Abstract and Keywords
This chapter discusses some of the stages of the evolution of the 1770s neologism into the timeless language of Augustan elitism. In this chapter, several critical literatures, writings, and essays to the Protestant Ascendancy, system of land tenure, the Emancipation Period, and the Irish Church are discussed. Among the literary products discussed here are the works of Tresham Dames Gregg, Sir William Scott, and Le Fanu. In addition, several critical essays and novels are mentioned.

Keywords: 1770s, neologism, Augustan elitism, Protestant Ascendancy, Emancipation Period, Irish Church, Tresham Dames Gregg, Sir William Scott, Le Fanu

1. From Emancipation to Rebellion
   Gabriel pointed to the statue, on which lay patches of snow. Then he nodded familiarly to it and waved his hand.— Good-night, Dan, he said gaily.

   (James Joyce)
The Act of Union achieved two principal and perhaps contradictory ends—it removed Irish parliamentary representation from a separate institution in Dublin to Westminster where all Members of Parliament for the British Isles were now united together; it placed the discussion of distinctively Irish issues in the context of an assembly where Irish representatives were necessarily a permanent minority. The first consequence is usually commemorated with some comment on the disappearance of resident dignitaries from Dublin which declined to the status of a provincial town. It is important to qualify this implied condemnation of the Irish MPs' remoteness from their constituents by emphasizing that, on the crucial issue of Catholic Emancipation, a majority of the Irish members had been in favour of relief long before Westminster conceded the issue in 1829. Majorities at Westminster had priorities other than Irish ones, and British governments had to consult the complex politics of an industrialized nation before adjusting some anomaly in Irish local affairs. Behind the intricacies of party politics, and the deeply reactionary mood inherited from the Napoleonic period, the question of Catholic Emancipation challenged a newly aggressive evangelical element in British Protestantism.
Apart from Emancipation, the history of Ireland in the 1820s and after has been primarily written with specific reference to land occupation and agrarian problems, with the tithes a largely Catholic tenantry paid to Protestant rectors forming a contentious link between the two agitations. The literature of the period is best remembered in the fiction of the brothers John and Michael Banim and of Gerald Griffin. Their cautious attention to the values of a depressed Catholic middle class is characteristic of one skein in the pattern of Daniel O'ConnelPs long campaign for emancipation. A need to trim the material so as to soothe the excited temper of the times is often visible in their work. The result is often at once tendentious and evasive; one has little sense of a distinctive and coherent literature in the 1820s, merely a dossier of workmanlike illustrations. This is not to say that the disturbed decade leading up to emancipation was without influence. Indeed the immediate cause and seat of the agitation associated with ‘Captain Rock’—gross mismanagement and violence on the Courtenay estate in County Limerick—will reappear in a subversive and vestigial form in Sheridan Le F ami’s 1864 novel, Uncle Silas. A comparison of John Banim and Le Fanu might suggest that the historical influence is most creatively absorbed when it is tensely drawn across a long span of years and when it links conditions which are acknowledged as altering. Immediacy, a consciousness of living in important times, can produce a literature which is totally non-reflexive.
Though the reforms of the 1790s had given Catholics the right to vote, and the 1829 Act gave them the right to sit in parliament, local government remained essentially closed. A conservative historian has described the hundred-odd Irish municipal corporations as ‘exclusively and arrogantly protestant … with petty peculation and jobbery, bigotry and incompetence as their outstanding characteristics’.\(^2\) It was of course the Corporation of Dublin who had given the lead in 1792 with its resolutions on the theme of Protestant Ascendancy. The larger context of the post-assembly debates in William Street was European revolution, and at the beginning of the revolutionary 1840s the Corporation of Dublin was once again the focus for a discussion of Protestant Ascendancy. History occurs twice, we are told, first as tragedy and (p.171) then as farce: in 1840 our witness to the Ascendancy debates is not Edmund Burke with his scrupulously ironic analysis of language, but The Reverend Tresham Dames Gregg.\(^3\)

Prior to the Irish Municipal Act of 1840, the peculiar character of the corporations created a distinctive area in Irish society where Catholics experienced the weight of the old mastership. Responding to the ‘Captain Rock’ agitations in the early 1820s, Thomas Moore distinguished carefully between the anxieties of Catholics living in the Ulster countryside ‘surrounded by armed Orangemen’ and the anxieties of ‘the Catholic inhabitants of towns and cities, whom the spirit of Corporation Ascendancy haunts through all the details of life’.\(^4\) Back in the 1790s Moore had been within an inch of involvement in radical, even revolutionary, politics, and he remained no friend of the Irish Establishment. His student days were ‘the glorious days of Protestant jobbing … the Golden Age of the Ascendancy when jobs and abuses flourished in unchecked luxuriance’.\(^5\) Moore effectively retains a perspective on Protestant Ascendancy which acknowledges its recent, urban, and bourgeois origins. In contrast, we may look at The Rockite, an evangelical and fictionalized tract by Charlotte Elizabeth: here the object of Catholicism is defined:

To overthrow the abhorred ascendancy of Protestantism, and once more to reign unrivalled and unchecked, became the sole object of that aspiring apostacy, which would, as God, ever sit in the temple of God, shewing itself to be a god.\(^6\)
What is evidenced here is not so much the valorization of the phrase, Protestant Ascendancy, as the logic by which Henry Grattan's assumption of possible universal salvation for Catholics and Protestants alike is reduced to an exclusivist (p. 172) evangelicalism. The comparison between Moore and Charlotte Elizabeth is revealing, not of some innate sectarian distinction, but of Moore's resistance to Protestant Ascendancy as ideology and the novelist's indulgence of it.

The Famine of 1845–7, and the rebellion of 1848, are the dominant events of the decade in Irish history. Yet both can only be understood in the context of political assumptions which permitted them: Whig laissez-faire economics contributed as much (or rather, as little) to the fate of the Irish population as the potato blight, and revulsion against Daniel O'ConnellPs collaboration with English Whiggery played its part in creating the Young Ireland group and William Smith O'BrienPs rebellion. Naturally, the political context cannot be appreciated solely in Irish terms: the 1840s are also the decade of Chartism in Britain and revolution in Europe. The restlessness of working people in England and France was not without parallel in Ireland, and though there was little prospect of a coherent working-class movement emerging in Dublin or Belfast, other political elements were keen to bind the working population to them. Industry in Dublin had suffered a decline, and the Reform Act of 1832 (while it fell far short of universal franchise) had the effect of bringing parliamentary electioneering within the experience of a substantial proportion of the citizenry. O'ConnellPs movement to repeal the Act of Union, launched in July 1840, provided a grand cause requiring a heightened rhetoric of all the protagonists.
Jacqueline Hill has written of the manner in which Protestants among the working class declined to accept the Repealers' arguments that the Union had caused the city's reduced prosperity. Though conservative newspapers were primarily directed towards a middle-class readership, The Warder took pains to report the activities of Protestant working-class groups. Of these the most important was the Dublin Protestant Operatives Association, founded by Tresham Dames Gregg. Since September 1840, Sheridan Le Fanu had had a share in the direction both of The Warder and of The Statesman. The Warder was a solid, respectable weekly paper in which Le Fanu retained an interest until 1870, whereas The Statesman—in part owned by T. D. Gregg—was flamboyant and aggressive. It ceased publication in 1846, though Le Fanu had not written for it in its last twelve months.

As the creation of Gregg, The Statesman became the principal voice of the Dublin Protestant Operatives Association. In 1840, Gregg proudly reported the differences between his paper and the conservative press generally:

> When The Statesman commenced its career, it avowed Protestant Ascendancy as its guiding principle. Some of the soi disant Protestant newspapers laughed us to scorn—told us that we were behind the spirit of the age. We should be glad to see which of them would venture to murmur against us now—which of them would presume to say that we are unreasonable in looking for all that is demanded by high principle. The question has, in truth, made way. If a proof of this be required, we need only refer to the complaint of Mr. his anti-union projects, the existence of O'Connell—no inferior testimony on such a subject—that gentleman alleges as the most effectual barrier to a strong 'Protestant Ascendancy' party. He is right.
The strong Protestant Ascendancy party was not, of course, orthodox Toryism but the network of fringe groups which had sprung up in the 1830s. The causes of this recrudescence of Protestant Ascendancy as a crusading political force are many—Catholic Emancipation, Tithe War, the suppression of the Orange Order, Melbourne's reforming government, and Thomas Drummond's scrupulous regime as Under-Secretary (1835–40). O'ConnelPs success in bargaining within the conventions of the united parliament added to the Irish Tories' sense of remoteness from Westminster. For the middle class, the Dublin Metropolitan Conservative Association provided one outlet for their disillusion and ardour, with Gregg's Dublin Protestant Operatives Association directing itself to the lower classes. Tension between these bodies was noted by others, apart from Gregg. The difference was one of manners as much as theory: Le Fanu writing home to his father complained of the embarrassment he felt in being involved with Gregg's paper:

My vote is overruled by the other two [proprietors] ... proposed converting the paper into a merely political one, but was overruled. /proposed changing it into a staunch Church paper but was overruled. I have no power over the Statesman and wash my hands of all responsibility for its tone in point of style & of feeling.10

Manners and theory are not absolutely distinct of course. Gregg's harangues to the faithful masses may have offended the son of the Dean of Emly, but the real grounds of their dispute were political. Le Fanu believed that a paper should either devote itself to politics or to Church affairs: the combination necessarily veered towards the vulgarly enthusiastic—as with Gregg's accusations of fornication brought against a Catholic priest and his attempt to 'rescue' a convert-novice from a convent.11 This is not to suggest that Le Fanu accepted any separation of Church and State, far from it: but he expected a certain decorum of public discussion.
Gregg’s notion of Protestant Ascendancy, if it offended Le Fanu, would have mortified Edmund Burke. Burke’s opponents in the Corporation of Dublin openly acknowledged the conjunction of ‘the security of property in this kingdom’ and ‘the Protestant ascendancy in our happy constitution’. The Ascendancy was defined by reference to specific political and administrative priorities and privileges. Gregg’s definitions, however, accentuated the Protestantism (p.175) of Protestant Ascendancy in a series of published letters addressed to the Corporation of his day:

My Lord Mayor and Brethren - ‘PROTESTANT ASCENDANCY!’ - A sore point this with the popular Conservative politicians of the day; they don’t know what to make of it. The age is so imbued with mock philosophy —this has become so much the standard that regulates every thing, and the thought of God and of religion is so much driven from us, that the man who confesses himself an advocate for Protestant Ascendancy is looked upon as infatuate, and laughed at as behind the intelligence of the times.

Still the principle of Protestant Ascendancy is a sound principle which must and will be acted on. How?—it is impossible! ‘All things are possible to them that believe’—‘By the help of my God I will leap over the wall.’ Why, what can poor abandoned Protestants do? Revolutionise the age make the current of popular opinion run in the right channel, and pour out large blessings on the world, ‘not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.’
It is absolutely essential that there should be sound views on this subject. So long as the nonsense which exists on it at present has place, so long as we find Protestants meally-mouthed about it, so long as we find such worthies as Sir George Murray and Alderman Warren, in the plentitude of their good nature coming forward, and saying, ‘we don't require any ascendancy over others’—so long nothing good will be effected. No! no! Let these excellent personages be well assured that the old Protestants who made ascendancy their rallying cry in the time of William the Third, were neither fools nor blind—that we may suspect our philosophy when it compels us to the adoption of a language so very different from theirs.

I can, however, justify these gentlemen. I know that in their own sense of the words they mean a right thing. What they mean to express is this, ‘we seek not to act the part of tyrants; we renounce the idea of any unreasonable domination over our Roman Catholic countrymen.’ They conceive that such is meant by ‘Protestant Ascendancy.’ Such an ascendancy they abjure, and so do I, and so does every Christian Protestant. The most strenuous advocates of the principle would abhor such an application of it. No; this were its abuse. In the renunciation of this, we agree with the worthy Alderman and the gallant General, and we only find fault with their language because it is capable of being mistaken.

Still our cry is ‘Protestant Ascendancy!’\textsuperscript{13}
Thus on the eve of their eclipse, the city fathers are exhorted to hold tenaciously to ascendancy, in the name of a Williamite rallying cry. ‘Unreasonable domination’ is abjured but the military triumph of Protestantism is strategically recalled. Gregg opposes any democratic reform of the Corporation, and offers instead an amalgam of evangelical fervour and pseudo-historical allusion. The ‘Golden Age’ to which Moore mockingly alluded as the period of Protestant jobbing is pressed back in time: on this occasion not only to include the eighteenth century in to to but also to associate itself with the origins of the Whig Revolution. Hand-in-hand with this sweeping historical revision, Gregg presents his own definition of a contemporary Protestant Ascendancy, by which he means ‘the making of the Word of God, as it ought to be, supreme in the councils of the state’, with the effect of overturning O’Connell’s ‘Apostate Church’. It is hardly necessary to add that the Corporation was reformed, and indeed O’Connell became the first Catholic lord mayor of the city since 1688.
In terms of party politics Gregg’s influence may have been negligible, but his significance cannot be measured solely in terms of immediate impact. The messianism so often attributed to Catholic nationalism in later years is latent in his Protestant war-cry. Basically, it utilizes that rare sense of nationalism, meaning the doctrine ‘that certain nations (as contrasted with individuals) are the object of divine election’. If a charge of this kind may be levelled at Patrick Pearse with his ideas of blood sacrifice, and at some latter-day saints, it is entirely explicit in Gregg’s *Protestant Ascendancy Vindicated and National Regeneration Through the Instrumentation of National Religion Urged* … For a nineteenth-century Irish Protestant Unionist to invoke national regeneration he had need of a considerably long perspective on history. The ‘Protestant Nation’ of Grattan’s phrase had surrendered its identity in 1800, and increasingly the pace of Irish politics had been determined by Catholic (p.177) problems if not always Catholic energies. By referring to the Catholic Church as apostate, Charlotte Elizabeth and The Reverend Mr Gregg sought to emphasize that the original church of Saint Patrick could be identified theologically with the Established Church of Ireland. In this sense the Church of Ireland was, so to speak, aboriginal and national, and Catholicism a series of aberrations provoking the sixteenth-century Reformation. In the context of the 1840s, the essence of the argument was its anti-democratic assumptions, hence Gregg’s assiduous attention to the emotions of Protestant operatives. Indeed, Gregg was not so much anti-democratic as anti-political: the ideology he proffered repeatedly substitutes Biblical quotation for social analysis or documentation. In *Protestant Ascendancy*, for example, having defined that term as the word of God supreme in the councils of the state, he proceeds:

I call the attention, especially, of the humbler classes to the promises made by God himself to the nation which thus exalts and honours his Word. ‘It shall come to pass if thou shalt (i.e. as a nation) hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God …’

The quotation is taken from Deuteronomy 28: 1, and Gregg proceeds to quote *in extenso* all of God’s promises to Israel of material prosperity:
Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle.\textsuperscript{17}

Irish Protestants, then, are identified with the children of Israel: the Williamite settlement is their promised land, ‘and he shall bless thee in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. The Lord shall establish thee an holy people unto himself …’,\textsuperscript{18} Apocalyptic language of this kind has many precedents. The distinctive feature of Gregg’s rhetoric is his presentation of social reward in return for an abjuration of social action. And the underlying strategy is to promulgate a false consciousness of history in which Saint Patrick, the Old Testament prophets, William of Orange, and Gregg himself (speaking God’s lines) are conjoined. To this alliance, other Protestants rather than other operatives were cordially invited.
Gregg’s exhortation to the doomed exclusivist Corporation may be unmemorable in the university seminar, though it will sound familiar enough to many in Ulster gospel-halls. Sociologists and partisans have striven to describe the emergence of a reactionary Protestant working class, and the task is best left to them. But the process of assimilating the Whig Revolution to the rhetoric of nineteenth-century Protestant Ascendancy has specifically literary consequences. Writing in 1934, W. B. Yeats spoke of four bells, ‘four deep tragic notes, equally divided in time, so symbolising the war that ended in the Flight of the Earls; the Battle of the Boyne; the coming of French influence among our peasants; the beginning of our own age ...’ William’s victory at the Boyne led to ‘the establishment of a Protestant Ascendancy which was to impose upon Catholic Ireland, an oppression copied in all details from that imposed upon the French Protestants’. In the following paragraph Yeats utters his more familiar tribute to ‘the Protestant Ascendancy with its sense of responsibility’, and the shift in tone is implicitly a shift in historical focus: oppression is acknowledged in the early eighteenth century, responsibility is posited for the late. Here, Yeats may have taken his cue direct from Grattan himself: addressing the Irish parliament in February 1793, he noted three policies towards Catholics— ‘the first was that of Cromwell—extermination by operation of the sword; the second was that of Ann—extermination by operation of the laws; and the third was your’s—which allowed them a qualified existence!’ The process by which Protestant Ascendancy is extended backwards from 1792 to embrace the age of Swift is particularly ironic if we take Swift’s excoriating dictum on Queen Anne’s Irish viceroy as evidence, ‘He is a Presbyterian in politics, and an atheist in religion, but he chuses at present to whore with a Papist.’ The multiple innuendo, a mixture one might say of Augustan paradox and hydrochlorate, reaches its most extended form in Swift when he characterizes the Duke of Marlborough, hero supreme of triumphant Whiggery, in his History of the Four Last Years of the Queen.
When Tresham Gregg eulogizes the victor of Blenheim he runs the risk of a thunderbolt from Swift’s ghost in Saint Patrick’s Cathedral. When he associates Protestant Ascendancy indiscriminately with King William, the Corporation, the eighteenth century, he creates a shapeless synthesis in which other imaginations may yet discern irony and order. Gregg’s uneasy partner on The Statesman, Sheridan Le Fanu, was already composing his early stories and novels at the time of the Irish Municipal Act: indeed, as a member of the Irish Metropolitan Conservative Association he was doubly active as radical conservative and as secret novelist. His first novel, The Cock and Anchor (1845), is set in Dublin in the last year of Thomas Wharton’s viceroyalty: Swift and Joseph Addison make brief appearances as foils to the genial, venial Wharton. If this is not Swift’s first appearance as fictional character, it is certainly an important early contribution to the mythic figure of Yeats’s pantheon. But, perhaps the most striking aspect of Le Fanu’s treatment of the early eighteenth century is his deployment of ‘ascendancy’ for a complex and ironic effect: conspiring Catholic Jacobites declare that

over-ridden, and despised, and scattered as we are, mercenaries and beggars abroad, and landless at home—still something whispers in my ear that there will come at last a retribution, and such a one as will make this perjured, corrupt, and robbing ascendancy a warning and a wonder to all after times.24
Le Fanu has chosen to exploit the anachronism of ascendancy meaning, in 1710, the governing elite in Ireland, and the motivation may well be connected with his recognition that in 1845 his own class was on the point of eclipse. For one of the symbolic implications of accepting ascendancy to do the work of aristocracy (albeit on behalf of a disguised bourgeoisie) is the attendant notion of a rising and falling pattern: the star which in the ascendant must fade or fall, the Protestant Ascendancy must be succeeded by some other social order. By Yeats’s day, the usage of ascendancy as elite was well established, but it is characteristic of his sensitivity to the inner dynamics of a word that he should ally his pride in ascendancy to a cyclical notion of history in which one order is succeeded by another in a perpetual pattern of rising and falling civilizations. Etymologically, as J. M. Synge noted in his reading of Trench’s *On the Study of Words*, ascendancy is derived from the language of astrology, and sardonically he summarized the discovery by noting that ascendancy involved a belief in astrology. Yeats, less satirical in his attitude to his ancestry, composed his own astrology in *A Vision*. That arcane philosophy speaks principally of world history, of the renaissance, and the loss of ‘unity of being’. Yet to a considerable extent it is facilitated by Yeats’s experience of the Anglo-Irish Protestant Ascendancy in the nineteenth century, the social experience of that elite, and the evolution of that linguistic term.

*The Cock and Anchor* is best approached as a late Irish contribution to the historical novel as founded and developed by Sir Walter Scott. The two-team structure of Jacobites and Williamites, with a hero and heroine drawn from opposing sides, the blending of violent incident and romance, preserve the outward appearance of the Scottish novel. But Le Fanu’s first exercise in fiction has also to be read in relation to his politics: accordingly, we find a species of ventriloquism in which the privations of eighteenth-century Catholics may be decoded as symbolizing the indignation of nineteenth-century middle-class Protestants. And this in keeping with the altered association of words, as between 1688 and 1840: Whiggery for the generation of Le Fanu’s fictional heroes was the Protestant Succession, the Penal Laws, Ascendancy: Whiggery for Le Fanu’s political associates was now closely allied with Catholicism, with the *hoi polloi* and detestable Dan O’Connell at their head. *The Cock and Anchor*, with its neglect of that
supernaturalism which had characterized Le Fanu's earlier short stories, with its posited union of Protestant and Catholic, accorded well with the attitudes of Young Ireland. Indeed Le Fanu's second novel, *Torlogh O'Brien*, concludes with two interdenominational weddings, while simultaneously the author was carried over into some collaboration with Young Irelanders such as Charles Gavan Duffy, Thomas Francis Meagher, and John Mitchel.\textsuperscript{25} The motion towards Young Ireland and nationalism was prompted by dread of further reform imposed by an English government, combined with outrage at British reactions to the Irish Famine. But there were necessarily reservations, and when Meagher and Mitchel, with William Smith O'Brien, became implicated in conspiracy, treason, and rebellion in 1848, Le Fanu's sense of self-betrayal was overwhelming. Instead of the harmonies and reconciliations of *The Cock and Anchor*, Le Fanu's fiction of 1848, the long three-part tale ‘Richard Marston’, is riddled with solitude and division.\textsuperscript{26} With this, we note also the re-emergence of the nervous supernaturalism which Le Fanu had purged from his first two novels. In Ireland 1848 brought to an end the minor renaissance of literature associated with Thomas Davis, James Clarence Mangan, and *The Nation*, a company with whom Yeats claimed a touching affinity. More significant, ultimately, however, was the foundation of the Encumbered Estates Court to begin the dismemberment of a landed estate system fatally shaken by the Famine and its consequences. The development of the Ascendancy as a cultural entity is closely related to the decline of landed estate.

(p.182) 2. Ubi Lapsus? Quid Feci? Sheridan Le Fanu as Subversive

the house, in its silence, seems to be contemplating the swell or fall of its own lawns.

(Elizabeth Bowen)\textsuperscript{27}
Between *Castle Rackrent* and *Ulysses* only one Irish novel approximates to a total apprehension of social reality, and given that its setting is Derbyshire its totality is necessarily problematic. *Uncle Silas* is in many ways flawed, but it nevertheless represents a bold inquiry into the nature of literary form and its bearing upon reality. Regarded as delinquent in the lists of respectable novels about castles and cabins set in a cloth of green, and consequently accommodated among the sensationalist productions of Wilkie Collins, Charles Reade, and Le Fanu himself at his more common second-best, *Uncle Silas* calls for analysis in less easily predictable terms. Its thorough-going symmetry, and hermetic completeness, has been established primarily by means of detailing Le Fanu’s structural use of Swedenborgian doctrine. Swedenborgianism, with its elaborate system of correspondences, aligns itself with allegory, and the present inquiry will concentrate on an account of how and why Le Fanu should choose to write in the allegorical mode in his finest fiction. However, allegory is itself in need of some restitution and a preliminary digression is in order.

In his magisterial study of German baroque tragedy, Walter Benjamin initiated a reassessment of the aesthetic status of allegory, which has not been sufficiently assimilated to other areas of European literature. Allegory had been relegated to the level of mere ciphering and deciphering by the romantic insistence on transcendence in the symbol: ‘even great artists and exceptional theoreticians, such as Yeats, still assume that allegory is a conventional relationship between an illustrative image and its abstract meaning.’ The priority, for Benjamin, was not simply the restoration of allegory to respectability as a technique, rather it was the elaboration of a comprehensive typology in which tragedy is distinguished from *trauerspiel*, myth from history, transcendence from immanence. Insisting on the dialectical nature of allegory in this typology, he speaks of its ‘worldly, historical breadth’:

> Whereas in the symbol destruction is idealised and the transfigured face of nature is fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption, in allegory the observer is confronted with the *fades hippocratica* of history as a petrified, primordial landscape.
Such speculations may appear to be remote from the birth pangs of Anglo-Irish literature. Yet, if we look forward to Yeats's ‘Purgatory’ or ‘The Words Upon the Window-Pane’, we will find the distinction between tragedy and *trauerspiel* may help to relate those plays to earlier Yeatsian drama. Furthermore, Patrick Diskin has pointed out resemblances between J. C. Mangan's translation of Zacharias Werner's ‘Der Vierundzwanzigste Februar’ in *The Dublin University Magazine* and Yeats's ‘Purgatory’—Werner's play is part of Benjamin's argument.\(^3\)

The culmination of this present inquiry will be an examination of the way in which ‘Purgatory’ succeeds in revealing the inauthenticity of the history its characters proclaim. One Irish antecedent to ‘Purgatory’, in its association of the Big House and Swedenborgian patterns, is *Uncle Silas*. And if we look back over the earlier history of Anglo-Irish literature, *The Absentee* stands out as an example of allegory rendered too palpable by the historical failure of the programme to which it referred. (One might offer the embarrassing comparison of Spenser's *Faery Queen* in which the allegory of Elizabethan *realpolitik* is transformed by the success of that *realpolitik.*)
Our principal focus on Le Fanu's allegory will be to examine the manner in which it assimilates and transforms the materials of history, and relates that history to other forms of order. It is significant that the sources are exceedingly diverse—Chateaubriand and 'Captain Rock'—for there is a formal logic to the mariner in which allegory deliberately seeks to incorporate such disparate elements. Benjamin speaks of 'the violence of the dialectical movement'\(^3\) in allegory; and, though he has in mind the plots of his baroque Trauerspiel, it is proper to consider this violence as a structural principle in allegorical forms. Dickens's novels, violent enough in their details, met much opposition from a neoclassicism which arrogates to itself an exclusive access to the Sublime. In being fully accepted as consummate art, they revealed a central and controlling dualism. It is often argued that the causes of Dickensian dualism were biographical, but the Anglo-Irish instance may be explored in less subjective terms. Client cultures tend to employ imitative forms, and do so for two reasons. First, by modelling their art upon that of the dominant 'mother' culture, they acknowledge the source of their identity and definition. In the heightened consciousness of a colonial society imitation tends to veer at times towards pastiche or even parody: thus, the second motive for the imitative nature of colonial literature is a need or ability to resist the imposition of identity. Irony binds the positive and negative elements of this stance: irony distinguishes the work of Swift, Sheridan, and Burke in the eighteenth century. In moving from Castle Rackrent to The Absentee we note the displacement of irony by a different mode of dual focus, which closely resembles allegory. And the impetus behind this altered literary practice of Maria Edgeworth's is her realization that Union had not achieved its object of dissolving Irish identity: that double-edged identity survived in ever more complex and overt forms of social practice. Closing the gap between Colambre and Nugent is not simply a matter of healing sectarian divisions: it is a longing to unite past and present, to transcend the conditions of social existence. In this problematic manner, the uneasy alliance of allegory and didactic is revealed. If Uncle Silas is unique among Irish novels appearing between Castle Rackrent and Ulysses in approaching what Georg Lukacs would term totality, it is because in Le Fanu's novel allegory flourishes untrammelled by fond didactic ambitions. Instead of such harmony in unity we have violent dialectic.
To test these speculations, let us begin with a single passage from *Uncle Silas* in which the narrator Maud is speaking of her father, Austin Ruthyn:

It was his wont to walk up and down thus, without speaking—an exercise which used to remind me of Chateaubriand’s father in the great chamber of the Chateau de Combourg. At the far end he nearly disappeared in the gloom, and then returning emerged for a few minutes, like a portrait with a background of shadow, and then again in silence faded nearly out of view.\(^{33}\)

What Maud has been reminded of is the following passage (translated) from Chateaubriand’s *Memoires d’outre tombe*:

My father would then set off on his walk, which would end only when it was time to go to bed. He was dressed in a white Petersham gown, or rather a sort of coat that I have seen only him wearing. His half-bald head was covered with a large white cap, held straight in position. As he walked about he would take himself away from the hearth, the vast room being so dimly lit by a single candle that he could no longer be seen: he was only heard still walking about in the shadows: then he would come back slowly towards the light, emerging little by little from the darkness like a ghost, with his white gown, his white cap, and his long pallid face.\(^{34}\)
Here too the narrator's father walks in a room so as to appear and disappear from and into the darkness. There is, however, a prominent element in Chateaubriand's account which is absent from Maud Ruthyn's. Indeed it is a integral part of the picturesque effect of the *Memoires*— the reiterated whiteness of the father's appearance. Readers of *Uncle Silas* will know that this element, though absent from the account of Austin Ruthyn, is insinuated repeatedly elsewhere in the novel—not in the description of the narrator's father but in that of her uncle. When she gives us her first impression of Silas, he is an 'apparition, drawn as it seemed in black and white'. Trying to sleep in Bartram-Haugh on that first night under her uncle's roof, she visualizes his face as 'ashy with a (p.186) pallor on which I looked with fear and pain'. In a crucial scene he is 'dressed in a long white morning gown ... with the white bandage pinned across his forehead ... \(^{35}\) Such cameos of Silas's whiteness and paleness could be multiplied by other citations. What is already evident is that Chateaubriand's pallid and perambulating father is reflected in *two* characters in *Uncle Silas*, Austin Ruthyn complying with the manner of walking in and out of the narrator's vision, his brother Silas carrying very many images of bloodless, pallid, white, and ghostly appearance.
We may conclude, therefore, that Le Fanu's allusion to *Memoires d'outre tombe* is not just simply the kind of casual name-dropping which flatters the reader's vanity. It is, however, less clear-cut than the acknowledgement of a debt or a source. The curious, vestigial presence of this borrowed image has its relevance for Chateaubriand also, for there were really two personalities in the author of the *Memoires*: on the one hand the astute politician who reverted to Christianity just at the right moment, and on the other, the poet and libertine. These polarities are reflected in the pious austerity of Austin Ruthyn, and the suspected criminality and licence of Silas. The structure of the novel as a whole is a vast series of symmetrical details, often dislocated from their immediate context but corresponding with details secreted elsewhere in the text. It is a two-part symmetry with Austin at Knowl ‘corresponding’ with Silas at Bartram-Haugh, with life continuing in death, rectitude revealed as guilt, truth replaced by conspiracy. Benjamin has summarized the conventional notion of allegory as a relation between an illustrative image (in the work of art) and its abstract meaning (lying outside the work of art). In *Uncle Silas*, this pattern is raised to the second power, so to speak, in that a Swedenborgian reading establishes the novel as a self-referring allegory: assumptions of virtue are vices, the soul's experience in death is indistinguishable from the events of life. Thus, one part of *Uncle Silas* provides an allegorical reading of the other, ensuring that an extended allegorical reading—* (p.187) *by which the novel as a whole is allegorically related to ‘external’ reality—is reflexive. By an internal analysis of character disposition, we may say that Silas is the posthumous revelation of the real guilt which lies behind Austin's pious rectitude: if we are to read Austin as allegoric of the Big House philosophy, then that philosophy is also reflected in Silas's homicide, fraud, corruption, and suicide. This identity of opposites in the fiction is ultimately deducible from an analysis of the novel as a whole, but it is offered in the first chapter in that cryptic allusion to Chateaubriand's father both ghostly and pedestrian.
One allusion does not make a novel. For most readers Maud Ruthyn's comparison of her father to Chateaubriand's father remains a decoration sustaining their confidence in the narrative as articulate and well-informed. It is crucial to Le Fanu's curious achievement in *Uncle Silas* that further investigation should undermine this confidence, should reveal a bifurcated response to the source of the allusion which threatens the separate identities of separately named characters. If this were the only instance of its kind in the novel, we might conclude that Le Fanu intended it perhaps as a sardonic joke, perhaps did not intend it at all. Other literary allusions—to Swift's Struldbruggs in *Gulliver's Travels* and to the wizard Michael Scott in Walter Scott's 'Lay of the Last Minstrel', for example—do suggest a consistency of intention: these references to figures who 'survive' death so as to teach a lesson to the living contribute metaphorically to the sense of Silas as a revelation of Austin's real moral condition. Often such references are integrated smoothly to a character's particular circumstances—Silas, for example, reels off verses from French poets with a fluency which we are meant to see as beguiling. Austin, on the other hand, is highly economical in his recourse to such devices, and this is in keeping with his withdrawn personality. In the important scene where he confides in his daughter on the matter of Silas's bad reputation, he allows himself a few Latin tags. Having won her agreement that she should assist in some future recovery of the family's honour—sullied by Silas's suspected crimes—he moves from an unyielding painterly pose into veritable eloquence:

(p.188) He turned on me [i.e. Maud] such an approving smile as you might fancy lighting up the rugged features of a pale old Rembrandt.

T can tell you, Maud; if my life could have done it, it should not have been undone—*ubi lapsus, quid feci*. But I had almost made up my mind to change my plan, and leave all to time—*edax rerum*—to illuminate or to consume.'\(^{37}\)

Austin's notion of doing nothing, of leaving all to Time, calls forth a Latin tag of no great obscurity: 'Tempus edax rerum' (Time, the destroyer of all things) comes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.\(^{38}\) But 'ubi lapsus, quid feci' seems, at first glance, inscrutable.
Burke's *Peerage* and similar works of reference tell us that the motto of the Courtenays of Powderham is 'Ubi lapsus? Quid feci?' translatable as 'Where is my fault? What have I done?' These words which express astonishment at a sudden and undeserved fall are said to have been adopted by the family when they lost the earldom of Devon. More immediately relevant to our problem is an additional note in Burke's to the effect that, in 1585, Sir William Courtenay (thirteenth *de jure* Earl of Devon) 'was one of the undertakers to send over settlers for the better planting of Ireland, and thus laid the foundation of the prodigious estates in that kingdom enjoyed by his posterity'. We have then some thematic relevance in Austin Ruthyn's citing the Courtenay motto: the actual Courtenays and the fictional Ruthys have suffered a reversal of fortune through no fault—they feel—of their own. And we have a rudimentary link between the Courtenays as Irish planter landlords and Le Fanu as an Irish novelist. The latter link can be immediately confirmed in that the principal Courtenay seat in Ireland was The Castle, Newcastle, Limerick, while Le Fanu was raised at Abington Glebe in the same county.

In critical terms we have reached a stage similar to that when the passage from *Memoires d’outre tombe* was seen to resemble Maud's account of her father, and *before* its resemblance to her account of Silas was noticed. In other words, the Courtenay motto has a sort of broad relevance to the context in which it appears—like the Courtenays, Austin wonders where he has made his mistake that he should feel his family's honour tarnished. Its critical contribution to a more diffused and subversive reading of the novel has yet to emerge. If 1585 seems remote from 1864 (when *Uncle Silas* appeared) we should recall that the novel evolved from a short story written in 1838 while Le Fanu was still living in County Limerick. Furthermore in 1838 the Courtenays were variously in the news, and their motto had an ironic propriety.
Le Fanu's father had been appointed to the parish of Abington in 1823, but he postponed his removal thence for some years due to the disturbed state of the county. These disturbances were soon widespread in Munster, and formed part of the background to the Catholic Emancipation crisis. Their origins in Limerick were quite specific and notorious. In late 1821 the county was 'in a very desperate state', according to Matthew Barrington, the Crown Solicitor for Munster. In evidence to a House of Commons committee he said that 'murder, burnings, breaking houses, outrages of every description were committed there'. Asked whether the disturbances had originated on the estate of any particular proprietor, he answered 'It was on the Courtenay estate, and in that neighbourhood.' Numerous other witnesses confirmed this identification of the Courtenays' estate at Newcastle as the starting-point of the widespread violence of 1821–3. The central outrage had been the murder of Thomas Hoskins, son of Alexander Hoskins, the agent on the Courtenay property. This agent, a new appointment and an Englishman unfamiliar with Irish conditions and Irish customs, had established a rigorous and (for him) profitable regime on the estate, and his determination to profiteer through his office was affirmed by witnesses ranging from the parish priest of Michelstown to the Earl of Kingston. In the expanding wave of violence which followed the murder of Thomas Hoskins, 'Captain Rock' emerged as the eponymous leader of the agitation and the conspiracy—the 'system' as it was called. Thomas Moore's *Memoirs of Captain Rock*, Mortimer O'Sullivan's *Captain Rock Detected*, and Charlotte Elizabeth's *Rockite* are only three ephemeral monuments to the nationwide consequences of the Courtenay estate disturbances. Blue Books from 1824 to 1832 repeat, with much affecting detail, the role of Hoskins in stimulating the violence.
If we look at the vestigial reference in *Uncle Silas* to this episode in Irish history, we may feel that it is curiously exact and remote; it has about it an abstract air which is potentially hostile to fiction. At the theoretical level one might counter by arguing that allegory is concerned to relate precisely such intractable evidences of abstract consciousness, and that this kind of consciousness is typical of colonial cultures. Yet the remoteness we speak of in *Uncle Silas* is not simply formal, it is thematically central to the depiction of the Ruthyn brothers who are cut off from county politics, Church affairs, even neighbourhood activities. This is voluntary in the case of Austin, and the result of ostracism in the case of Silas—here again are those binary oppositions which so intimately connect the brothers while seeming to distinguish between them. In terms of society as depicted in the novel, we see a landowning class at once wealthy and endangered, remote from other strata of the community. There are servants of course in the Big Houses, but these are either stage-hands as far as the action is concerned or they are extensions of the conspiring, endangered aspect of the master. Tenants on the estate do ultimately play a part in the heroine's escape but their contribution is entirely mechanical and unrelated to any depiction of their lives and values. In other words, *Uncle Silas* could be interpreted as presenting an intensified version of the isolated Anglo-Irish ascendancy for whom local affairs and the religious life of the community were closed. And looking back to the origins of *Ubi lapsus?* in the murder of young Hoskins there would seem to be confirmation of this sense of a conflict of extremes, resulting in Le Fanu's novel in a depiction of one of those extremes—the ascendancy—against a darkened and empty background. To interpret this incident as a fatal conflict between castle and cabin, landlord and peasant would be to accept uncritically the blurred sociology implicit in such terms as 'ascendancy'. That Hoskins Senior was agent for an absentee landlord—William Courtenay being obliged to live abroad at the time—contributes a further element to a stereotyped response. The facts are more various in their implications. After the Napoleonic War, agriculture was greatly depressed; provincial banking collapsed, and the economy entered a deep recession. The Reverend John Kiely, parish priest of Mitchelstown, County Cork, described to the Commons committee the social effects in Munster of the post-war depression:
The times were very bad for the farmers, and there was a peculiar kind of gentry, a kind of middle order between the rich gentry of the country and the peasantry; persons who were generated by the excessive rise of the agricultural produce during the war, and got the education of persons above their rank; by the fall of the times these were reduced to their original level. Without the habit of labour, they associated with the lowest description, and in order to keep themselves in the possession of their lands, and so forth, they deferred to the system [i.e. of agrarian conspiracy], and hence, I believe arose the organisation in the system itself, that could not have been devised by the lowest order of the peasantry.  

It is worth confirming this diagnosis by reference to an article appearing in the *Quarterly Journal of Agriculture* in which the earlier notoriety and present quiet prosperity of the Courtenay estates in Ireland are noted.

The discontents were fomented by persons of a much higher class [than the actual assailants], who, being themselves in arrear, perhaps from bad management and extravagant housekeeping, were apprehensive of being called on peremptorily to discharge them.

(p.192) ‘Captain Rock’, therefore, may be characterized as a middling farmer, short of money and in danger of losing his leases, at the head of a peasant band. Questioned on the murder of young Hoskins, Matthew Barrington told the committee that ‘some of the under-tenants on the Courtenay estate did encourage the lower orders’ and hired an assassin to kill the agent’s son. These middle-men, far from being the simian figures later invented by *Punch*, may also be found in the novels and tales of Gerald Griffin. No feudal lord nor noble savage is at the heart of the Hoskins affair: it would be more accurately seen as an incident in the annals of an insecure middle class.
Ubi lapsus? Quid feci? The insensitive management of Viscount Courtenay's estate in Limerick in the 1820s can hardly in itself explain the motto in *Uncle Silas*. The short story version of the novel, ‘Passage in the Secret History of an Irish Countess’ had appeared in 1838, and Courtenay had died just three years earlier. William Courtenay, the third viscount, was the only son of William Courtenay and Frances Clack, a Wallingford tavern-owner's daughter. Young Courtenay had been seduced and corrupted by William Beckford of Fonthill: later in life the third Viscount was obliged to reside outside England to avoid prosecution. Despite this, in 1831 at the prompting of his third cousin (regrettably another William Courtenay) Beckford's 'Kitty' was declared to be the twenty-ninth *de jure* Earl of Devon by a questionable decision of the House of Lords.49 Thus, the exiled 'Kitty' Courtenay succeeded in reversing the loss of honour which had led his ancestors to adopt their distinctive motto. The irony of this was not lost on contemporaries: Lord Chancellor Brougham was advised that Courtenay was one 'who ought to think himself happy that his titles and estates have not been forfeited or himself paid the debt to the law like the Lord Hungerford of Heytesbury' [beheaded in 1540].50 When a bill was found against him, he remained abroad, afraid to take his seat in Parliament, his motto raising (p.193) 'a question which its owner avoids to leave to a tribunal of his country to answer'.51
Austin’s complacent ejaculation, Ubi lapsus? Quid feci?, thus contributes to the structural identification of pious Austin and depraved Silas, for the motto is borrowed from one who was least fitted to bear it. ‘Kitty’ Courtenay, the twenty-ninth Earl of Devon died in the Place Vendome, Paris, in May 1835, and was succeeded by his namesake and third cousin. In the history of this remarkable family—three ancestors had been attainted by the sixteenth century—reversal’s reversed at a stroke, and the thirtieth Earl proved to be a model landlord. Indeed between 1843 and 1845 he was chairman of a government commission investigating land tenure in Ireland, its evidence the most revealing indictment of landlordism in the nineteenth century. Naturally, despite the improvements at Newcastle, Sheridan Le Fanu and the Irish Metropolitan Conservative Association deplored the Devon Commission’s findings. Like Smith O’Brien’s rebellion of three years later, it could be drastically interpreted as treachery, a blow struck from within at the ‘security of property in this kingdom’ and ‘the Protestant ascendancy in our happy constitution’.  

But how can we relate the irony of Ubi lapsus?, now decoded, to the opacity of ‘Chateaubriand’s father in the great chamber of the Chateau de Combourg’? If Le Fanu’s allegory is to be anything more than occasional external parallels lodged in the density of inner symmetries, some dynamic organization of the allusions is required to integrate the plot and texture of the fiction as a whole. Of the plot Elizabeth Bowen has observed that it is really a fairy-tale—the Endangered Heiress, the Wicked Uncle, and so forth. But if it is fairy-tale, it is fairy-tale wrought in Victorian embroidery, at once garish and restrained. Miss Bowen has also remarked the sexlessness of the heroine, indeed ‘no force from any one of the main characters runs into the channel of sexual feeling’. This is true, provided that we allow its opposite also to be true—that the novel is deeply concerned with the force of sexual feeling, and employs much of its energies ensuring that evidence of this concern is deeply buried in its structure. For these forces are disguised or inhibited on the surface of the action: when Maud’s loutish cousin Dudley makes a pass at her, his technique is a rugby-player’s and not a roue’s. Miss Bowen’s contemporary among Anglo-Irish novelists, Francis Stuart, remarked in conversation that, if Uncle Silas were written now, Silas and his niece would be locked in sexual mesalliance, incestuous intrigue.
Certainly, on the level of sexual implication the novel produces remarkably ingenious responses in readers: the Knight of Glin has recently suggested that the story of the brothers Ruthyn is based on that of the Rochfort family in Westmeath. Robert Rochfort, Lord Bellfield, married for love as his second wife Mary, the daughter of Richard, Viscount Molesworth. They had four children, the last a boy born in 1743. Shortly after this date, his lordship was

privately informed that she co-habited unlawfully with his younger brother. Upon which he put the question to her, and she with consummate impudence owned the fact, adding that her last child was by him, and that she had no pleasure with any man like that she had with him.\(^{55}\)

(p.195) Arthur Rochfort fled to England, but eventually languished in a debtors' prison until death separated him from his brother. The incestuous wife was locked up in Gaulstown, a house just six miles from her husband's seat at Belvedere. Another brother, George, lived in another neighbouring house, and when Lord Bellfield quarrelled with him, he built the largest Gothic sham ruin in Ireland—the 'Jealous Wall'—to blot out the view of the offending brother's residence.
The Knight of Glin admits that the similarity is not very great, and that Le Fanu's novel is 'roughly based' on the Rochfort saga. In seeing a resemblance, he implicitly makes certain assumptions. First, two houses in the neighbourhood of Belvedere, that which imprisons the woman and that which is the offending brother's home, are conflated in order that they resemble Bartram-Haugh, Silas's home and Maud's prison. Second, the relationship between Arthur Rochfort and his sister-in-law is comparable to that between Silas Ruthyn and his niece: both are of course forms of incest—if one admits that sexual bond which Francis Stuart prescribed and which Elizabeth Bowen denied. The violation of sexual taboo had a place in the Courtenay saga also, and even Chateaubriand contributes to the undercurrent of sexual offence in that, at the time his father perambulated in the shadows, the future author of the Memoires was passionately in love with his sister. (Michel Butor traces this passion in the incestuous patterns of Chateaubriand's fiction.) These offences against custom and the law may be said to have one common factor, they were overvaluations of blood-relationship (brother/sister) or sexual similarity (male/male).
In *Uncle Silas* nothing so explicitly sexual is admitted. Nevertheless, Silas does attempt to marry off Maud to his own son, her first cousin. While such marriages were not within the tables of forbidden affinity, they were generally disapproved of as genetically short-sighted. The motive behind Silas’s scheme is as economically self-centred as it is maritally introverted—the preservation, to his own heir, of Maud’s wealth. Moreover, the patterns of overvaluation of blood etc. are counterbalanced by other patterns of undervaluation. Silas’s dead wife had been the daughter of a Denbigh innkeeper, and the proposed marriage between Maud and his son Dudley is frustrated by the discovery that Dudley is secretly married to Sarah Mangles of Wigan.57 ‘Kitty’ Courtenay’s mother had been the daughter of a Wallingford innkeeper, while the unfortunate Lady Bellfield, on appeal to her father was ignored ‘because she was only his bastard by his wife before he married her’.58 Of course these are more offences against class and custom than against taboo or even law: yet they illustrate an urge to sexual alliance outside certain prescribed limits, thus they undervalue these limits. Overvaluation in sexual introversion, undervaluation in social *mesalliance*—*Uncle Silas’s* sources reveal a complex network of sexual forces unconfessed upon the surface of the novel.
All of this is entirely in keeping with our findings in other areas. A literary allusion attaching to Austin describes Silas also. A claim of innocent bemusement, an invitation of public scrutiny, is itself revealed to be an accusation. The dual level at which these allusions to Chateaubriand and Courtenay operate parallels the nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish myth of an Augustan Golden Age. *Uncle Silas*, we should remember, grew from ‘Passage in the Secret History of an Irish Countess’, a story solidly lodged in the Irish eighteenth century. Le Fanu’s method is to contribute to this myth by means of expansive evocations of neo-classical architecture which, in the latter half of the novel, is revealed to be echoing, decayed, ruinous. The contribution to myth is simultaneously a subversive critique of assumed rectitude and validity. The suggestion that the story of Knowl and Bartram-Haugh is based on the Rochfort family houses is substantiated further if one notes the exemplary extinction of their honours and titles with the Act of Union. Lord Bellfield having been created Earl of Belvedere, he died in 1774 and was succeeded by his son George. The second Earl was said in 1775 to have been ‘left very embarrass’d in his Circumstances, & from his Distress must consequently be dependent’ (p.197) on the Crown, likely to quarrel with his Brother Robert, a respectable amiable man.59 Here we have two elements familiar from *Uncle Silas*—security and property is succeeded by dependence and discord, and (for the second time in two generations) brother quarrels with brother. The second Earl died in 1814 and, by the terms of the Act of Union, all his titles became extinct.60 The history of the earldom of Belvedere is exemplary in that it is explicitly terminated by the last decision of the Anglo-Irish Protestant parliament: more specifically, it is characterized by the overvaluation of blood in incestuous adultery, and by the undervaluation of blood in the repeated conflict of brothers.
Le Fanu's fiction shows the present as a repetition or indeed a higher confirmation of the past: the past, by producing the degenerate and self-extinguishing present, is condemned as the fount of corruption. In terms of character and action, suicide is the dominant pattern—self-regarding and violent, character destroys itself. Ostensibly, the fault \textit{(lapsus)} lies in a noble propensity to mate with innkeepers' daughters, and this should be read not so much as an echo of eighteenth-century habits but as a nineteenth-century sensitivity among the Anglo-Irish ascendancy on the topic of disagreeable exogamy. Behind this lies a largely unacknowledged code of inbreeding, intensified in the various forms of sexual introversion discernible in the material we have considered. It is the function of Le Fanu's remarkable use of allegory that the decoration of French literary reference and secreted evidences of Irish local and family history may be integrated to the over-all contours of the novel. There is much in \textit{Uncle Silas} to distress the fastidious reader, yet the novel preserves a negative totality in its reflection of social reality. The absence of any middling order of characters, the apparent monopoly of master and servant, is not only a reflection of the false sociology which went into the making of 'ascendancy', it is also a critique in lurid terms of that opting for ideology over an imaginative rationality.

3. Charles Lever: From \textit{Harry Lorrequer} (1839) to \textit{Luttrel of Arran} (1865)

\begin{verbatim}
I stood in Luttrel's Glen. Ash saplings tossed
And Zephyr sullenly came, churning the dust.
A path let in, out of the clash of the light,
Ferns shivering towards a stream. Broken, as slight
As flesh, weak with leaves,
Stone arches bedded in the slope; disused
Forges withered, half in sight,
Their cold lids clumsily slammed; moss on smashed eaves.
(Thomas Kinsella)\textsuperscript{61}
\end{verbatim}
Le Fanu's trilogy of the 1860s is the most concentrated Victorian examination of the eighteenth century, the Irish eighteenth century as distinct from the Augustan compromise of Pope, Fielding, and Johnson. Yet the morbid psychology of his fiction has attracted less attention than the comic extravagances of his friend, Charles Lever. Yeats acknowledged that Lever has 'historical significance' because he so vividly ‘expressed a social phase’ of ‘frieze-coated humanists, dare-devils upon horseback’. The extent to which the eighteenth century has been interpreted all but exclusively in terms of Jonah Barrington's *Recollections* and Buck Whaley's *Memoirs* would serve as a reliable measure of our need for a genuine literary history and Kulturgeschichte. Le Fanu's sensationalist plots and Lever's picaresque comedies (p.199) are merely the twin strategies of evasion and confession which characterize the Victorian attitude to the Irish past. This is not to say that Lever's comedy constitutes evasion and Le Fanu's sensation enacts confession: each novelist combines in different proportions both attitudes. If Le Fanu has been hitherto neglected because his dominant tone has been interpreted as pathological, Lever may have been the victim of a grosser misinterpretation in being presented as a thoughtless jester. It is true that recent commentators have pointed to a deepening of Lever's involvement with his material in the later novels: what requires emphasis is that both the picaro-heroics of *Harry Lorrequer* (1839) and the sombre depiction of society in *Lord Kilgobbin* (1872) proceed from Lever's response to altering conventional views of the eighteenth century.
The plot of his early novels revolves around the adventures of a young soldier whose relationship to the society he encounters is both privileged and ignorant. Any possibility of a more intense involvement in social reality, of the kind posited for Colambre in *The Absentee*, is turned aside by excursions to the Peninsular War, to Brussels or the German spas. Half a dozen of Lever's novels of the 1830s and 1840s fit this description, with only the minimum adjustments required to differentiate one novel from another. The base of these novels is Victorian picaresque—an apparently shapeless quest by the hero through unfamiliar and yet entertaining landscapes and through incidents which never threaten real violence or any real offence to moral decorum. Irish readers, influenced by Daniel Corkery, have taken offence at the English hero whose ignorance of Irish ways they deem to be a mark of patronizing ascendency attitudes in the author. This is mistaken, for the comic irony of Lever's early novels is that the hero is officially travelling at home within the United Kingdom and his bewilderment is an index of the Union's failure.

Moreover, the Victorian picaresque hero's ultimate destiny—success in the world apart—is honourable marriage, and Lever's choice of brides for his heroes has a symptomatic interest. In *Harry Lorrequer* (1839), the young English officer ends up married to Lady Jane Callonby just as her father is appointed Viceroy of Ireland. *Jack Hinton* (1843), Lever's third novel, follows the formula closely though it has the added attraction of including Mrs Paul Rooney, the author's version of Maria Edgeworth's Mrs Anastasia Rafferty—indeed one illuminating way to read Lever's picaresque is to interpret it as *The Absentee* drained of social function as to plot, with military pranks provided as a substitute. Jack Hinton, however, finally marries Louisa Bellew whose name encapsulates more than a hint of Catholic nobility.⁶⁴
By the time we reach *Luttrell of Arran* (1865) this pattern has for us a further dimension to its meaning. For Lever's early fiction offers a clear-cut demonstration of the difference—crucial to the practice of literary history—between past significance and present meaning. To say that the comic irony of *Harry Lorrequer* or *Jack Hinton* lies in its *expose* of the Union is to emphasize the present meaning of the novel read within our latter-day literary history; to speak of the conclusive marriages is to emphasize the significance of the fiction in its day as part of the ideological reinforcement of Union. But, as we have seen already in the case of Lever, these functions of the work—significance and meaning—necessarily interact through the contradictions inherent in each. In the case of both Le Fanu and Lever these contradictions are manifested in formal terms. *Harry Lorrequer* was intended by its author as a series of monthly sketches, but the pressures of serialization in the conservative *Dublin University Magazine* combining with the renewed vitality of the novel-form in the London markets drew the material (p.201) into the shape of moralized picaresque. In both Le Fanu's and Lever's novels, there is a generic pressure within the fiction towards an acknowledgement of a shorter, interpolated fiction, a tale within a tale. And here again, *Harry Lorrequer* provides a typical example.

In the thirty-ninth chapter the irrepressible O'Leary tells the story of 'the Knight of Kerry and Billy M'Cabe'. A synopsis can be reconstructed from O'Leary's words:
Well, it seems that one day the Knight of Kerry was walking along the Strand in London, killing an hour's time till the House was done prayers ... his eye was caught by an enormous picture displayed upon the wall of a house, representing a human figure covered with long dark hair, with huge nails upon his hands, and a most dreadful expression of face ... he heard a man ... call out 'Walk in, ladies and gentlemen. The most wonderful curiosity ever exhibited—only one shilling—the wild man from Chippoowango, in Africay—eats raw wittles without being cooked, and many other pleasing performances.' The knight paid his money, and was admitted ... to his very great horror, he beheld ... a man nearly naked, covered with long, shaggy hair, that grew even over his nose and cheekbones. He sprang about, sometime on his feet, sometimes all fours, but always uttering the most fearful yells, and glaring upon the crowd in a manner that was really dangerous. The knight did not feel exactly happy ... and began to wish himself back in the House, even upon a Committee of Privileges, when suddenly the savage gave a more frantic scream than before, and seized upon a morsel of raw beef which a keeper extended to him upon a long fork like a tandem whip ... Just at this instant some sounds struck upon his ear that surprised him not a little ... conceive, if you can, his amazement to find that, amid his most fearful cries and wild yells, the savage was talking Irish ... There he was, jumping four feet high in the air, eating his raw meat, pulling out his hair by handfuls; and amid all this, cursing the whole company to his heart's content, in as good Irish as ever was heard in Tralee. ... At length something he heard left no further doubt upon his mind, and turning to the savage, he addressed him in Irish, at the same time fixing a look of most scrutinizing import upon him.

‘Who are you, you scoundrel?’ said the knight.

‘Bill M′Cabe, your honour.’

‘And what do you mean by playing off these tricks here, instead of earning your bread like an honest man?’
‘Whisht,’ said Billy, ‘and keep the secret. I’m earning the rent for your honour. One must do many a queer thing that pays two pound ten an acre for bad land.’

(p.202) This was enough: the knight wished Billy every success, and left him ... This adventure, it seems, had made the worthy knight a great friend to the introduction of poor-laws; for, he remarks very truly, ‘more of Billy's countrymen might take a fancy to the savage life, if the secret was found out.’

No doubt there are echoes of Don Quixote in this tale of ‘the worthy knight’ of Kerry; but Billy M'Cabe's pretence, the fiction of an African within the fiction O'Leary relates to Lorrequer in Lever's novel links literary convention to economic expose. Most of the elements are immediately evident—the rent, the malingering knight ticking-off his hard-working tenant, the Irish speaker as savage on the Strand. The interpolated tale whimsically displays an image of social relations which the enfolding tale generically rejects. And yet, if O'Leary's story reveals an aspect of truth, the invitation is there for the reader to see some further measure of truth in Lorrequer's conquest of the future Viceroy's daughter. To read Harry Lorrequer requires decisions by the reader as to proportions of revelation and concealment enacted in the fictions of the novel.
But every novel is composed from the language which remains outside that novel, and the tale-within-the-tale is often structurally a return to that larger social dimension by means of an appearance of microcosm. Certainly in 1839 there was a Knight of Kerry alive and well; what is more, he had been a Member of Parliament for over thirty years, though he was finally unseated in the aftermath of the 1832 Reform Act. Maurice Fitzgerald (1774–1849, eighteenth Knight of Kerry) had represented Kerry in the Irish and later the Westminster parliament, and had held various government offices in Tory governments. Though he had ceased to be an MP by 1838, the Knight of Kerry was a vigorous opponent of the government's attempt to extend the Poor Law system to Ireland, holding (as an Irish landlord) that the estates could not afford the charge on the rates. Thus, when Lever was writing his chapter in August 1839, his comments on the (p.203) salutary effect of the Billy M′Cabe encounter upon the Knight's friendship towards the introduction of the Poor Laws are ironical. Moreover, Lever's official setting of the novel in the second decade of the century is simultaneously undermined, and the contemporary function of historical fiction laid bare.67
The example of the Knight of Kerry's indirect appearance in *Harry Lorrequer* encourages a similar approach to *Luttrell of Arran*, where historical allusion is even more devious. Before passing to the later novel, one further aspect of the thirty-ninth chapter is unavoidable. The Knight and his tenant are able to converse confidentially, as it were, in the middle of London by virtue of their sharing the Irish language. Triumphant, the wretched M'Cabe can silence his landlord while simultaneously cursing the ignorant audience whom he entertains. Yet the Irish language cannot be admitted into the discourse of Lever's fiction; it stands beyond the bar of tolerance for such a novel, just as if it were a wild man from Chippoowango. The exchange—here, not an entirely Yeatsian one—between beggar and nobleman successfully leaps over any intervening social element by a combination of shared intimacy (language) and shared displacement (the Strand). When we return to the larger fiction of Harry and Lady Jane etc., the action moves through France, Canada, Strassburg, and eventually Munich where Lorrequer is married to the new Viceroy's daughter. The unreality of such a consummate Union is not mute. Whether through residual Irish, or the exotica of a German *mis en scene*, such intimacies of beggar and nobleman, picaro and Viceroy, require specific ideological mediations.

By the end of the 1840s, Lever's fiction had grown more sombre in tone, partly as a result of criticism directed at the capers of Harry and Jack, and partly as a consequence of the sociological/political disaster of the Famine. The contrast therefore between *Harry Lorrequer* and so late a novel as *Luttrell of Arran* is only startling if one passes over the intervening development. Nevertheless, the novel of 1865 does possess characteristics which demand our attention by way of a comparison with *Lorrequer*. Lever's dedication-page in *Luttrell of Arran* provides a neat initial point of reference through which we can begin a broader analysis.
The novel is dedicated "To Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu Esq.,—He who can write such stories as "Wylder's Hand" or "Uncle Silas" ...'. It is true that the two men had been friendly in the 1840s, and that in 1863 Le Fanu had resumed novel-writing after a sixteen-year-interval—here are grounds for a dedication, surely. Yet in 1865 the two had drifted apart, the one to Italy, the other to a reclusive life in Dublin. What prompts the examination of this gesture towards Le Fanu is Lever's choice of name for one group of characters, the Courtenay sisters, Laura and Georgina. To find, in a novel dedicated explicitly to the author of *Uncle Silas*—which had appeared the year before—characters called Courtenay goes some way towards confirming the analysis of ‘Ubi lapsus? Quid Feci?’ which assimilated it to Le Fanu's complex allusive system. Yet the Courtenays play a relatively minor part in *Luttrell of Arran*, and that unconnected with the aspects of Courtenay family history drawn upon by Le Fanu.

Though very specific details of the novel detonate its meaning, a summary by synopsis and quotation is unavoidable. John Hamilton Luttrell was engaged to marry Georgina Courtenay, having initially fallen for her sister Laura. Prompted to inquire about his rapid exit from ‘the Irish university’ Georgina discovered that he has been a United Irishman. Pressing him for details to reassure her family she learned from him that many eminent men in public life had been LuttrellPs fellow revolutionaries. Mr Courtenay, a friend of Castlereagh in his time, went to the Government: there were investigations, resignations and, in Ireland, demands for the traitor's name:

‘Why not Luttrell?’ said one writer in a famous print. ‘His father betrayed us before.’ This was an allusion to his having voted for the Union. ‘Why not Luttrell?’ They entered thereupon into some curious family details, to show how these Luttrells had never been ‘true blue’ to any cause.⁶⁸

(p.205) The wedding was cancelled, Luttrell wounded in a duel:
He would seem to have mixed himself up with the lowest political party in Ireland—men who represent, in a certain shape, the revolutionary section in France—and though the very haughtiest aristocrat I think I ever knew, and at one time the most fastidious ‘fine gentleman’, there were stories of his having uttered the most violent denunciations of rank, and inveighed in all the set terms of the old French Convention against the distinctions of class. Last of all, I heard that he had married a peasant girl, the daughter of one of his cottier tenants … ⁶⁹

Mrs Luttrell was never publicly acknowledged as his wife by Luttrell; her family had its own long record of subversion, albeit of a more agrarian than aristocratic kind. Her sister’s daughter, Kate, is taken up by Laura Courtenay’s husband who educates her alongside his own daughter, Ada. The ‘romantic’ element in the novel concerns Kate’s social advancement, her seduction by Adolphus Ladarelle, and her ultimate marriage to Harry Luttrell, her aunt’s son, by now an honest sailor. Kate has been adopted by old John Luttrell as his daughter and his heir, in the belief that his son is dead, and Ladarelle’s object in the fraudulent marriage is her inherited estate. The final marriage, however, brings together the son and the adopted daughter of the ostracized aristocrat-rebel.
Summarized thus, the novel does not amount to much. Yet there are intriguing patterns even in the summary. The husband of the woman Luttrell originally loved ‘adopts’ Kate, who is subsequently adopted by Luttrell himself—she has thus been the surrogate child of the original couple. Kate is falsely married to Ladarelle—an inadequate bonding—and will be truly married to her cousin/brother—a double bonding. Ladarelle has virtually appeared from nowhere, conveniently during Harry's absence (presumed death) at sea. As the similarity of the names suggests ‘Ladarelle’ is a false Luttrell, attracting into his function that hereditary falseness to all causes which the name symbolized to John Luttrell's comrades. From the drastic social *mesalliance* of the fine gentleman John Hamilton Luttrell and Sally O'Hara of Arran, the novel moves to the introverted marriage of Kate Luttrell (p.206) and Harry Luttrell: “‘The Luttrell spirit is low enough, I take it, now,’ said she, blushing. ‘If their pride can survive this, no peasant blood can be their remedy.’” 70 In contrast to the central hero’s marriage to Lady Jane or Lady Louisa, his marriage into Viceregal or quasi-recusant circles, the absent hero of *Luttrell of Arran* finally focuses on an wr-Gaelic Ireland, a western isle located rather uncertainly somewhere near the coasts of Galway, Mayo, and/or Donegal. We thus have several kinds of inward motion in a plot which decisively commences with the eclipse of the hero in suddenly exposed (and yet hereditary) guilt. As in *Uncle Silas* this guilt is associated with exclusion from politics; and whereas Le Fanu presents the marriage of first cousins as one threat which hangs over his heroine, Lever employs an intensified form of this inward movement within a family as the climax to his plot. Luttrell, like Silas Ruthyn, has married ‘beneath’ him; whereas this dis graced Le Fanu's hero/villain, Luttrell’s marriage into the O'Hara family is doubly the means of grace—at least as far as the narrative endorses the conclusive marriage of Kate and Harry.
Narrative form, or forms, constitutes an important aspect of these mid-century novels. Le Fanu's sustained use of a female narrator in *Uncle Silas* in part reflects the eclipse of traditionally male heroics in its Anglo-Irish provenance, and in part also contributes actively to that eclipse. In Lever's novel of the following year, the anecdotal method of *Harry Lorrequer* is replaced by a more comprehensive multi-vocal narrative. Lever liked writing dialogue, and though *Luttrell* is officially an impersonal narrative a great deal of it indeed reaches the reader through the words of specific characters. The retrospective account of Luttrell's exposure of his political activities and the results of that exposure appears at times to have the tone of impersonal narrative, but the first-person pronoun strategically bursts this appearance towards the end — ‘the very haughtiest aristocrat I think I ever (p.207) knew ...’. The reader commences to read aware of the particular speaker, is then drawn towards an interpretation of what he reads as narrative rather than speech, and is again redirected towards the speaker's perspective. The technique is far from original in Lever—consider the drastic application of such a working on and against the reader in *Wuthering Heights*—but it derives its significance by its bearing upon the altering views of history advanced in the altering narrative.
Arran is not precisely located for the reader where a map-reader would expect it. It is unlikely that many readers will have paused to worry over such imprecision, finding the reflection of ecclesiastical ruins, the Irish language, and occasional references to County Galway an adequate guarantee that they do not err drastically if they call Inis Mor to mind. Yet such excursions to the topographical world vitiate the strategies of fiction and its reading. Less easily accommodated to this kind of reading are references to the site of Luttrell’s alleged treason as ‘the Irish university’. True, such locutions may represent a speaker’s unfamiliarity with Ireland and its institutions—thus he avoids the idiomatic ‘Trinity College’ or ‘Dublin University’ because he is unaware that there is only one university in Ireland at the time of the alleged events. Yet this explanation only shifts the significance of the phrase from the author to the character or narrator. Furthermore, there was a notorious inquiry into subversion in Trinity College, conducted by Fitzgibbon and Dr Patrick Duigenan on the eve of the United Irishmen’s rebellion. Among those examined by the inquisitors were Thomas Moore, the future melodist, and an obscure friend called Dacre Hamilton. No Luttrell can be found implicated in these proceedings, while in the novel the imposition of an oath on the young John Luttrell evidently was attempted after the rebellion. The fictional hero is subsequently denounced as an informer on his former comrades, and there had indeed been many informers placed (p.208) in the ranks of the United Irishmen—the most famous being Francis Higgins (‘the Sham Squire’) and Leonard MacNally. As for the associations of the name Luttrell in 1798, one figure of note bearing that name was Lord Carhampton (Henry Lawes Luttrell, 1743–1821), Commander-in-Chief of the forces in Ireland from 1796. (His illegitimate son sat in the Irish parliament from 1798 to 1800, and subsequently became a wit and man of fashion in London.)
Neither of these Luttrells of the period invoked at the opening of Lever's novel seems a likely candidate for the reclusive, embittered aristocrat-rebel. Cautiously, one might notice that there is a blurred resemblance in the circumstances of the novel to some discrete aspects of the Rebellion—the presence of informers, the presence of Luttrells, the inquisition at Trinity—but circumstances and aspects fail to line up in any neat pattern. Pressing such searches for pattern, one might desperately seize on Lord Carhampton's seduction of a gardener's daughter near Woodstock, Oxfordshire, as an original to the *mesalliance* (in Society's terms) with a Catholic peasant girl from Arran. It is true that Carhampton at first vehemently opposed Union, and then supported it, but such a change of heart is not unique or even remarkable in one of his military background.  

Two developments are in progress in this 'blurring'. The first is simply a new adjustment between folklore and history, the second a rewriting of the United Irishmen's rebellion in the decade of Fenian rebellion. For the Luttrell family had a larger and more defined place in the folklore of the eighteenth century than in the history of 1798. Two brothers Luttrell were prominent in the ranks of King James's forces prior to the Battle of Aughrim. Simon Luttrell (d. 1698) sat in the Jacobite parliament of 1689 representing the county of Dublin together with Patrick Sarsfield, James's premier Irish general. After the Jacobite defeat, he was attainted for treason and died in exile—his treason was (p.209) therefore the result of a change of regime and not a change of loyalty. His brother, Henry (1655P-1717), however, defected to the Williamites immediately prior to the Battle of Aughrim, and took advantage of the terms of the Treaty to secure his position with the new regime. He was shot dead in his sedan-chair on 3 November 1717 in Stafford Street, Dublin; and his grave was violated some eighty years later during the period of the United Irishmen rebellion when his grandson's high-handed methods in putting down discontent had excited popular feeling. According to Macaulay (no friend of Jacobitism), the perpetrators were ‘descendents of those whom he had betrayed’. Of the grandson, the Lord-Lieutenant, Camden, wrote that he ‘did not confine himself to the strict rules of law’. From a position of unimpeachable, twentieth-century impartiality, *The Complete Peerage* comments of the Luttrells 'they seem to have been an unlovely race'.  

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Popular opinion of the eighteenth century, therefore, is radically modified and yet exploited in the pre-history of *Luttrell of Arran*, Luttrell treachery as Jacobites or to Jacobitism being subliminally drawn upon to justify the third-hand observation that the family had never been true blue to any cause, the cause on this occasion being *Jacobin* rather than Jacobite in its leanings. The third Earl of Carhampton (John Luttrell-Olmius, died 1829, aged about 84) was the last of his line, with whom all his titles became extinct. Like the shadow of the Rochfort family which may shine behind the dark patterns of *Uncle Silas*, we encounter here a noble ancestry now extinct. Like the fictional Ruthyns and the historical Rochforts, Luttrell notoriety involves sibling conflict, the self-division of a family to whom pride and depravity jointly adhere. It may seem that Lever's novel misses this sibling rivalry, for we hear nothing of disputatious brothers as such; instead, however, there is the otherwise inexplicable villain Ladarelle who substitutes for honest (p.210) Harry during the latter's presumed death. The *Doppelganger* of Ladarelle/Luttrell resembles the Ruthyn brothers' relationship in that villainy and virtue are never presented at once, though their presence (separately) in the novel requires a patterned symmetry to be at all explicable. But the significance of Lever's treatment of Luttrell notoriety is its contribution to the notion of identity consolidated in hereditary guilt. Whereas, the discrete material lying behind Le Fanu's allegory points to guilt in the binary offence of overvaluation and undervaluation of sexual and blood bonds, Lever's historical traces serve to point to the coexistence of antagonist political loyalties—Jacobite and Williamite, originally.
That synthesis had been anticipated in Irish historical fiction through the influence of Walter Scott upon—amongst others—John Banim and Sheridan Le Fanu. The ventriloquism of Le Fanu's *Cock and Anchor* (1845) had presented the anxieties of the author's Protestant Ascendancy caste through the humiliation and suffering of Jacobite heroes of a bygone age. Lever's implied synthesis of the Jacobite and Williamite past is merely a further stage upon the same progression. That progression is, of course, the alignment of history in resistance to the threats of a reformist government in Britain (for Le Fanu in the 1830s and 1840s) or to the threat of Fenian and Mazzinian outrage in the 1860s. The renowned shift in Lever's sympathies (from a mockery of the native Irish in early novels to a near-nationalist position in *Lord Kilgobbin* etc.) is simply another statement of that rewriting of history; rebellions of the past may be rehabilitated, indeed 'romanticized', so as to be a bulwark against contemporary unrest; the phenomenon is familiar even today in circles to whom the Provisional IRA are an embarrassment. The United Irishmen are presented at the opening of *Luttrell of Arran* as an honourable conspiracy, or at least which it would be dishonourable for a gentleman to betray. The novel's narrative holds at a distance the confirmation of Luttrell's membership, and also fails quite to confirm that he betrayed anyone. Lever was living in Florence at the time of writing, and he conceded a curious unease about the novel:

I do not believe 'Luttrell* will do, and my conviction is that the despair *(p.211)* that attaches to Ireland, from Parliament down to 'Punch', acts injuriously on all who would try to invest her scenes with interest or endow her people with other qualities than are mentioned in police courts.
The police court exactly identifies the change between the context of pre- and post-Famine. The administration of order had by the 1860s reached a point of public organization in which the pervasive informer system of the 1790s was less effective. In *Luttrell of Arran* the change is acknowledged in the contrasting styles of subversion associated with John Luttrell and his adopted daughter's grandfather, Peter Malone. Luttrell is to be seen, it is hoped, as an aristocratic United Irishman, a testy Philippe Egalite: Malone and his associates are presented as vindicative or misled malefactors, in a mode ostensibly of the eighteenth-century Whiteboys but more recognizably a product of contemporary fears of Fenian secrecy. The police court is the administrative counter to a political conspiracy which cannot be penetrated by noble democrats or sensitively ambiguous informers. In the face of a new republican conspiracy, *now petit bourgeois* and predominantly Catholic in composition, *Luttrell of Arran* offers an image of the United Irishman in aristocratic embrace of a refined peasantry. The Celtic Revival will press home this holy alliance of guilt-ridden Ascendancy and marginalized Gaelic peasantry as a bulwark against the politics of class and the sociology of an industrialized metropolitan colony. Its subscribers shall include some unlikely partners.

4. W. E. Gladstone

    How little reaped where they had sown—

    The generous Ascendancy.

    (Leslie Daiken)\textsuperscript{77}
The significant element, culturally speaking, in the fiction (p. 212) of Sheridan Le Fanu and Charles Lever which we have examined is the technique of subterfuge. Feelings of personal guilt or compromise do not satisfactorily account for the means by which allegories of ascendancy culpability are unveiled and veiled again. If guilt is repeatedly a hallmark of ascendancy there is nevertheless some uncertainty as to the precise location of this identifying guarantee. A guilty past satisfies on two levels—it establishes the reality of one's identity and at the same time sanctions a latter-day dereliction. To the old-style nationalist, convinced of the moral depravity of 'the Anglo-Irish Protestant Ascendancy', we must break the unwelcome news that the Ascendancy to a large degree invented its depravity as a small price to be paid for its continued viability as a social entity.

The abashed nationalist has powerful allies, however, and they emerge precisely in the wake of that fiction we have been examining. The 1860s were years of Fenian anxiety, and traditionally the conversion of William Ewart Gladstone to the reformist solution of the Irish question is attributed (grudgingly) to the impact of Fenianism and attendant discontents. The long-awaited extinction of Palmerstonian Whiggery finally came in the election of 1868, and within a few years the Irish established Church and the Irish landlord system were in the crucible, and Home Rule poised on the rim. The October 1868 election campaign saw Gladstone touring in Lancashire, delivering a series of immensely long speeches on the priorities of new-style liberalism. The resulting collection of election addresses is impressive not so much for its material—which is naturally somewhat repetitive—as for the ultimate identification of a symbolic focus for a new Irish policy. On 23 October, Gladstone spoke at Hengler's Circus, Wigan; his main themes were already familiar but the climactic paragraph of this final Lancashire rally broke new ground:

...
It is clear the Church of Ireland offers to us indeed a great question, but even that question is but one of a group of questions. There is the Church of Ireland, there is the land of Ireland, there is the education of Ireland: there are many subjects, all of which depend upon one greater than them all; they are all so many branches from one trunk, and that trunk is the tree of what is called Protestant ascendency. Gentlemen, I look, for one, to this Protestant people to put down Protestant ascendency which pretends to seek its objects by doing homage to religious truth, and instead of consecrating politics desecrates religion ... We therefore aim at the destruction of that system of ascendency which, though it has been crippled and curtailed by former measures, yet still must be allowed by all to exist. It is still there, like a tall tree of noxious growth, lifting its head to heaven and darkening and poisoning the land as far as its shadow can extend; it is still there, gentlemen, and now at length the day has come when, as we hope, the axe has been laid to the root of that tree, and it nods and quivers from its top to its base. It wants, gentlemen, one stroke more—the stroke of these elections.78

This is Gladstone's most trenchant attack upon the causes, as he sees them, of the Irish Question. In earlier speeches of the campaign he has condemned the trailing of political insignia in Protestant churches and ceremonies, but at Wigan Orange practices are virtually conflated with the dignities of Protestant Ascendancy. Though the future prime minister is unlikely to have had The Reverend T. D. Gregg in mind as he spoke, he too assumes ascendancy to have an ancient pedigree, an outmoded history. Gladstone's central image of course is the tall tree of noxious growth which, though he does not specify it, is the Javanese upas. The implications of this metaphor were not lost on commentators: Lord Edmond Fitzmaurice, speaking on an Irish education bill in 1873, declared that:

It was perfectly certain that a man who possessed a great deal of imagination might, if he stayed out sufficiently long at night, staring at a small star, persuade himself next morning that he had seen a great comet; and it was equally certain that such a man, if he stared long enough at a bush, might persuade himself that he had seen a branch of the upas tree.79
There is great aptness in Gladstone's image, for the upas is both a tree which exudes a poisonous juice (*Antiaris toxicaria*) and a legendary or fabulous tree which is so poisonous as to destroy all life around it for many miles. Like the vampire (bat), it connotes a real and specific thing, and a fantasy of the human mind woven from that thing. There is no doubt that upas trees were saved from the axeman on the strength of their legendary powers, and the Protestant Ascendancy is likewise girded round with magical protection. And yet the tree-image has other kinds of ambiguity attaching to it also; just as Burke's notion of the State as an organism indivisible as a tree coexists with the fashion of planting liberty trees symbolic of man's freedom to initiate as well as to perpetuate, so Gladstone's upas comes to mimic Burke's great-rooted blossomer. The assault upon Protestant Ascendancy at Wigan in 1868 absolved Lever from the need subliminally to insinuate a guilty past into his fiction—Lever's late novels are far more explicit in their condemnation of the past than *Luttrell of Arran*—and it lent the dignity of a prime minister's outrage to what had been previously nervous and ill-defined. It is fair to say that, without the consensus encapsulated in Gladstone's denunciation, the process by which Yeats takes Protestant Ascendancy and renders it as cultural tradition would not have been possible. Gladstonian reform of the Irish Church and the system of land tenure provided the evidence of political renunciation and denial by the Protestant Ascendancy, upon which cultural compensation by way of tradition would eventually build.
The image of Protestant Ascendancy reflected in the Wigan speech had reached the status of public opinion, with all the elusive ramifications this involved. Gladstone's ability to enunciate a statement of Protestant Ascendancy lay largely in his unfamiliarity with the society in which this transformed ideology operated. In Ireland, testimony of a similar scale and intensity is less available. To the Protestant Ascendancy, Protestant Ascendancy required no elaboration or definition; while to the Catholic population—whom Burke had warned so many years earlier—the currency of the acceptance of this distinctive sociology was its own validity. Nevertheless, there were of course denunciations of the (p.215) monopoly Protestants enjoyed in public offices and the professions, and complaints as to the limited extent of Catholic emancipation in a society where an elite regulated the distribution of reward within its own ranks. By 1868, such complaints, allied to a recognition of the Church Establishment and (more remotely) land tenure as political issues embittering the Union, were common enough. What makes Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland: Its Cause and Cure worthy of attention is the manner in which ascendancy is related to the development of a sectarian sociology.
Its author, Mulhallen Marum, was a Queen's County justice of the peace, a barrister by profession. His recurring concern in the pamphlet was to recommend the concept of *copyhold* as a reform of Irish land tenure, and the commentary on Protestant Ascendancy is partly incidental to that concern. The history of Ireland's woes is extended back to the Reformation and before, with Protestant Ascendancy granted at least a Cromwellian provenance. The resolutions of the Corporation of Dublin in 1792 are quoted *in extenso*, but they are accepted simply as a confirmation of an acknowledged and venerable concept. Marum's notion of Protestant Ascendancy in 1868, then, was simply the dominance of wealth, office, and dignities by Protestants, a state of affairs requiring no differentiation by historical period as to degree, intensity or any other factor. While his title speaks of causes, these are so remote in history as to be virtually a *primum mobile*; as for cures these degenerate into atomized proposals, the product of a campaigner's enthusiasm, mere schemes. Thus, Protestant Ascendancy came to symbolize not simply the permanence of a state of affairs (say, like the monarchy), but its apparent necessity whether enjoyed or resented. Burke's metaphor had been 'abracadabra', and indeed the mid-nineteenth-century invocations of Protestant Ascendancy had the tone of magical spells. The crucial stage leading to this experience of Protestant Ascendancy as some inevitable dimension of existence in Ireland was the loss of its history, the process of back-dating the phrase to (p.216) encompass first of all the eighteenth century generally, then the Williamite wars and the Settlement, and ultimately Cromwell and post-Reformation society *in toto*. That latter position may never have been held or expressed by serious historians—history can be falsified but it cannot actually be annulled—but the tactics were sufficiently widespread to produce what amounted to an eternal image, an iconic representation of history.
Marum's pamphlet links this significantly with the antagonism not only of creeds but of races also. Like the *Dublin University Magazine* of 1837, he compared the interaction of peoples and cultures in England and Ireland, but came to different conclusions. Catholicism, he insisted, was the element in pre-Reformation England which facilitated the amalgamation of Saxon and Norman etc; Protestant Ascendancy in post-Reformation Ireland effected a racial schism: The fell spirit of Ascendancy stalked through the land, establishing religion as the criterion of race, and smiting the Roman Catholic as of inferior caste—even as the black man on the new continent. This rather ambiguous period piece of prejudice is a timely reminder that the corollary of Protestant Ascendancy became in due course the revival of Celticism as an exclusive, identifying theory by which the repression of class enacted in Protestant Ascendancy was unwittingly complied with. Marum can refer in passing to ‘the Celtic race and creed’, unconcerned by the linguistic area of reference involved in ‘Celtic’. The sociology of Ireland was to be propagated thereafter in a binary scheme which implied both mutual exclusion among a categorized population and a dehistoricized model of dominance subservience. The ruins of Le Fanu's and Lever's fiction are not simply remnants of English romanticism preserved in a provincial literature too undeveloped to throw off such anachronisms: they are the static and shattered, the exclusive and radically divided image of colonial Ireland.
Fades hippocratica is no longer remote from the petrified, primordial landscape encountered in the ruined houses of Le Fanu or the shanty-abbey of Lever. In a culture which fossilizes history as unchanging condition, historical allegory becomes a means of subversion by which anachronism and dislocated identity draw attention to the reader's task of reading relations between various levels of allusion. Chateaubriand and Courtenay, Luttrell as United Irishman—these are not to be taken as fictional exotica uncertainly controlled by a wayward writer. In the business of reading, within a coherent literary history, Uncle Silas and Luttrel present a challenge not categorically different horn Finnegans Wake or Ulysses where multiple allusion and so-called ‘misinformation’ also proliferate. The mid-nineteenth century is not a degeneration of romanticism so much as it is the early manifestation of modernist anxieties. And Ireland is less a backward and marginal culture than it is a central if repressed area of British modernism. An area of British modernism by virtue of its place in the British colonial system, of British modernism by virtue of its intimate place in the United Kingdom, the flagship of high capitalism in the nineteenth century.

Yeats's view of the Irish nineteenth century was otherwise. It is well known, and in due course will be subject to scrutiny. In declaring the century void he demonstrates the romantic priorities of symbolic unity, of which cultural nationalism was but one expression. No equally extensive Joycean diagnosis is available though arguably ‘The Dead’ is an anatomy of Victorian Ireland in which the (im)balance of the sects is more accurately adjudged than in complaints such as Mulhallen Marum’s. By the time Joyce wrote Dubliners, of course, many of the issues raised by Marum had been resolved. Thomas Kinsella’s summary of an alternative to the Yeatsian view inevitably employs Joyce:
Joyce, with a greatness like Yeats's, was able to reject (that is, accept) the whole tradition as he found it—as it lay in stunned silence, still recovering from the death of its old language. Joyce's isolation is a mask. His relationship with the modern world is direct and intimate. He knows the filthy modern tide, and he immerses himself in it to do his work. His relationship with Ireland is also direct and intimate. In rejecting Ireland he does so on its own terms ... He is the first major Irish voice to speak for Irish reality since the death of the Irish language ... (p.218) The filthy modern tide does not only run in Ireland, of course, and Joyce's act of continuity is done with a difference: he simultaneously revives the Irish tradition and admits the modern world ... So, the Irish writer, if he cares who he is and where he comes from, finds that Joyce and Yeats are the two main objects in view; and I think he finds that Joyce is the true father. I will risk putting it diagrammatically, and say that Yeats stands for the Irish tradition as broken; Joyce stands for it as continuous, or healed—or healing—from its mutilation.83

Even in a diagnosis which so signally declines to prescribe Yeats the tendency to write criticism and literary history as a paraphrase of Yeatsian history is not absent.

Notes:

(5) Ibid.


T. P. Le Fanu, undated; quoted in *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, p. 87.

op. cit.


op. cit.

Ibid.

See the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which cites as its example of the sense G. S. Faber on the primitive doctrine of election published in 1842, two years after Gregg’s pamphlet.

op. cit.

Idem.

Idem.

The bibliography of the Irish question, or the Ulster question, is vast and still growing. Liam de Paor’s *Divided Ulster* (Penguin Special, 1970) is perhaps the best introduction to a contentious subject.

(21) Ibid.


(24) [Sheridan Le Fanu], The Cock and Anchor (Dublin: Curry, 1845), vol. i, p. 20. For a discussion of this novel, and its relation to the author's politics, see Mc Cormack, Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland, pp. 97–100.

(25) Details of this episode are provided in Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland, pp. 100–6.


(28) See ch. 5 of Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland.


(30) Ibid.


(32) op. cit.


(35) *Uncle Silas*, pp. 190, 194, 279.


(37) *Uncle Silas*, p. 102.

(38) Ovid *Metamorphoses*, xv. 234; see notes to the World’s Classics edition for the range of allusion drawn upon by the author.


(42) Ibid.

(43) Ibid.

(44) ‘State of Ireland’ (1825), pp. 513 and 696.

(45) ch. 5L. M. Cullen, *An Economic History of Ireland since 1660* (London: Batsford, 1972)

(46) House of Commons, loc. cit.


(50) Ibid.

(51) *ibid*

(52) See pp. 72 ff. above for the Corporation of Dublin's use of the catchphrase in 1792.


(54) Ibid.
Letter of Lord Egmont, 2 May 1743; quoted by the Knight of Glin in ‘Foreword’ to a sale catalogue published by Messrs Christie's on the occasion of the sale of Belvedere, County Westmeath on 9 July 1980 (p. 1). I am grateful to William O'Sullivan, sometime Keeper of the Manuscripts, Trinity College, Dublin, for drawing my attention to this source. In addition to the general resemblance between the houses and brothers of the Rochfort saga and those of Le Fanu's Ruthyn family in Uncle Silas, there is a further area in which the possibility of Le Fanu's debt to the saga is enhanced. Jonathan Swift was a frequent visitor at Gaulstown, the premier Rochfort house, and composed several poems describing the household. Le Fanu, by way of his Sheridan family connections, had inherited some of Swift's papers, wrote about Swift, and generally regarded himself as an indirect literary descendant of the Dean's. Moreover, the title of his first 1860s' novel, The House by the Church-yard, echoes in its title a poem by Swift ‘On the Little House by the Churchyard of Castlenock’—Castleknock, being on the northern side of the Phoenix Park in Dublin, and the setting of the novel (Chapelizod) being on the south-west. For the Swift poems see The Poetical Works (London, 1866, in 3 vols.), vol. iii, pp. 96–8, 167–72. The Castleknock poem is discussed by John P. Harrington in ‘Swift Through Le Fanu and Joyce’, in The Irish Tradition in Literature, ed. Daniel S. Lenoski (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1979), pp. 49–58.

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Uncle Silas, p. 328.

Letter of Lord Egmont, quoted by the Knight of Glin (p. 1).


(64) Several members of the Bellew family were active in movements for Catholic relief between 1790 and 1820. During the period of the novel's setting, Sir Edward Bellew represented a moderate wing of the movement: see R B. McDowell, Public Opinion and Government Policy in Ireland 1800–1846 (London: Faber, 1952), pp. 90, 95, 100, 105; also McDowell, Ireland in the Age of Imperialism and Revolution 1760–1801 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 410, 412, 559.

(65) [Charles Lever], Harry Lorrequer (Dublin, 1839)

(66) In Our Mess, vol. i, Jack Hinton the Guardsman (Dublin, 1843), the 6th chapter, ‘The Sham Battle’ (pp. 37–47), provides another illustration of pretence within the fiction veering towards symbolic reportage.


(69) Ibid.

(70) Ibid.


(81) Ibid.

(82) Ibid.
