciary, for example, thus allowing for the considerable expansion of the most important section of the reading public, the middle classes.

With the rise in literacy and the growth in the middle classes who could and did read, there is a commensurate growth in publishing and journalism. Journalism also allows for commentary and we also see in the early- to mid-nineteenth century not only an increase in political pamphlets and political writing, but also an increase in the representation of political problems and issues in fiction. From the mid-1830s onwards Ireland sees a convergence of literacy, upward social mobility, politics, taste, and economics all of which should have brought it to an interesting literary threshold as a similar convergence had in England during the same period. Instead, Ireland finds itself in literary doldrums. As Eagleton wryly comments:

> The historical irony is apparent. At the very point when the English novel was entering on its maturity, the Irish literary institution found itself in a lamentable condition. The result of the political union of the two nations, in this respect at least, was the intensified cultural subordination of the junior partner.[25]

[24] Deane[a]: 90
[25] Eagleton[a]: 146

This 'cultural subordination' found some relief in literature. Irish novelists in the 1840s, for example, began to explicate "the Irish problem" to a English audience, in the hopes of gaining sympathy for campaigns such as that of Daniel O'Connell to repeal the Act of Union.[26] Representing the reality of Ireland to this English middle class reading public had its own problems, the most immediate of which being the constant presence of politics, and the literature of subordination became one of apologia, pleading, appeal and deference to a English audience on behalf of the Irish middle class. "The new Irish literature written in the English language tended to focus on the experiences of the Irish lower middle classes",[27] and this experiential representation, its mimesis, was not always either accurate or endearing. The literature of Ireland of this time in the early- to mid-nineteenth century was intent on over-representing the Irish situation, on exaggerating and drawing almost cartoonish and outlandish situations of misery, hardship, poverty, oppression and destitution for a English audience from whom the authors desperately wanted to make money in the form of sales, but from whom they also hoped to garner political sympathy. As there appeared to be little reality in the representation of day-to-day life in Ireland, serious and even humorous analysis was banished. Ireland no longer seemed a candidate for assimilation into a British polity and culture, and the Irish were best depicted as the apes of *Punch* or the hapless fools of the theatre.[28] It is therefore difficult to see how novels in the realist mode could indeed have thrived, there being so few, and much of the writing of the time being so exaggerated and, literally, incredible.

Eagleton[29] sees no great conundrum in the fact that nineteenth-century Ireland didn't produce the same quantity nor quality of novels in the realist tradition as did, say, England. For him, the condition of Ireland at the time justifies (if indeed it needs justification) the absence of Irish realism: "That the novel in Ireland never flourished as vigorously as its English counterpart is surely no mystery. For culture demands a material base; and a society as impoverished as Ireland was hardly in a position to provide one." There is also an economic explanation, commencing with the Act of Union and its effect on the Irish publishing industry:

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[26] Cahalan: 48
[27] Loeber *et al.*: 23
[28] Murphy: 50
[29] Eagleton[a]: 145

> The notion that the Act of Union of 1800 decimated the Irish economy is nowadays widely dismissed as a nationalist myth; but the Union certainly played havoc with the country's publishing industry…A good deal of printing still went on…; but this was hardly of the stature of a *Mansfield Park* or *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and by the mid century the Famine had brought widespread bankruptcies to the book trade.[30]

Before 1800, Dublin booksellers had concentrated on expanding the Irish market, but with the new century, it appeared their greatest threat now were the London booksellers,[31] selling both English and Irish authors to the two islands. Research on the publishing industry supports Eagleton's justification for the lack of an Irish realist tradition, with Belanger[32] especially critical of the lack of attention which has been given in academic enquiry on the Irish realist tradition to general publishing trends, not simply in Ireland or Britain, but throughout Europe. Such research as has been done she refers to in the work of Moretti[33] who sees "all of Europe reading the same books, with the same enthusiasm, and roughly in the same years (when not months)", and more crucially, "all of Europe unified by a desire, not for 'realism'…but for what Peter Brooks has called 'the melodramatic imagination': a rhetoric of stark contrast that is present a bit everywhere". Publishing markets were therefore not just national, but very often international[34] and within them niche markets were present even in the nineteenth century. Consequently, Irish writers were very aware that they were writing most certainly for a potentially non-Irish readership. Given the turbulent social, cultural, material and political circumstances of nineteenth-century Ireland, they adopted their representation of what Ireland was to suit their non-Irish markets. The result appears to have been a distillation of classic realism into exaggerated representation, and the instillation of a sense of confused literary identity.

By the end of the nineteenth century, arguments were still ongoing over the nature of Ireland's identity, the confusion over which had been well represented in the literature of the century. Was Ireland, for example, British or Irish? Was it a Catholic country, or a Protestant

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[30] Eagleton[a]: 145
[31] Richetti: 25
[32] Belanger: 21
[33] Moretti: 177-178
[34] Culler: 69

one? Was Ireland a collective of peasant farmers[35] or an industrialising and culturally pluralist society? Finally, was Ireland a progressive modern country or an outpost of protectionist, inward-looking savages? From the literature of the preceding century had come no concrete answers, although it was this common good of a confused Ireland which had preoccupied many of the writers of Victorian Ireland to different extents.

> The different traditions which contributed to the literature of Victorian Ireland were repositories of wit and humour…[they] gave formal beauty as well as religious and political insight. All these qualities helped to enrich the national life and to disclose to an unhappy and divided country, aspects of its best or better self.[36]

Unfortunately, this disclosure to an 'unhappy' country merely created a defensive international posture in later years, and by the end of Victoria's reign Ireland became "increasingly pietistic and parochial",[37] by the twentieth century isolated physically and culturally from the rest of Europe, and very much turned in on itself. This isolation also has its own literary roots, with Sean O'Faolain laying the blame for national navel-gazing at the feet of Daniel Corkery and his *The Hidden Ireland* (1924), a book which attempted to create or recreate a narrow Gaelicised worldview of Ireland and Irish literature. According to Fanning,[38] Corkery was "led to a flight of fantasy, to an idealisation – delusional on several grounds – of glorious times in a hidden Ireland of the past." His book and his opinions, however, were ones of consequence, and their timing impeccable for a young country beholden to the Catholic Church and a very conservative political leadership which was happy to defend and promote such an idealised, fantastical illusion of a past Ireland. This was an Ireland which needed protecting from outside corrupting influences and hence shut its door on the rest of the cultural world. The 'Irish Ireland' culture erected nationalist/nativist themes into barriers against perceived cultural and political threats from abroad. Irish racial purity was to be protected against outside corruption at all costs.[39] Not everybody was happy with this; in particular many writers correctly felt that connections with the past stifled representations of the present and movement forward into the future.

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[35] Vance: 120
[36] Vance: 132
[37] Moynahan: 200
[38] Fanning: 245
[39] *ibid.*

CHAPTER 3 – REALISM

Familiar today in the literary styles of writers such as Tolstoy (Russia), Balzac (France), Jane Austen and George Eliot (England), the realist novel found its feet in the nineteenth century. Realism was the literary mode which broke with the classical demands of art to show life "as it is",[40] and such was the success or proliferation of the realist novel, it was able to claim "avowed supremacy" over other narrative forms in the nineteenth century.[41] Despite this supremacy, however, the idea of 'realism' is still a notoriously evasive term,[42] and one which regularly causes confusion in the field of literature.

A PRACTICAL IDEOLOGY

Realism is both a practical literary style and also a theoretical or ideological approach to writing. At a practical level, realism disregards the 'higher' end of literary subject matter, such as the tragedy for example, and instead concentrates instead on the representation of the more mundane, the average, and the commonplace. In effect, realism deals with the quotidian, but mostly with that of the middle classes, recording their daily struggles "with the mean verities of everyday existence – these are the typical subject matters of realism".[43] Auerbach's *Mimesis*[44] sets the background to the representation of the real in writing, although he is vague about defining realism specifically. According to Doran:

> *Mimesis* is the story of realist representation in language, defined not in ontological terms as a verbal approximation of reality [...] but in formal and aesthetic terms as the serious presentation of human reality in its aspects that are most common or ordinary. *Seriousness*, with respect to the mode of presentation, and *everydayness*, with respect to what is presented, are the two fundamental conditions of what Auerbach calls "realism."[45]

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[40] Keep *et al.*
[41] Nash: 6
[42] I. Williams: xi
[43] Keep *et al.*
[44] *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (tranlsation by W. Trask), see Bibliography
[45] Doran: 354

In many instances, this was all done using in many cases a relatively common construction. According to Barthes,[46] the narrative or plot of a realist novel is structured around an opening enigma or puzzle which throws normal or conventional ideas and practices into disarray. Taking his cue from Barthes, Lye describes it thus:

> In a detective novel, for example, the opening enigma is usually a murder, or a theft. The event throws the world into a paranoid state of suspicion; the reader and the protagonist can no longer trust anyone because signs – people, objects, words – no longer have the obvious meaning they had before the event. But the story must move inevitably towards closure, which in the realist novel involves some dissolution or resolution of the enigma: the murderer is caught, the case is solved, the hero marries the girl. The realist novel drives toward the final re-establishment of harmony and thus re-assures the reader that the value system of signs and cultural practices which he or she shares with the author is not in danger.[47]

For Shires, "[t]he ending is normally that of marriage or death":[48] the ultimate result is that in bringing events back to a resolved beginning, realist novels often reaffirm that the way things are is the right way, the way they should be. The realist novel therefore sees events as a whole and records the proper order of things: "The most fundamental common element in the work of the mid-Victorian novelist, however, is probably the idea that human life, whatever the particular conditions, may ultimately be seen as unified and coherent".[49] From this we can describe some broad outlines of what ideas underpin realism. Nash has condensed these ideas into five main points:

1. There is a positively determinable world – which we can call 'actuality' – external to the work of fiction, and which it's the fundamental responsibility of fiction to represent 'as it is' or 'has been'.
2. That this world is a cosmos – that is, a complete, integrated system of phenomena governed by some coherent scheme of rules (such as those of natural law, the assembled forces of history).

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[46] Barthes: 20
[47] Lye: n.p.
[48] Shires: 65
[49] I. Williams: xiii

3. That the essentially right procedures for referentially-motivated fiction are those of *mimesis* … the material transcription of the empirically verifiable data (the objects) of the physical senses.
4. (and 5.) That, just as in the 'actual' world at any one moment we may not have access to *all* the information we may seek on a given subject and consequently must strive to assess the probable truth based on the most exhaustive collection of information possible.
5. The greatest effort must be made towards the ostensibly most 'objective' articulation of the data as possible ('nothing but the truth'), with the minimal visible intervention on the part of the teller.[50]

As at the very heart of the realist novel is a contradictory or paradoxical relationship between the 'real' and the 'fictional', it is perhaps not surprising that there are issues with the idea and practice of realism in literature. The realist novel obviously has a considerable task in order to accurately represent life 'as it is', and given the multitude of issues and events in everyday life, and the variety of perspectives available in any analysis or description of these issues and events, actual representation is rendered difficult, and some would say, impossible. According to Murfin,[51] even at the peak of the Victorian realist novel, many felt that these new, "realistic-seeming" works of fiction misrepresented reality. To countless "respectable" Victorians, novelists were illusion-mongers, unsavoury characters hawking lies masquerading as truths. Maupassant raised this problem in "Le Roman", the preface to *Pierre et Jean*, concluding that the realist is in fact an illusionist.[52] It seems there are, therefore, a lot of problems with this literary tradition.

Barthes himself felt that realist writing was too 'readerly', which is an interesting critique on a novel, as the basic premise would be that literature would or should be capable of being read. For him, realist novels are too 'transparent' and intelligible, and too easily assimilated by readers. Readers were comforted by finding in these novels a simple confirmation of their (bourgeois) view of life. Barthes felt that an accepted 'natural' view of the world was created,

[50] Nash: 8,9
[51] Murfin: 33
[52] Smiley: 803

which suggested that there is one truth only, and that the realist text is its voice.[53] Such accepted views of the world are indeed problematic: for example, "to one reader the *Divinia Commedia* or *Gulliver's Travels* or *Der Prozess* or *Catch 22* is sheer fantasia, to another it is the spitting image of life".[54] Susan Sontag placed the realist tendency in the context of Auerbach's *Mimesis*, and noted that however 'unreal' their works may appear, Homer thought he was being realistic and so did Virginia Woolf.[55]

There are also problems with representation. If it is to represent *actualité*, realism must assume that there is a direct, incontrovertible relationship between the word and the thing it represents (e.g. the word 'brick' must correspond to the readers' idea of the word 'brick'). If language is nothing but symbols signifying what is real, according to Nash,[56] then anything in that language must be realistic or it becomes gibberish. Realism must therefore be certain that the language it uses is a language which the readership can understand and respond to with a positive understanding of "our ideologically constructed sense of the real".[57] Language then comes under pressure to accurately signify what is real. The same applies to the common realist technique of using an omniscient narrator, who gives the reader access to the thoughts, motivations and feelings of the various characters, the idea being to give 'depth' to the different protagonists, to imply that they have lives

> independent of the text itself. They, of course, do not; the sense that they do is achieved entirely by the fact that both author and the reader share these codes of the real. The consensual nature of such codes is so deep that we forget we are in the presence of fiction.[58]

One response, perhaps, is to take a different way of looking at realism, to see it as "a mode that is not simply *about* reality but *mimics* it",[59] where literature and the realist novel is accurate or true only to the extent that it represents the age in which it is written, with every age having its own reality. On this basis, therefore, realism changes with time, working for one

[53] Allen and Walden: 200
[54] Nash: 3
[55] Bellamy: 120
[56] Nash: 3
[57] Lye: n.p.
[58] *ibid.*
[59] Nash: 4

age or culture, but not for another or the next. It also means that realism is less about *representing* a version of reality, and more about *presenting* a version of it.

CRITICISM

Criticism of realist literature has been around for as long as the genre itself. The significant result of particularly early criticism was that the classic realist text became narrowly identified with a "strict mimesis or imitation of people, places and things".[60] Realism then escaped relative severe criticism until the 1970s when a new generation of critics began to seek plausible reasons for realism, resulting in both the notion of realism and the 'classic realist text' coming under sustained attack.[61] McCabe's *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word* (1978) provides a deconstructionist opinion of the classic realist text, condemning it as being naively expressive. Post-McCabe, Belsey tried to expose as deficient previous critics' ideas that realism was "a mode that depends heavily on our commonsense expectation that there are direct connections between word and thing",[62] arguing that this idea of 'commonsense expectation' was deficient: realism, she wrote, is a transparent medium that gives immediate access to experience, where the "reader is invited to perceive and judge the 'truth' of the text, the coherent, non-contradictory interpretation of the world".[63]

Although these new debates in the 1970s and 1980s were seen as useful in many respects, revising and reconsidering as they did the basic empirical assumption that novels simply 'reflect' the world,[64] they did not appear to recognise the fact that even in the nineteenth century, at the very height of literary realism, there was profound uncertainty and disagreement over what realism actually was. These debates also failed to acknowledge how complex and complicated 'so-called' realism could be. At this time, realism was narratologically regarded as a 'predominantly conservative form' because of its ultimately reassuring effect on readers[65], and its habit of confirming "the patterns of the world we seem to know".[66] This conservative form of literature neatly suited the contradictory timidly-

[60] Regan: 191
[61] *ibid.*: 190
[62] Levine: 9
[63] Belsey: 69
[64] Regan: 190
[65] *ibid.*
[66] Belsey: 51

adventurous nature of much of Victorian British society, where adventures and experiences could be lived vicariously through others and the novels they wrote.

There were some other, perhaps more positive, findings from the renewed interest in nineteenth-century realism. More attention was paid to the diversity and range of fictional output of the century, and there was a new emphasis on comparative realism rather than the usual rather narrow focus on the English models. It was proposed that realism was not simply one single, homogenous narrative method, but one which had within it a variety of different styles and voices. Realism had also been seen as the opposite of Romance, "but closer inspection revealed in the novels of Hardy, Dickens, the Brontës and others a surprising persistence of interest in Gothic and sensational devices that had previously been considered the preserve of earlier, romantic authors".[67] More recently, criticism has considered the diversity of fictional types in the nineteenth century, as well as the range of themes which realist novels covered. Nowadays, critics are more likely to refer to 'novels' rather than 'the novel', and to think of realist fiction as a composite form rather than as one homogenous artefact.[68]

There are also other considerations for the realist novel of the nineteenth century in areas which appear to receive less attention than, say, literary styles or themes. "The realist novel is an outcome of a complex evolution in the art of representation, an evolution spread stratigraphically across all of human culture-across art, politics, dress, economics, religion".[69] Given that, it is important that realism and the realist novel is also looked at in the greater social, economic and material contexts, rather than simply through a literary lens. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the realist form is still, however, the dominant popular mode in literature, film and television drama,[70] and has thus shown itself to be an incredibly resilient stylistic mode.

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[67] Regan: 191
[68] *ibid.*: 193
[69] Vernon: 17
[70] Belsey: 67

CHAPTER 4 – THE VICTORIAN NOVEL

Given the increase in mass literacy during the nineteenth century and the new readership it provided, the Victorian reading public helped establish firmly the novel as the dominant literary mode of the period.

VICTORIAN EXPECTATIONS

Despite the early years being a "rather arid period for fiction",[71] the novel, commonly associated exclusively with the classic realist text such as George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871-72) was arguably the crowning literary achievement of the nineteenth century. Demographics and economics, of course, had a considerable contextual role to play, especially in terms of the rise in potential readership and the creation of new markets for both supply and demand. Some of the main factors which account for the rise of the novel at the time are:

> the growth of cities, which provided concentrated markets; the development of overseas readerships in the colonies; cheaper production costs when it came to both paper and printing processes; better distribution networks, and the advertising and promotion of books.[72]

Domestic issues, too, had an impact. As outlined, Victorian Britain was the period which saw the rise of the middle classes, the professional class of their day. Relatively early in the century a new and clear demarcation emerged between home and work lives, between work time and the new concept of leisure time, and between time for men and time for women. Employment patterns changed with many people now working regular hours, and with an increase in suburban living alongside considerable development of railway infrastructure, a rise in the numbers of people working farther and farther from their place of work. These were the early commuters, and commuters then, as now, liked to have something to occupy them on their daily journeys. Booksellers such as WH Smith were keen to oblige and soon established bookselling stalls and shops at many of the larger train stations, selling affordable publications to a new audience of literate readers with more time than ever before to devote

[71] Barnard: 99
[72] Flint: 19

to the pleasures of the novel. The practice of selling novels in monthly instalments also meant that the poorer, increasingly literate, members of society could afford them. At home after ten hours toiling in the office, the novel was regarded as: "a splendid thing after a hard day's work, a sharp practical tussle with the real world".[73]

At the time of Victoria's ascent to the throne in 1837, Britain was seeing a steady but constant increase in the dissemination of realist ideas throughout national culture, and at a certain stage in their development these realist ideas demanded expression through imaginative literature and especially through the novel, rather than through history, theology or social criticism.[74] Both artistically and economically, "novelists...sought to make the most of the present",[75] and were economically astute enough to be able to provide fiction for the tastes and sentiments of the mostly middle class potential readership, although this satisfaction of demand had to be tempered by the expectations of the reading public, as undoubtedly the Victorians now had certain expectations of their novels. The Victorians definitely wanted the 'real' in their novels,[76] and read – as many people read – for escape and diversion.[77] Henry James was fundamental about the presence of realism in fiction: "The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life [...] The characters, the situation, which strike one as real will be those that touch and interest one..."[78] Despite this predilection that art should take its material from life and deal with it appropriately, Victorians still had a love of the happy ending and the lovable character, thus setting themselves up for a potential conflict between the happy ending which consoles and the unhappy ending which is perhaps more true to life. Among the most notable of the Victorian novelists who eschewed sensational incident, unreal emotions and conventional melodramatics in order to capture the tones of life as everyday people experience it every day,[79] it was Trollope who defined the Victorian reader's expectations when he determined that the novel was:

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[73] see *The Doctor's Wife* (1864) Braddon: 20
[74] I. Williams: 115
[75] Altick: 1
[76] I. Williams: x
[77] Gilmour: 9
[78] From Henry James's *The Art of Fiction* (1884), cited in Walden: 27
[79] Barnard: 115

> a picture of common life enlivened by humour and sweetened by pathos. To make that picture worthy of attention, the canvas should be crowded, not of individuals known to the world or to the author, but of created personages impregnated with traits of character which are known. To my thinking, the plot is just a vehicle for all this.[80]

Although the Victorians wanted 'real', however, they didn't want it too real:[81] they wanted it heightened, softened, sweetened, made at once more interesting and more consolingly shaped than it is in life itself. [82]

THE ART OF COMPROMISE

Both these Victorian novels and the novelists who wrote them were responsive to a market eager for the printed word. The main subject matter of the Victorian novel is the relationship between self and society,[83] and their novels had characters who were blends of good and evil, and who led crusades against social evils, reflecting the moral earnestness of the age. Writers had an impulse to describe the everyday world in terms the reader would recognise, and to adopt the basic principles of realism. They contained regular expressions of love, humour, suspense, melodrama and pathos (mostly in the form of deathbed scenes).[84] However much they recognised and acknowledged the 'real' in their writings, not all Victorian writers felt bound by it the constraints of popular realism, and writers such as George Eliot were happy to emphasise the un-heroic character of most human behaviour, the determining power of environment and the probability of failure.[85] Many novelists of this period believed that their literary aims were to be achieved by understanding and representing the proportions and relations of different aspects of individual and social experience, as well as the material conditions of life.[86] This blending of 'real' and 'softened real' results in a sort of narratological compromise, essentially creating a mélange of audience-indulging mediatory literature.

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[80] Trollope: 124
[81] Gilmour: 11
[82] In 1958, the economist JK Galbraith demonstrated the transferability of this Victorian notion of the ideal, when discussing the impact of wealth: "We associate truth with convenience, with what most closely accords with self-interest and personal well-being or promise best to avoid awkward effort or unwelcome dislocation of life. We also find highly acceptable what contributes most to self-esteem." (see *The Affluent Society*, p.7)
[83] Shires: 61
[84] Gilmour: 11
[85] *ibid.*: 10
[86] I. Williams: xiv

The resulting form of the nineteenth-century Victorian realist novel is therefore somewhat more complex than it appears at first sight. In essence, realist fiction of the nineteenth century was a form of Romantic art, but one which placed the emphasis on the reproduction of the external conditions of life and the material laws:[87] the medium through which realism realised itself was the novel, although not always successfully. *Wuthering Heights* (1847), for example, was not terribly well received by readers on first release. The reading public found Emily Brontë's novel and its version of realism difficult to accept and understand until, after her death, her sister Charlotte wrote a preface for the 1850 edition explaining the novel's distinctions.[88] Prior to this, readers would have expected something more along the lines of a novel by Austen or Scott, fiction based largely on classic realist literary conventions, from novelists whose conservatism was the condition of their achievement. The likes of Austen and Scott had without doubt remade the novel in England, but had also failed to lay down guidelines for its future immediate development:[89] the ideological result was a novelistic form left to fend stylistically for itself; the practical result, as mentioned, were novels of compromise. Perhaps this is unsurprising, as "the central task of Victorian culture was mediatory, seeking always to reconcile and synthesise – reform with tradition, present with past, doubt with duty, romantic feeling with domestic stability".[90] The Victorians and the novelists of the time differed, therefore, over their modes of fiction. As a profession, though, Victorian writers were highly aware of their lineage through their eighteenth-century predecessors and their own position in an already long and distinguished tradition,[91] and despite their stylistic differences "they all believed that fiction was an art of the real, that novels could tell the truth about reality, and in doing so, exhort, persuade and even change their readers".[92] It is this confidence that is one of the defining features of Victorian literature. Writers of the mid-Victorian period in particular had an almost naïve confidence that 'reality' consisted in the material and social world around them.[93]

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[87] I. Williams: xii
[88] Shires: 65
[89] Gilmour: 115
[90] *ibid.*: 11
[91] I.Williams: ix
[92] Gilmour: 10
[93] I. Williams: x

Although the list of Victorian realist writers is potentially enormous, some of the more well-known of them include the following:

	Noted for:	**Novels**:
Charles **DICKENS**	Comic creations which verged on caricatures; Descriptions of childhood and youth; Fertility of character creation.	Oliver Twist (1838) A Christmas Carol (1843) David Copperfield (1849-50) Bleak House (1852-3)
William Makepeace **THACKERAY**	Portrayal of upper middle class and lovable rogue types; Contrast between human pretensions and weaknesses.	Vanity Fair (1847) The History of Henry Esmond (1852)
George **ELIOT** (Mary Ann Evans)	Penetrating character analyses; Convincing realistic scenes; Character's inward search for knowledge.	Adam Bede (1859) Silas Marner (1861) Middlemarch (1871-2)
Thomas **HARDY**	Behaviour and problems of people in social mileu; Minimum contemporary social detail.	Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891) Jude the Obscure (1895)

Reviewing the nineteenth-century novel is not easy. Apart from that fact that to "write briefly of the Victorian novel…is merely to scratch the surface, for it is one of the richest fields in our literature",[94] the idea of the rise of the novel in this period is something which needs to be approached with care. Critically renowned books on the topic, such as Watt's highly influential *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), for example, have subsequently been shown to have been heavily biased towards the author's preferences, in Watt's case for what Regan calls a

> subtle psychological realism – the realism of Samuel Johnson, Jane Austen and Henry James – and a conviction that here was the destiny of realist fiction, slowly but steadily unfolding in a mode of writing that took the exploration of consciousness as its central task.[95]

[94] Barnard: 117
[95] Regan[a]: 189

Watt's exposition is one of those books which has through critical analysis constructed a grand narrative of the novel, especially that of the nineteenth century. Warner[96] criticises books such as Watt's, however, on the grounds that they seem to have formed with no rationale a perfect trajectory of emergence, rise, maturation, and culmination, from Defoe, through to Eliot and on to modernist experimentation and self-reflection with the likes of Joyce and Woolf. Such a process he refers to as "autotelic". This has been explained by reason of firstly, the imperial insularity of English culture in the nineteenth century, and secondly, by "the narrowly marginalised boundaries that have typically defined English literary studies throughout the twentieth century".[97]

The problem for Irish literature is that quite often in analysing its own achievements, it has taken English literature and genre models as the norm against which to judge its own nineteenth century output. This raises questions of both quality and equality which will be discussed later.

[96] Warner: 1
[97] Cleary[a]: 219

CHAPTER 5 – THE IRISH VICTORIAN NOVEL

As the Irish and the novel are both slippery beings,[98] the result for observers is naturally enough frequently one of confusion. Mixed identities, religions, markets, audiences and locations meant the creation of something that induced a mixture of curiosity and vague revulsion at the same time.

CONFUSION REIGNS

For the English, Ireland and the Irish, as people, places and in their literature were at once familiar and exotic. They were *heimlich* and *unheimlich*,[99] not just for those who visited, but also for those British who lived here for many years (whom Ireland tended to influence over time[100]) as well as for those who never set foot on Irish soil. Language provides a good example and analogy, with English being spoken in Ireland, but a variation of the language both in vocabulary and grammar, accent and dialect which frequently left the British visitor knowing that English was being spoken, but unclear as to what was actually being said. The British traveller too found much contextual confusion in Ireland, it being at once a part of the United Kingdom (since 1801) and yet a place so different as to be completely alien. As Edward Wakefield commented on a visit in 1812: "We have descriptions and histories of the most distant part of the globe […] but of Ireland, a country under our own government, we have little that is authentic".[101] Ironically for a country so geographically proximate, visitors reported the Irish as being similar to many nations – "Estonians, Finlanders, Russians, Hungarians, Spanish, native Americans" – except the English, their nearest neighbour.[102]

Within Ireland itself, and within the literary movement such as it was, there was also confusion about the type of nation Ireland was, its religion, its language and its place and status in the world. Although this thesis deals with Irish literature and writers who wrote in English, within the scope or profession of writer in Ireland there was another division, between the Anglo-Irish writer literature and the Irish writer and literature, the 'Anglo' in

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[98] Belanger: 11
[99] Fegan 32
[100] "…this is more than I ever heard, that any English there should bee worse than the Irish: Lord, how quickely doth that countrey alter men's natures." (from Spenser's *A view of the state of Ireland* (1633), page 143)
[101] Maxwell: 218
[102] Fegan: 31

Ireland being the dominating force in what was essentially a dual society of masters and 'natives': in dramatic form, Catholic peasants standing against the land-owning Protestants.[103] Although, the phrase "Anglo-Irish" literature came into usage only in the 1890s, it eventually created a selection from the varied literatures of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Ireland, for then current ideological purposes.[104] Writers of either hue and none were pragmatic enough, however, to realise that on a small island, and "yoked by a common fate",[105] they would have to suffer each other. The result was that each, from their own perspective, was made to ask of himself what made him an Irishman, and what indeed was this place called Ireland?

There are several differences between the Anglo-Irish writer and the Irish writer of the nineteenth century, and they are not so much differences of subject matter, language, themes, but more of a "distinct difference in tone".[106] It is felt that Anglo-Irish writers asked more of their readers, requesting of them that they explore something further than that seen on the page, to consider some question rarely asked directly but implied through the novel in hand; this was often a question more connected with the writer than the book.[107] This distinction is interesting as it speaks more about the nature of Irish writing as a whole in the nineteenth century than perhaps it intended, such writing often being more about the situation of the author or the class they represented than the actual story on the page: "[i]ndeed, among the most characteristic features of the genre as practised in Ireland, is the urge to communicate a message – political, social or religious – to interpret or satirise Irish reality past and present".[108]

Accepting such internal differences, and accommodating them in their entirety into the field of nineteenth-century Irish literature, there were then also many differences between English and Irish writers and their literary outputs. Despite using the same language, many countries will naturally produce different literatures due to various reasons including whether they are a dominated or dominating nation; wealthy or poor; educated or not well educated;

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[103] Flanagan: 36
[104] Murphy: 50
[105] *ibid.*: 36
[106] Carpenter: 173
[107] *ibid.*: 174
[108] Rafroidi: 18

progressive or stagnant; idealistic or pragmatic; of a different religion to a comparison country; or a hot climate or a cool one; a harsh dark urban metroscape or a lush green agricultural landscape[109]. For some of these reasons Ireland, understandably, produced a different literature to England, although it can be argued that to even compare the two is perhaps less than fair.

It was in the 1820s that the Irish novel emerged from under the wing of first English and then British literature into what was arguably its own identifiable subgenre. That is not to say there was no literature or literary history prior to this, for as Schwarz puts it, the novel had existed in Brazil well before there were Brazilian novels,[110] so when they appeared, it was natural that they should follow the European models. The same is true for Ireland and Irish novels, but towards the end of this decade moves were made to try to identify those elements which could go towards defining what made an 'Irish novel'. Of course, in order to identify these qualities, questions had to be asked, and it is interesting here to note that it was not just Irish authors, critics and commentators who were asking these questions, but also their English counterparts. From Ireland came questions that put both the terms 'Irish' and 'novel' under pressure:[111] what did it mean to represent Ireland accurately? Who could claim to be an Irish author? Did the polemical qualities of Irish novels compromise their status as art? When did a novel cease to become a novel and become instead a history text, a travelogue or a religious tract? Less well-known, and hence examined with less frequency, are questions which were raised by English authors and critics of the same period, who published commentaries "with such compelling titles as: 'What do the Irish read?', 'What do the Irish country folk read' or 'Wanted an Irish novelist', these essays appeared both in Irish periodicals and in London journals".[112]

Although by now the Irish novel had established itself as an entity in its own right, its progress, and indeed Ireland's relationship with it, was often "vexed, uncertain,

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[109] The landscape is often felt to be an important factor in much writing of the time: "we must also be aware of the fact that the physical entity of Ireland is an integral part of the atmosphere of much Anglo-Irish writing" (Jeffares: 11).
[110] Schwarz: 41
[111] Belanger: 13
[112] Kelleher[a]: 192

discontinuous".[113] The Irish novel proved not only to be a slippery thing but also unpredictable, and its trajectory was nowhere near as smooth as that of its English counterpart. As Eagleton notes:

> The disrupted course of Irish history is not easy to 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 other equally gratuitous tale, running several storylines simultaneously, ringing pedantically ingenious variations on the same few plot elements.[114]

Part of the reason for this 'slippery thing' was that for many the novel was always seen as some sort of 'imported' artefact, not quite Irish and definitely not at home in Ireland: it was "a foreign genre".[115] The problem with this argument, compelling in some eyes as it may be, is that it consistently pits the Irish novel against, and as reacting to, similar genres elsewhere. The achievements of the Irish novel are therefore compared against those of England, and to a lesser extent, of continental Europe.[116]

Comparing them to near or continental neighbours is not to suggest that all Irish novels were equal to or surpassed them: the nineteenth century is considered by some commentators to be the period when Irish literature for the first time in two thousand years lost its creative dynamism.[117] Discussing the 1890s, O'Brien[118] suggests that for the previous forty years or so, Irish cultural life had virtually been in abeyance, and this opinion is reinforced by both Kelleher,[119] who feels that "overall, the roll call of Irish nineteenth-century novelists deemed worthy of mention shrinks visibly during this period", and by Tynan[120] whose view was that "in the years between 1848 and 1878 there was not much doing"; of what was produced, there appeared to be very little of any significance. Until the mid-1840s there had been a good deal of interest in the British reading public for Irish

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113 Belanger: 12
114 Eagleton[a]: 147
115 Lloyd[b] 133
116 Belanger: 18
117 O'Tuama: 31 (O'Tuama here was in particular concerned with the collapse of the poetic tradition in Ireland.)
118 O'Brien: 118
119 Kelleher[a]: 193
120 Tynan: xxiii

fiction, caused both by such factors internal to British reading tastes (such as the popularity at one stage of "national tales"), and, especially in the early period, by an apparently genuine interest in understanding Ireland. Reviews of Irish fiction were featured in journals and magazines from the *Quarterly Review* and *Edinburgh Review*, through *Blackwood's Magazine*, *Fraser's Magazine*, the *Athenaeum,* and the *Gentleman's Magazine*, to the *London Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Letters*. By the 1850s however, after the Famine, the British market had tired of Irish fiction and did not really return to it until the 1880s.[121]

Although the following table is intended merely to highlight some important writers of the nineteenth century, the above-mentioned gap is still notable:

[121] Murphy: 50

	Noted for:	**Novels**:
Maria **EDGEWORTH**	Moral purpose; Duty of upper class towards their tenants (*noblesse oblige*).	Letters for Literary Ladies (1795) Castle Rackrent (1800) The Absentee (1812) Ormond (1817)
John **BANIM**	Accurate depiction of Irish peasant character; Dark and frequently horrible incidents.	The Nowlans (1826)
William **CARLETON**	Positive representation of home-life; Critical of darker side of Irish character.	Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry (1830) The Emigrants of Ahadarra (1847)
George **MOORE**	Serious realism especially in depiction of amorous pursuits of recognisable characters; Tackled difficult subjects such as prostitution, extra-marital sex and lesbianism – books often banned.	A Modern Lover (1883) Confessions of A Young Man (1886) Ester Waters (1899)
SOMERVILLE & ROSS	'True' Ascendancy writers with whom British readers were truly comfortable; Managed to combine and anthropological approach to characters and events with comedy.	An Irish Cousin (1889) The Real Charlotte (1894) Some Experiences of an Irish R.M. (1899) In Mr Knox's Country (1915)

As part of contemporary analyses, however, a certain view emerges of the nineteenth-century Irish novel, and at least four main aspects can be identified, which continue to influence our own theoretical conceptions of the genre. Kelleher[122] tackles them thus:

Firstly, Nineteenth-century Irish novels were mostly judged on how well or badly they represented life in Ireland (see previous discussion): opinions varied on how successful or

[122] Kelleher[a]: 193

not the various authors were. Secondly, Irish novels were not judged on their artistic merits. Indeed, "the sociological or historical character of these novels is judged, implicitly or explicitly, in opposition to and as detrimental to artistic considerations". In 1919, Stephen Gwynne was keenly aware of the division between literature and art:

> Literature in Ireland, in short, is almost inextricably connected with considerations foreign to art; it is regarded as a means, not as an end. During the nineteenth century the belief being general among all classes of Irish people that the English know nothing of Ireland, every book on an Irish subject was judged by the effect it was likely to have upon English opinion, to which the Irish are naturally sensitive, since it decides the most important Irish questions. But apart from this practical aspect of the matter, there is a morbid national sensitiveness which desires to be consulted. Ireland, though she ought to count herself amply justified of her children, is still complaining that she is misunderstood among the nations; she is for ever crying out for someone to give her keener sympathy, fuller appreciation, and exhibit herself and her grievances to the world in a true light. The result is that kind of insincerity and special pleading which has been the curse of Irish or Anglo-Irish literature.[123]

As a third point, Kelleher[124] notes that Irish writers of the period, when they were mentioned in critical reviews, were often criticised for the 'Anglicisation of Irish genius'. Others simply criticise writers from Ireland for an overproduction of novels (presumably of inferior standard), whilst also lamenting the absence of writers of quality. Reviews contained calls such as: "would we had a George Eliot", "why should Ireland not have her George Eliot", "what Ireland wants is a Walter Scott" and so forth. Ireland was generally regarded poorly in the novel stakes in the nineteenth century. From Ireland itself came further criticism from Egan:[125] "There is not an Irish novelist worthy to be mentioned in this paper whose work can be judged by an exclusively literary or artistic standard", although internal criticism is quite often a positive reflection on the maturity of the subject at hand. Perhaps predictably, there wasn't much internal criticism on the state of the Irish novel at the time.

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[123] Gwynne: 8
[124] Kelleher[a]: 194
[125] Egan: 3

Finally, near the end of the century, many commentators were confident that "the new [Revival] movement which is expressing itself in Irish literature"[126] would surmount some of the problems which had beset Irish literature earlier in the century: its overly sociological, poorly literary and market-driven character.[127] It could be argued that, and not just in Ireland, these are the very same problems which still beset twenty-first century novels.

A SEA OF DIFFERENCE

Even though any history of the Irish novel should naturally take a different course than a similar analysis of their English counterpart, the question remains though, how were Irish novelists and their novels so different from their English counterparts? Some of the differences derive particularly from the idea that Ireland was a colonial outpost of the United Kingdom,[128] although whether Ireland was an actual colony along the lines of India or Burma is debateable.

In colonial countries it is very difficult to trace any autonomous rise in the novel as in the colonies the novel self-evidently originates as a metropolitan import, and furthermore the reading habits, predilections and expectations of the European model normally follow that of the vernacular. There are already stores of books, stories and tales in the country but post-colonisation these collections become 'novelised' along European principles, only later to be compared to the progress of the colonisers' own novels. This leads to a perceived deficiency in many instances, and can be seen even today in comparisons of the histories of Irish and English novels: it is a "staple element of commentary on the form".[129]

Irish literature, as we understand it today, essentially developed as an offshoot of the literature of a European 'mother country', in Ireland's case this was England. The linguistic influence of this mother country was also to have a considerable impact on the development of Irish literature. As the nineteenth century progressed the world of literature became increasingly Anglophonic, helped in Ireland by the adoption of the English language by both the new National School system and the Catholic Church. The use of English by the Church

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126 Egan: 3
127 Kelleher[a]: 195
128 Cleary[a]: 210-214
129 *ibid.*: 210

helped to both diminish its intellectual links and relationship with the broader continental European church, established when many Irish religious were educated abroad in European seminaries (e.g. Leuven), as well as reinforce its links with England, resulting distinctly in a trend of Anglicisation at the level of popular culture.[130]

A result of these closer links to the Anglophonic world were closer ties, culturally and economically, with the political overlord, Britain. Irish authors saw this as an opportunity to both publish and sell, and also to promote their own political views, and indeed gain sympathy for the plight of the Irish, for in England especially there was a regular (although not constant) appetite for information about Ireland, and an interest in the nature of Irish society.[131] Unforeseen, however, was the impact this would have on Irish literature, the common denominator between the two abovementioned responses being that of audience. Much Irish literature of the early nineteenth century in particular "agonises about the best way to represent the Irish people in order to improve their standing with the English".[132] A fictional mode "that constantly overhears itself in the ears of its British interlocutors",[133] the Irish novel thus placed itself before the bar of British public opinion.[134] This, naturally, involved avoiding over-contentious issues which will turn the audience away from literature from Ireland.

Further, as the Irish situation was frequently quite complex and involved politically and socially, it was also often necessary to explain, and indeed placate the audience: the literature needs to be accessible and comprehensible to a non-Irish audience, the characters need to be sympathetic, attractive and understandable, and alienation of the key audience needs to be avoided. Irish writers, therefore, although quarrelling with and amongst themselves and their culture,[135] were not writing with and among themselves but to this "readership of foreigners"[136] who initially needed education and enlightenment leading to the use of a tedious language of explanation. The upshot is a crisis of identity for Irish writers. Their

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130 Cleary[a]: 214
131 Flanagan: 33
132 Fegan: 38
133 Eagleton[a]: 201
134 Flanagan: 39
135 *ibid.*: 36
136 Leerssen: 257

books become heavy with long and detailed footnotes explaining and justifying Irish customs, and arguing the case for an Irish civilisation. In some cases, the plot became a mere vehicle for the paratext,[137] and the novels quickly became suspect "both in the sense of the location from which they speak (an Anglo-Irish usually published in London) and the location to which they speak (a loose English reader). The narrative set to readers-at-a-distance remains a sticking point".[138] As a result, the realist novel when loaded down with all its baggage of detailed explanations, prefaces, and other extraneous notations, finds it difficult to retain its sense of reality. That, however, is only one explanation for the dearth of the classic realist text in nineteenth-century Irish literature: there are others.

[137] Fegan: 38
[138] Ferris: 46

CHAPTER 6 – THE ABSENCE OF REALITY

The Catholic Church and commerce both provide further explanation for the lack of a classic realist text in nineteenth century Ireland.

FAITH AND FINANCE

Given the nature of both Catholicism and realism, an inevitable dogmatic conflict emerged between the two. Catholic ideology opposed the idea of realism, equating it with the real, the observable, the palpable, everyday world of the senses; the Church rejected the notion that the world is sufficient to itself, with no room for incorporeality. Realist authors, however, tended to scorn this theocracy-centred worldview, and their novels frequently explicated the spiritual and denied the exceptional. Catholic writers, bound more to their own doctrine than their craft, have therefore more often been drawn to other forms of fiction, the romance, the fable, the supernatural tale, the philosophical novel, or the novel of ideas, at the expense of the realist text. In England, popular culture had canonised the realist novel, and relegated the others to the margins, but in Ireland the battle became one over two different versions of 'the real', with the Catholic Church's belief in salvation from individual effort, supernatural intervention, and spirituality in direct conflict with the literal and literary reality of everyday life.[139] The Church had direct agency over the newly emerging middle-class Irish, those who were both authors and readers, and hence would appear to have directly influenced from the pulpit the form of the Irish novel.

Moretti's *Atlas of the European Novel* (1999) takes a very pragmatic view of realism in nineteenth century Ireland. His opinion is that Irish writers may well have been driven by very conscious, logical, commercial decisions to write in genres which they knew would appeal to the reading public (for example, the historical romance) to the exclusion of the obviously troublesome realist novel. Then, as now, writers were frequently driven by financial pressures, and few were in the privileged position of being able to ignore the need to earn a living, hence the need to produce work that would sell was imperative. "As the best selling novels, at least mid-century, were not (according to Moretti) realist, then it is not

[139] Cleary[a]: 215

surprising that many Irish authors rejected the less popular and therefore less lucrative realist novel".[140] As such, it can be argued that the presence or absence of Irish realism in the nineteenth century may have been determined by factors far more basic than literary talent or ability, Catholic ideology or Protestant ethos, but by the economics of survival and the wider tastes of a European, and indeed by the end of the century American, reading market.

The condition of society and culture in Ireland in the nineteenth century played its part too in accounting for a dearth in realist novels by Irish authors. The country was politically and socially divided, metaphorically at war with itself and with others, mostly the English. There was considerable instability of economy and politics and hence of culture as well: as the realist novel is the "form par excellence" of settlement and stability,[141] this naturally made its production somewhat difficult. Art demands serenity, stability, stable evolution, classical equipoise; and an island racked by rancorous rhetoric is hardly the appropriate breeding ground for these virtues.[142] Indeed, the production of literature in general in nineteenth century Ireland was troubled by the politically divided nature of the country. The barrister and Member of Parliament, Isaac Butt complained about the absence of an attitude in Ireland that could "correct, reduce, chasten, and harmonise the tumultuous and turbid exuberance of our unprincipled and random literature".[143] Gavan Duffy too, another politician and leading figure in Irish literary circles, was of the opinion that it would have been difficult for literary art to emerge from the political turmoil of the time.[144] Another impact of these agitated political times on literature was that they helped blur the lines between fiction and reality, what was real and what was not real, as different groups and parties spun their lines to suit their objectives. This too then becomes reflected in literature, and as language was a major component of political debate this meant a concentration of effort on the language, the medium rather than the message,[145] and also that much literature that was published was of the political pamphlet style.[146]

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[140] Belanger: 21
[141] Eagleton[a] : 147
[142] *ibid.*:151
[143] Butt: 1200
[144] Eagleton[a]: 149
[145] Deane[b]: 13
[146] Eagleton[a]: 148

As previously mentioned, Irish writers frequently worried about how best to present their nation to their essentially English audience. Too much realism can become grim and off-putting, too little and the message gets lost in the caricatures of life. Politics being a mainstay of Irish life for much of the nineteenth century, it was only to be expected that it would be prominent in literature as well. The problem here is that the realities of the political world can easily politicise the realities of life out of existence.

> If the British view of Ireland is of a squalid, fractious, brutalised nation, then there are Irish authors who will seek to redress that demeaning view by sanitising their own social order, edifying their compatriots and impressing their metropolitan audience with a fiction which sweetens and sublimes.[147]

It may be seen, therefore, that to depict Ireland as it really is could well be unpatriotic as it does no good but merely ignites the indignation of the English reader at the price of highlighting the degeneracy and squalor of the very object for which it was intended to raise sympathy. As nineteenth-century Irish authors found, it is tricky to write in such a manner as to depict reality while at the same time censuring the oppressor without making fools of the degraded. It is even trickier to write realistically about Ireland, to nurture national pride without giving false comfort to the persecutors[148]. Though it has not received the critical attention it perhaps deserves, Irish fiction was very much part of a great propaganda war about Ireland within British politics for the heart of British liberalism.[149] Realism was therefore a politically sensitive ideology and practice.

From a 'socio-literary' point of view also, realism found it difficult to find its feet in nineteenth-century Ireland, for realism is not only the home of stability, it is also the home of "totality",[150] that is the ability to have a holistic, if not imaginative, view on a situation. In a society divided by itself, piecing the parts together in reality or on paper is made much trickier by the need to identify, isolate and then patch together again disparate groups, parties and events. Balzac and Dickens, for example are replete with characters from divergent

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[147] Eagleton[a]: 153
[148] after Eagleton[a]: 154
[149] Murphy: 51
[150] Eagleton[a] 150

backgrounds melding into one overarching worldview, the lower and higher classes, shopkeeper, farmer, priests meeting and interacting in a single panorama.[151] This is notably absent in the literature of nineteenth-century Ireland.

The non-literary history of nineteenth-century Ireland then has provided a lot of the clues explaining the apparent dearth of classical realism in the national literature of the time: the politically divided country; the confusion over from where and to whom authors were writing; and as O'Connell[152] writes: "the instability of the post-Union period, the absence of a strong middle class, and absenteeism are all thought to work against the production of realism but to provide fertile ground for works of wild literary experimentation." Realism depends on the middle class discovering and accepting that their daily lives can indeed be interesting, if not exciting, and instead of this in Ireland much writing "turns its back on them, recycling the riddling wordplay and extravagant dream world of the ancient sagas in the face of a reality which is more to be disavowed than tenderly reproduced".[153]

THE EQUITY OF COMPARISON

There has been a "predictable and recurring"[154] pattern in the history of Ireland not to look at Ireland as a nation in its own right, but at the ways in which Irish culture and society failed to match those of its more modern neighbour. The larger issue is then, of course, the question of whether it is even equitable to examine the Irish realist novel of the nineteenth century in comparison with England, for example. Lloyd identifies the problem:

> The core of the difficulty [tracing the Irish novel] is without doubt the canonical status of the realist novel, not only in Britain, but in continental Europe and the United States – and this is…not a problem for the Irish writer and critic alone, but one that confronts every literary culture emerging from the periphery. The decisive status of realism haunts insistently every attempt to rethink the history of the Irish novel.[155]

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151 Eagleton[a]: 151
152 O'Connell: 1
153 Eagleton[a]: 149
154 Cleary[b]: 48
155 Lloyd[a]: 230

Recognition of this problem, one would have thought, would have come sooner, but even in the late 1950s criticism of Irish literature still hadn't faced up entirely to the potential inaccuracies in defining the Irish novel as inadequate in comparison to the 'norm'. Flanagan failed to acknowledge that in the first instance the comparison with, in particular, the English realist tradition is perhaps inappropriate and unfair, but also not seeing that there is no actual shame in not having produced an Irish realist literary tradition, "for it is not only that Ireland produced no *Middlemarch*", as Margaret Kelleher records,[156] "it also produced no *Pere Goriot* or *Sentimental Education*, no *Effi Briest*, no *Moby Dick*, no *War and Peace*, *Crime and Punishment* or *Fathers and Sons*." It is this sense of Irish deficiency, measured against a model from England which is deemed to be the norm that has influenced greatly the historiography of the nineteenth-century Irish novel.[157] Such a comparison may also be erroneous, as it is tempting to overestimate the integrity of the English model and its own literary history: it too was hardly a homogenous entity.[158]

However compelling the reasons for the lack of an Irish *Middlemarch* or a general classic realist novel, they do not quite adequately account for its absence. It is still a question of some intrigue given that by the mid-nineteenth century the Irish middle class were steadily on the march upwards, that they didn't use some of this newfound social, cultural and political confidence to create a novel tradition despite the omnipresence of the Catholic Church: "[E]ven if there are, as mentioned earlier, plausible reasons that explain why Catholicism and the realist novel of the Middlemarch type might not have been compatible partners, this still does not explain why Irish Catholic middle-class culture did not achieve a novel tradition of more consistent distinction in some other 'non-realist' genres".[159]

By the end of the century, things were hardly improving. With the social disgrace and subsequent fall of Parnell in 1891, the country had become tired of political activity. In the early 1890s, WB Yeats[160] had prophesised the rise of an intellectual movement "at the first lull in politics", and on cue a huge range of organisations and groups sprung up focused on

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156 Kelleher[a], cited in Lloyd[a]: 230
157 Cleary[b]: 48
158 Eagleton[a]: 223
159 Cleary[a]: 216
160 Yeats: 199

Ireland and 'Irishness', trying to answer questions which had challenged writers for at least the previous one hundred years. Máire NicShiublaigh recalls:

> This was 1900. In Dublin these were great days of the Gaelic League, of innumerable little clubs and societies, of diverse mo[v]ements, aimed at the establishment of a new national order…Dublin bristled with little national movements of every conceivable kind: cultural, artistic, literary, theatrical, political…Everyone was discussing literature and the arts, the new literature was emerging.[161]

Indeed, a new literature was emerging in Ireland, but it was one coming under the increasing influence of a triad of politicians, businessmen and the Church, all of whom for their various political, commercial and spiritual reasons felt that the last thing Ireland now needed were independent thinkers (and consequently, "[t]he intellectual became a depressed group"[162]). Whereas the writers themselves were keen to distance themselves from any 'Irishness' (either in the form of leprechaun or heroic rebel) which had previously been so well exploited, the forces of Church, politics and business felt otherwise, and soon took them on an enforced journey which involved a great deal of 'Irish' verse alluding to "a mystical entity which is the soul of Ireland, and which expresses itself through the mind of Ireland".[163] Despite novels such as Joyce's *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Irish realism was still proving elusive.

CRITICISM

There are several major works on Irish literature of the nineteenth century, some of which have proved more insightful, useful or helpful than others. Critical analysis has tended to focus somewhat more on certain genres than others, poetry being the major beneficiary of much writing on the nineteenth century and Ireland's literary legacy, and novels generally being somewhat neglected.[164] Daniel Corkery has, probably justifiably, come in for a lot of criticism: his *The Hidden Ireland* (1924) is regarded as an avoidance of a confrontation with, and the reality of, genuine nineteenth-century peasant life, instead imbuing it with a certain

[161] NicShiublaigh: 3
[162] O'Faolain: 97
[163] Pearse: 120
[164] Geary and Kelleher: 118

false hope.[165] Corkery had a tendency to idealise the often grim past of Ireland and instead construct a false representation of a glorious Ireland which never existed. In *The Hidden Ireland*, according to Walsh, Corkery

> attempts to reconstruct the Gaelic worldview which, he argues, was preserved in reduced circumstances by the poets amongst the impoverished, oppressed Catholic peasantry of the Penal Law era. This *mentalité* is "hidden" in the sense that it was virtually invisible in the Anglo-Irish versions of history that had until then dominated Irish historiography.[166]

To Corkery's mind, as transmitters of culture the 'great houses' of the old Irish aristocracy were not only greater than the Planter houses but also greater than the very universities of Europe.[167] Such gross misconceptions would be harmless were it not for them being taken as a convenient truth by Church and State alike to use for their own ends at the time. He also argued that it was not enough for a writer to be merely Irish by birth, they must also write about Ireland, and in addition write authentically (which, emanating from Corkery, was ironic) and nationalistically at that.[168] Both O'Faolain and O'Connor took issue with Corkery's view of Ireland's history, but ultimately it was too little, too late. His *The Hidden Ireland* book became an instant and very influential classic, and in due course unfortunately went on to inform the cultural orthodoxy of the State.

Thomas Flanagan's *The Irish Novelists 1800-1850* (1959) also took Corkery, among others, to task for his dismissive attitude towards the Irish novel as a literary form in the nation's history, deriding it as "English" and as "mere travellers' tales" in his other seminal work, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature*.[169] According to Flanagan "Professor Corkery…is an extreme

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[165] We can see in this quotation the hopelessness of the situation imbued with a contradictory and overtly optimistic tone, as also implied by the use of an exclamation mark rather than a question mark to finish: "Such then, was in general the face of Ireland, such, more particularly, the face of Irish Ireland – that hidden land whose story has never been told. Poverty was its only wear – poverty in the town, the cabin, the person, the gear, the landscape. Civic life was not only broken, but wiped away. Institutions and the public edifices, ceremonies, arts into which the institutional blossoms in home-centred countries, had ceased to exist. Life did no more than just crawl along, without enough to eat, unclothed, fever-stricken, slow: how could it have a thought for anything beyond mere existence from day to day!" (Corkery[b]: 36)

[166] Walsh: 27

[167] Fanning: 245

[168] Geary and Kelleher: 120

[169] Corkery[a]: 8

cultural nationalist, and is happiest when a work of art is Gaelic, patriotic, Catholic, and puritanical (though the latter two are in the Irish context, interchangeable)".[170] Flanagan was also critical of the Irish Revival movement for neglecting the novel. This movement's aim was to examine and conserve what it regarded as a vernacular Irish tradition, and which ultimately led to a greater understanding and appreciation of Irish literature which had survived well into the twentieth century.[171] Although probably commendable in itself, this movement was influential and at the time overshadowed much of the detailed critical response to Irish writing earlier in the nineteenth century.[172]

There were several reasons for this. The Irish Literary Revival movement was dominated by the views of WB Yeats. His pronouncements not only shaped the Irish literary canon – what was in, what was not – they also determined they way in which this canon was viewed critically, and following Yeats's lead, therefore, many critics chose to ignore the reading and writings of nineteenth-century middle-class and rural Ireland, who were the majority of the population at the time. The twentieth-century view of the nineteenth century was also shaped by the forces of cultural nationalism – articulated so well by Daniel Corkery – which only tended to think worthy Irish writing which supported the view of the Irish people as rural, Catholic and nationalist. Anglo-Irish writers, no matter how talented or popular (such as Maria Edgeworth, or Somerville and Ross) would never be a match for the likes of the poetry of Charles Kickham, despite Kickham's verse being far inferior to anything Somerville and Ross ever published. They, however, were Protestant, and Ascendancy literature was 'Colonial' literature and therefore, at that time, significantly insignificant. Finally, there was the more international influence of modernism on literary scholarship, a field of study which was dominated for many years by the 'moral formalism' of FR Leavis (see *The Great Tradition*, 1948). Leavis developed a system of very narrow parameters on literature, the result being that a lot of fiction simply dropped from view. Leavis's qualities of 'moral sanity', 'felt life' and so forth were also simply not present in much nineteenth-century Irish literature (as it dealt with a different set of contexts and demands than the likes of Jane

[170] Flanagan: 44
[171] http://www.ireland-information.com/reference/revival.html
[172] Geary and Kelleher: 118

Austen or George Eliot) and so were either unexamined by critics or else judged as mere historical background to the twentieth century.[173]

In *Anomalous States* (1993), Lloyd also addresses the issue of realism in the nineteenth century, looking in particular at the role that realism plays in socialising the individual. For Lloyd (134), realism has a function beyond that of the literary in that it demonstrates the "civilising process, the passage from savagery to civility", whereby the readers identify with the process and hence become part of this broader socialisation *modus operandi*. Although this idea has a slightly patronising tone, the flaw in the process in the Irish context was that there was not a significant quantity of middle class to begin with, and also that the middle class, such as it was, was incredibly unstable politically, socially and economically: "[p]recisely the social class that for the English novel furnished representative figures through whom progressive reconciliation could be envisaged, in Ireland eludes such a representative function, appearing instead as a locus of unstable transitions, uncertain affiliations and social disequilibrium".[174] Eagleton recognises a similar facet of realism, seeing it as both a sociology and a phenomenology at the same time, a "sober documenting of facts and forces" sourced in the depths of human experience.[175]

It is also Eagleton who provides some interesting contextual analysis of the common elements which different approaches to the 'history of the novel' share, despite their fundamentally polar ideologies. In particular he compares the Marxist-socialist and feminist-Foucauldian histories. The results of the comparison between the two approaches to the rise of the novel show that for both:

a) the origins of the novel are modern: both disregard ancient classical, medieval and Romance narratives;
b) the novel is constituted as an indigenous English product and its later development traced within an English framework;
c) defining the novel as an English invention in more than mere parochialism – this ties the novel to the economic, political and cultural rise of the English middle classes and

[173] Geary and Kelleher: 118-121
[174] Lloyd: 140
[175] Eagleton[b]: 227

"hence to a larger set of assumptions about both the class's and the genre's relationship to Protestantism, individuality and democracy"; and

d) the novel is essentially equated with the 'realist' novel, all other types of novelistic narratives are expelled or dismissed.[176]

More recently, Trumpener's *Bardic nationalism: the Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (1997) effectively turned the modern history of the novel on its head by refusing to use as her starting point, for example, the work of Watt and his assumption of an eighteenth-century origin for the modern realist novel. Trumpener's history of the novel is far less linear, and in her assessment, the novel's trajectory wavers between and across other genres (travel writing, adventure, historical novels), and also between and across other geographies, particularly colonies and semi-colonial peripheries.[177] She effectively outlines an inter- and intra-geographical and typological set of influences which is quite different from earlier versions of the novel's history. From the perspective of the realist novel also, Trumpener shifts the axis of English historical influence:

> by refusing to privilege the realist novel over other contemporary genres and by trying to reinsert the fictions written in Ireland, Scotland and Britain's other overseas colonies into her account of the early nineteenth-century novel, she very effectively decentres the standard English framework that has prevailed in both Marxist and feminist-Foucauldian histories.[178]

Cleary[179] also praises "the more sophisticated Irish literary historians" who have never simply followed Watt's ideas on the development of literature in nineteenth-century Ireland, who merely queried and lamented the lack of an Irish realist tradition along English lines. Most of these more sophisticated analysts seek instead to derive more contextual reasons for Irish realism, such as it is. The gap in most analyses, however, would be that they appear to concentrate on sociological and historical issues and omit any serious in-depth consideration of issues such as economics (macro- and micro-), technological developments (especially in printing), marketing (and the development of marketing strategies) and retailing. If historians

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176 Eagleton[a]: 204
177 Cleary[a]: 208
178 *ibid.*
179 *ibid.*: 203

are going to analyse realism, then they must be realistic about what should be analysed, and not shy away from the complex, obvious, hidden or sensitive issues – some of which will undoubtedly be out of their sphere on knowledge – which have as much impact on the development of realism in Ireland as its sociology.

Elusive or not, with arguably (and argued) inappropriate comparisons being made with its coloniser overlord, Britain, the 'deficiency' in realism in nineteenth-century Irish literature may be a very contestable concern. Ireland has its own literary styles and history, and as such perhaps the deficiency is more in the methodological approaches to Irish literary history by historians and other commentators than the content of any such history. According to Eagleton,[180] there "remains the sense that Ireland gave the slip to realist representation"; yet this too implies that Irish literary history eluded something to which it should have belonged. It is precisely because Ireland did not bypass or give the slip to realism, but travelled along its own path, perhaps even oblivious to realism, that it developed its own separate contribution to the European literary canon. As Becket[181] asserts: "[A] century that saw the publication of *Castle Rackrent* in its first decade and *The Real Charlotte* in its last has some claim to distinction." Indeed, "[t]he marginal nature of Irish realism is one reason why early-twentieth-century Ireland was the only sector of the British isles to witness an astonishingly rich outcrop of modernism"[182] in the form of Joyce and Wilde, for example.

MISSING IN ACTION?

From both macro and micro theoretical and practical perspectives of realism in nineteenth-century Irish literature, several issues arise.

The first is the notion of why look for realism in Irish literature in the first instance if a lot of the signals point towards an explanation of an *absence* of realism. The literature on Irish literature of the period is both critical of the dearth of realism in Irish novels and also offers explanations of why this is so. In criticising the lack of realism the literature generally makes a comparison with the equivalent literary output from England at the time. This in itself then becomes an issue of some contention: is it equitable to compare the novels produced at the

[180] Eagleton[a]: 183
[181] Beckett: 139
[182] *ibid.*: 154

time from the two countries given their considerable difference in population, wealth, power, stability and status? Initially, it seems not, but at the time Irish authors and publishers were more than happy to utilise the services and markets of, in particular, London, and in so doing put themselves in the firing line for such comparisons. It is difficult to argue that, as he publishes with a London publisher, an Irish author writing for an Irish and English audience should not be compared with English literary outputs. So, perhaps the comparison is unequal, but also perhaps, not totally unfair. In any comparison, however, this lack of social, economic and literary equality should be borne in mind.

Secondly, in looking at realism, it is important to note that there are many and varied explanations of what constitutes realism. Realism means different things to different authors and critics, and hence decrying an absence of realism begs the obvious question of what *exactly* is being criticised. If the critics cannot agree as to what realism is and of what it should consist – and Auerbach himself was reluctant to provide a specific definition – then any measurement of its presence or absence is made doubly difficult. Inherent in this confusion is a lack of appreciation of quite how complex realism can be. Merely taking realism as a representation of real life, a mimesis if you will, is only having a limited vision of the genre. Realism is a broad church, which perhaps explains the confusion over its definition, and any analysis of realism should acknowledge and accept that.

Thirdly, by any measure, nineteenth-century Ireland had quite unique and pressing ongoing social, economic and political issues. On top of the constant political insurrectionist rumblings and discontent with absentee landlords, high rents, a dubious tax regime and religious discrimination came a famine which decimated the population through death and emigration. The only people who could resolve the situation were the very people who had caused it in the first place. As a cruel irony, these people were also a significant audience for the Irish literary industry, so when there was a demand for realism from this audience, there was a certain restraint required in order not to worsen an already poor situation. Realism was a political instrument in Ireland as not seen elsewhere, and like many such instruments it could be sharp on both sides of the blade, hence extreme caution was required.

It can also be argued whether or not any analysis should even be attempted, for surely by so doing, there is an implicit acceptance of the righteousness of realism as a genre, when in fact realism might only have been appropriate for a different context, e.g. England. In analysing the presence or otherwise of realism in nineteenth-century Irish novels, it is therefore important to accept the above points: also, without recognition of the singular Irish context, any analysis is flawed from the outset. Consequently, this thesis seeks the missing Irish realist novel in the light of the boundaries mentioned above. Even still, there are several nineteenth-century Irish novels from which to choose to analyse as part of the realist experiment. The most obvious from our perspective is Somerville and Ross's *The Real Charlotte*.

CHAPTER 7 – *THE REAL CHARLOTTE*

Despite the possible inequity in comparing nineteenth-century Irish and British novels in the quest for realism, and perhaps in contradiction to some of the research and analysis which tries to explain why Ireland didn't have a glorious literary equivalent to Eliot's *Middlemarch*, Somerville and Ross's *The Real Charlotte* (1894) offers an interesting counterbalance through which to assess the veracity of the many claims of an Irish realist vacuum at the time.

SOMERVILLE AND ROSS AND *THE REAL CHARLOTTE*

Near the end of the nineteenth century, certain elements in Irish fiction were beginning to grapple with certain elements of modernist form (see Joyce, for example), and in this sense, much of this new literature did not feel a need to treat Irish life directly. Some, however, continued to oblige the quotidian, and none more so than Edith Somerville (1858-1949) and Martin Ross (1862-1915).[183] Second cousins, Somerville and Ross were born into Protestant Anglo-Irish landed gentry, and were the unmarried daughters of families whose status had declined steadily through the nineteenth century, as one by one their privileges in politics, religion and society were overturned.[184] As such, they were perfectly placed to record the trials and tribulations of everyday life in the 'Big House'. Having first met in 1886, the pair began writing collaboratively soon after. Originally conceived as a "shilling shocker", they first literary foray was *An Irish Cousin* (1889), a book which started life as a Gothic sensational novel but gradually developed into a more realistic picture of Big House life.[185] The Big House was to become a recurring theme in their literary output. Their critical reception, however, wavered from extreme popularity in England, and criticism in Ireland, to the opposite, with their more sombre novels not to the general reading public's taste in England whilst their more light-hearted humorous tales, such as *Some Experiences of An Irish R.M.* (1899) did very well there.[186] In Ireland, their comic fiction earned them considerably harsh criticism from nationalist reviewers. It is entirely possible, of course, their success in

[183] Frazier: 120
[184] Stevens[a]: n.p.
[185] Powell: 57
[186] Stevens[a]: n.p.

England could have resulted in some of the disapproval of their work in Ireland, as they regularly made fun of Irish country life.

In 1894, Somerville and Ross produced *The Real Charlotte*, arguably the finest depiction of Irish gentry society during this decade of its swift decline,[187] although it was for a long time overlooked:

> [W]hile most literary critics and historians focus their attention of (male) Renaissance writers like W.B. Yeats, J.M. Synge, and James Joyce, some of the most penetrating writing was actually written prior to these Revivalists' work. *The Real Charlotte*…is a brilliant book analysing the complex relationship between language, culture, and imperialism in late nineteenth-century Ireland.[188]

Pursuing the theme which occupied much of English, and indeed European, fiction throughout the nineteenth century, that of insatiable class ambition, *The Real Charlotte* "exists for critics as that rare Irish novel aspiring to be a totalising work of social realism, on occasion compared to George Eliot's *Middlemarch*";[189] indeed, it is both elegiac threnody and delightfully cruel satire of the Irish Protestant population in southern Ireland.[190] Favourable comparisons have also been made with Ireland's foremost modernist of the early twentieth century: "[In…*The Real Charlotte*] which chronicles Ascendancy culture in decline, a typical Sunday afternoon in a Protestant quarter of the north side of Dublin is proleptic of the pathos of Joyce's representation of North Richmond Street life…".[191] The narrative form, however, is not modernist. In what must qualify as relief for those seeking Irish realist fiction of the time, according to Frazier, "The book is written as Jane Austen would have written it had she lived in Castletownsend, Co. Cork, at the end of the nineteenth century, rather than Steventon, Hampshire, at the start of the nineteenth century."[192]

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[187] Frazier: 120
[188] McClellan: 69
[189] Kreilkamp: 71
[190] Stevens[a]: n.p.
[191] Harding: 46
[192] Frazier: 120

The novel has also been criticised by many reviewers, even in more recent years, and been dismissed and dull and traditional nostalgic representation of the Big House era. According to Cahalan, Somerville and Ross were simply "traditional" novelists who provided realistic portrayals of Irish life at the turn of the century.[193] In general, however, *The Real Charlotte* is regarded as one of nineteenth-century Ireland's finest works.

By their own admission, Somerville and Ross wanted *The Real Charlotte* to be a realistic picture of life at a Big House, offering readers character portraits with psychological depth hitherto lacking in nineteenth-century Irish fiction.[194] Achieving this reality, however, was a complicated task (an opinion shared by fellow female Anglo-Irish writers Maria Edgeworth and Lady Morgan many years earlier, and a particular difficulty for Edgeworth who had a gift for exaggerating and distorting reality),[195] and one which they were not prepared to shirk in the interests of increased sales. The popularity of their *Irish R.M.* series (1899, 1908, 1915) also haunted attempts at more sober works, with audience expectations at odds with the realist subject matter. Writing *The Big House at Inver*, Edith Somerville remarked: "It gets sadder every day!...I'm afraid the people who talk so much of our rollickingness will be rather sick. But *how* could a book about Ireland in 1920 rollick?"[196] This conflict between authors' desires and audience demands was not new. Even their closest relations put them under pressure.

> That their aim was realistic representation is evident from a letter in which Edith complained about the expectations that their respective families had about literature. She said: "My feeling is that any character is interesting if treated realistically. They care nothing for belted earls or romantic peasants". Belted earls and romantic peasants were not to be found in the literary production of the Somerville-Ross enterprise.[197]

Other female Anglo-Irish writers from Edgeworth to Bowen had also felt the strange limbo of being in a position of social privilege and yet being aware of, and wanting to write about, the uses and abuses of power by their own class, thus creating a conflict between their

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[193] Cahalan: 92
[194] Stevens[a]: n.p.
[195] Le Gros: 68
[196] Robinson: 176
[197] direct quotation from Robinson: 88, quoted in Powell: 57

heritage and natural instincts as Protestants and their desire to write realist fiction as authors. As Regan notes: "One of the peculiar and distinctive features of Irish fiction of the nineteenth century is the disparity between its insistence on telling the truth or showing things as they are and its actual instability and profound uncertainty about its capacity for realist verisimilitude".[198]

In depicting the reality of nineteenth-century life, one of the tools deployed by Somerville and Ross in *The Real Charlotte* was that of language. They weren't alone with many writers of that time seeking a more realistic portrayal of Irish life, and accomplishing this through a more careful and realistic use of language. As Gifford Lewis notes, until then, such authenticity in scene, dialogue and representation was rare.[199] Letters exchanged between the two authors clearly indicate the importance of language to their literary enterprise: they

> saw use of English as an indicator of where one stood along a hierarchy of class differentiation and as a key to character, intelligence, and the degree of respect to which one was due. Their correspondence reveals that both women regularly and gleefully noted the verbal affectations of their own class, as well as recording the exotic speech of the lower class.[200]

Somerville and Ross had an innovative approach to language and culture,[201] and this allowed them to capture a broad panorama of Irish society.[202] In reproducing accurately the speech patterns of their characters, Somerville and Ross were very careful with their use of Hiberno-English,[203] and whereas they were determined to incorporate realism into their characters and dialogue, thereby creating an accurate portrayal of life and culture, they were also aware of the dangers of writing in an idiomatic style.[204] As Edith Somerville writes: "Phonetic spelling in matters of dialect is a delusive thing, to be used with the utmost restraint."[205] At a macro level, the representation of socio-linguistic speech diversity created meaning greater than that

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198 Regan[b]: xxii
199 Lewis: 9
200 Grubgeld: 141
201 McClellan: 70
202 Cahalan: 92
203 Hiberno-English is a language they describe as a "fabric built by Irish architects with English bricks": Somerville and Ross: 184
204 McClellan: 74
205 Somerville and Ross: 175

of mere language systems: Somerville and Ross used their realist fiction to criticise the British imperial project in Ireland and language became a way for the authors to transmit, combine and translate ideologies. Their use of language therefore allowed them to demonstrate the mixed and differentiated layers of society and reality in imperialised Ireland at the time. Edward Said, believing all culture and civilisation was hybrid, would later theorise it thus: "Partly because of empire, all cultures are involved in one another, none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic." [206]

The downside of such methods of representation, however, was the danger of creating confusion in the mind of the reader (mostly English) between an "accurate" depiction of Irish life, discourse, and culture, and the reader's understanding of that culture "until it becomes impossible to tell the difference between the 'real' portrayal of Ireland and imperial stereotypes of the Irish and their culture".[207]

SOME PRINCIPLES OF REALISM AS APPLIED TO *THE REAL CHARLOTTE*

In the earlier chapters of this thesis the theory and practice of literary realism was examined (see Chapters 2 and 3, for example). The intention was to see how the ideology of realism is translated into literary form in fiction, however, as with many ideologies the boundaries and rules of what is included or appropriate vary from commentator to commentator. It is still possible, however, to identify several overarching practices which can be said to form the basis of literary realism in fiction. Although these principles of realism can be categorised as follows, it must be remembered that not all writers subscribed to them. In general, therefore:

- Realism disregards the higher end of subject matter and concentrates on the mundane.
- Realism is traditionally a record of the struggles of the middle classes.

[206] Said: xxv [Said, however, given his interest in Eurocentric colonialism, tended to focus on national cultures that also tend to be heterogeneous (Varisco: 106); In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said concludes: "Contamination is the wrong word…, but some notion of literature and indeed all culture as hybrid…and encumbered, or entangled and overlapping with what used to be regarded as extraneous elements – this strikes me as *the* essential idea for the revolutionary realities today, in which the contests of the secular world so provocatively inform the texts we both read and write" Said: 317]
[207] McClellan: 72

- There is great effort towards articulation of the data with minimal intervention from the teller.
- Realism must use a language its readers can understand.
- Structurally, an opening enigma or happening throws things awry, but the story, however, must inevitably move towards closure/An unhappy ending is more true to life.
- Realist novels have characters who are blends of good and evil and morally earnest.
- In Irish realism, there is a lack of mixing of classes.

By applying each of the general precepts above to Somerville and Ross's book, it may be possible to determine whether or not Ireland did indeed have its very own work of classic realist fiction in the nineteenth century, contrary to much that has been written about this topic to date. The starting point before any assessment is, however, the intention of the authors to write a realist novel in *The Real Charlotte*. Based upon this premise, it can at least be assumed that if this was their intention, then the authors deliberately set out to bring realism to the text and in so doing used some of its most common features.

<u>Realism disregards the higher end of subject matter and concentrates on the mundane.</u>

There is very little high-mindedness in *The Real Charlotte*. The hero is a grotesque land-grabber and social climber, a "hard-bitten pragmatist"[208] who seizes every opportunity to better herself financially. The subject matter concerns perennial issues of matchmaking, social advancement, basic scheming and the day-to-day concerns of a forty year old woman, by now a very shrewd nouveau (and aspirant) Protestant aware that the position of the class to which she aspires in Ireland – that is the land-owning-through-ineritance upper middle Anglo-Irish class – is coming to a close. It is precisely Somerville and Ross's ability to deal with this mundane in such an interesting fashion that the novel such an interesting read.

<u>Realism is traditionally a record of the struggles of the middle classes.</u>

Charlotte is aspiring member of the new Irish middle classes. She is Protestant, and naturally for such a person, a land-owner, although interestingly not through inheritance as most genuine Anglo-Irish gentry acquired land, but through business. Her concerns are not those

[208] Stevens[a]: n.p.

of finding money to pay unfair and discriminatory taxes, nor of finding food to eat or work to earn money, nor indeed of the politics of a country. Her daily ambitions vary, but revolve around petty ambitions of upward mobility, and devious schemes and planning to inveigle money and advancement from her acquaintances and relatives. Her 'struggles', such as they are, are not those of the poverty-stricken (usually) Irish, nor those of the upper-classes. The other main characters too – Francie, the Lamberts, Mr. Dysart, for example – are essentially very middle class, and their problems are not too far removed from Charlotte's although their actions and reactions to them differ considerably.

<u>There is great effort towards articulation of the data with minimal intervention from the teller.</u>

This is typically a difficult principle to assess. In *The Real Charlotte*, the 'teller' is recognisably present but relatively inconspicuous. The teller moves the narratology along without directly influencing the direction of the story, nor the readers' expectations. Yet there is a constant presence of this teller, without whom the story would lose a lot of its pace and structure. The teller undoubtedly 'articulates the data', but the degree to which their intervention is 'minimal' is a difficult concept to measure. A detailed textual analysis of the novel does, however, reveal subtle intervention through differences in treatment of class by the narrator, the authors being critical of 'their own' class as well as being blunt about the middle and lower classes. As Vanarwegan notes: "It is striking how the authors are able to condemn certain kinds of behaviour of their own class through small narratorial hints while successfully avoiding commenting directly. They did not wish to be class traitors by being too critical, yet succeed in giving criticism by working subtly through the narrator..."[209] The interventions, though, are more delicate than direct.

<u>Realism must use a language its readers can understand.</u>

Using a language readers can understand has long been a bone of contention with Anglo-Irish writers. The main market for their output being England, they were caught between representing Hiberno-Irish speech in a realist fashion, which may be difficult for a non-Irish audience to comprehend, or else represent their Irish characters in a non-realist fashion (say, speaking Standard English) and thereby make their fiction less real but more

[209] Vanarwegen: 62

comprehensible. *The Real Charlotte* is replete with characters from different classes of society, and therefore the novel was never going to be full of characters whose main language was Hiberno-Irish; given the number of Anglo-Irish middle- and upper-middle class characters in the novel, there was always going to be a large measure of Standard English. In this way, therefore, *The Real Charlotte* is a good example of realism. It didn't shy away from representing individual characters as they were. We therefore get Lady Dysart speaking of "superfluity at a picnic",[210] whilst the more down-to-earth Peggy Roche mumbles about "a wee suppeen o' shperits to wet the grool"[211]. Indeed, such was the realist treatment of the language of the indigenous Irish, it took a degree of effort to work out what was being said even with Somerville and Ross's restrained use of phonetics. They were, however, very careful not to over do it. See Peggy Roche again:

> "Faith, 'tis hardly she'll ate that itself." Peggy Roche rose as she spoke, and, going to the dresser, returned with a black bottle. "As for a bit o' bread, or a pratie, or the like o' that, she couldn't use it, not let it past her shest; with respects to ye, as soon as she'd have it shwallied it'd come up as simple and as pleashant as it wint down."[212]

The result is a blend of Standard and Hiberno-English, the latter in particular not being overdone in such a way as to be off-putting to the English audience.

<u>Structurally, an opening enigma or happening throws things awry, but the story, however, must inevitably move towards closure./An unhappy ending is more true to life.</u>

The Real Charlotte begins with two significant events, both of which go on to shape the novel. Chapter Two concerns with the death of Charlotte's aunt, Mrs Mullen, from whom Charlotte inherits a considerable sum of money. In the process the cheats her much younger second cousin Francie out of her more rightful inheritance, as Charlotte had 'persuaded' Mrs Mullen to will the money to her. The second significant event the arrival of Francie from Dublin to Charlotte's house (Tally-Ho Cottage), an invitation issued in an attempt to salve her guilty conscious after denying Francie her inheritance. The arrival of Francie, her interactions with male characters in the novel (Roderick Lambert and Christopher Dysart),

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[210] *The Real Charlotte*: 71
[211] *ibid.*: 58
[212] *ibid.*

and Charlotte's attempts to set her second cousin up with a husband at the same time as finding one for herself, subsequently set the tone for the remainder of the narrative.

When first published, *The Real Charlotte* received mixed reviews. The English audience in particular was concerned on several levels: they didn't like the novel's use of the grotesque; and they found it very difficult to accept Charlotte Mullen who was a powerful and conniving heroine. In addition, *The Real Charlotte* doesn't 'move towards closure' in the traditional realist sense – although there is a death which was a common element of realist endings[213] – or at least in a sense which left them satisfied. The closure, when it comes, is too unexpected and violent. The audience found it difficult to understand why her pretty, younger cousin, Francie Fitzpatrick, did not marry the hero in the end but, instead, was killed off with startling and horrifying abruptness,[214]arguably a *Dues ex machina*..

> …Norry fell upon her knees, and flung out her arms inside her cloak, with a gesture that made her look like a great vulture opening its wings for flight. The cloak flapped right across the mare's face, and she swerved from the cart with a buck that loosened her rider in the saddle, and shook her hat off. There was a screech of alarm from all the women, the frightened mare gave a second and third buck, and at the third Francie was shot into the sir and fell, head first, on the road.[215]

If, however, realism is a stylistic aim of the novel, then death is one of the most 'real' facets of human existence, and in this respect, *The Real Charlotte* through its unhappy ending and the unexpected death of one of the main characters, satisfies a general definition of realism in fiction. The specific context of Francie's death, however, might suggest that the ending was anything but a traditional realist conclusion, with the fulfilment of Peggy Roche's curse on Charlotte on being removed from her house, and Norry the Boat's 'vulture'-like movements with her cape which frighten the horse and thus kill Francie. These elements seem more suited to the Irish supernatural than Irish realism.

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[213] Shires: 65
[214] Stevens[a]: n.p.
[215] *The Real Charlotte*: 327

It is interesting to note the lack of discussion of these elements in *The Real Charlotte* in the literature. Few works on Somerville and Ross or *The Real Charlotte* deal with the death of Francie and the ending in any great depth, and none treat it in the context of realism, instead preferring to see her demise as symbolic. As Stevens writes: Francie's ruin at the end of the novel, the collapse of light into darkness...reveals the ambiguity at the heart of the novel. Francie Fitzpatrick is the sacrifice in this study of agricultural improvement and cultural enlightenment in colonial Ireland.[216]

Realist novels have characters who are blends of good and evil.

Humans, by their very nature, are not as black and white or simplistically 'good' or 'evil' in their nature. It follows, therefore, that any realist depiction of characters must have in their personalities a blend of many different elements, including positive and negative proclivities. So it is with *The Real Charlotte*. Each of the characters cannot be defined or described through their goodness or lack of it. It is a tribute to the realism of the novel that this is so. Although some display a greater tendency towards goodness of relative 'evil' – such that it is – no one character is all of one and none of the other. Charlotte Mullen has perhaps the most conniving character of all the main personages in the novel, but at not stage, despite her selfish machinations and inherent greed, is she evil. She has unpleasant traits and may be an unpleasant human, but she is not evil. She is a blend of many aspects and characteristics. Francie Fitzpatrick – of whom Christopher Dysart remarks: "it sounds like she ought to have been a parlour-maid"[217] – is indeed vulgar, but has with it a certain attendant charm. The balance of her character when compared to her cousin Charlotte is definitely more inclined towards the 'good' end of the spectrum, but yet she still retains a slight propensity for misbehaviour, as opposed to evil. Christopher Dysart himself is essentially 'good', but has a certain egotism and snobbery about his character which, depending on the perspective of the reader may be interpreted as 'not positive', but again, such a trait comes nowhere near being evil. Roddy Lambert is not perfect either. He married for financial gain and has no qualms about chasing Francie Fitzpatrick, whom he has loved since she fourteen. Again, he might not have the finest collection of 'goodness' traits, but equally neither is he evil. *The*

[216] Stevens[b]: 86
[217] *The Real Charlotte*: 81

Real Charlotte, in line with most other English realist novels of the nineteenth century, has characters who are realist blends of personality traits, not extremes of one or another.

In Irish realism, there is a lack of mixing of classes.

It is ironic in *The Real Charlotte* that it is one of the characters, and not a critic, who remarks: "Irish society is intolerably mixed",[218] thereby highlighting the melding of classes in the novel. This is in contradiction to the norm for classical realism at the time. This mixing of classes is, however, probably a greater reflection of the dwindling Anglo-Irish Protestant Ascendancy class's own social and economic circles and hence their need to interact more with others outside their own traditional class and culture. Also, Ireland being a relatively small country, it is most likely that towards the end of the nineteenth century, as the Catholic Irish were themselves developing their own middle classes, that such cross-cultural, interdenominational and socio-economic mixing would occur. Charlotte Mullen calls in upon her neighbours and tenants (Julia Duffy, for example), even though the reasons for her social callings may be dubious. Francie Fitzpatrick is not really of the same class as Christopher Dysart, but yet associates freely with him through the offices of Charlotte. In these respects, *The Real Charlotte* then breaks the rule of Irish realism by allowing characters of different classes to interact and indeed become the focus of romantic attention. "Of course, in this realistic text class divisions prove to be too strong for love to stretch across class divides. Instead, the novel traces the destruction of vulnerable characters like Francie in the face of the romantic delusions of the landed élite and the powerful greed of entrepreneurs like Charlotte Mullen and Roderick Lambert".[219]

That *The Real Charlotte* is a work of realism is, it can be reasonably held, beyond doubt. That it is different from English works of realist fiction is also true. This however does not and should not diminish its value as realist fiction. *The Real Charlotte* identifies with many of the typical characteristics of the classical realist novel of the nineteenth century with its focus on middle-class values and issues, class, characters with blends of traits and characteristics, and a concentration on the mundane issues of each of the classes. Where it differs from works such as Eliot's *Middlemarch*, for example, are its use of characters with whom the audience

[218] *The Real Charlotte*.: 91
[219] Stevens[a]: n.p.

can relate and language which the audience can readily understand. Bearing in mind the main audience for this work was an English one, the majority of whom had never set foot on Irish soil, some of the characters would have appeared far from 'real'. In other words, the middle-classes readers of Northampton, Surrey or even northern destinations such as York or Newcastle would most likely not have come across indigenous English characters such as Peggy Roche or the women preparing "grool" in her kitchen, or indeed the drunken Billy Grainy, even though England did have its own fair share of drunken and unusual personalities.

Language is another differing aspect. This is not to suggest that English realism did not use colloquialisms in its own fiction, but to indicate that given the considerable difference in the English spoken in England and the English spoken in Ireland – Hiberno-English – especially by the working classes, the ability to understand what was being said without oversimplification or overuse of phonetic speech made Irish realism more challenging for both the authors and the readers. Furthermore, the Irish language was also frequently used and mixed in with English. This, naturally enough, created another challenge for authors in presenting a completely foreign language to their audiences. They managed, however, and *The Real Charlotte* can been seen as a fine example of authors overcoming the challenges of writing Irish realism for an English audience in the nineteenth century to produce what is arguably Ireland's finest realism novel of the period.

CHAPTER 8 – SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

This thesis is to examines the notion of realism in nineteenth-century Irish fiction, with a focus on whether or not it can be said that such realism existed at all. Realism in fiction is a broad topic, with a diversity of opinions, many of which have developed and transformed over the years. Commentary and criticism also changes, and what was once seen as a pertinent analysis of a genre or history can now be regarded as narrow-minded and overly nationalistic, if not simply wrong (see, for example, criticism of Corkery's *The Hidden Ireland*). The ethics of comparing one nation's literary output to another's also creates confusion. Are such comparisons fair? Is it even correct to attempt to make comparisons like this? How does one 'judge' literary quality? Some of these issues are too broad and intricate for a research project such as this to address, but they are worth mentioning if only to highlight the difficulties inherent in examining a nation's output, and then comparing it to a different nation. At the most basic level, such comparisons tend to ignore the larger contextual issues surrounding the literary output, and at a more complex level, they tend to focus on details whose overall contribution is questionable.

Given this, there are several remarks which can be made about Irish realism in the nineteenth century.

Firstly, the idea of realism itself is not fixed. The classic realist text is for some George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, but for others it may be Balzac, Tolstoy, Zola or even Dickens, each of whom have a different narrative approach to Eliot. Hence, the idea of what exactly constitutes realism is not something with universal acceptance: what is realism for one reader is fantasy for another. Any examination of realism in a specific context is immediately bound, therefore, by the variation in opinion of what constitutes realism. Although not as highly regarded nor influential now as when first published and in the immediate decades thereafter, FR Leavis's narrow version of reality (his "felt life") still permeates generalised perceptions of realism. His *The Great Tradition* and its rather direct, if not simplistic, idea of what constitutes realism remains a convenient backdrop for many in their assessment of realism, even in the twenty-first century.

Contrary to some opinions, realism – in the generally accepted, contemporary, sense of the word – does exist in nineteenth-century Irish fiction. The examination of *The Real Charlotte* in the previous chapter demonstrates to some extent that although it was not the same as classical English realism, Ireland of the nineteenth century was not entirely devoid of its own brand of realist fiction. Arguably, Irish realism is not the same as English realism from the same period, but in its own right, realist writing occurred in Ireland at the time.

That Irish realism is not the same as English realism has occasionally been a problem. With English realism being elevated to the status of 'classical', any other form of realism has a difficult job to attain the giddy heights of parity with such acclaim. What such comparisons fail to take into account, however, are the different contexts of Irish realism's production and consumption. Despite being geographical neighbours, Ireland and England (indeed, the entire United Kingdom) were significantly different places, with different social, economic and educational settings. Mid-way through the nineteenth century Ireland suffered a famine which devastated through death and emigration a large percentage of its population. Universal education only came into being properly in the 1830s. The country was riven by political fighting and infighting, and was governed by a frequently harsh and discriminatory overseas régime. The irony for Irish literary output on the nineteenth century is that this harsh and discriminatory régime was also its main market. English writers had none of these problems. It had an established middle class about whom to write. Political fighting was done in Westminster. It was not ruled by a foreign power, had plenty of food and a growing population. Most significantly, its market was its own country, and so in writing about middle class life and values, it did not have to make amendments to its style – including its language – in order to be understood by an alien market. In this sense, the context of literary production and its consumption were important factors in driving the narratological style of much of Irish fiction at the time.

The context of production was also significant to the extent that the political situation in Ireland affected not just how and where books were written, but also what they said. Consequently, it was not unusual for Irish fiction to have political over- or under-tones. Fiction was often used as a medium for transmitting political messages to its ruling régime, who were the English, in the hopes of gaining some degree of sympathy for the Irish

situation. These messages varied from time to time as the situation altered for better or worse in Ireland, but nonetheless they were a regular feature of Irish realism and as such altered its narratological style.

Much of the discussion concerning Irish realism immediately compares it to English realism and the classic English realist texts. On some levels, this is a logical comparison to make, but, as seen above, given the different contexts of Irish production, and indeed the confusion engendered by ostensibly writing for a market outside their own country alongside that of frequently communicating a political message, it is also often an illogical comparison. Geographical proximity does not always make for literary proximity, and the lesson is probably that comparisons should be made on a firmer basis than geography or even language.

The Real Charlotte was first published in London in 1894 by Ward and Downey in a set of three volumes.[220] An edition was published by World Classics Series in 1948, an honour rarely bestowed to a living author (Edith Somerville - Martin Ross had died in 1915). In between 1894 and 1948, it is difficult to ascertain what editions were published and by which publishers, but given its prestigious imprimatur by the Oxford Press it must be assumed that it had undergone several successful reprints in the intervening years. In 1986 it was reprinted by Rutgers University Press and Quartet Books; and in 1989 by The Hogarth Press. In 1999 the publishers JC Sanders and Company brought out another edition. In the twenty first century the newest edition available is published by Farmar & Farmar of Dublin. What is noteworthy for a book which has been so consistently popular since its publication and one which has been made into a popular mini-series for television in 1991 (by appropriately enough a joint Anglo-Irish production company), is the lack of a current popular edition from any of the main publishing houses. It must be asked why there is no Penguin nor current Oxford World Classics edition of the novel, nor no Blackwater Press, no Vintage or Virago editions. Undoubtedly there are copyright, marketing and economic issues for this apparent gap in the market, but the popularity of the novel is not helped by the difficulty in obtaining a mainstream copy, particularly outside Ireland.

[220]See Loeber, Loeber and Mullins's *A Guide to Irish Fiction 1650-1900* (2006) for a detailed publishing history including binding materials and editions.

Finally, it is notable from the research carried out for this thesis that there are two outstanding areas of interest which remain to be addressed. The first of these is that of looking at Irish realism in the nineteenth century alongside that of other countries, and especially alongside that of other countries with a similar context and history. There appears to be a dearth of comparative analysis of Irish realism in contexts other than that of England. The second area of proposed research is that of the context of production and consumption. Again, there appears to be a scarcity of research on the pragmatics of Irish realist writing of the period. In many respects, writing and publishing the nineteenth century was no different to today. The economics of supply and demand are and were frequently the main drivers of writing and publication. Then as today, no publisher will want to publish fiction which is not going to sell. Neither will a writer want to write something which nobody will read. Writing was for many authors a source of income, not a hobby, and as such generating a return on their writings was the main aim. Except for Moretti's *Atlas of the European Novel*, this is an aspect of nineteenth-century realism which seems to get omitted in favour of micro-level, narrow-focused textual and narratological analysis, which although it may help identify features of realism, quite often fails to explain why or how they came to be present.

NOTES

The frontispiece is '*Country Races of a Typical Sort*', by EO Somerville c.1890.

The copy of *The Real Charlotte* used in this masterproef is the Farmar & Farmar (Dublin) edition, 2007.

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