BEYOND ENGLAND: BRINGING IRELAND INTO THE VICTORIAN NOVEL, THE CASE OF ANTHONY TROLLOPE

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Anthony Trollope was, among other things, the very English author of five very Irish novels − *The Macdermots of Ballycloran* (1847), *The Kellys and the O'Kellys* (1848), *Castle Richmond* (1860), *An Eye for an Eye* (1879), and the unfinished *The Landleaguers* (1883). He also penned two 'English' novels, *Phineas Finn. The Irish Member* (1869) and *Phineas Redux* (1874), the second and fourth of the Palliser series, which have as their hero the Irish politician, Phineas Finn. Trollope also sporadically produced short stories with significant Irish content. Taking Trollope as a test case, this essay will explore what happens when an English writer looks beyond England and turns his attention, very specifically, to Ireland. Like the Irish writer, but heading in the opposite direction and placed at the better end of an uneven power relationship, his English counterpart is still called upon to negotiate a set of boundaries, passages, and transitions. And yet, coming as he did to Ireland as a Post Office administrator (albeit initially in a lowly position), Trollope would have had far more doors opened to him there than would have been the case for the vast majority of Irish writers (not to mention of the Irish in general) seeking their fortune in Britain. Unlike many of the Irish in Britain who tried to become invisible there, Trollope would have felt little need or inclination to camouflage his Englishness in any of his dealings on John Bull's Other Island. However, he would attempt to get beyond stereotype, to offer mostly respectful and singular representations of the Irish, and show empathetic understanding of the fate of those Irish who were trying to make their way in Britain. This would become a substantial, if sporadic, focus of his fiction.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's description of Trollope's novels being "just as English as a beef-steak" (Trollope, *Autobiography* 144), was one that the somewhat insecure author embraced partly because he was a writer whose English roots were looser than might be surmised. When faced with severe financial difficulties at home, his mother Frances (Fanny) Trollope had salvaged her and her family's fortunes by looking beyond England and moving to the United States. In so doing she kick-started a productive writing career with her successful *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832). Trollope's own move to Ireland was sparked by frustration with his unpromising situation as an under-appreciated junior clerk at the General Post Office at St-Martins-le-Grand in London, by his desire to have a fresh start, and by his need to get out of debt and to earn a better living. A junior Post Office official's salary would surely go further in rural Ireland than it would in London and there would be considerable expense claims to boost it further. Like his mother, Trollope was remarkably mobile and had little difficulty making his home in Ireland and later, in journeying, re-

lentlessly, around the world to see to Post Office affairs (while equally unrelentingly pumping out page after page of his almost fifty novels).

Critics, such as Simon Gikandi in *Maps of Englishness*, have argued that "it is in the contrastive space afforded to it by its colonies that English identity consolidates itself" (Gikandi 46), however for Trollope the contrastive space of Ireland was the more important formative element. Trollope became the Englishman we know today because of his move to Ireland, a country seen by many of his fellow Englishmen as a no-man's land better avoided. He quickly became a figure of substance there, a valued public servant and later never failed to underline how happy his life had been there after the previous 26 years in which by his own account he "had been wretched. I had been poor, friendless, and joyless" (Trollope, *Autobiography* 132). Things changed for the better after he landed in Dublin in September 1841 without, as he says in the romanticized transformation legend that he constructs in his *Autobiography*, "an acquaintance in the country":

> I had learned to think that Ireland was a land flowing with fun and whisky, in which irregularity was the rule of life, and where broken heads were looked upon as honourable badges. I was to live at a place called Banagher, on the Shannon. (62)

For Anthony, the shortest route to success in his literary and Post Office careers was through the initially unpromising and circuitous journey that saw him working and living up and down the length and breadth of Ireland in Banagher, Clonmel, Mallow, Belfast, and Dublin. This was a singular inversion of the typical nineteenth-century career path that saw aspiring writers making a beeline for London.

The optimism, the belief in the possibility of individual and collective progress that was the motor of British nineteenth-century success, had largely been lost on Trollope up until his Irish move. It was in Ireland that he actuated the Victorian dream of individual success by following the classic values of the time – self-reliance, personal responsibility, thrift, and, most of all, hard work – and in doing so he quickly gained a sense of his own personal worth, becoming an exemplary Victorian. But for all that, Trollope is too often perceived as embodying all the conservatism of Victorian England, a conventional artist who rarely questioned the social or literary conventions that he inherited. Catherine Hall describes him as "safe and English [...] riveted by the daily round of politics without being political, producing happy endings for his novels, believing in church, family and nation in ways which confirmed complacency rather than producing unsettled states of mind" (Hall 210-11). To read him in this way is to miss the challenging, critical edge that made him one of the great observers and interrogators of the social, cultural, and political mores of his time. Beneath the orthodox surface sheen of his writings, there is a constant questioning of established wisdom and convention. And his writing about Ireland fits into the pattern.

Trollope attempted to understand and interpret Ireland in the often calamitous four-decade period that stretched from his arrival into a country on the cusp of the Great Famine up until his final visits in the early eighteen-eighties at the height of the bitter

and divisive Land War. He is unique among English novelists in this sustained engagement with Ireland and in his on-the-ground knowledge of the country. He is almost equally a rarity within the Irish nineteenth-century canon as just one of a handful of writers who kept faith with Irish issues throughout his career. In doing so, he was well aware that he was battling against indifference and ignorance at home in England. As he put it, in *Phineas Finn*, "men in Parliament know less about Ireland than they do of the interior of Africa" (549). At a time of "literary famine", to borrow William Carleton's term, at a time when "our literary men followed the example of our great landlords; they became absentees, and drained the country of its intellectual wealth precisely as the others exhausted it of its rents" (1: v), Trollope's choice of Ireland was unusual. It was also unpopular with his publishers. After the low-key impact of his second novel, *The Kellys and the O'Kellys*, his publisher, Colburn, told him that it was "evident that readers do not like novels on Irish subjects as well as others" (Trollope, *Autobiography* 78). Trollope paid little heed and returned stubbornly to Irish themes, characters and settings, rarely failing to describe what he saw and heard with skill and colour, pace and candour. Even if the politics to be drawn from the novels sometimes jars and if none of his Irish novels are wholly successful, they all offer much to the reader alternating as they do between the deeply tragic and the affectionately comic. An example of the latter is to be found in his descriptions of the Irish clergy – both Catholic and Protestant – or in the description in the *Kellys* of Martin Kelly's "horrid voyage" from Dublin to Dunmore among the "diversified crowd" on the "floating prison" that was "the Ballinasloe canal-boat":

> the fumes of punch; the snores of the man under the table; the noisy anger of his neighbour, who reviles the attendant sylph; the would-be witticisms of a third, who makes continual amorous overtures to the same over tasked damsel, notwithstanding the publicity of his situation; the loud complaints of the old lady near the door, who cannot obtain the gratuitous kindness of a glass of water; and the baby-soothing lullabies of the young one, who is suckling her infant under your elbow. […] Martin, however, made no complaints, and felt no misery. He made great play at the eternal half-boiled leg of mutton, floating in a bloody sea of grease and gravy, which always comes on the table three hours after the departure from Porto Bello. He, and others equally gifted with the *dura ilia messorum*, swallowed huge collops of the raw animal, and vast heaps of yellow turnips, till the pity with which a stranger would at first be inclined to contemplate the consumer of such unsavoury food, is transferred to the victim who has to provide the meal at two shillings a head. Neither love nor drink – and Martin had, on the previous day, been much troubled with both – had affected his appetite; and he ate out his money with the true persevering prudence of a Connaught man, who firmly determines not to be done. (77-8)

Much of the warmth and affection that Trollope held for Ireland is expressed in these lines which doubtless grew out of his own journeys on the same means of transport. In an even more autobiographical key, Trollope enthused in *North America* that

> It has been my fate to have so close an intimacy with Ireland, that when I meet an Irishman abroad I always recognize in him more of a kinsman than I do in your Englishman. I never ask an Englishman from what county he comes, or what was his town. To Irishmen I usually put such a question, and I am generally familiar with the old haunts which they name. (599)

Protestations of kinship of course are no guarantee of accuracy or that Trollope was all sweetness and light. Quite the contrary. In his role as a highly effective Post Office chief in Ireland, he exercised his authority over his Irish underlings in gruff, peremptory tones. His manner with subordinates, as Pope-Hennessy describes it, "was aggressive and offhand […] what Trollope's friends used to call his 'abrupt bow-wow way' of addressing them" (Pope-Hennessy 81). This behavior was in no way confined to his Irish staff, however, but extended to all who served under his charge. Trollope was also remarkably open to the experiencing what Ireland (and later other parts of the world) offered and was not the "insular Englishman whose early sympathies and antipathies were unmodified by reason or by observation", whom some critics describe (Stebbins and Stebbins 321). As can be seen in the following passage from *South Africa*, he was not without self-awareness or awareness of how the English ruling classes behaved abroad:

> Let an Englishman be where he may about the surface of the globe, he always thinks himself superior to other men around him. […] He, – and the American who in this respect is the same as an English, – always consumes the wheat while others put up with the rye. […] He expects to be "boss" while others work under him. (Trollope 17)

This description was not written as a self-portrait. However, in attempting to impose an 'English' system of management on the Irish postal system, Trollope was engaged in what was a colonial enterprise. That said, it is more appropriate to read his Irish work (both postal and literary) as an expression of Unionist rather than colonialist beliefs. Trollope was at most a reluctant colonialist, and argued in 1874 that "Great Britain possesses enough of the world […] and that new territorial possessions must be regarded rather as increased burdens than increased strength" (qtd. in Brantlinger 6). He saw Ireland as an integral part of the United Kingdom, believed the country could be modernized, integrated and improved by being made more like England, and felt that this process would strengthen the Union and could only benefit England's own security and wealth as it would Ireland's. The character of Phineas Finn – who enjoys a successful but complicated career as Irish politician in Britain – is his most sustained demonstration of this.

Long before Phineas, what emerges from Trollope's earlier Irish novels is a sense of political turbulence, social injustice and unrest, and an overall situation of unsustainability that can only be addressed through a fairer economic union between the two countries. *The Macdermots of Ballycloran* is centrally concerned with questions of justice. It chronicles the fall of the family of Larry Macdermot, an impoverished survivor of the old Irish Catholic gentry, who represents a doubly marginalized reality, held at a distance by the Anglo-Irish, but also by the peasantry that resents his family's rank, even if they have fallen into abject poverty. He and his son Thady and daughter Feemy live in a dilapidated (although recent) mansion in County Leitrim, unable to pay the mortgage which is being enforced by Joe Flannelly, who built it for them many years earlier, and by Flannelly's lawyer and son-in-law, Hyacinth Keegan. Flannelly had attempted to have his daughter, Sally, marry into the Macdermot family, but

was rebuffed by Larry. Keegan is trying to remove the Macdermots and take possession of their property through his father-in-law and is aided and abetted to this end by the Macdermots' dishonest and deeply feared bailiff, Pat Brady. He realizes that "the days of the Macdermots were over" and that he must "ingratiate himself with Keegan, the probable future 'masther'" (173). This element of the plot comes to a head when Larry refuses Keegan's derisive offer for the estate.

As in almost all of Trollope' novels, the central plank is the problematic love plot. The greater part of the novel hinges on the relationship between Feemy, who walks "as if all the blood of the old Irish princes was in her veins" (11), and Captain Myles Ussher, "a Protestant, from the County Antrim" and "the illegitimate son of a gentleman of large property, who had procured him the situation which he held" (27). Ussher represents a morally corrupt version of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. Much of the narrative is concerned with Thady's well-meaning but ineffective attempts to hold him to account on his sister's behalf, but Thady procrastinates until finally – and disastrously – confronting Ussher when he believes he is abducting Feemy. He attempts to block him by hitting him with a heavy stick and accidentally kills him. In a single blow Thady achieves what the local Ribbonmen have long threatened to do. He subsequently flees and is given shelter by the Ribbonmen in return for taking the oath. Too honest to stay in hiding, Thady turns himself in and is tried and convicted of murder, wrongly convicted for having committed a political crime, an act of Ribbonism, when in fact he was trying to preserve his sister's honour and to prevent what he thought was her abduction. A better description of his crime would be unintended manslaughter with no political intent. The pleas of the local priest on his behalf are in vain as the magistrates feel they have to make an example of him by condemning him to death. The novel ends on a hopeless note with Thady's hanging, his father's madness, and Feemy's death during the birth of Ussher's child (a detail removed from later editions as it was considered too strong for Victorian tastes). There is no sense, whatsoever, of justice having been done. Thus this first novel sets the foundation for a thematic preoccupation with justice and its lack, which would become a staple of all of Trollope's output and not just of his Irish novels.

The descriptions in the novel of the "impoverished town of Mohill" is a cutting indictment of the utter lack of justice in the Ireland to which Trollope was witness. The reader is taken inside a cabin and brought face to face with:

> A sickly woman, […] suckling a miserably dirty infant. […] Two or three dim children – their number is lost in their obscurity – on a few rotten boards, propped upon equally infirm supports, and covered over with only one thin black quilt – is sitting the master of the mansion; […] And now you have counted all that this man possesses; other furniture has he none – neither table nor chair, except that low stool on which his wife is sitting. Squatting on the ground – from off the ground, like pigs, only much more poorly fed – his children eat the scanty earnings of his continual labour. And yet for this abode the man pays rent. (126-27)

The tone of indignation is heightened by the use of the present tense which indicates that the novel is commenting, albeit indirectly, on the current state of Ireland. Blame

for this situation is laid at the door of the absentee Anglo-Irish Lord Birmingham, "a kind, good man, a most charitable man!" who helps everyone except his own people:

> Is he not […] a vice-presiding genius for relieving destitute authors, destitute actors, destitute clergymen's widows, destitute half-pay officers' widows? […] In short, is not every one aware that Lord Birmingham has spent a long and brilliant life in acts of public and private philanthropy? 'Tis true he lives in England, was rarely in his life in Ireland, never in Mohill. Could he be blamed for this? Could he live in two countries at once?" (128)

The scornful tone of Trollope's description takes much from Edgeworth's biting portrayals and Lever's mocking depiction of Owen Leslie in *St Patrick's Eve* (1845).

If the *Macdermots* gives voice to Trollope's frustration with the lack of justice available to the majority Catholic underclass in Ireland, *The Kelly's and the O'Kelly's* offers a more optimistic rewriting of the earlier work. The novel revisits many of the legal issues raised in the *Macdermots* and marries the judgments offered by the enactment of a local, improvised system of justice with a wider vision of equity suggested through this fictional work. If, in the *Macdermots*, Thady's destiny is determined by an informer's false words, his sister's refusal to speak, and by his own loose, incautious words, in *The Kellys and the O'Kellys*, it is the violent threats uttered by the villain, Barry Lynch against his sister, rather than his actual deeds, that bring about his undoing. Lynch's punishment is enforced by the local community leaders: the Protestant Landlord, the Catholic Doctor, and the Anglican clergyman – and it is shown to be thoroughly deserved. It also carries the narrator's endorsement even if it rides roughshod over legal niceties.

The legal thread – and the battle, ultimately for land – is a key element in the novel. This is underlined in the opening chapter which features Daniel O'Connell's trial for conspiracy in Dublin as witnessed by Martin Kelly. At the same time, Trollope sympathetically portrays Martin Kelly as a representative of a consolidating Catholic farmer class as well as "a staunch Repealer" who "had gone as far as Galway, and Athlone, to be present at the Monster Repeal Meetings" (6) and who showed "patriotism by paying a year's subscription in advance to the *Nation* newspaper" (37). However, the issue of repeal returns only sporadically in the novel and is not nearly as important as the theme of Ribbonism was in the more politically engaged *The Macdermots*. This is because Trollope had sympathy for the motives that lay behind the demands for land reform but no time for the calls for Repeal.

If the *Macdermots* closed on a hopeless note, describing a country blighted with violence, informing, distrust, and injustice, in his second novel, Trollope offers instead, an imagined, wished-for Ireland, a vision of a place where the industrious are rewarded, where landlord and tenants can cooperate, where social progress and a modicum of justice is possible, and where the community knows how to deal with those who do not play to the rules.

But this, to an extent, was an escapist vision written during the ravages of famine, a topic Trollope would eventually take on twelve years later in 1859 in *Castle Richmond*, at times a politically upsetting and even morally offensive work. If the concern of the first two novels was to somehow do justice to the Irish of all social levels, here Trollope's principal concern is to stridently defend British administration of the country during the Famine. One of the key themes of *Castle Richmond* and of the series of letters he wrote earlier in the *Examiner* in defence of British Famine policy is that of the limits of charity, of philanthropy. And while it is easy to condemn him for heartlessness, he does pose a question which is important today: How best can problems of hunger, homelessness, starvation, famine be addressed by those who are fortunate to live in comfort? Is it wrong to argue for complex long-term economic change which will not, however, offer much immediate succour? In our own times of austerity these are not irrelevant questions.

Although *Castle Richmond* masquerades as a love story, what remains with the reader are the sporadically described realities of Famine Ireland that ultimate linger long after the humdrum romantic plot has been forgotten. As Stephen Gwynn commented, the Famine descriptions bear

> the stamp not of invention but of dreadful reminiscence. Trollope had evidently seen that ravenous glare somewhere in his comings and goings. ... *Castle Richmond* is the *locus classicus* in literature for description of the Irish famine; for it renders not only the facts of destitution but the state of mind among those who were not destitute, reproduced with a simplicity that makes one rub one's eyes. (Gwynn 77)

The narrative offers a heartrending description when Herbert, the protagonist, enters an unfurnished cabin and finds there a mother dressed in "some rag of clothing", seated on the wet earth, darkness, a child in her arms. It is extraordinary how this vision of impending death slowly takes shape before the eyes of Herbert and of the reader:

> But as his eyes became used to the light he saw her eyes gleaming brightly through the gloom. They were very large and bright as they turned round upon him while he moved – large and bright, but with a dull, unwholesome brightness, – a brightness that had in it none of the light of life.
>
> … Her rough short hair hung down upon her back, clotted with dirt, and the head and face of the child which she held was covered with dirt and sores. On no more wretched object, in its desolate solitude, did the eye of man ever fall. (358)

From a writer who underlined Irish injustices in his previous two novels, lambasting the Anglo-Irish for their lack of responsibility and the English for their lack of interest, a reader might well have expected a similar denunciation as to the causes of this lamentable state of affairs. Instead we get a generalization as to the devastating effects of famine as seen throughout the country:

> In those days there was a form of face which came upon the sufferers when their state of misery was far advanced, and which was a sure sign that their last stage of misery was nearly run. The mouth would fall and seem to hang, the lips at the two ends of the mouth would be dragged down, and the lower parts of the cheeks would fall as though

> they had been dragged and pulled. There were no signs of acute agony when this phasis of countenance was to be seen, none of the horrid symptoms of gnawing hunger by which one generally supposes that famine is accompanied. The look is one of apathy, desolation, and death. (358)

Herbert does not know what to do and rather uselessly offers coins and promises to send help. But, as the narrator notes, "when the succour came it was all too late, for the mother and the two children never left the cabin till they left it together, wrapped in their workhouse shrouds" (362). Trollope is not afraid to look directly at the hunger and starvation but, very differently to Dickens, whom he parodied as "Mr Popular Sentiment", he admits to the inevitability of the sympathetic and charitable reaction to such awful suffering while hoping to instill in his readers a sense of the greater necessity for an economical response (rather than a short-term charitable one which more often than not is of greater benefit to the giver and his conscience than it is to the receiver). He confronts the reader with these sketches, not to elicit easy sympathy, nor to turn his gaze on Famine victims for aesthetic ends; rather he hopes to take the reader beyond sympathy and to take a sterner stand, a position based on economics. Just as it seemed for a time that no kindly intervention could save Herbert and his family from ruin – so too the Irish must submit to the omniscient justice that has handed down such a tough but ultimately improving sentence upon them. No social class is spared, all must learn their lesson and ultimately rejoice "that the idle, genteel class has been cut up root and branch" and that the poor peasant "has risen from his bed of suffering a better man" (68). But what about the peasant who does not rise from suffering? Necessary collateral damage? Just as it pains Mr Prendergast to bring so harsh a judgment on people like the Fitzgeralds who deserve better, so too it troubles Trollope to deliver such a severe verdict on the Irish in his novel: "It was sad and piteous. Stern and hard as was the man who pronounced this doom, nevertheless the salt tear collected in his eyes and blinded him as he looked upon the anguish which his judgment had occasioned" (216).

The fact is, however, that Herbert and his family *are* rescued from what seems like a certain doom while huge numbers of the starving Irish poor are not. The Fitzgeralds *are* saved because of the intervention, not of providence, but of an act of justice which sees the English conspirators and blackmailers being found out and rightful land ownership being reasserted. No such just reprieve is possible for the mass of Famine victims depicted in the narrative. Despite its attempt to establish a parallel between the family plot and the national calamity, ultimately, because of its insistence on the fatalistic economic-providentialist reading of the Famine, the novel only renders full justice to its privileged protagonists. Despite the insistence on the long-term economic solution, Trollope ultimately asserts that, given the incontrovertible abundance of suffering and death, all that could be done was done and all that can be done is to argue that it is God's will or worse that the "extermination" was somehow necessary:

> Change is good: It is with thorough rejoicing, almost with triumph, that I declare that the idle, genteel class has been cut up root and branch, has been driven forth out of its

> holding into the wide world, and has been punished with the penalty of extermination. The poor cotter suffered sorely under the famine, and under the pestilence which followed the famine; but he, as a class, has risen from his bed of suffering a better man. He is thriving as a labourer either in his own country or in some newer – for him better – land to which he has emigrated. He, even in Ireland, can now get eight and nine shillings a-week easier and with more constancy than he could get four some fifteen years since. But the other man has gone, and his place is left happily vacant. (68)

There is a dangerous blindness in this cynical extrapolation which attempts to justify the horror by claiming that the country is, a decade later, on a sounder economic footing. Trollope is guilty here of what might be generously described as effecting a willful disconnect between the piteous suffering to which he is a reliable witness, and its causes. He fails to accept the logical conclusions of what he describes and absolves those who were in positions of responsibility. The justice that he evoked and sought for Ireland and the poorer Irish in *The Macdermots of Ballycloran* is reduced here to justice for the Anglo-Irish while the starving natives are left with little more than pity, pathos, and the camouflage of Providence, which is used to justify the economic absurdities of Ireland in the Famine years.

A second major element of Trollope's involvement with Ireland is to be found in his English novels and stories set in England, but featuring a variegated collection of Irish characters in major and minor roles. The most famous is the sensitively drawn Phineas Finn, who stands out against a tradition of English stereotyping, and is a properly individualized Irish character seen developing throughout the long course of the Palliser novels which cover several decades of private and professional life.[1] But there are many other noteworthy characters, such as the loud, objectionable Mrs. Greene in the story "The man who kept his money in a box" (*Tales of All Countries*) whose Irishness is conveyed only through her "considerable brogue superinduced by her energy" (*Complete Shorter Fiction* 253). Another Irish virago, Mistress Morony, plays a cameo in *The Struggles of Brown, Jones Robinson*, a short novel, published in the *Cornhill* in 1861 and 1862. Onesiphorus Dunn, a more positive if still minor Irish character is to be found in *The Last Chronicle of Barset* where he appears as a 'stout gentleman' who is "usually called Siph by his intimate friends." A likeable freeloader, Dunn is "an Irishman, living on the best of everything in the world, with apparently no fortune of his own, and certainly never earning anything." Although a figure of almost no consequence, Trollope cannot resist fleshing out his Irish character:

> He did not borrow money, and he did not encroach. He did like being asked out to dinner, and he did think that they to whom he gave the light of his countenance in town owed him the return of a week's run in the country. He neither shot, nor hunted, nor fished, nor read, and yet he was never in the way in any house. He did play billiards, and whist, and croquet – very badly. He was a good judge of wine, and would occasionally condescend to look after the bottling of it on behalf of some very intimate friend. (546)

1 I have written extensively about Finn (and his foil Laurence Fitzgibbon) in *Writing the Frontier. Anthony Trollope between Britain and Ireland*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015, 138-174.

The marginal literary Irishman, Mr Molloy, whom we encounter in "A Turkish Bath" (*Editor's Tales*) is far less social adept but offers (among other things) a far more complex window on Trollope's complicated relationship with the Irish. He is depicted as trying (and failing) to make his way as a writer in London (as Trollope himself did before his move to Ireland) in a story that hints at minority issues that were risky for Trollope to treat in fiction, most prominently, Irishness and homosexuality. Narrated by an unnamed editor, the story tells of his encounter with Molloy in a Turkish bath and of their subsequent meetings at the editor's office during which Mr. Molloy unsuccessfully attempts to have some of his articles published. Resolution comes when the editor visits Mr Molloy's home and is informed of his "madness" by his hardworking wife.

The depictions of both the Turkish Bath and of the Irishman's state of undress suggest a sexually ambiguous, border-line situation. Turkish baths had only recently been introduced into Britain and Ireland by the Scottish diplomat and politician David Urquhart, who had been greatly impressed by the system of dry hot-air baths in use in Spain, Morocco and in the Ottoman Empire, and had described them in his *The Pillars of Hercules* (1850). But they were controversial. In choosing to locate his story in the Jermyn Street Turkish Baths, built under Urquhart's direction, Trollope would have been very conscious of the lively contemporary debate about the physical and moral benefits or risks of the baths that he describes with "delicious wonder." He was well aware of the exotic aura of the sauna, a semi-respectable twilight arena for middle-class men to meet and enjoy the attention of what the narrator describes as "those Asiatic slaves who administer to our comfort" (*Complete Shorter Fiction* 516). While most users were respectably married Victorian gentlemen, a minority would have been attracted by the Sauna's Oriental (a by-word for homosexual) allure.

A detailed sketch is given of the gentlemen's bathing house, with close-ups of the semi-naked men, their towels and seating arrangements:

> some there are who carry it under the arm, – simply as a towel; but these are they who, from English perversity, wilfully rob the institution of that picturesque orientalism which should be its greatest charm. A few are able to wear the article as a turban, and that no doubt should be done by all who are competent to achieve the position. We have observed that men who can do so enter the bathroom with an air and are received there with a respect which no other arrangement of the towel will produce. (515)

The narrator acknowledges that it is "not every man who can carry a blue towel as a turban, and look like an Arab in the streets of Cairo, as he slowly walks down the room in Jermyn Street with his arms crossed on his naked breast", but concludes "that the second towel should be trailed. The effect is good, and there is no difficulty in the trailing which may not be overcome" (515).

The sauna was also seen to offer protection against what Teresa Breathnach calls "the harried and polluted streets" to middle-class men who believed "that cleanliness was central to the fight against both physical and moral decline, and ultimately, against the threat of the "great unwashed" (Breathnach 164). This protective screen

is violated by the unwanted intrusion of the cigar-smoking Irishman whose very presence would have conjured up images of dirty, diseased, dying and dead Irish from the Famine, still present in the Victorian collective memory at the time of this story (1869).

Noting that "men do depend much on their outward paraphernalia", the reader is encouraged to pay close attention to clothes codes, to observe the "stout, middle-aged gentleman clad in vestments somewhat the worse for wear, and to our eyes particularly noticeable by reason of the tattered condition of his gloves" (514). The narrator's social superiority to the down-at-heel Irishman is underlined in his comment that a tattered glove is "the surest sign of a futile attempt at outer respectability" and in his asking if there is "an editor whose heart has not been softened by the feminine tattered glove" before stressing that in "this instance the tattered glove was worn by a man." The digression about the "feminine" glove suggests that there is something sexually "different" about this Irishman whose cigar he nonetheless accepts. While a cigar is sometimes just a cigar (to appropriate Freud) in this context in which much is necessarily left unsaid, it is not outlandish to intuit that it suggests more.

The day after the encounter, the editor receives a visit from Molloy in his office and notes the same tattered glove and the same plump middle-aged man who is "tattered" (shabby, worn, disordered) not only in appearance but also in his behaviour. In what he calls "the little ruse" of tricking the editor, Molloy behaves shabbily, but beneath there is a more complex disorder, his "madness" (which is hard to credit given his sane determination in seeking out the editor). The nature of the disorder is not resolved in the story. The early sections of the narrative suggest that his presumed homosexuality – which seems to be what the editor/narrator initially finds attractive about him – is the cause of his ruin, but many of the later parts and especially the descriptions of his wife and children, and his wife's blunt assessment of her husband's condition – "Her husband was a madman" (529), run against this initial impression. Trollope shies away from pushing the homosexual option and concludes the story in terms of the Irish journalist's mental derangement. This is to duck the issue but clearly Trollope felt he could not push it any further. This ending comes, however, only after awkward unanswered questions have been raised for the reader to ponder.

What the story stages is a veiled study of homosexual desire in a homoerotic *locus par excellence*. It also presents a surprising reversal of gender roles. Where we usually expect the marriage of a strong Englishman with a weak Irish woman – a commonplace allegory of union in generations of Irish novels – here we find a feminized Irishman utterly dependent on his masculinized English wife. She is the "strong hearty-looking" domestic breadwinner "with that mixture in her face of practical kindness with severity in details, which we often see in strong-minded women who are forced to take upon themselves the management and government of those around them" (529). Mr Molloy exemplifies Ernest Renan's description of the Irish as an "es-

sentially feminine race" (Renan 8), and Trollope here is playing with the ideas about the Celts and the Saxons that were being enunciated by Matthew Arnold in articles in the *Cornhill Magazine* (where the two writers often appeared in the same issues) and later collected as *On the Study of Celtic Literature*. Molloy's wife, on the other hand, incarnates the typically "Saxon" qualities he lacks. But this scenario is further complicated by the English editor's evident attraction to the semi-naked Irishman and his "peculiar and captivating grace" (517).

At a key moment in their exchange, Trollope has the narrator slip from the "we" of public decorum into the private first-person singular. This singular form usage is unusual in a story pointedly told in the plural, a choice which Trollope justified in the *incipit*: **"**our readers, we hope, will, without a grudge, allow us the use of the editorial we. We doubt whether the story could be told at all in any other form" (514). Why could it not have been told in another form? It is odd that for the bulk of the narrative Trollope eschews a first or third-person singular and thus a more intimate, layered and complex narrative voice and presence and relies on the impersonal "we." He subsequently chooses to disrupt the cohesive "we" relationship established between narrator and reader presumably because in attempting to deal with sexual ambiguity and homosexuality he felt such taboo subjects had to be placed at a distance from a first-person singular narration that might have been more clearly connected with Trollope himself. Thus the author/narrator establishes his credentials as part of the conservative "manly" majority of his readers, only to subtly undermine this position by the shift from the collegial "we" to the individual "I" of prohibited desire. This happens twice: firstly when the narrator realizes the stranger is Irish: "I detected just a hint of an Irish accent in his tone; but if so the dear brogue of his country, which is always delightful to me " (517); secondly when he describes Molloy offering him a cigar and then comments on his attractiveness: "I accepted his offer, and when we had walked round the chamber to a light provided for the purpose we reseated ourselves. His manner of moving about the place was so good that I felt it to be a pity that he should ever have a rag on more than he wore at present" (518).

On these two occasions the editor uses the "I" form to express admiration for Molloy's Irishness and his sexualised physical presence. These two moments are out of sync with the stiff-upper-lip of the first-person plural narrative. It is as if the first-person plural voice functions like the much-talked-of clothes in the story – it presents the public man with his decorous and manly public thoughts while the first-person singular corresponds to the naked man, and is used to communicate private and forbidden thoughts. Society is built on the decorous third-person but beneath the surface lurk very real desires and thoughts that subvert the public front and which Trollope, as far as he believes is possibly without censure, attempts to explore:

> "And yet," said we, "men do depend much on their outward paraphernalia."
>
> "Indeed and they do," said our friend. "And why? Because they can trust their tailors when they can't trust themselves." (517)

Trusting convention allows society to keep functioning according to Victorian mores but occasionally, and this story is a good example of it, Trollope allows a ray of light to fall on alternative lives and lifestyles, counter discourses and on the complications that lie below the surface.

Quite independent from whatever sexual ambiguities are present here, the fact remains that the editor can only appreciate the Irishman as an individual when he sees him out of context, literally "in the flesh." Repeatedly in his fiction, Trollope returns to the difficulties encountered by Irish writers (and Irish politicians) in making themselves heard in England. And as someone who experienced similar rejection himself, he is sympathetic.

Trollope's more complex stories (Irish and not) are written with a knowing reader in mind, one with the capacity to read between the lines of his risky counter-hegemonic narratives and to find much lurking within its shadows. In this sense, the Irish stories are representative of all his output and offer significant evidence of a writer who is not afraid to be indelicate (something he was accused of by Thackeray when the latter rejected another "risky" and partly Irish story – "Mrs General Talboys" – for *Cornhill*) nor to challenge the "squeamishness" of his times. So it is wrong to see Trollope as a resolute champion of the status quo, a comforter to the conservative, an un-conflicted imperialist; fairness impels us to focus on his capacity to swim against the current on a variety of political, social, gender and race issues. Which is not to say that he is not also innocent of throwaway or sometimes more considered stances – enunciated in private correspondence but also in his fiction – which undermine much of this. In reality, Trollope was an unconventional figure, a wavering, often conflicted public and private man who vacillates between endorsing commonplace views, but also one capable of offering unexpected counter-readings of a variety of subjects, including Ireland.

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