

**‘In the common light of day’:
Gender and Socio-political Issues
in Jane Barlow’s Early Prose Fiction
– *Irish Idylls* (1892), *Kerrigan’s Quality* (1894),
and *The Founding of Fortunes* (1902)**

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Abstract

Jane Barlow (1856-1917) was one of the most popular and prolific Irish authors of her day. A writer of poetry, short-stories, and novels, her work was widely-read both in her native country, and abroad. The primary objective of this study, therefore, is to re-introduce this neglected author to literary-critical discourse, and to situate her work in the context of contemporary revivalist literature, and nineteenth-century Irish women's writings. The analysis deals solely with Barlow's early prose-fiction: *Irish Idylls* (1892), her first and most successful short-story collection, and two of her most important novels *Kerrigan's Quality* (1894) and *The Founding of Fortunes* (1902). Notwithstanding their generic status as fictional narratives, and the fact that they concentrate on 'domestic' situations and personal relationships, this study contends that Barlow's work explores issues of significant socio-political relevance to contemporary Irish life in relation, particularly, to matters such as poverty, emigration, land-ownership, and the representation of women. As such, this reconsideration of her writings will add to ongoing reassessments of the revival among Irish studies scholars, and to our increasing knowledge and understanding of Irish women's writings from this period.

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Introduction

Jane Barlow (1856-1917) was one of the most popular and prolific Irish authors of her day. A writer of poetry, short-stories, and novels, her work was widely-read both in her native country, and abroad. Yet, aside from a handful of essays, MA and PhD. projects, there has, to date, been little scholarly analysis of her writings. The primary objective of this study is to re-introduce this neglected author to literary-critical discourse, and to situate her work in the context of contemporary revivalist literature, and nineteenth-century Irish women's writings. My analysis deals solely with Barlow's prose-fiction, and focuses on three texts published between 1892 and 1902, the first decade of her long writing career, which continued until her death at the age of 59 in 1917. These works are: *Irish Idylls* (1892), the author's first and most successful short-story collection, and two of her most important novels from this early period, *Kerrigan's Quality* (1894) and *The Founding of Fortunes* (1902). Notwithstanding their generic status as fictional narratives, the fact that their plots usually unfold in domestic settings, and make little direct reference to political developments in Ireland, I contend that these works explore issues of significant socio-political relevance to contemporary Irish life. This is apparent in terms of how they represent issues such as poverty, emigration, peasant-character, land-ownership, and the position of peasant women in Irish society. As such, this reconsideration of Barlow's early work will contribute to our understanding of both revivalism and Irish women's writings from this era.

In highlighting the relevance of contemporary socio-political realities to an understanding of Barlow's writings, my analysis is informed by recent trends in Irish historiography and literary criticism, particularly as they concern women's lives and writings in nineteenth-century Ireland. 'Gender as a category for analysis may

appear a recent preoccupation', Margaret Kelleher writes, 'and its absence from studies of nineteenth-century Ireland might lead readers to infer that the questions it raises regarding the construction of identity are separate from this period'. However, 'arguments regarding men and women's 'proper sphere'', she goes on to note, are actually inseparable from 'literary, social and political writings' of this period.¹ As such, the contemporary literature can itself be seen to underline the relevance of 'gender' to historians and literary critics alike.

Indeed, the 'category' of gender has the potential to re-define the realm of 'the political' itself. The nineteenth-century in Ireland is a pertinent case in point. 'In a century of complex and changing power relations,' as Kelleher remarks, 'key conflicts, negotiations and resolutions occurred along and between gender lines.'²

This redefinition is particularly evident in how gender-based analyses can undermine traditional/patriarchal divisions between the private and public spheres of life. As Maria Luddy comments, 'Historians of women have long been concerned with the divisions that arose between the private realm of the home and the public realm of work and politics'. Such distinctions 'are to a great extent artificial', she maintains, and serve a particular – patriarchal – political agenda. 'Individuals' private lives', Luddy notes, 'are rarely separated totally from the public world, reality is far more complex. Though activities may take place in the private or domestic sphere, they are written about and judged in the public world.'³

¹ Margaret Kelleher, 'Introduction' in Margaret Kelleher & James H. Murphy (eds), *Gender Perspectives in Nineteenth-Century Ireland – Public and Private Spheres* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1997), p. 13.

² Kelleher, *Gender Perspectives*, p. 17.

³ Maria Luddy, *Women in Ireland 1800-1918 – A Documentary History* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995), p. 4.

Kelleher and Luddy made the above-quoted observations in the mid-1990s. The intervening twenty years have seen witnessed a surge of interest in nineteenth-century Irish women's histories, and writings. One of the key features of this often diverse body of work concerns the manner in which critics have sought to 'recover' previously neglected female lives and literature in ways that illustrate the political significance of those texts, and supposedly 'private' realms of experience. As Heather Ingram has commented with reference to Irish women's writing specifically, the reason why so much of this work has been omitted from literary history is that scholars of Irish literature 'are primed to look for certain topics in Irish fiction connected with wars, the land, the nation, and religion'.⁴ The ability to perceive the political import of Irish women's writing, therefore, as Heidi Hansson remarks, will often require the critic to adopt 'a different approach from the standard, ideologically charged Irish critical context that measures all writers against the aesthetic values of writers like Yeats, Joyce and Beckett.'⁵

The kind of critical methodology outlined above is extremely useful to an analysis of Barlow's writings. Barlow's fiction is not political according to traditional understandings of that term. There is little reference to topics such as 'wars [...] the nation, and religion', in her work; and although 'the land' is a recurring thematic, it is addressed in a manner that does not easily fit into Irish nationalist discourses or paradigms. However, a gender-based analysis enables the critic to perceive how her fiction not only addresses political themes such as poverty, emigration, and land-ownership, but does so in ways that serves to challenge traditional divisions between

⁴ Heather Ingram, *Irish Women's Fiction From Edgeworth to Enright* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2013), xiii.

⁵ Heidi Hansson, (ed.), *New Contexts: Re-Framing Nineteenth-Century Irish Women's Prose* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2008), p. 2.

private and public spheres of life and, therefore, our understanding of what constitutes the realm of ‘the political’ itself.

My analysis of Barlow’s early prose writings is organised as follows: **Chapter One** is divided into two parts. Part One focuses on Historical Contexts under the following subheadings: (i) Biography, (ii) Barlow’s Writings and (iii) Contemporary Critical Reception. Part Two sets Barlow’s work in two closely-related critical contexts: (i) Revivalism and (ii) Irish Women’s Writings. In **Chapter Two** I present a detailed consideration of the stories contained in the author’s most successful short story collection, *Irish Idylls*. In **Chapter Three** I analyse two of her most interesting, and politically provocative, novels *Kerrigan’s Quality* and *The Founding of Fortunes*. Finally, my **Conclusion** identifies some of the most significant ways in which the preceding discussion of these works challenges earlier interpretations of Barlow’s writings, and helps to further our understanding of revivalist literature, and Irish women’s writing of this period.

Chapter One

Part One: Historical Contexts

i. Biography

Not much is known of Jane Barlow's personal life. She was born in Clontarf, Co. Dublin, on the 17th October 1856, the eldest daughter of Protestant clergyman and author, the Reverend James William Barlow F.T.C.D., and Mary Louisa Barlow, née Barlow (her husband's first cousin).⁶ The Barlows had seven children: three daughters – Jane, Catherine, and Mary, and four sons – William, John, James and Maurice. The author was raised with her siblings at 'The Cottage' in Raheny, where she was educated by the family governess and by her father.⁷

Katherine Tynan (1861-1931), the author's friend, and fellow-writer, describes Barlow as having a thoroughly educated mind, but notes that the family 'lived in a practical seclusion.' In her younger years, Barlow was constantly in her mother's shadow according to Tynan, and her life was centred almost entirely on the family home.⁸ In later life, however, the author became 'less frightened of her world', and

⁶ There is a degree of uncertainty about Barlow's year of birth. Most sources maintain she was born in 1857. These include: Robert Beorn Meredith's PhD. study *Reviving Women: Irish Women's Prose Writing 1890-1920* (Queen's University Belfast, 1999), p.104; Frances Clarke, 'Jane Barlow', in *Dictionary of Irish Biography: A-Burchill, Volume 1 of Dictionary of Irish Biography: From the Earliest Times to the Year 2002*, ed. by James McGuire and James Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.275; Heidi Hansson, 'Our Village: Linguistic Negotiation in Jane Barlow's Fiction', in *Nordic Irish Studies*, Vol.7 (2008), p.60; Lucy Collins (ed.), *Poetry by Women in Ireland: A Critical Anthology 1870-1970* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), p.264; and Debbie Brouckmans' PhD study *The Short Story Cycle in Ireland: From Jane Barlow to Donal Ryan* (KU Leuven, 2015), p.26. However, Mary Duane's MA study *The Life and Letters of Jane Barlow* (University College Dublin, 1955), p.3, states her birth year as 1856. I have opted for 1856 as this is the year of birth listed in the baptismal record of Dollymount Parish Church. <https://churchrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/display-pdf.jsp?pdfName=d-833-2-1-018> accessed 16/11/2015.

⁷ Frances Clarke, 'Jane Barlow'. In *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, p.276. John Sutherland, *The Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2014), p.41. Lorna Sage, Germaine Greer and Elaine Showalter, (eds.), *The Cambridge Guide to Women's Writing in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.39.

⁸ Katherine Tynan, 'Evenings with the Barlows of Raheny', in *Memories* (1924). Reprinted in abridged form in *The Acorn* (September-October, 1961), pp.11-16, (p.11-12).

began attending literary gatherings.⁹ Tynan's comments would seem to be corroborated by the fact that from 1896 to 1898 (when Barlow would have been in her 40s) she worked as an examiner in English for the Department of Education. We also know that she was proficient in French and German, and had some knowledge of Irish. Barlow travelled widely, both in Ireland and abroad (including Italy, France, Greece, Turkey, and Jamaica).¹⁰ She was an active member of the National Literary Society (she was elected its vice president in 1897) and of the Dublin-branch of the Psychical Research Society. In 1904 (by which time she was a successful author) Barlow was conferred with an Honorary Doctorate in Literature by Trinity College – the first woman to be thus honoured by the university. At the ceremony, she was described as 'a woman of outstanding merit, who is exceptionally well qualified to be the first female recipient of our degree *honouris causa*'.¹¹

Barlow's mother died in 1893. The author remained living with her father until his death in 1913, after which she and her siblings left Raheny and moved to Bray, Co. Wicklow. Jane Barlow died 20th April 1917, a few years later. She was 59 years old. Her obituary in *The Irish Book Lover* states that 'her fame rests on short stories of Irish peasant life, written with much literary grace and power depicting with perfect pathetic, loveable and generous nature of her countrymen', and notes that her 1892 publication, *Irish Idylls*, achieved larger sales than any other Irish short story collection of recent years.¹²

⁹ Tynan, p.15.

¹⁰ Clarke, p. 276.

¹¹ 'Jane Barlow (1857-1917), Poet and Writer' [no author listed] in *Raheny Footprints*, ed. by Raheny Heritage Society (Dublin: Raheny Heritage Society, 2009), pp.10-12, (p.12).

¹² 'Obituary of Jane Barlow', in *The Irish Book Lover – A Monthly Review of Literature and Bibliography*, ed. by John S. Crone, Vol.8 (June-July, 1917), pp.141-142, (p.141).

ii. Barlow's Writings

As already noted, Barlow was a prolific writer. Between 1892 and her death in 1917, she published an average of one volume per year.¹³ These writings ranged over poetry, short-stories and novels. Her earliest known work – a poem entitled ‘Walled Out: Or Eschatology in A Bog’ – appeared in the *Dublin University Review* in 1885.¹⁴ She would subsequently contribute poems and short stories to a wide range of journals and magazines, both in Ireland and abroad.¹⁵

Some doubt surrounds the matter of Barlow's first book-publication. Several scholars, and dictionaries of biography, list this as a novel entitled *History of a World of Immortals Without a God*, which was published in 1891 under the pseudonym Antares Skorprios.¹⁶ It is not clear, however, that Jane Barlow was in fact the author of this work. Uncertainty on this matter arises from the fact that her father, the Reverend James William Barlow (1826-1913), also a published author, used the same pseudonym.

My research has led me to the conclusion that this novel was the work of the Reverend Barlow, and not his daughter. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, the pseudonym, Antares Skorprios, is dropped from the 1909 edition of the novel, in which the title is changed to *The Immortal's Great Quest*. This edition names the

¹³ *Raheny Footprints*, p.12.

¹⁴ W.J. Paul notes that when Barlow sent this poem into the *Dublin University Review* she neglected to include a return address. Having received no reply, she assumed the editors were not interested in it, and so sent it to *Cornhill Magazine*. It was some time later that she learned the poem had already been published in the *Dublin University Review*. W.J. Paul, *Modern Irish Poetry, Vol. II* (Belfast: Belfast Steam Printing Company Ltd., 1897), p.108.

¹⁵ These included *The Nation*, *Irish Homestead*, *Dana*, *The Bookman*, *Cornhill Magazine*, *National Review*, *The Outlook*, and in America, *Living Age*, *Literary Digest* and *Eclectic Magazine*.

¹⁶ Sources that list Jane Barlow as the author of this novel include: Frances Clarke, ‘Jane Barlow’, *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, p.276, Robert Beorn Meredith, *Reviving Women: Irish Women's Prose Writing 1890-1920*, p.108 and Jack Fennell, *Irish Science Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p.237.

Rev. James William Barlow as the author of the work. The 1909 edition also contains a Preface written by Reverend Barlow. (These are the only differences between the two publications). Secondly, this work – a science-fiction type novel, set on the planet Hesperos – is unlike Jane Barlow’s other writings, most of which are set in the ‘here and now’ of late-nineteenth or early twentieth century Ireland (although her 1908 novel, *A Strange Land*, also has an other-worldly setting). Thirdly, and most significantly, my research has uncovered correspondence between Barlow and the British scientist and political theorist, Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-1913) in which she names her father as the author of the novel.¹⁷

There is no doubt, however, that *Bog-land Studies* (1892) – a work which is highly characteristic of the author’s subsequent writings in terms of its focus on Irish peasant life – was Barlow’s first poetry collection. She published a further five works of poetry: *The End of Elfintown* (1894); *Ghost-Bereft* (1901); *The Mockers and Other Verses* (1908); *Doings and Dealings* (1913); and her final collection, *Between Doubting and Daring* (1916).

In addition to these works, Barlow wrote ten short-story collections. The first (and most successful) of these, *Irish Idylls*, was, like *Bog-land Studies*, published in 1892. *Maureen’s Fairing and Other Stories* and *Strangers in Lisconnel: A Second Series of*

¹⁷ The Preface to the second edition is contained in *The Immortal’s Great Quest* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1909). In her letter to Alfred Russel Wallace of 29 December, 1901, Barlow writes that: ‘your appreciation of my father’s romance gives me the greatest pleasure. My Father is very much gratified by your letter, and with regard to your two criticisms wishes me to say that he has no doubt the Hesperian scientists soon found their hypothesis of a storm-causing satellite quite untenable, and that he agrees with you about the impossibility of so extensive a circle of acquaintances for people possessing merely human memory, but thinks it would be hard to fix limits for the development of the faculty among the Hesperians.’ Although Barlow refers to the work as a romance, her comments concerning Hesperian scientists indicate she was commenting upon the 1891 edition of the novel. Jane Barlow, [WCP3207.3175: Letter to Alfred Russel Wallace, dated 29 December [?1901]], in Beccaloni, G.W. (Ed.) Wallace Letters Online. <http://www.nhm.ac.uk/research-curation/scientific-resources/collections/library-collections/wallace-letters-online/3207/3175/T/details.html> accessed 18/02/2016.

Irish Idylls both appeared in 1895. *Mrs Martin's Company and Other Stories* and *A Creel of Irish Stories* were published in 1896 and 1897 respectively. *From the East unto the West* appeared in 1898. *From the Land of the Shamrock* was next to follow in 1900, and *By Beach and Bog-Land* in 1905. Her penultimate short-story collection was *Irish Neighbours* (1907); and, finally, *Irish Ways* appeared in 1909.

Barlow wrote five novels (I exclude *History of a World of Immortals without a God* (1891) for the reasons outlined above). Her two most popular novels (which I examine in Chapter Three of this study) were *Kerrigan's Quality* and *The Founding of Fortunes*, published in 1894 and 1902 respectively. *A Strange Land* was published six years later, in 1908, under the pseudonym Felix Ryark. *Flaws* appeared in 1911; and her final publication, *In Mio's Youth*, was published shortly after her death, in 1917.

In addition to these works, Frances Clarke makes reference to a libretto which Barlow wrote for an opera she had jointly composed with Michele Esposito, but which was rejected by Esposito in 1898.¹⁸ Clarke also lists a play by the author, entitled *A Bunch of Lavender* which was staged by the Theatre of Ireland in 1911, but was not judged a success, and remains unpublished to this day.¹⁹

¹⁸Michele Esposito (1855-1929) – Italian pianist, composer and conductor. He spent most of his professional life in Dublin. He became chief pianoforte professor at the Royal Irish Academy of Music in 1882.

¹⁹ Clarke, p.276.

iii. Contemporary Critical Reception

Lee Erickson notes that Barlow's publishing success never matched that of her first two volumes, *Bog-land Studies* and *Irish Idylls* (both published in 1892) though, as we have seen, her output of poetry, short-story collections, and novels, continued at a quite prolific rate until her death in 1917. Most of her works – across all three genres – were published by British or U.S. based publishing houses, such as T.F. Unwin (London), Hodder and Stoughton (London), Dodd, Mead and Company (New York), Methuen and Co. (London), Macmillan and Co. (London), Smith, Elder and Co, (London), George Allen and Sons (London) and B.H. Blackwell (Oxford). Like many writers of the late Victorian period, Erickson comments, Barlow frequently changed publishers in what proved an ultimately failed attempt to repeat the early success of *Bog-land Studies* and *Irish Idylls*.²⁰

Reviewers from England and the U.S. were generally well-disposed to Barlow's work. The American journal, *Living Age*, referred to her as 'the Sarah Orne Jewett of Ireland'.²¹ In his 1896 collection of the world's best literature, Charles Dudley Warner, wrote that 'the innate sweetness of the Irish character which the author brings out with fine touches, makes it worth portrayal'.²² Her work was also well-received in The London journals, *The Outlook*, and *The Bookman*.²³

²⁰ Indeed, despite its success, Erickson notes, Barlow was unhappy with the sales of *Bog-land Studies* (first published with T.F. Unwin) and brought out a revised second-edition of this collection in 1893, with Hodder and Stoughton. Lee Erickson, 'The Market', in *A Companion to Victorian Poetry – Blackwell Companion to Literature and Culture*, ed. by Ciaran Cronin (New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons Inc., 2008), pp.345-360, (p.353).

²¹ Anon, 'Books and Authors', in *Living Age*, Vol. 227 (October 6, 1900), p.71.

²² Charles Dudley Warner, (ed.), *Library of the World's Best Literature – Ancient and Modern – Volume IV; Bancroft – Birrell* (New York: The International Society, 1896), p.1543.

²³ See *The Outlook* (17th September, 1898), p.188; In the July 1895 edition of *The Bookman*, an anonymous critic wrote that Barlow's short story collection *Maureen's Fairing and Other Stories* contains "two masterpieces": 'Maureen's Fairing' and 'Stopped by Signal' which s/he suggested were 'worthy of a place of honour among the best of her work'. (July, 1895), p.418.

In her native country, however, critical responses to Barlow's writings were mixed. T.W. Rolleston, who first published her poetry and short stories as editor of the *Dublin University Review*, likened her to William Carleton, a view echoed by the editor W. J. Paul.²⁴ 'No one since Carleton, has depicted the Irish peasant with his many-sided character, so natural and so real as she', Paul maintained. For this critic, Barlow's poetry captured the tone of voice of the Irishman as he retells his story of joy and sorrow, and her character sketches demonstrate her ability to reveal the actual life of the people.²⁵ Unsurprisingly, Tynan also praised her friend's writings, describing them as 'new wine in old bottles, the new philosophy caught into a medium, gentle and romantic'.²⁶

In one of the first histories of the Revival – *The Irish Literary Revival: Its History, Pioneers and Possibilities* (1894) – W.P. Ryan wrote that Barlow was 'amongst our foremost writers, with every encouragement to go on and prosper'. Not everyone was enamoured with Barlow's work, however. Many readers, Ryan commented 'shrugged their shoulders over the "brogue" and the whole form, confessed their inability to read it, and cast it away'.²⁷ In a lecture on Irish writing delivered to the Irish Literary Society on the 2nd March 1912, the poet and novelist, Shan Bullock, criticised the manner in which Barlow's had been neglected and/or dismissed by many involved in the contemporary Irish literary scene. Barlow's writings, he

²⁴ Quoted in Benedict Kiely, *Poor Scholar: A Study of the Works and Days of William Carleton, 1794-1869* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1947), p. 136.

²⁵ W.J. Paul, *Modern Irish Poetry Vol.II* (Belfast: Belfast Steaming Press Co. Ltd., 1897), p.108.

²⁶ Tynan, p.12.

²⁷ W.P. Ryan, *The Irish Literary Revival: Its History, Pioneers and Possibilities* (London: Paternoster Steam Press, 1894), p.146.

maintained, ‘always suggested to him Rembrandt’s pictures, Beethoven’s music and Pater’s prose’.²⁸

The neglect of Barlow’s work in Ireland during her own lifetime was epitomised by W.B. Yeats’s negative assessment of her writing. In his 1895 letter to the *Dublin Daily Express* entitled ‘Best Irish Books’, Yeats explains that in his list of thirty Irish books, he included ‘only books of imagination, or books that seem to be necessary to the understanding of the imagination of Ireland, that may please myself and the general reader’.²⁹ Barlow was excluded because, ‘despite her genius for recording the externals of peasant life, I do not feel that she has got deep into the heart of things’. Like Emily Lawless – whose writing he also excluded – Yeats claimed that Barlow was ‘only able to observe Irish character from without and not to create it from within’. Both writers, he asserted, had ‘bowed to the fallacy of our time, which says that the fountain of art is observation, whereas it is almost wholly experience’.³⁰ It is precisely this kind of negative assessment of Barlow’s writings that the present study sets out to challenge. One of the strengths of her prose, I maintain, is that while she often ‘observe[s] character from without’, as Konstantin Stanislavski noted of Barlow’s great Russian contemporary, Anton Chekhov, she often uses ‘external’ realities ‘to reveal to us the human soul’ of the men, women, and children who populate her fiction.³¹

²⁸ Shan Bullock (1865-1935) Shan Bullock quoted in ‘Some Irish Novelists’, in *The Irish Book Lover*, Volume 3 (1911-1912), pp.146-147.

²⁹ W.B. Yeats, “Best Irish Books” (Letter to the *Dublin Daily Express*, 27th February, 1895), rep. in *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, ed. by Allan Wade (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), p.246.

³⁰ Yeats, “Best Irish Books”, p.248.

³¹ Konstantin Stanislavski. Quoted in David Allen, *Performing Chekhov* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.16-7.

Chapter One

Part Two: Literary-Critical Contexts

(i) Revivalism

The Revival was one of the most influential movements of modern Irish history. Gregory Castle refers to it 'as a recovery of a past action, artefact, language, practice, policy or way of life'.³² The movement sought to challenge and reverse stereotypes of Irish character that had emerged particularly strongly in the aftermath of the Great Potato Famine of 1845-50. Revivalists sought to encourage a renewed interest and pride in Irish identity, among the Irish themselves, through the retelling of ancient heroic legends, and by making Irish folklore available to the public through collections of Irish ballads and folk-tales in English. As Roger McHugh and Maurice Harmon note, the movement can thus be understood as 'a creative assertion of Irish identity which drew sustenance from Ireland's past and endeavoured to establish artistic standards for the treatment of contemporary realities with truth and insight'.³³ The production of Irish literature – in English – was, therefore, a central feature of this movement. As Terence Brown has commented, as a literary movement, the revival 'sought to supply the Ireland of the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century with a sense of its own distinctive identity through the medium of the English language'.³⁴

³² Gregory Castle, 'Irish Revivalism: Critical Trends and New Directions', in *Literature Compass* 8/5 (2011), pp.291-303, (p.293).

³³ Roger McHugh and Maurice Harmon, *Short History of Anglo-Irish Literature: From its origins to the Present Day* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1982), p.7.

³⁴ Terence Brown, 'Cultural Nationalism 1800-1930', in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, Volume II, ed. by Seamus Deane, Andrew Carpenter and Jonathan Williams (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1991), pp.516-520, (p.516).

The beginnings of this movement can be traced to the early 1890s. W.B. Yeats famously maintained that the revival began with ‘the fall’ of Charles Stewart Parnell in 1891.

The modern literature of Ireland and indeed all that stir of thought which prepared for the Anglo-Irish war, began when Parnell fell from power in 1891. A disillusioned and embittered Ireland turned from parliamentary politics; an event was conceived; and the race began, as I think, to be troubled by that event’s long gestation.³⁵

In 1892 Yeats, T.W. Rolleston and Charles Gavan Duffy set up the Irish Literary Society in London; and in the same year Yeats founded the National Literary Society in Dublin with Douglas Hyde as its first president. The writers associated with these, and a range of other literary and dramatic organisations, John Wilson Foster comments, created ‘an enduring body of literature,’ which ‘revolutionised Irish perceptions’.³⁶

Yeats’s reference to the fall of Parnell being a catalyst for the movement highlights the political implications of the revival. The interconnections between culture and politics in revivalism have, subsequently, been explored by a great number of historians and literary critics. Foster, for instance, maintains that – as well as ‘their romanticism, their preoccupation with heroism, their interest in folklore and the occult, their attention to the peasantry’ – the diverse range of individuals involved in the revival were connected through their ‘promotion of an ancient Gaelic polity and worldview, and by their repudiation of realism, democracy, individualism, modernization, and the bourgeoisie, and cultural union with England.’³⁷

³⁵ W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1955), p.559.

³⁶ John Wilson Foster, *Fictions of the Irish Literary Revival: A Changeling Art* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1987), xi.

³⁷ Foster, *Fictions of the Irish Literary Revival*, xi.

Similarly, Brown comments upon the connection between revivalism and the political struggle that unfolded in Ireland during the revolutionary decade of 1913-

23. The movement's 'main writers and thinkers' he contends,

believed that a general awareness of the splendours and riches of Gaelic literary antiquity and of the residual fires of the Celtic way of life (still burning in rural districts, particularly in the West) would generate a sense of national self-worth and of organic unity, which would give to the political struggle a dignity and purpose it would otherwise lack.³⁸

Declan Kiberd also highlights the political significance of the revival when he remarks that

political leaders from Pearse to Connolly, from de Valera to Collins, drew on the ideas of poets and playwrights. What makes the Irish renaissance such a fascinating case is the knowledge that the cultural revival preceded and in many ways enabled the political revolution that followed.³⁹

According to Frances Clarke, Barlow had considered herself a nationalist since childhood.⁴⁰ We know that she developed an interest in the Irish language in the 1890s, and in 1900 was elected an honorary member of the St. Columba branch of the Gaelic League. Her revivalism is apparent in her 1892 article for the *Bookman*, 'Literary Dublin', in which she highlights the need for more Irish publishing houses, and for a circulating library scheme in Ireland, alongside the lines of the one she had seen on her travels in Wales.⁴¹

³⁸ Brown, p.517.

³⁹ Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (New York: Vintage, 1996), p.4.

⁴⁰ Frances Clarke maintains that Barlow was inspired by the Young Ireland and Fenian movements, and that she contributed romantic nationalist verse to the *United Irishman*, anonymously, to avoid embarrassing her father. Clarke, *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, p.276.

⁴¹ Jane Barlow, 'Literary Dublin', in *Bookman*, No.9, Vol.2 (June, 1892), pp.80-81, (p.81). Ben Levitas comments that Barlow's suggestions in this article were dismissed as being 'off the pace' in a rapidly changing situation, and notes that 'it was the young pretender Yeats whose trail blazed brightest'. Levitas, 'Reading and the Irish Revival 1819-1922', in *The Oxford History of the Irish Book, Vol.5: The Irish Book in English 1891-2000*, ed. by Clare Hutton and Patrick Walsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp.43-69, (p.46).

It is also evident in her creative writings. Barlow's prose fiction and poetry are both characteristic of revivalist writings from the period in terms of their focus on the West of Ireland peasantry (their lifestyles, the sometimes comic, sometimes tragic incidents of day-to-day village-life, eccentric personalities, etc); and in terms of the extensive use she makes of Hiberno-English in an attempt to faithfully represent the speech-patterns of the Irish peasantry.

The extent to which Barlow's revivalism morphed into a political- as opposed to cultural-nationalist outlook is difficult to ascertain. She clearly did not support the actions of those involved in the 1916 Rising in her native city, the year before her death. Apostrophising the rebels directly in her poem 'For Herself Alone', from the collection, *Between Doubting and Daring* (1916), she opines that:

Thy true sons, hearkening, left thee
Full many a hero's name.
These all thou hast clean forgotten;
By vile arts misled
To thy bitter woe hast followed,
Strayed from ancient honour
Afar,

Basest foes whose steps defile the
Blood-stained ways of war.
My heart's grief, Ireland! This
Bides ever thy shame
That thy faith thou hast broken, and
Hast betrayed thy dead.⁴²

This work suggests that Barlow felt the 1916 rebels had betrayed and dishonoured the cause of 'Ireland' by their actions. The implication of this is that either she was a cultural- as opposed to political-nationalist (who like figures such as Douglas Hyde,

⁴² Reprinted in Benedict Kiely, 'Yesterday is Forever: (An article on Jane Barlow's life)', in *Irish Bookman*, Vol.1, No.9 (April-May, 1947), pp.11-26, (p.22).

believed the revival was “no political matter”), or that she supported the actions of those Irish nationalists who – following the constitutional-nationalist programme for Home Rule led by John Redmond – had enlisted in the British Army during the Great War.⁴³

On this issue, Benedict Kiely maintains that Barlow did not approve of that ‘armed revolution’.⁴⁴ Mary Duane refers to Barlow as ‘a nationalist in a staunchly unionist family.’ However, she ‘suspects the depths of her nationalism’ remarking that the author was only ‘patriotic when it was romantic and poetic’.⁴⁵ Similarly, Meredith suggests that her writing can be characterised as ‘literary Fenianism’, and contends that although she had no love for England, ‘Barlow never subscribed to political nationalism.’⁴⁶

It is the contention of this study, however, that although there is no evidence to suggest she supported the cause of separatist-nationalism, Barlow’s political views concerning Ireland were more radical than commentators have recognised to date. The writings examined in this study contain very little sense that in the rural districts of the West one can still discover the ‘splendours and riches of Gaelic literary antiquity’ or ‘the residual fires of the Celtic way of life’, which we saw Brown note characterises much revivalist literature. Instead, they display a deep interest in contemporary economic and socio-political realities, realities which are portrayed without recourse to the idealised representations of Irish peasantry which characterised much revivalism. *Irish Idylls* draws the reader’s attention to the hardship and poverty endured by the Irish peasantry, to their constant fear of a return

⁴³ Douglas Hyde, ‘The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland: A Lecture Delivered before the Irish National Literary Society in Dublin, 25 November 1892.’

⁴⁴ Kiely, p.22.

⁴⁵ Duane, *The Life and Letters of Jane Barlow*, p.13-4.

⁴⁶ Meredith, *Reviving Women*, p.113.

of the blight, and consequent starvation, to the devastating effects of emigration on their lives and communities. It also challenges the stereotypes of lazy and inept Irish character promoted in British media, as well as conventional/patriarchal attitudes that represented women as less industrious and mentally-capable than men, and as inhabiting a domestic zone which could be considered ‘outside’ politics. The novels, *Kerrigan’s Quality* and *The Founding of Fortunes*, also highlight Barlow’s radical ideas concerning the highly contentious issue of land-ownership in Ireland; particularly so when they are read in the context of her support for the theories promoted by the influential political and natural scientist, Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-1913).

(ii) Irish Women’s Writings

The reason why the political import of Barlow’s work has not yet received recognition is due, in large part, to the gendered approaches to literature which have characterised much Irish criticism. As Heather Ingman has commented, rather than a ‘patriarchal plot’, the occlusion of women’s writing from the Irish literary canon, has occurred because many scholars ‘are primed to look for certain topics in Irish fiction connected with wars, the land, the nation and religion.’⁴⁷ Women’s fiction, she continues, often resists ‘insertion’ to such ‘ready-made Irish identity constructions’, because of their ‘characteristic [...] acknowledgement of competing voices within the Irish nation’ and, relatedly, on account of the fact that they frequently prioritise ‘private narratives as sources of truth over public histories.’⁴⁸

Lucy Collins makes a similar point with reference to Irish women’s poetry. Poems by writers such as Katherine Tynan and Barlow, she comments, reveal

⁴⁷ Ingman, xiii.

⁴⁸ Ingman, xiv.

the varied ways in which the relationship between nation and literature may be conceived – not in the narrow political sense but with a larger appreciation of the vision that accompanies the interrogation of national identity and its expression in language.⁴⁹

Kathryn Kirkpatrick draws attention to the positive social and political implications of the ‘recovery’ of these writings, when she remarks that ‘reclaiming women’s literature helps transform a national culture by including the voices of more of its citizens’.⁵⁰

The occlusion of Irish women’s writings has been especially evident in relation to nineteenth century studies. Anne Colman has observed that this century has at times been portrayed ‘as a silent period in Irish women’s literary history.’ As Colman goes on to note, however, the reality is that in excess of five hundred Irish women were writing and publishing across a range of genres between 1800 and 1900.⁵¹ The growth of interest in nineteenth century Irish women’s writing that has occurred in recent years has been informed by the idea that these works ‘deal’ with political issues and themes in a variety of ways which do not always ‘adhere’ to traditional/patriarchal critical methodologies. As Margaret Kelleher has observed, though fiction by Irish women between 1845 and 1900 varies ‘in terms of plot, theme, setting and genre’, the work nevertheless represents ‘a diverse and often complex engagement with the class and political issues of the time.’⁵² In her study, Hansson notes that prose by Irish women in this period has been dismissed because it does not fit existing critical paradigms. In keeping with the aforementioned critics,

⁴⁹ Lucy Collins, (ed.), *Poetry by Women in Ireland: A Critical Anthology 1870-1970*, p.5.

⁵⁰ Kathryn Kirkpatrick, (ed.), *Border Crossings: Irish Women Writers and National Identities* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press Ltd., 2000), p.6.

⁵¹ Anne Colman, ‘Far From Silent: Nineteenth-Century Irish Women Writers’, in *Gender Perspectives in Nineteenth-Century Ireland: Public and Private Spheres*, ed. by Margaret Kelleher and James H. Murphy (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1997), pp.203-211, (p.203).

⁵² Margaret Kelleher, ‘Women’s Fiction 1845-1900’, in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing Volume V: Irish Women’s Writing and Traditions*, ed. by Angela Bourke, Mairín Ní Dhonnadha, Siobhan Kilfeather, Maria Luddy, Margaret MacCurtain, Geraldine Meaney, Mary O’Dowd and Clair Wills (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002), pp.924-930, (p.924).

however, she contends that through the exploration of supposedly ‘private’ experiences, women writers created a space for imaginative explorations of national identity and political unity.⁵³

Notwithstanding the increased critical attention that Irish women’s writing has received in recent years, this work of recovery is still unfinished. As Ingman has remarked, ‘For every step forward ... names are still omitted when it comes to Irish literary history.’⁵⁴ Jane Barlow is one such name. As noted already, Barlow’s work has not yet received its critical due. It is difficult to understand why her writings were not only excluded from volumes I-III of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, I, II and III* but also from volumes IV and V: *Irish Women’s Writing and Traditions*.

Furthermore, those critics who have discussed her work in recent years, such as Meredith, Hansson, and Brouckmans, have not – in the opinion of this scholar – been sufficiently attentive to the political resonances of her writings. As the following analysis of her fiction attempts to demonstrate, not only does Barlow’s work raise issues of political and gender-related significance, it epitomises how Irish women’s writing can address such matters in ways that challenge our understanding of what constitutes political literature.

⁵³ Heidi Hansson, (ed.), *New Contexts: Re-Framing Nineteenth-Century Irish Women’s Prose* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2008), p.4.

⁵⁴ Ingman, xiii.

‘Writing in the light of common day’:
the representation of the Irish peasantry in *Irish Idylls* (1892).

It is often maintained that the short story holds a special place in the Irish literary tradition, evolving as it does from the ancient practice of oral storytelling. Less often commented upon is the particular contribution that Irish women writers have made to the development of the form. In her 1984 study, Janet Madden-Simpson suggests that, historically, some of the ‘best writing by Irish women’ has taken the form of the short story.⁵⁵ She notes that many of these writers achieved extraordinary high sales in their lifetimes, but are no longer so highly regarded or have been ‘forgotten altogether’.⁵⁶ More recently, Elke D’hoker has observed that the achievements of women writers and their contribution to the short story have often been side-lined or limited to one or two chapters in a critical study.⁵⁷

Barlow’s first short-story collection *Irish Idylls* was published by Hodder and Stoughton in 1892. This highly successful publication ran into nine editions and was read in France, Germany, Britain and the United States of America. The English edition had gone through three editions by November 1893.⁵⁸ Heidi Hansson maintains that the author’s reputation lies primarily with this work, and notes that the

⁵⁵ Janet Madden-Simpson, *Woman’s Part: An Anthology of Short Fiction by and about Irishwomen 1890-1960* (Dublin: Arlen House, 1984), ii.

⁵⁶ Madden-Simpson, p.6.

⁵⁷ Elke D’hoker, *Irish Women Writers and the Modern Short Story* (Switzerland: Springer Publishing International, 2016), p.1. Barlow’s inclusion in a short story symposium in March 1897 is evidence of how popular her work was in this genre during her lifetime. Organised by the *Bookman* magazine the symposium was entitled ‘How to Write a Short Story’, and included contributions from Robert Barr (1850-1912), Harold Frederic (1856-1898), Arthur Morrison (1863-1946) and Jane Barlow. In her contribution, Barlow maintained that the form allowed an author very little ‘sea-room to spare for aimless drifting’, and reiterated Aristotle’s assertion that ‘a well-constructed plot must not begin nor end at haphazard’. Jane Barlow, ‘How to Write a Short Story – A Symposium’, in *Bookman*, Volume V, No.1 (March, 1897), p.46.

⁵⁸ *The Outlook* (November, 1893), p.858.

work achieved larger sales than any other short-story collection in the period.⁵⁹ The collection is composed of ten ‘chapters’, as they are referred to in the text. It is unusual, generically, in that it lies somewhere between a short-story collection and a novel: there is no one plotline running through the chapters, but the stories are all set in the fictional Connemara village of Lisconnel and its environs, and many of the characters appear in more than one chapter/story, which gives it something of the feel of a novel. Like much of Barlow’s later work, *Irish Idylls* focuses on the lives of peasants in the West of Ireland, and does so, according to Foster, ‘respectfully and fairly knowledgeably’.⁶⁰

Irish Idylls received many positive reviews. It is often the humanity of Barlow’s portrayals of peasant life that garnered praise. *The Nation* reviewer commented that the stories represented ‘the most original contributions to the study of Irish character that we have seen for some time.’⁶¹ The collection was particularly popular among young Irish writers. W.P. Ryan remarked how Barlow’s *Irish Idylls* was a ‘luminous index for other young Irish authors of that world of appealing humanity which is still to be found by observant eyes in Irish local life.’⁶² Clifton Johnson, who did the illustrations for the 1898 edition, and who travelled the Connemara boglands in order ‘to make the pictures faithful transcripts of nature and life as they really are amid the

⁵⁹ Hansson, ‘Our Village: Linguistic Negotiation in Jane Barlow’s Fiction’, p.60 [accessed 18/12/2014]. As noted previously, her poetry *Bog-Land Studies* was also published in 1892. Hansson notes that an anonymous critic in the March 1893 edition of *The Nation* considered it would have been more appropriately entitled ‘Bog-Land Studies in Verse’ and *Irish Idylls* entitled ‘Bog-Land Studies in Prose’. While ‘Bog-Land Studies’ gathered considerable attention, it was *Irish Idylls* which received a wider readership. *The Nation*, (March, 1893), p.166.

⁶⁰ John Wilson Foster, *Irish Novels 1890-1940: New Bearings in Culture and Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.2-3.

⁶¹ *The Nation* (March, 1893), p.166-167, (p.167). An anonymous critic in *The Outlook* suggested the collection ‘touches the heart’. *The Outlook* (November, 1893), p.857. The reviewer in *The Atlantic Monthly* noted how Barlow manages to give ‘to each character, no matter how insignificant, some moment of relief which lift, individualizes and often glorifies it.’ *The Atlantic Monthly* (November, 1893), pp.699-702, (p.700).

⁶² W.P. Ryan, *The Irish Literary Revival: Its History, Pioneers and Possibilities* (London: Paternoster Steam Press, 1894), p.146.

sombre bogs’, remarked upon Barlow’s ability to portray the reality of peasant life in these ‘out-of-the-world villages, in their petty strifes, their pinching poverty, their loves, their disappointments, and their triumphs’. In his view, the stories present ‘the whole gamut of human nature’.⁶³ The praise for the author continued with William Boyle who, in 1912, referred to the ‘delicate tenderness she exhibits in her peasants’, and suggested that readers ‘love her for her humanity, and wish we had many more Jane Barlows’.⁶⁴

The central importance of the Irish peasantry to revivalist writers has often been noted. Those who wrote short stories were no exception. Heather Ingman observes that writers often used this literary form to ‘record the beliefs and habits of Irish peasant life’ before they were lost forever.⁶⁵ It could reasonably be maintained that Barlow understood her role in this light. The extensive use she makes of Hiberno-English in this publication (and in her other works) also underlines the revivalist quality of her writing.⁶⁶ However, notwithstanding the doubtful authenticity of her peasant-dialogue at times, Barlow does not attempt to romanticise the figure of the Irish peasant, or to downplay the less attractive features of their lives. In this sense, her work has resonances with her contemporary, J.M. Synge, whose writings are closely associated with the use of Hiberno-English, but who also drew attention to the harsh living conditions endured by the West of Ireland peasantry, and who refused to mythologise those communities.

⁶³ Clifton Johnson. Quoted in Jane Barlow, *Irish Idylls* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1898), v.

⁶⁴ Boyle, p.229.

⁶⁵ Heather Ingman, *A History of the Irish Short Story* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.16.

⁶⁶ As Robert Welsh has noted, Hiberno-English was widely employed by revivalist writers in an attempt to reproduce the Irish peasant’s natural patterns of speech, and to illustrate that ‘the Irish’ have ‘their own grammatical structures, vocabularies, sound systems, pronunciations, and patterns of intonation. In Robert Welsh, *Oxford Concise Companion to Irish Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.150.

Edward Hirsch has observed that revivalists often ‘mystify[ed]’ peasant life by representing it as a kind of ‘ancient, unchanging folk life’. Removed from ‘the harsh realities of land agitation and social conflict in the countryside, they could treat the peasant as a romantic emblem of a deep, cultural pastoral’.⁶⁷ Barlow, in contrast, captures the humour, warmth and humanity of the peasantry, but not at the expense of downplaying the many hardships they had to endure. Her stories highlight the unpalatable realities of rural Ireland in relation to problems such as emigration, famine, poverty, and crop-failure.⁶⁸

The opening chapter of *Irish Idylls* – ‘Lisconnel’ – contains little by way of plot or character-development usually associated with short stories. However, it does introduce the reader to the townland in which all the stories are set, and also raises a number of themes which animate the collection as a whole, such as the harsh physical realities of life in this rural community and the resilience of its inhabitants. It is significant that human characters only appear in the latter half of this chapter, most of which is taken up with stark and powerful representations of the physical landscape of this part of west Connaught. These passages serve to highlight both the author’s considerable literary gifts and also evoke something of the lives, and personalities, of the peasantry who live in Lisconnel.

⁶⁷ Edward Hirsch, ‘The Imaginary Irish Peasant’, in *PMLA*, Volume 106, No.5 (October, 1991), pp.1116-1133, (p.1122).

⁶⁸ Debbie Brouckmans’ useful study of this collection draws attention to the manner in which it offers the reader a positive and caring presentation of community life. However, in the view of this reader, her study pays insufficient attention to the individuality of Barlow’s peasant characters, and the relevance of broader socio-political problems to a reading of the text as a whole. In *Irish Idylls*, Brouckmans contends, ‘the protagonist is the community of Lisconnel as a whole. The different stories zoom in on the daily life of different persons or families which are part of the community, but the emphasis always lies on the interaction between these inhabitants.’ Debbie Brouckmans’ PhD study ‘The Short Story Cycle in Ireland: From Jane Barlow to Donal Ryan’ (KU Leuven, 2015), p.28.

In the evocative opening paragraphs the unnamed, third-person narrator whom Barlow employs throughout the collection brings the reader on a journey from the rural townland of Duffclane to the even more remote Lisconnel. These evocative passages draw attention to the isolation and loneliness of the area as a whole. There is not a ‘lonelier road through a wilder bogland’, we read, than the ‘seven Irish miles’ from Duffclane to Lisconnel.⁶⁹

The hinterland is described, as merging ‘into one uniform brown, with a few rusty streaks in it, as if the weather-beaten fell of some huge primeval beast were stretched smoothly over the flat plain.’(2-3) It is a terrain Barlow describes as being like a ‘converse chameleon’, one which ‘often has the property of subduing superimposed objects to its own vague tints.’(4) This ‘monochrome’ landscape, we learn, in another memorable passage, is ‘here and there’, ‘broken’-through with colour. On ‘very rare’ occasions, we read,

A white gleam comes from a tract where the breeze is deftly unfurling the silky bog-cotton tufts on a thousand elfin distaffs; or a rich glow, crimson and dusky purple dashed with gold, betokens the profuse mingling of furze and heather blooms; or a sunbeam, glinting across some little grassy *esker*, strikes out a strangely jewel-like flash of transparent green, such as may be seen in young moss. (2)

It is only later, as s/he progresses through the stories that make up *Irish Idylls*, that the reader comes to realise that this detailed description of the bogland evokes something of the dull and monotonous nature of human life itself in Lisconnel, the pervading boredom of which finds relief in rare-but-intense moments of humour and laughter, instances of human solidarity and fellow-feeling, suffering and loss.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Jane Barlow, ‘Lisconnel’, in *Irish Idylls* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1898), p.2. (Further page-references to stories from this collection are included in parenthesis in the main text.)

⁷⁰ James H. Murphy suggests there were ‘at least five major trends’ in Irish fiction of the 1890s and one of these trends was the comical element which ranged from satire to the humorous.’ James H. Murphy, *Irish Novelists and the Victorian Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.229.

As it approaches the village, we read that the bogland road from Duffclane ‘starts abruptly, as if it had suddenly taken fright at its own loneliness, and dips down a steepish slope, but quickly pulls itself up, [and] finding that escape is impossible’ enters Lisconnel. (5) The stark portrayal of rural-life then continues as we gain our first indication of the poverty and hardship endured by the inhabitants of the village. Most of the cabins (which ‘huddl[e] together for company’ (6)) are built with rough stones, we learn. Due to a shortage of mortar or straw with which to thatch the roofs, they provide little protection from rain, and they suffer from what the narrator dryly refers to as ‘a great deal of unscientific ventilation’, which leads to ‘many a shivering night.’ Only some of the inhabitants can afford ‘a whole pane of real glass’ for their windows, ‘opaquer substitutes’ such as biscuit tin lids ‘are not at all exceptional’. (6-7)

Due to the ‘strictly limited’ supply of tillable land, the cabins are built on ‘pieces of ground where the rock lies bare in flat ledges’ which ‘living rock...forms convenient ready-made flooring, barring a slight unevenness here and there.’(8) The livestock never exceeds ‘half a dozen goats, as many pigs and a few chuckens and in bad seasons these vanish as speedily as swallows after an October frost.’(9) Many of the inhabitants of Lisconnel are potato-growers, but the crop has become ‘unremunerative’, which means they live a highly stressful existence worrying about ‘rent-days, for example, and blights, and “buryin’s.”’ (9-10)

Notwithstanding the difficulties they face (and in notable contrast to stereotypes of Irish character in much contemporary British literature and media) Barlow’s peasantry are hard-working individuals whose lives are taken up with the daily struggle for survival. In times of poor harvest, the men, we are told, ‘tramp off with their sickles’ to look for work in other districts. (10) It is also noteworthy in the

context of the representation of women in this author's work, that the hard-working nature of these peasants – and their ability to provide an income for their households – is emphasised with particular reference to the women of the village. Indeed, the first human characters we meet in this chapter are two 'industrious' women travelling by foot between Duffclane and Lisconnel: 'an old woman' carrying a creel, and 'a girl' knitting. (5) Further on in the story, we learn how the women of the village 'knit stockings' which they sell to shopkeepers in Duffclane. (10)

As these passages illustrate, Barlow presents a bleak and unromantic picture of peasant life, one which focuses on the harsh living conditions that the peasantry have to endure, and the dogged and determined manner in which they struggle to survive. As the narrator puts it in the final sentence of this introductory chapter, Lisconnel 'stands here in the light of common day, a hard fact with no fantastic myths to embellish or disprove it.' (13) Not just a comment on the nature of life in the village, this is also a kind of statement of authorial intent: an indication of how Barlow, as a writer, *represents* the Irish peasantry in the nine stories that follow.

Chapter II, 'A Windfall', is the first fully-developed short story in the collection. It is characteristic of much of Barlow's writing in that, on the one hand, the tale makes extensive (at times heavy-handed) use of Hiberno-English, and contains a very unrealistic literary device in the form of an unexpected money-order which resolves the crisis at the heart of the story; but on the other hand, it also highlights certain 'hard fact[s]' associated with peasant-life without embellishment or sentimentality. The story centres on the Widow M'Gurk. A typically-strong 'Barlow woman'. The first thing we learn about the Widow is that she has 'managed her own farm of more than half an acre ever since her husband's death', which occurred some years prior to the time at which the story begins (14)

The narrator's account of the Widow's relationship with her husband provides an insight to the manner in which caring human relationships somehow manage to survive, in Lisconnel, despite the extremely difficult social and economic conditions the peasantry have to endure. In the opening paragraphs, for example, the narrator observes that even when the Widow's husband was on his deathbed, his primary concern was for his wife, and how she would manage without him there to tend the farm. Indeed, the Widow has to lie to her husband to prevent him rising from his bed to plant seed potatoes, by telling him the ground was 'frozen as hard as bullets'. (14) Subsequently, the local priest also lies to him by suggesting that one of the neighbours is presently sowing his potatoes for him. (15) It is only when he is thus assured that the Widow's husband agrees to remain in his bed, where he dies peacefully, shortly afterwards.

The story then draws attention to how the Widow's neighbours – despite their own poverty – do their utmost to look after this vulnerable, elderly neighbour. Various villagers arrive at her door with potatoes and offers to tend the land for her. The Widow, though, is a proud woman who (in contrast to the stereotype of the Irish peasant) refuses to accept charity, even though this puts her life at direct risk. For example, when her neighbour, Hugh Quigley digs the Widow's potato patch for her without first asking her permission, the Widow 'gloomily' digs the ground all over again from top to bottom herself and as a result of the delay this causes, half of her potato crop rots in the ground. (17)

The crisis that the Widow's sense of pride causes her neighbours is resolved by the compassion and sensitivity shown by her neighbour, Mrs Kilfoyle, who succeeds in getting the Widow to accept help without offending her personal dignity. Rather than charitable acts and gifts, Mrs Kilfoyle represents her offers of turf and potatoes in a

manner that makes it appear that the Widow M’Gurk is doing her a favour by accepting them.

“I suppose now ma’am, you couldn’t be takin’ a couple o’ stone o’ praties off of us? Ours do be keepin’ that badly, we can’t use them quick enough, and you could be payin’ us back when the new ones come in, accordin’ as was convenient. If you would, I’d send one o’ the childer up wid them as soon as I git home. Sorra the trouble in it at all, and thank you kindly, Mrs M’Gurk, and good evenin’ to you, ma’am.”

[...]

Or it might be: “Good evenin’, then Mrs M’Gurk, and I’ll be careful wid your jug. I was thinkin’, be the way, you maybe wouldn’t object to the lads lavin’ you up a few creels of turf now our stack’s finished buildin’, just to keep them quite, for it’s beyond themselves they git entirely, if they’re not at some job.” (19-20)

The diplomacy Mrs Kilfoyle displays here is a characteristic of many of the women in the collection: in Barlow’s stories it is often female characters who are most effective in handling the delicate and testing social situations to which impoverishment gives rise.

The Widow M’Gurk’s financial problems find an unlikely solution midway through this story when she receives in the post a money-order to the value of fifteen shillings from distant relatives in the U.S. (At this point, Barlow subtly draws attention to the broader socio-political contexts that underpin the Widow’s existence by noting that the elderly woman is initially very shaken by the letter, as she assumes it must be a rent demand). The close-knit nature of life in the village again comes to the fore as the Widow’s neighbours begin to discuss with her how best she should spend her unexpected (and unlikely) windfall. Of the many suggestions the widow receives, Mrs Kilfoyle’s advice that she spends the money on a half barrel of good quality oatmeal (‘not the yella Injin thrash, that’s fitter for pigs than human cratur’) which will feed her through the coming winter, is by far the wisest idea that anyone in Lisconnel comes up with. (26) In the end, however, the Widow uses the money to

buy much-needed food-stuffs and clothing for her neighbours: tobacco for old Mick Ryan, sugar sticks for the children of the village, liniment oil for Mrs Quigley and Peter Sheridan, knitting yarn for Peg Sheridan, tea and soft sugar for Mrs Kilfoyle.

On a ‘surface’ level, therefore, this story can read as a tale about the peasantry which makes substantial use of Hiberno-English, and hinges on the timely – but unlikely – gift of money from an unknown benefactor. At a deeper level, however, we can see that it is really a story that highlights the close-knit nature of relationships within rural communities in late-nineteenth century Ireland, and the sense of personal dignity, and resilience, that characterised the individuals who lived in them.

The very positive representation of marriage and family relations in ‘A Windfall’ is countered by the following chapter, ‘One Too Many’. This is a story of ‘domestic agitation’ the narrator informs us. (45) It is also the first story in the collection that addresses the theme of emigration in detail.⁷¹ Emigration was a huge factor in Irish life in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Thomas Bartlett remarks that the famine broke the will of those who were trying to resist it and, in effect, turned the country into an ‘emigrant society’. No other European country in the nineteenth-century that lost such a high percentage of their population to the emigrant ship as Ireland, he contends.⁷² Maria Luddy and Dymphna McLoughlin note that ‘women were thought to make the best emigrants. They were believed to be more reliable in returning remittances to their families, which aided the economic

⁷¹ The subject of emigration is first raised in the Preface to *Irish Idylls* where Barlow comments that many Irish people have left ‘the wild boglands of Connaught’ for a better life in the United States. Indeed, her preface indicates that she intended the publication for a North American readership. ‘It is indeed the fact of those emigrants that chiefly encourages me to believe there may be room and a welcome across the Atlantic for this one emigrant more.’ *Irish Idylls*, vii.

⁷² Thomas Bartlett, *Ireland: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.289.

life of the family they left behind and also allowed other members of the family to emigrate.’⁷³

In ‘One Too Many’, we learn that the Sheridans, a family considered ‘unlucky’ (45) by their neighbours, have endured a difficult winter which has made their already fraught economic situation even more desperate. As a result, the parents conclude one of their children will have to emigrate to America. Larry Sheridan, their second eldest son, is the one they decide has to leave. Larry is selected because they consider him ‘scatter-brained and innately lazy’, and so a financial burden on the household. (47) A comic element emerges when we see that Larry’s parents are unsure how to break the bad news to their son. He is, however, an intelligent young man (who has a deep attachment to his family and to Lisconnel), and he soon picks up on the various hints that his parents drop to the effect that they consider him ‘surplus to requirements’. When he discovers his parents’ intentions, Larry tries to make himself as useful as possible around the house, and small farm, in an effort to convince them, and his siblings, that they need him at home. He is a poor farmer, however; his efforts around the farm invariably backfire and only serve to reinforce the view of the family that he should be the one to leave. Larry departs eventually, but never makes it to the United States. Instead, he falls ill, and dies, in a workhouse infirmary located in a port town close to where the emigration ship he had intended to board is moored.

⁷³ Maria Luddy and Dympna McLoughlin (eds.), ‘Women and Emigration from Ireland from the Seventeenth-Century’, in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing Volume V: Irish Women’s Writing and Traditions*, eds, Angela Bourke, Mairín Ní Dhoneadha, Siobhan Kilfeather, Maria Luddy, Margaret MacCurtain, Geraldine Meaney, Mary O’Dowd, and Clair Wills (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002), pp.567-588 (p. 568).

The strength of this story relates to the manner in which it provides the reader with a real sense of human tragedy that underlies the experience of emigration; and, relatedly, Barlow's portrayal of Irish peasants as complex human individuals rather than one-dimensional literary stereotypes. For example, we soon come to perceive that Larry, although rather lazy and scatter-brained, is also a highly-intelligent and good-natured individual. He is a keen reader, the narrator informs us, who

especially in winter time, when the uncomfortable outer world became a fact to ignore as much as possible, he was very fond of getting into a few tattered sheets of an old song-book and a loose-leaved volume of *Ivanhoe*, picked up goodness knows where, and presented to him by the widow M'Gurk, who had also taught him his letters. (47)

Larry is particularly close to his younger sister Peg, who suffers from neuralgia.

When their parents' plans for him become clear, Peg is the only one of his siblings who tries to convince the others of Larry's 'worthy deeds' (56) in an attempt to get them to change their minds. The closeness of Larry and Peg's relationship reinforces the tragic nature of this story of emigration, as it is when Peg 'turns on' her beloved brother that he decides it is time for him to leave.

Peg's sudden change of attitude comes about when Larry, 'seized' by what he thinks is 'a great idea', which will 'prove a splendid feather in his cap' (61-62) takes it upon himself to plant his family's hoard of seed potatoes, one particularly cold morning. Unfortunately, Larry does not realise that his father and brothers had deliberately left the seed potatoes unplanted on account of a threat of blight they felt was in the air at that time. It is Peg who first discovers 'the whole calamity.' (63) 'Mercy on us all alive, Larry,' she exclaims to her brother as he stands proudly over his freshly dug potato drills, not yet realising the disastrous consequences of his morning's work. 'It's lost we are', she cries at him. 'The blight's in the win', and

sorra the thrace of a one of them'll iver he seen above the ground.' (63) In an understandable burst of rage (as the narrator points out, the family are 'confronted [...] with a prospect of more than semi-starvation' (65), on account of Larry's well-intentioned but misguided actions), Peg furiously lambastes her brother for his incompetence:

'ye great stupid mischief-makin' gomerall,' said Peg, 'ye meddlin' good-for-noth' jackass, that can't keep your hands off interferin' wid what ye've no call to be touchin [...] it's no more than the truth they're spakin' when they do be sayin' ye'd a right to take off yerself out o' this to someplace where ye might ruinate and desthroy all before you, and no matter to us.' (64)

Realising the gravity of his mistake, the narrator informs us that Larry says nothing in reply, except to note, ruefully, 'as he gazed down the length of a freshly drawn furrow, "And all the while I might as well have been diggin' me grave.'" (65)

Not just a story of 'domestic agitation', (45) 'One Too Many' is, rather, a story in which the author uses a domestic setting to draw attention towards issues of a more obviously 'public'/political nature. Through the characters of Larry and Peg, in particular, Barlow highlights how individual lives and families in late nineteenth-century Ireland were destroyed by poverty and emigration. These two, richly-drawn peasant characters, bring home to us the human tragedy that lies behind the widespread phenomenon of emigration in Ireland at this time. Nationalism plays no direct part in this story. However, the reasons why Larry has to leave are obviously political in the sense that they are presented as being sourced in the Sheridan family's poverty; and this poverty is not a consequence of any laziness, or ineptitude, on their part (they are, like many of the inhabitants of Lisconnel, extremely hard-working and industrious), but is due to socio-economic problems over which the Sheridans have little or no control.

Notwithstanding the individuality of peasant characters such as Larry and Peg, it is clear that Barlow intends them, and their tragic predicament, to be understood as representative of peasant experience in general in late nineteenth-century Ireland. One of the most memorable sentences from the story occurs when Barlow's narrator reminds readers that the blight is a disease of which all Irish peasants live in constant fear. The 'east wind', she notes on the morning that Larry decides to plant seed-potatoes, had arrived in Lisconnel 'like a lurking assassin,' which 'stabs and slays *all life and growth* in its frail first beginnings.' (63) [my italics]

At a number of points in this tale, also, the narrator extrapolates from the Sheridan's difficulties to expound on the widespread nature of the problem of emigration generally in contemporary Ireland. Larry's strong reluctance to leave his family and village is characteristic of most Irish peasants, she remarks. Notwithstanding the hardships they endure in "th'ould place at home", (41) the Irish peasant possess a deep attachment to their family, home-life, and the communities in which they grow up. He (i.e. the Irish peasant) sees,

some sinse and raison in his own townland and neighbours, because he has all his life been used to the look of them, and to their ways. But the very aspect of a strange place makes him feel as lost and helpless as a leaf blown from its bough. (41)

The Irish peasant's attachment to 'th'ould place' for Barlow, therefore, is not merely a fixation with owning 'a bit of land', it also betokens a deep emotional commitment to a tightly-knit nexus of human relationships involving both family and neighbours. S/he 'is bound down securely with strong ties of memories and associations, twined through long years, and to be broken by no storm-gusts of circumstance.'(42) It is for this reason that emigration, Barlow writes, in 'One Too Many' is viewed with such trepidation by the Irish peasantry. To the older generation (who would have had

direct experience of the Great Famine) emigration, we read, seemed ‘much the same thing as death’, and the topic would be discussed in a tone they would adopt when ‘talking about the outbreak of some dangerous epidemic.’ It was simply ‘too tragical’ a matter to be discussed openly. (43)

Chapters IV and V, ‘A Wet Day’ and ‘Got the Better Of’, respectively, are probably two of the most comical stories in the collection. The former tale contains little by way of plot. Instead, it focuses on a detailed characterisation of three of the most eccentric personalities in Lisconnel. Big Anne, the Dummy and Mad Bell are three women who inhabit a single cabin together. The narrator refers to them ‘as queer a trio, maybe, as you could find under one roof in the province of Connaght.’ (80) Big Anne, we are told, is ‘ranked as the responsible head of the establishment.’ (80) She is described as tall and big-boned and walks on the heels of very large feet resulting in her neighbours spotting her from a distance on account of her gait. She is the most ‘normal’ of the three. (80)

The other two women behave in ways that might easily have seen them committed to a mental institution. The Dummy is a short woman with a pale broad face. Her neighbours are uncertain as to whether or not she is ‘really dumb or only malingering.’ (81) They note that she reacts to certain sounds even though she is supposed to be deaf. On the other hand, though, no one in the village can recall her ‘having uttered a syllable.’ (81) Mad Bell dresses eccentrically in a Gainsborough hat with blue velvet rosettes and streamers and a rough white woollen wrap. Her face is compared to a ‘wizened lemon’. (83) Mad Bell’s most eccentric behavioural trait is that she regularly bursts into song for no apparent reason, and always at the sound of rain. This leads to her being evicted from the cabin by her ‘co-tenants’ on ‘wet

days', who leave a chair and table for her outside where she continues to sing. (84-85)

As in most of the stories from *Irish Idylls*, therefore, this tale has a domestic setting. Furthermore, although they are not related by blood, the three women are a family of sorts. What stands out for the reader who sees beyond the comic eccentricities of these women is that they live relatively happy lives together, and that they form an accepted part of the broader community of Lisconnel. Like other stories in the collection, 'A Wet Day' draws attention to the poverty endured by these women, as well as other inhabitants in the village. Summertime, the narrator informs the reader, can be a particularly trying period for a community such as Lisconnel, which is so dependent on the potato for sustenance.⁷⁴ 'In July, dinner is often something of a failure. You might walk past many of the open doors while it is in progress, without coming upon the pleasant familiar smell of pitaties'. (86) This is because, 'it seldom or never happens that anybody's store [of potatoes] holds out beyond the end of June'. (86-87) July is likened to 'a Ramadan with no nightly feasting to make up for the day's abstinence; a Lent whose fast no Church ordains and blesses.' (87) The conversations among neighbours, we are told, revolve, almost exclusively, around the subject of potatoes. The fear of blight, we learn, remains ever present in the

⁷⁴ The 'blight' was how the fungus *phythopthera infestans*, which caused the Great Potato Famine of 1845-50, was commonly referred to. The fungus had a drastic effect on Ireland as the majority of the population were reliant on the potato crop. The repeated failures of the potato crop in this period was a key factor in the deaths of one million people during these five years, and the two million more who left Ireland in the ten years that followed the emergence of the blight. Notwithstanding the disastrous experiences of 1845-50, the potato remained a main source of food for much of the Irish population in the latter half of the century. As Póirtéir observes, as a consequence many people were living 'precariously at subsistence level', and emigration remained the only option 'for those who had the resources to flee disease, death and poverty'. Cathal Póirtéir, (ed.), *The Great Irish Famine* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1995) p.9.

consciousness of the people of Lisconnel, who are always worried that the autumn rain will ‘bring the blight along wid it as ready as anythin’ – bad scran to it.’ (88)

In this story also, Barlow again draws attention to the very dilapidated living conditions endured by the inhabitants of Lisconnel.

Lisconnel cabin-interiors are all more or less examples of what may be termed the cavern style of domestic architecture, as their darkness tempered by in-artificial chinks, together with their free exhibition of undisguised stone and earth in walls and flooring, suggest a cave-dwelling in almost its severe primaeval rudeness. (89)

‘A Wet Day’ is the first of three stories (chapters four, five and six) which are particularly interesting in terms of the representation of women. The second of these stories, ‘Got the Better Of’ (Chapter V) deals with the marital relationship between Ody and Biddy Rafferty. Ody is a comical hero and ‘sliveen’ who, with the help of his donkey, Jinny, transports jars of ‘potheen’ from an illicit still in the bog that surrounds Lisconnel to a nearby blacksmith’s forge which doubles as a shebeen.

(107) The most Somerville and Ross-like story in the collection, this is one of only a few tales in *Irish Idylls* which the institutions of the state – in the form of the local constabulary (or ‘pólis’ (117) as the local inhabitants refer to them) make a significant appearance. Acting-Sergeant Clarke, we learn, is determined to put a stop to poteen making in the area. To this end with three or four subordinates he sets up a checkpoint on the road that Ody usually travels on to the shebeen. The comedy unfolds when the locals realise what sergeant Clarke is up to, and set out to scupper his plan to put an end to drinking and trading in illegal whiskey in the area.

‘Got the Better Of’ is also one of the few in the collection where Barlow makes reference to nationalist sentiment among the peasantry. On spying the checkpoint, the inhabitants of Lisconnel, we learn, ‘got up the symptoms of a miniature rising with a credible celerity’. (116) However, Ody Rafferty, who takes great pride in the

reputation he has for being a cunning operator, believes he has a smarter plan to deal with the sergeant. 'We'll git the better of thim yit, one way or the other', he tells the others 'but it won't be by walkin' sthraight down their *threacherous throaths*, which is what they're intendin'. (my italics) (117) Instead, Ody intends to hide his store of poteen in the bog. This plan never comes to fruition, however. After partaking of some of his own produce, Ody somehow comes to believe that the police want to buy some poteen from him, and so he loads a bottle onto Jinny, his mule, with a view to delivering it to them himself.

Ody's wife, Biddy Rafferty, like everyone else present when Ody announces his new plan, is dumbfounded by the stupidity of his proposal. However, because Ody regards her as being less intelligent than his beloved donkey, she is unable to convince him not to go through with it. 'Is it stupid the woman's grown?' (121) Ody remarks to all the villagers present when Biddy tries to persuade him not to go through with his idea; and again, 'Whist gabbing,' woman alive, and don't be showin' your ignorance.' (123-124)

Jinny the donkey, and an inebriated Ody, then proceed down the road to the checkpoint. Lots of comic confusion ensues when Ody finally comes to realise his error, and the constabulary end up chasing him and his donkey through the bogs. When the polis eventually take possession of the bottle that Ody has strapped to his donkey (which he believes contains his illegal poteen) it looks as though his luck has run out. However, it transpires that – unbeknownst to her husband – Biddy had secretly exchanged the bottle of poteen that Ody strapped to Jinny with a bottle of 'soapy water flavoured with sour goat's milk.' (132) Far from being grateful for masterminding his escape, however, Ody is upset and angry that his wife has been shown to have 'got the better of me'. (132) For her part, Ody's wife expresses a

degree of sympathy with her husband, which suggests she has often had to come up with similar ruses to prevent him from getting into trouble. ‘Sure, poor man,’ she remarks to her neighbours, ‘he’s simple like, when he gits a foolish notion in his head.’ (133)

The following story, ‘Herself’, is quite possibly the most impressive of the whole collection. It tells the story of an industrious and enterprising woman who is emotionally and mentally broken by the impossibly difficult economic and socio-political realities she has to face. As in ‘One Too Many’, in this tale, Barlow offers the reader detailed and intimate portrayals of individual peasant-characters whose lives unfold in domestic settings, but at the same time manages to highlight the connections between their ‘private’ stories, and broader socio-economic realities such as poverty and emigration.

The story begins ‘a dozen years or more’ after Mrs O’Driscoll (Herself of the story’s title) has died. (134) In her prime, we are informed, in the opening paragraphs, Mrs O’Driscoll was a fine-looking, intelligent and enterprising woman, who was married to a hard-working husband, and had five children. As with so many of the stories in this collection, Barlow is keen to draw the reader’s attention to the physical structure in which the peasantry of Lisconnel live. The O’Driscoll’s cabin, we are told, though it now lies in ‘ruins’ was ‘originally [...] a better dwelling than any other in Lisconnel’. This was due to the industriousness of John O’Driscoll, who ‘acted as his own architect and mason’, and who went to extraordinary lengths to ensure that his cabin was as warm and weather-tight as possible. (134)

The success of John O’Driscoll’s ‘holding’ is especially noteworthy, the narrator observes, because his small patch of land was particularly unsuited for agricultural

uses. 'His little bit of field [was] more infested with boulders' than most others in Lisconnel, and his fellow inhabitants, we are told, used to 'marvel at how the O'Driscolls reared their children on it at all.' (135) Indeed, the extraordinarily poor condition of the O'Driscoll's holding leads to one of the few direct references in the collection to the injustices of the landownership system. Barlow's powers of descriptive synthesis are again evident towards the end of the first paragraph as she connects the industriousness of Irish peasants with the unfairness of the landownership system, and the 'hopeless' condition of the soil in west Connaught.

It is in reality a worse strip of ground; a mere skin of soil over the bleached limestone skeleton underneath, scarcely thicker than the sheet of paper on which the land-agent wrote his rent-receipt for the wistfully counted-out shillings and small grimy note. I do not wonder that this "holding" has never yet found another tenant; and so wholly obliterated are all signs of the O'Driscolls' long struggle against its sterile curse, at that the present day you might as reasonably regard it as a site for a stone-quarry as for a potato-plot. (135)

John O'Driscoll is credited with the building of the cabin, but it was Herself (i.e. Mrs O'Driscoll), the narrator notes, who was the 'main spring and moving spirit' behind the family, and was responsible for their ability to eke out a living on this patch of land. (136) As noted above, 'Herself' was a good-looking woman 'with her gracious curves and soft-apple- and pear blossom colouring'. (136) The narrator also draws attention to her 'industry and contrivance' noting that

no woman could have made more whatever property accrued to her [...] she was full of energy and enterprise, and had the intuitive deftness of brain and hand which belongs almost exclusively to such women, enabling them to evolve their ingenious designs with as little visible effort and preparation as a flower shows in unfolding. (137)

The representation of this enterprising woman is a further example of how Barlow's writing challenged conventional, patriarchal representations of woman as less industrious than men, and as occupying a position in the homestead that was

associated primarily with domestic-household, and maternal duties. Herself was as much the ‘bread-winner’ of her family as her husband.

It is also highly noteworthy, therefore, that the narrator suggests the barely ‘visible’ but highly effective manner in which Herself sets about her work is indicative of a distinction between the male and female genders in general. As she goes on to remark here:

This quality, by the way, is what has put into the heads of men, who can as a rule set about nothing without clumsy thinking processes, the delusion that they do all the world’s inventing and the contrivances of Herself were manifold and wonderful, considering the resources at her command. (137)

Following these remarks, the story develops around familiar themes to do with the difficulties of farming land in Connaught and the theme of emigration. After a number of ‘bad seasons’ in Lisconnel, we learn that one of the O’Driscolls’ daughters emigrated to the United States with her husband and, settling well, wrote home inviting her family to join her there. (139) Although Herself felt that to leave Ireland would be ‘very sad’, (140) and crossing the ocean might be a terrifying experience, she is also excited by the prospect of emigration. She was, at this time, we read, ‘not in years more than middle-aged, and in heart and hope younger, perhaps, than any of them.’ [i.e. her children]. (140) Furthermore, ‘Leaving the old country’ would, she believed, help to keep her family together, and mean her children would have a better future than they could ever expect at home. (140) Having soon become reconciled to the idea, we learn that Herself ‘began to weave plans as busily as a linnet weaves its nest in the spring, and her thoughts went out into the future as undauntedly as a swallow starts on a migration.’ (140)

Herself never made it to the United States however. This is because her husband, who was ‘many years older than his wife’, refused to leave to leave Lisconnel

himself, though he does, eventually, agree that his sons can go, on account of the fact they ‘do be tired of starvin’ – the crathurs.’ (141) Herself then convinces both her sons and her one remaining daughter, Rose, to emigrate, despite the fact that she (and her children) are aware this will mean the parents will struggle to farm the land alone. Barlow’s ability to represent the individual and family tragedies that lie behind the widespread social phenomenon is again evident as her narrator relates to the reader the ‘black day’ (145) that the O’Driscoll children leave home. The father, unable to express his feelings, never says a proper goodbye to his children, and instead goes out into the field to gather stones. Herself is left to handle their departure alone. We read how she ‘watched them out of sight over the brow of the low hill. All the while [...] thinking how one of them might at the last moment fling down his bundle, and declare with forcible asseverations that he would not go a fut’.

(144)

The children continue on their way, however, and that evening Herself and her husband, alone together in their cabin, are unable to put into words their sense of loss and can, instead, merely repeat a series of platitudes to each other, noting ‘nine times that the childer had a fine day for startin’, and seven times that they might be hearing from them next month, *early*.’ (145) This moving scene epitomises the manner in which Barlow manages to portray the reality of peasant experience in ways that notwithstanding the sometime heavy-handed use of Hiberno-English nevertheless communicates both sympathetically, and realistically, their humanity in dealing with the very difficult realities they have to endure.

As the years pass, we learn that the effect of losing her children – and the chance of a better life in the U.S. – on Herself, is that she loses interest in life. We read that she ‘sadly grew out of her industrious habits’, as ‘all the purposes of her life seemed to

be flapping aimlessly about her'. (146) When her husband dies a number of years later, her sense of dignity means that she sells her remaining life stock in order to purchase a coffin for him, rather than have one supplied by 'the House' [workhouse]. (149) Her interest in her own home also diminishes: it becomes 'the lair of a fearful thing', (150) which is 'so quite [*sic*] and lonesome', she tries to stay out of it as much as possible (153) Gradually losing her wits, Herself is sometimes heard talking to Mad Bell about her family as though they were still with her, and comes to walk 'with bent shoulders, and the uncertain step of an old woman who has not any definite goal in view.' (150)

The final paragraphs of the story again see Barlow link this individual human tragedy to the broader social and political circumstances in which this woman's life unfolded. Even before her husband died, the O'Driscolls had been falling into arrears with their rent, and following his death, 'the land-agent wrote to his employer at the Carlton' to the effect that Herself, now a widow, would never be able to pay the rent, and that this old woman 'who seemed to be an uncivilised, feeble-minded sort of creature, would be much better off in the Union, and that as she must at any rate be god rid of'. (157) Shortly afterwards, the narrator describes how the full military resources of the state were employed to ensure that this harmless old woman was evicted from her home. The district of Lisconnel, the narrator notes, was 'reported disturbed, and therefore a squadron of dragoons had been brought from the nearest garrison, [...] to protect' the sub-sheriff's party who were overseeing the eviction, and to 'overawe' the local peasant population with their presence. (157) The local population, we read, are initially impressed by the colour and pageantry of this 'invading force', (158) the like of which had never before been witnessed in the area. However, once they ascertain the purpose of their presence in the village, the

crowd's mood changes rapidly, and they become extremely abusive towards the soldiers.

The political resonance of the story is further highlighted by Barlow's description of the manner in which the eviction is carried out. We read that, on the advice of the bailiff, Herself's cabin is 'not only unroofed but demolished'. (159) The detailed and powerful account of the scene suggests that Barlow had witnessed such events first-hand. It also serves to illustrate how private and domestic realities and the political apparatus of state power were inextricably interwoven with each other in late nineteenth-century rural Ireland. In probably the most incendiary passage of prose in the collection as a whole, Barlow depicts the destruction of the O'Driscoll household in terms of a brutally violent attack on a defenceless human body.

When the ancient, smoke-steeped, weather-worn covering had been plucked from off the skeleton rafters, and lay strewn around in flocks and wisps like the wreck of an ogre's brown wig, the picks and crowbars came into play, for it was before the days of battering-ram or maiden. The mud walls were solid and thick, yet had to yield, and presently a broad bit of the back wall fell outward all of a piece, as no other sort of masonry falls, with a dull, heavy thud like a dead body. (159-160)

The political ramifications of this passage are particularly noteworthy when we consider that this collection of stories was intended, primarily, for an American readership, and that stories of evictions and politically- or economically-enforced emigration played an important role in the growth of organisations such as the Fenian brotherhood in the latter half of the nineteenth-century in America.

Although they can do nothing to prevent the eviction from going ahead, the close-knit nature of the Lisconnel community again comes to the fore as Herself is taken in by a number of her neighbours, and so saved from the indignity of the workhouse. She dies some unspecified time later, too mentally distracted to concern herself that

the state will have to pay for her funeral as she has no money, and neither can her neighbours afford the cost.

The next chapter, 'Thunder in the Air', is one of the few stories in which Barlow addresses the topic of orthodox religious belief. The absence of significant reference to the religious or spiritual nature of the Irish peasantry is itself a noteworthy feature of Barlow's writings. It has often been noted that much of the revivalist interest in the Irish peasantry stemmed from the belief that they were innately spiritual people. In Barlow's writing there is little suggestion of pagan spirituality or the belief in supernatural beings (fairies and spirits) associated with revivalist representations of the peasantry. In the opening chapter 'Lisconnel' there is a short reference to otherworldliness of the Connemara landscape: as traveller journeys along the road from Duffclane to Lisconnel, the narrator remarks that he or she becomes aware of how the 'twelve towering Connemarese peaks', in the distance 'seem as if they were looking in out of another world' (2-3); and in the penultimate story from the collection, 'Backwards and Forwards', the author also raises the subject of peasant beliefs in 'spectral hauntings' and 'visitations', we shall see (244-245). However, where Barlow raises this subject she does so in a way that counters revivalist representations of the Irish peasantry as being innately superstitious and possessing a strong belief in the presence of supernatural realities around them.

In addressing the subject of religion in this story, Barlow focuses specifically on the Catholicism of the Irish peasantry. She treats this subject in a comic manner, which borders on the satirical. The story opens with a suggestion that the practice of the Catholic faith is not taken very seriously among the peasantry of Lisconnel.

Attendance at mass is poor among the peasantry with most of the inhabitants being keen to find excuses not to have to undertake the lengthy walk to the church.

For when from the population of the place you have deducted the people who are too young, or too old, or crippled like Peter and Peg Sheridan, or minding babies and invalids; and from the residuum again abstract the men who prefer basking in the sun, should it happen to spread the poor man's feast, and the boys who under any meteorological conditions whatever would choose rather to rush and yell about the wild bog than it still within four solemn walls, you will find no very imposing contingent left. (164)

Attendance at mass is particularly associated with women folk. During late summer and early autumn, when the weather is at its most pleasant, we learn that 'mothers and wives and sisters find it easier to beat up recruits for their three-hours' trudge to first Mass.' (166) Of the two priests referred to in the story, the narrator suggests that the first, old Fr Rooney who has been the parish priest for over forty years, is more interested in parishioners from wealthier districts than those from Lisconnel; and the second, Fr Carroll, is a cross-featured man with an interest in horses.

The satirical treatment of religious belief in this story is perhaps most evident in relation to the tale that is recounted here of two young Lisconnel brothers, Terence and Matt Doyne. The narrator recounts how, one day, Terence and Matt were questioned by Fr Carroll as to why they had not gone to mass that particular Sunday but had, instead, spent the morning 'fishing for pinkeens along by the river'. (169) Terence, 'a wildish lad', cheekily responded that he didn't need to go because his mother, a devout Catholic, was 'down below there prayin' away for me like iverything you could name.' (169) The saints to whom she prays to, Terence told the priest, wouldn't "go for to be makin' a fool of her, lettin' her waste her time axin' for nothin' she'll git." (169) While Fr Carroll didn't deny the power of intercessory prayer, he tried to trump Terence's rationale for non-attendance at mass with the suggestion that – although his 'mother will experience the benefit of her prayers' – she might be granted 'something else better, instead of the saving of a young slieveen like yourself [...] where'd you be then, me fine lad?' (169) Terence, we

learn, was 'somewhat flabbergasted' by this suggestion. However, his brother Matt intervened to state that the scenario outlined by the priest was impossible, as his mother has 'such a wish for' Terence that she wouldn't give the saints 'divil a minnit's paice' until one of them saved Terence's soul for her. (170)

The story then digresses into a number of reminiscences by various inhabitants of Lisconnel concerning incidents and characters from the past. When the narrative returns to Terence and Matt Doyne's situation, an unspecified period of time has passed since their conversation with Fr Carroll. Mrs Doyne, their mother, is now out searching the bogs for her two sons because she is convinced they will be fighting with each other, as they usually are, and the 'wild bog' she notes to a neighbour before she leaves her house, is 'a terrible dangerous place for any persons to be quarrellin'. (181) She ventures into the bogs despite the fact a heavy thunder storm has just broken out. The bravery of Mrs Doyne action is underlined by the fact, as the narrator as already informed us that she is terrified of thunder.

Mrs Doyne stumbles on amidst hailstones and thunder-claps until she discovers her sons, who are indeed fighting each other as she guessed they would be. She calls out to them, but as she does so 'floods of seething darkness rushed in upon her from all sides, and swept her out of consciousness.' (187) Matt and Terence are convinced their mother is dead. After they carry her home, however, she is 'brought to life' by a mug of poteen. Their mother's new lease of life does not lead to any change in her sons' attitudes towards religious observances. They help to nurse their mother back to health but do not become mass goers.

This is arguably the most satirical story in the collection, in terms of its representation the peasantry in the collection. It is perhaps no coincidence that it

should focus on the subject of religious rituals and practices as, despite her protestant family background, Barlow's involvement with the Psychical Research Society of Ireland had might suggest she was sceptical of orthodox religious beliefs generally.⁷⁵

'Between Two Lady Days' (Chapter eight) is perhaps the most sentimental story in the collection. It focuses on the character of Stacey Doyne, a young woman betrothed to fellow Lisconnel resident Dan O'Beirne. In the opening paragraphs of this tale, we learn that Stacey, and indeed all the inhabitants of the village, believe her fiancé has deserted her. Following their engagement, Dan, a 'strong and stalwart' (208) young man, left Lisconnel to take up work in a peat factory in Co. Antrim. Stacey heard nothing further from her fiancé until a week before their wedding day, when she was told that Dan had been seen boarding the Stranraer steamer at Larne. When their wedding day comes and goes with no sign of his return, the people of Lisconnel assume that Dan has 'slipp[ed] off out of the country [...] without a word to anybody'. (211) Unsurprisingly, his disappearance has a devastating effect on Stacey Doyne. We read that 'the poor little bride-elect put a brave face on the matter', (210) but the reality is that her fiancé's apparent desertion is a 'turning point' in her life 'whence all her fortunes began to wane through a twilight of doubt and despondency to an ever deepening despair.' (209-210) A proud woman, the knowledge that her neighbours are discussing her situation among themselves is

⁷⁵ It is noteworthy in this context that her father was involved in a religious controversy. The Reverend James William Barlow was a dissenting Church of Ireland clergyman and one of many clerics involved in the 'Gorham Controversy'. This was a controversy concerning the Church of England's teaching of baptism. It was led by the Reverend George C. Gorham against the Bishop of Exeter. The Reverend Barlow along with many more clerics denied Baptismal Regeneration which means that salvation is linked to the act of baptism. As a consequence of his views, the Reverend fell under ecclesiastical ban. Like his daughter, the Reverend was also a member of the Psychical Research Society in Dublin.

particularly painful to her: ‘the sight of those shawled heads bobbing together over her fate’ we read, ‘chilled Stacey with despair at times’. (211)

By the end of the story it transpires that Dan ‘had no notion of running away from the match,’ as the gossips of Lisconnel maintained. (211) Having finished his contract in Co. Antrim, this industrious young man learned of a ‘lucrative job’ in Scotland. (238) He wrote to Stacey informing her that he was taking up this employment, and would be home in time for their wedding, but the ‘unreliable messenger’ (239) to whom he entrusted the letter never delivered it. On his way from the job in Scotland, Dan is badly injured while rescuing a foreman’s son from an accident involving factory machinery. He is hospitalised for several months and – rather unwisely – decides not to write home in order not to worry Stacey and his family. The story has a happy ending: Dan eventually returns home to Lisconnel, makes a full recovery, and he and Stacey wed on Lady Day, as it was called locally, in Easter week of the following spring (having originally planned to marry on the harvest-time Lady Day of the previous August).

Notwithstanding the sentimentality of the plot, ‘Between Two Lady Days’ also illustrates the uncompromising realism that underpins Barlow’s representations of the Irish peasantry. Stacey Doyne and Dan O’Beirne are both fully-rounded human characters rather than lazy stereotypes of Irish peasantry. As noted above, Barlow reveals to us the very understandable anguish that Stacey Doyne feels when it seems her fiancé has deserted her. For his part, Dan O’Beirne is portrayed like, so many of Barlow’s peasants as an ordinary, hard-working and steadfast young man. The realism of this tale is also evident in terms, once again, of the portrayal of day-to-day life in Lisconnel. As in the earlier stories, ‘Between Two Lady Days’ presents the reader with a very stark and uncompromising portrayal of the hardships endured by

these peasantry. In this tale, we learn of how the inhabitants of Lisconnel ‘all shivered sorely in their lairs of heather and rags’ on winter nights; and how their ‘faces lengthened and heads shook’ when they ‘recognised signs of a frost-blighting that must entail a serious shrinkage of estimated [potato] supplies.’ (228)

We also see how the community as a whole tries to support each other through the harsh winter months by sharing what meagre clothing and food supplies they possess, and by opening their cabin doors to the most vulnerable and isolated members of the village. Stacey’s behaviour is especially illustrative of the strong community spirit that exists in Lisconnel. After her wedding day passes without any sign of Dan’s return we learn that she resolves to cut up the material for her wedding gown to make ‘warm and stout’ clothing for some of her most vulnerable neighbours. (235) ‘Och honey, but supposin’ you might be wantin’ it one of these days after all?’ her mother protests as Stacey cuts up her wedding gown. ‘Niver a want I’ll want it’ replies her heart-broken but resolute daughter. ‘He’s dead and gone, mother jewel. Tis a sin to lave it lyin’ up; there’s a beautiful warmth in it.’ (235)

Towards the end of ‘Between Two Lady Days’ the narrator makes reference to ghosts that the inhabitants of Lisconnel associate with the bogs. As Stacey makes her way towards the Kilfoyles’ cabin at night, we read that the winter wind

was full of sighs and voices, and shadows wavered and flitted on the snow. How could [Stacey] tell what they might be? Suppose she should meet that strange little crying child, whom people said sometimes ran after them when they were late abroad on the bog? Or the limping old woman, who laughs in your face as she goes by? Terror whirled through Stacey’s thoughts like an autumn gust among a drift of fallen leaves. (237)

Stacey’s fiancé returns at this point in the story and her fears of an encounter with strange and malevolent spirits immediately disappear; however, the subject of

peasant belief in the spirit-world arises as a significant theme in the following, penultimate story of the collection.

‘Backwards and Forwards’ opens with a reference to the role that belief in supernatural realities play in the culture of the Irish peasantry ‘It is a commonly received opinion that the dwellers in any remote and lonely district are largely responsible for whatever growths of ghostly legend may flourish there.’ (242) In an implied reference to revivalist conceptions of peasant culture, the narrator remarks that ‘we have all heard how the peasants gather round their hearths on eerie winter evenings, and beguile the time with the recital of marrow-freezing ghost stories, to which they contribute, at any rate, wilfully credulous minds.’ (242-243)

According to Barlow’s narrator, however, the notion that the Irish peasantry are ‘wilfully credulous’ of ghost stories and tales of other supernatural beings is false. ‘I can confidently assert’ the narrator informs us, that the fixation with the supernatural ‘is not to be found in Lisconnel’ and she doubts that it exists in other rural communities. ‘People who live their lives in solidary places of the earth’ and who struggle to eek a living from the land ‘are little likely to hanker after the introduction of any supernatural crooks into their lot; [or] to voluntarily fill the wild blasts of wailing round their poor hovels with unearthly shrieks and lamentations’. (243)

‘In Lisconnel’, she continues, ‘there is a marked tendency to resist the admission of spectres [...] and to resent any obstinate assertion of their presence.’ (243) Johnny Ryan, she remarks, ‘will fight you any day [...] to uphold his contention that “he niver saw or heard aught on the bogland quarer than it might be an ould white goat glimmerin’ in a strake of moonlight, or a saygull lettin’ a screech goin’ by”.’ (244)

The narrator maintains that ‘whatever belief in spectral hauntings’ (244) exists

among the peasantry of Ireland has its source in actual, traumatic historical events. Stories of ‘fearsome wanderers met a-field [...] of strange forms found covering by the hearth at home [...] of a shadow lying black all day across the threshold, with nothing visible to cast it, but falling ice cold upon whomsoever makes bold to step over it [...] of a lame old woman, who comes tapping at your door’, have a real-life source in distressing historical experiences, the memory of which peasant communities attempt to cope with by incorporating them into fictional narratives: ‘the origin of these visitations’ she remarks, ‘now lies obscured in the history of such old unhappy things, that it has come to be narrated in more various ways than I can here recount.’ (245)

The story then turns to ‘one of our local tragedies’ to illustrate how the transformation of traumatic historical experience to fictional narrative occurs. The real-life event in question, the narrator informs us, took place during the ‘great Famine year; that is, ‘some half-century since.’ (245) A few miles outside the town of Lisconnel

where a skeleton cabin stands to-day [...] a man, driven distraught with famine-fever, barred himself and three or four small children into their room, while the mother went in quest of food. And when she returned with some bread at nightfall, through the snow, the poor wretch would not open to her. So all night she beat on the door, and called to her crying children; and the next day the whole family were found cold and dead, the father and children in the cabin, and the mother outside, half-buried in a drift heaped against the wall, her loaf untouched, and in her hand the stone with which she had been battering the door. (245)

The cabin where this horrific event took place ‘has been ever since deserted, and its doorway is a ruinous gap.’ (245) However, according to local folklore, the mother of this tragic family is still often seen at night standing by the cabin-doorway ‘wringing her hands and buffeting the empty air.’ (246) If one escapes her gaze nothing untoward will befall the person who beholds this ghost; however, ‘if she turns and

beckons you to come and help her, you could be given no surer warning of black troubles in store.’ (246) The description of how this family home became a site for such horrific events and, subsequently, was transmogrified by a traumatised community into a place characterised by spectral hauntings, is a particularly poignant, and powerful, example of how Barlow’s writings manage to connect supposedly private, domestic spaces, to more obviously social and political realities.

The latter half of the story relates how Brian Kilfoyle, a peasant who does not usually believe in ‘ghostly manifestations’, came to believe that he had seen this woman’s ghost and that she had beckoned to him. It had been a particularly difficult winter for ‘all Lisconnel’s feeble folk’ the narrator informs us, ‘The Pat Ryans had lost their youngest twin child’ and the elderly grandparent ‘Old Mick Ryan’. (246) These difficult ‘circumstances’ led Brian Kilfoyle to take ‘quick alarm’ (247) when his own mother appeared out of sorts. When he saw a ‘dark figure standing in the ruined doorway’ who ‘beckoned to him through the twilight, put a finishing touch to his uneasiness’, the narrator informs us. (247) This character then summoned both a doctor and a priest to his household. Brian Kilfoyle’s concerns prove unfounded, however, as his mother soon recovers. Although this elderly woman dies peacefully at the end of the tale, there is no suggestion that this has any connection to her son’s belief that he saw the ‘dark figure’ beckon to him. On the contrary, the narrator’s above-referred to comments concerning the true ‘historical’ origins of stories concerning spirits, and the fact that Kilfoyle’s mother was ‘a great age’ already (282), point the reader to the true cause of her death.

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We have seen that Barlow's short stories present the reader with vivid and sympathetic sketches of the Irish peasantry. The collection includes an array of curious characters (the widow M'Gurk, the comical and often inebriated Ody Rafferty and his trusted companion Jinny, eccentric personalities such as Big Anne, The Dummy and Mad Bell), and contains a fair number of unlikely coincidences and comical incidents. However, the stories also draw attention to the harsh reality of life as a peasant in Ireland in the latter half of nineteenth-century – a period of upheaval for families across the country.

Barlow was aware of the changing reality of nineteenth-century Ireland and she documents these changes by highlighting issues to do with poverty and emigration. As readers we see the devastating effects these experiences have on individuals, on families, and the community of Lisconnel as a whole. Yet these characters somehow manage to endure. The collection is especially noteworthy in terms of the positive representations of women it contains. *Irish Idylls* has a cast of strong-minded individuals, the widow M'Gurk, Mrs Kilfoyle, Big Anne, Biddy Rafferty and Mrs O'Driscoll, among others. It is primarily through their interconnected stories that Barlow highlights how the inhabitants of the village of Lisconnel manage to survive the continually difficult socio-political conditions in which they find themselves.

**‘they work on cooperatively’: land ownership in the novels
*Kerrigan’s Quality (1894) and The Founding of Fortunes (1902).***

Land ownership was one of the most divisive issues during the latter half of the nineteenth-century in Ireland. In the decades after the famine a dramatic shift took place not only in the size of Irish farms but in the type of farming that was practised. The period saw a movement away from tillage in favour of pasture, and the number of agricultural labourers decreased greatly. F.S.L. Lyons notes that conflict between landlords and tenants concerning rent and land-ownership rights escalated significantly in this period.⁷⁶ Many tenant farmers could not afford to pay their rent during periods of poor harvests and economic recession. This led to the rate of evictions rising. Lyons maintains that many landlords were hard-pressed themselves, and were ‘driven to resort more freely than before to evictions for non-payment.’⁷⁷ Foster notes that evictions peaked in the spring of 1882, and calculates that between 1879 and 1883, approximately 14,600 tenants were evicted.⁷⁸

Michael Davitt, an ex-Fenian, helped to establish the Land League in 1879, with Charles Stewart Parnell as its president. The Land League campaigned for a reduction in rates, an end to the evictions and an eventual transfer of ownership from landlord to tenant. Their aims were summarised as the three Fs (Fair Rent, Fixity of Tenure and Freedom of Sale – also known as the Ulster Custom). Between 1879-1882 widespread agrarian agitation erupted over the issue of land rights and ownership of the land. The ‘Land War’ resulted in attacks on landlords, the maiming of cattle and burning of homes.

⁷⁶ F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland since the Famine* (London: Fontana Press, 1985), p.25.

⁷⁷ Lyons, p.114.

⁷⁸ R.F. Foster, p.408.

This civil unrest led to the introduction of political measures which the British establishment hoped would improve the living conditions of Irish tenant farmers and reduce support for the burgeoning Home Rule movement led by Parnell's Irish Parliamentary Party. In 1885, the Ashbourne Act was passed at Westminster. This Act allowed tenants to borrow the entire purchase price of their farms from the British government.⁷⁹ In 1891, a new Land Act passed in the British Parliament which contained two elements: a land purchase scheme and also a Congested Districts Board. Under the Act, the British government advanced loans to Irish farmers to enable them to purchase their holdings. The Congested Districts Board (CBD) was an official body to improve the living conditions of people in the Western regions of Ireland. The CBD aimed

to promote local industries by subsidies and technical instruction; to amalgamate uneconomic holdings by land purchase; to assist migration from impoverished areas to the newly amalgamated holdings; and finally to improve the quality of agriculture in the congested areas.⁸⁰

The next major stage in a process of reform was the Land Purchase Act of 1903, also known as the Wyndham Land Act. It was the most significant land purchase scheme of all and was intended to facilitate the transfer ownership of much of the land from rent-collecting landlords to owner-occupier farms. Margaret O'Callaghan notes that the Wyndham Act resulted in approximately 300,000 sales.⁸¹ Lyons maintains the Land Purchase Act of 1903 'deserves to be called revolutionary' as it had carried land purchase further than any other Act had ever done before.⁸²

⁷⁹ David Ross, *Ireland: History of a Nation* (Glasgow: Waverley Book, 2014), p.320.

⁸⁰ Lyons, p.205.

⁸¹ Margaret O'Callaghan, *British High Politics and a Nationalist Ireland; Criminality, Land and the Law under Forster and Balfour* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1994), p.151.

⁸² Lyons, pp.218-219.

A number of critics have noted that the highly contentious issues referred to above – to do with land ownership and landlord-tenant relations in nineteenth century Ireland – frequently found expression in the fictional writings of the period. Barry Sloan observes that nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish writers demonstrated that the question of Irish nationality was essentially ‘one of who owned and controlled the land.’⁸³ Similarly, Stephen Regan comments that the ‘power relations between Protestant and Catholic, and between Anglo-Irish Ascendancy and Irish peasant society’, were a central preoccupation for Irish fiction writers in these years.⁸⁴ It is not surprising, therefore, that these issues are key thematic concerns in two novels considered here: *Kerrigan’s Quality* and *The Founding of Fortunes*.

Barlow’s critics have not taken full account of this aspect of the novels. Meredith, we saw, refers to the author’s ‘literary Fenianism’ but he suggests this was ‘balanced’ by her ‘reverence for those Big House dwellers who are also wedded to the landscape’, and maintains that the Land War ‘is dealt with in Barlow’s work only terms of reform of landlord practices.’⁸⁵ It is the case that Barlow’s novels attempt to incorporate Ascendancy landlords into a new and more just system of land ownership. However, Meredith’s assessment presents too conservative a reading of these works, my analysis contends. The novels do not make direct reference to the Land War, religious divisions, contemporary political campaigns or legislative measures. Instead, they focus on fictionalised personal situations and relationships among the peasantry and the landlord class. It is also the case (as a number of critics have suggested) that her novels are not as successful, aesthetically, as her short

⁸³ Barry Sloan, *The Pioneers of Anglo-Irish Fiction 1800-1850* (Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe Ltd., 1986), p.244.

⁸⁴ Stephen Regan (ed.), *Irish Writing: An Anthology of Irish Literature in English 1789-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.xxii.

⁸⁵ Meredith, *Reviving Women*, p.113.

fiction and poetry. Ernest A. Boyd remarks that in both novels “a slight plot gives an air of cohesion to these stories, but the author is always and essentially a short-story writer.”⁸⁶ Indeed, in her own correspondence Barlow comments upon the ‘absurdity in the plot [of *Kerrigan’s Quality*] and notes that ‘most of the characters are not very real, but *Kerrigan* is rather a human sort of person.’⁸⁷ Nevertheless, as with *Irish Idylls*, these works draw attention to the hardships endured by the peasantry, and challenge patriarchal attitudes towards women. They also attest to the author’s strikingly progressive ideas concerning land-ownership issues in the Ireland of her day.

Barlow’s support for Alfred Russel Wallace’s radical proposals concerning landlordism and land-ownership are vital to an understanding of her views on this subject as they appear in her novels; this is an aspect of her work which has not been recognised by her critics. Wallace is perhaps best known for his work in developing a theory of evolution through natural selection in advance of Charles Darwin. Not only was he one of the leading evolutionary thinkers of the nineteenth-century, however, he was also an important social activist and advocate of land nationalisation.

In 1881, Wallace became the first president of a newly formed Land Nationalisation Society.⁸⁸ In his *Land Nationalisation; Its Necessity and Its Aims; Being a*

⁸⁶ Ernest A. Boyd, *Ireland’s Literary Renaissance* (Dublin: Maunsel and Company Ltd., 1923), pp.376-377.

⁸⁷ Barlow, Jane, (?1895), [WCP3157.3125: Letter to Alfred Russel Wallace, dated 11th February], in Beccaloni, G.W. (ed.), *Wallace Letters Online*. http://www.nhm.ac.uk/resources/research-curation/projects/wallace-correspondence/transcripts/pdf/WCP3157_L3125.pdf accessed 18/02/2016. After several re-reads of her novel, Barlow felt it was not as bad as she had feared and hoped she had the competence to write a sequel.

⁸⁸ Charles H. Smith remarks that Wallace ‘must be counted as one of the period’s most vocal proponents of land reform.’ <http://people.wku.edu/charles.smith/wallace/S722-1.htm> accessed 18/02/2016.

Comparison of the System of Landlord and Tenant with that of Occupying

Ownership in the Influence on the Well-Being of the People (1882), Wallace attacks 'the widespread and crying evils – political and social, material and moral' which, he maintains, result from the system of landlordism. He proposes instead a 'guarded system of Occupying Ownership under the state, which, he claims, would remedy those injustices in 'a practicable' manner, without 'producing any one of the evil results generally thought to be inseparable from a system of land-nationalisation.'⁸⁹

In this work, Wallace argues that no one should be evicted from either their homes or their farms against their own will. (202). 'Unrestricted private property (232) is at the heart of the problems, he contends, as it gives the landowners a 'despotic power' over the freedom, property and happiness of those who are not of landowning class. (228)

Ireland is the focus in chapter three of this work. Wallace states here that 'no part of the British Isles offers such striking examples of every kind of evil that results from unrestricted private property in land as Ireland.' (30) This 'unfortunate country', he writes, has witnessed 'the most merciless appropriation by the landlords of the improvements and actual property of the tenants'. Irish landlords, he continues, 'exhibit an almost complete disregard for the welfare, or even the existence, of the native agricultural population.' (30-31). The landlord 'does nothing but take rent' while the whole process of cultivating the fields in which the work has been carried out is undertaken by tenants. (32). Landlordism in general, he concludes, 'is a system which requires to be held in check by exceptional legislation in order to prevent horrors and catastrophes like those it has produced in Ireland.' (51).

⁸⁹ Alfred Russel Wallace, *Land Nationalisation: Its Necessity and Its Aims; Being a Comparison of the System of Landlord and Tenant with that of Occupying Ownership in the Influence on the Well-Being of the People* (London: Trübner & Co., 1882), p.vii. Further page references will be given in the main text in parentheses.

Barlow became acquainted with Wallace through their involvement in the Psychological Research Society. During the course of their friendship, they wrote a number of letters to each other, some of which indicate that Barlow had read, and supported, Wallace's radical ideas on land nationalisation. In an undated letter – the content of which indicates it was written sometime after the publication of *Kerrigan's Quality*, in 1894, and before the publication of *The Founding of Fortunes* in 1902 – Barlow expresses strong support for Wallace's ideas on land nationalisation. 'Your Land Nationalisation I have been studying carefully,' she writes here, 'and have seldom read anything that interested me more, especially so the parts relating to Ireland, from which I learned much that I had not known.' In this letter, she comments upon the 'scarcely credible meanness of landlords [...] constantly in evidence.' And remarks 'I firmly believe in the principle of land nationalisation.'⁹⁰

Kerrigan's Quality was published in 1894 by Dodd, Mead and Company.

The novel is set in the fictional village of Glenore in the west of Ireland. The precise period in which the action unfolds is never stated, but it is clearly mid- to late-nineteenth century Ireland. Early in the work, the third person narrator notes that the village of Glenore had gone down in the world in recent times. The cause of this decline, we learn, was sourced 'in the blighted fields of black famine years, and on board coffin ships, and in agents' and lawyers' offices.'⁹¹ The 'Big House' of the area – Linmore – has, we are informed, has 'lain practically derelict,' (5) for some years, and the peasant dwellings are described as 'crumbling cabin-rows, now

⁹⁰ This letter is dated 11th February, but no year is given. In it, however, Barlow thanks Wallace for his positive comments concerning *Kerrigan's Quality* and refers to her plans to write a 'sequel' to that work, which becomes *The Founding of Fortune*. Barlow, Jane, [WCP3342.3310: Letter to Alfred Russel Wallace, dated 13th February], in Beccaloni, G.W. (ed.), Wallace Letters Online.

http://www.nhm.ac.uk/resources/research-curation/projects/wallace-correspondence/transcripts/pdf/WCP3342_L3310.pdf accessed 18/02/16.

⁹¹ Jane Barlow, *Kerrigan's Quality* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1894), p.64. Further page references to the novel will be given in the main text in parentheses.

flourished over by nettles and docks'(64). The degeneration of the Big House is also a factor in the collapse of the village as a whole. Because Linmore has been left vacant so long no one has taken charge of the care of the land. As a consequence, instead of tillage farming, the local peasantry have had to turn to fishing – a far more dangerous activity, we are told – to try to feed and support their families. Glenore resident, Molly Nolan, is loath to see her husband recover from a fever he caught while out fishing, because once his strength returns she knows he will head straight back to his unsafe boat and out into the Atlantic. If only the men of the village 'could come by pitaty-drills enough to keep the childer fed through the long twelvemonth,' she complains, 'he would concern himself very little about anything that might be won from the rolling ridges off shore.' (90)

The theme of emigration is also raised early in the work. In Chapter One, we read that the title-character, Martin Kerrigan, is a peasant from Glenore who – as 'a dispirited lad of eighteen' (8) – had reluctantly agreed to leave the village for his uncle's farm in Australia. The novel commences on his return to Glenore twenty years later. When Kerrigan comes home he is a wealthy man, having uncle having named his nephew as 'sole heir' to his fortune, in his will.

The traumatic effects of emigration are brought home to the reader – as we saw they are in *Irish Idylls* – but in this work, Barlow focuses on the experience of the emigrant rather than the parents or siblings who remain at home. Kerrigan's first thought upon receiving the inheritance, we discover, is to return home: 'what struck him as the great feature in his situation,' the narrator comments, was that he 'could now take ship forthwith for the old country, the old life, the old people, and never leave them again.' (15). 'The weeks of his homeward voyaging', we are told, 'were

probably the happiest in his life.’ (18). He longed for ‘the white house at the end of Farrell’s Longing’, where

He knew every inch of that townland, a very green pastoral corner of a northern county, where the country side is crumpled into soft hillocks and hollows, and where the small fields are divided by tall thick hedges, which throw their shadow halfway across the grass at sunset, when the summer evenings are clear. (17)

Kerrigan’s joyful anticipation at the thought of returning home are soon dashed, however, when he receives a frosty welcome from both his remaining family members and the local inhabitants of Glenore. Only his sister Maggie provides him with a warm welcome, and she is preparing to leave home herself, to enter a convent in Belfast. His brother Tom tells Kerrigan of his own money woes and informs Kerrigan that he can’t return to live in the family home.

The close-knit nature of the peasant community portrayed in *Irish Idylls* is noticeably absent from this novel. The peasants’ dislike of Kerrigan finds an echo in his own attitude towards them. In the view of this returned emigrant, the peasants are too blame for the rundown condition of Glenore village, and for their own impoverishment. All around Glenore, Kerrigan witnesses the ‘little cabin-rows, with their shaggy roofs and rough-rifted walls, huddling away’, and ‘the children playing in wispy wags along the road; their hollow-cheeked elders ragged also.’ Such scenes lead Kerrigan to the conclusion that the inhabitants of the village were ‘a lazy, thriftless, dissipated folk, to thank for their own plight, however uncomfortable they might be.’ (39)

Shortly after his return, Kerrigan uses his inheritance to purchase Linmore, the dilapidated Big House of the area. This purchase was ‘the unpopular act of an unpopular person’, (5) the narrator comments, as the local peasantry are resentful of the returned emigrant. Kerrigan has no plans to renovate Linmore, and instead

moves into the humble surroundings of a nearby farmhouse where he used to spend time in his youth.

A year passes uneventfully before the next, somewhat unlikely, development in the novel takes place: a passing member of the Irish gentry – Sir Ben O’Connor – is injured in an accident near the farmhouse, and Kerrigan invites him (and subsequently his whole family) to stay in the big house while he recuperates. Sir Ben’s family includes his brother Sir Leopold, their step-mother Lady O’Connor, and Lady O’Connor’s niece Miss Merle Clariston. This gentry family are on their way down the societal ladder due to a ‘pecuniary disaster’ (73) resulting from some unwise financial investments.⁹² Having taken up residence in the run down Big House, the O’Connor family become known as ‘Kerrigan’s Quality’ among the locals.

The O’Connors stay a number of months at Linmore. Disappointingly perhaps, Barlow does not explore the interesting dynamics that might evolve in a situation where a ‘fallen’ gentry becomes dependent on the goodwill of a former-peasant-come-landlord. The politics of land ownership do become a thematic focus, however, when the O’Connor family announce their intention to quit Kerrigan’s Big House in Chapter Seven.

⁹² The complicated series of events that led to the O’Connor’s money problems are given in full detail: Desiring to help his father, who owed five thousand pounds, Sir Ben had entrusted the inheritance left to him by deceased mother to his half Greek cousin Dion Ionidês. Ionidês was instructed to travel with the money to Dublin and give it to Sir Ben’s father. The money never reached its intended destination, however, because Ionidês decided he would invest the funds in the family’s financial benefit, and these investments failed. Ionidês then telegraphed Sir Ben’s father to inform of the investment failure and left for Australia to start afresh. Sir Ben’s father never received this telegraph, however, and concluded simply that his son had decided not lend him money, and committed suicide.

Kerrigan does not want his 'Quality' to leave Linmore. In an effort to entice them to stay, he decides to buy them a black mare. Sir Ben and Merle (who is the only important female character in the novel) take the boat journey with Kerrigan to Rossmalevin to buy the horse. The small peasant fishing vessel in which they undertake the trip develops a leak, and while they await a lift from another craft, a number of key moments arise in which – through the character of Merle – Barlow addresses the injustices of the land ownership system in Ireland in very direct and uncompromising prose.

As the party awaits the arrival of a new craft, we read that – from where Kerrigan, Sir Ben, and Merle stood – the village of Glenore 'lay far enough away to be only a picturesque scattering of white gleams capped with golden, lay sunning itself serenely in its frame of green and russet and blue'; and the leaves on the trees surrounding the Big House formed 'softly powdered purple brown masses' which 'glint[ed] like jewels held up to the light. (150-1) Merle, however, knows this land, and its peasant holdings 'at close quarters', and can see the harsh social and economic reality behind this beautiful – and distant – rural landscape. The peasants 'little square fields [...] with their painfully piled up stone cairns and patches of labour-baffling swamp', she understands, 'were the scene of hard struggle and toil, and the centre of hopes piteous alike in fulfilment and in frustration.' (151)

Merle becomes angry that Kerrigan thinks so little of the peasants of Glenore and refuses to make 'allowances for the disadvantages under which they laboured in their farming and fishing, and general conduct of affairs.' (He dismisses them brusquely as 'a lazy lot') (152). In the most powerful, and impassioned, passage of text in the novel, she expresses her sympathy for the peasantry and the hardships they have to endure. More than this, however, she also rails against the patent injustice of the

land ownership system, and outlines to Kerrigan the radical changes she would make if she was in a position to do so. 'I wish that they never had to go out fishing at all', she says of the local peasantry.

I wish they all had land enough to make their living on, for certainly they do the best they can with the shreds they've got. It's a pity that they should be pushed out into the sea, when there's really plenty of room for them, and everybody else, on shore. Look at those empty fields over there. What use are they to any one? Perhaps a few beasts graze on them now and then, and perhaps there is some man who likes to think that the property belongs to him. If I had the managing of things he might just put that idea out of his head; because the people who wanted to do something with the land should have it. Why should one man stick his house down in the middle of a great green park, and let nobody live within three miles of him, while half-a-dozen others are huddled together in huts on a patch not the size of his lawn-tennis court, and can't feed a goat without trespassing? Why, for any good the country is to them, they might as well live on a bit of rock like this, with nothing but water round them. I think that everybody should have as much land as he actually wanted in the first place, and what was left over would do for parks. It wouldn't matter if they had to be a few sizes smaller. Then there'd be no occasion for the people to go out fishing, unless they chose, and they could get themselves proper boats too. (153-154)

Kerrigan, we are told, 'listened with [...] surprised dissatisfaction' to Merle's impassioned speech. His dismissive attitude towards her ideas is only tempered by his misogyny: what he sees as her 'exceedingly crude scheme' was, we learn, in keeping with his 'humble estimate of womankind's capacity for talking sense'. (154)

Merle dies in this episode when she falls into the rapidly rising waters circling the small island of Inish where she and Kerrigan have been stranded, while Sir Ben went off with the owner of their leaking boat to look for help. However, as the novel draws to a close, we find that her impassioned attack on the injustices of the land ownership system has had an effect on Kerrigan, after all.

His change of heart towards the local peasantry is evident, firstly, in terms of his charitable attitude towards the family of a recently-deceased local peasant girl, Norah Caffrey. The 'dread of a workhouse funeral weighed sorely' on the minds of her parents (205), we learn, until Kerrigan provided the money for 'a rael respectable

buryin’.’ (206). Shortly afterwards, a sickly Kerrigan is visited by Sir Ben, whose family have left Linmore by this point. In the course of their conversation, Kerrigan informs Sir Ben of his desire to repair the Big House and its land in a manner that benefit the local peasants, and asks for Sir Ben’s assistance with this project. ‘I’ve a sort of notion’, Kerrigan remarks:

I’d like as well as anything to fix it so as it might be some manner of benefit to them folk below there...for it’s uncommonly little to me. I can’t say, if they’re good for much – they may be or they mayn’t; most people aren’t – but beyond a doubt, whoever’s fault it is, some of them haven’t the life of a dog. There’s a deal of things might be done about the place, if they had anybody to spend the money on it...there’s that breakwater contrivance, that they say ‘ud keep them from drowning by dozens – the way Mick Nolan lost his life in the spring. They’ve materials for it handy enough all about, the Lord knows; and t’would give a sight of employment, that, and the wet bog yonder at the bay’s head; it might be drained without much botheration. Anyway, it ‘ud be something if anybody could make out somehow so as they beings might have a dacint-sized scrap of land apiece, instead of to be setting their pitaties among the litters of stone, or you may say in the shingle itself. (211)

Kerrigan’s new-found compassion, and sense of justice, is also evidenced by his observation that the peasant houses also need radical improvement: ‘some of the cabins look liker an old clay bank that’s weathered into hollows than a place for human cratures to be livin’ in’, he tells Sir Ben. ‘A few new ones ‘ud do no harm.’ (211)

As his conversation with Sir Ben – and the novel itself – draws to a close, Barlow has Kerrigan acknowledge how deeply Merle’s ideas had influenced his change of outlook. Merle didn’t really know ‘of the way things in the world are mixed up, and the devilment that’s in them’, he tells Sir Ben:

But maybe that mightn’t hinder her having the sense to see right enough that they’d be better managed somehow. Anyhow, it was thinking of the way she said she’d like to have them regulated that put it into my head to consider could it be contrived at all. (214)

The novel ends optimistically with these two men agreeing to work together for the betterment of the local peasantry. Sir Ben agrees to Kerrigan’s request that he stay on at Linmore House to assist with the planned reforms.

The Founding of Fortunes (1902) reads as a sequel to *Kerrigan's Quality*.

Martin Kerrigan and Sir Ben O'Connor both reappear in this work (though the latter character has been renamed Sir Ben O'Neill), which is set in Port Maguire a neighbouring village of Glenore, where Kerrigan and Sir Ben still reside. These characters' discussions about the developments that have taken place in Glenore enable the reader to ascertain that the plot of *The Founding of Fortunes* unfolds approximately twelve years after the former novel concludes.

The Founding of Fortunes is divided into three sections: Of Transfers; Of Evictions; and Of Purchases. Port Maguire, we learn in section one, is in a similar if not worse condition we find Glenore in at the start of *Kerrigan's Quality*. It is 'squalid and dilapidated,' the narrator informs us early in the work:

a place of which somebody had once said, unconsciously adapting an ancient epigram, that if you got into it, the next best thing could happen you would be to get out of it again as soon as possible. Another, more original perhaps, remarked that the most anybody could say for it would be that there wasn't much of it, which is true enough.⁹³

In a similar fashion to Linmore estate, the big house in this village, Shanabawn, is badly run down due to the incompetence of its Ascendancy owners; and as in the former work, the transformation of this estate – and the fortunes of the tenantry who live on it – comes about when an individual comes into a fortune through an unexpected inheritance-gift, and decides he wants to buy the big house and institute the kind of changes that Kerrigan and Sir Ben have undertaken in Glenore.

Aside from negative descriptions of the village and its Big House, the first section of the novel introduces us to several unlikeable peasant characters from the area. Mrs Ginnelly, who lives in a small cabin on the side of the road between Glenore and

⁹³ Jane Barlow, *The Founding of Fortunes* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1902), p.16. Further page references to the novel will be given in the main text in parentheses.

Port Maguire is a 'cynical' woman whose 'opinions were universally disregarded, as they belonged to merely a very poor old ignorant crone, who owned little or nothing else except a few hens and a pig.' (5) Her grandson, Timothy Galvin, is an even more unsavoury character who begins conning people from a very young age – even his own family. The reader observes how Mrs Ginnelly – Galvin's grandmother is swindled out of a halfpenny every time he would be asked to buy her some heads of cabbage. (6) Constantly on the lookout for an opportunity to escape Port Maguire as young man, Galvin eventually effects his escape through blackmail and deceit.

In the second section of the novel – Of Evictions – we meet literary scholar Ulick Hanmer who moves to Port Maguire from London after being told that his eyes are in bad health and he needs to give them 'complete rest for a couple of years in country air'. (75). Shortly after he arrives in Ireland, however, Hanmer contracts influenza. It is while he is recuperating at the Tubbermaglen Imperial Hotel to recuperate that he makes the acquaintances of Martin Kerrigan and Sir Ben O'Neill. Hanmer learns of Kerrigan's and Sir Ben's association with Glenore, an estate which he has already heard described in Port Maguire as 'a terrestrial paradise.' Sir Ben replies that Port Maguire is such 'an awful place', and it's not surprising Glenore has made such a positive impression there (109).

Sir Ben then describes the kind of changes he and Kerrigan have introduced in Glenore over the previous twelve years. When he remarks that the peasant holdings there had been as bad as anything now found in Port Maguire, but that those hovels are 'all gone now', Hanmer assumes he means the tenants had been evicted, and the land put to more productive use. Sir Ben quickly corrects him on this point. 'No, we evicted none of them,' he tells Hanmer, 'unless you call it eviction to offer a man the nearest bit of decent land available, in addition to the hopeless screed he was on.'

(110). In an oblique reference to Merle, which only readers of the earlier novel will pick up on, Sir Ben notes that the radical changes at Glenore were planned by Kerrigan, but notes that ‘it was some one else who first put the notion into his head.’

(112).⁹⁴ Sir Ben’s detailed descriptions of how the new land ownership system operates provides a clear indication of the extent to which Alfred Russel Wallace’s ideas on land ownership influenced Barlow’s thinking on this subject. The tenants in Glenore ‘farm conjointly’, Sir Ben remarks:

Each tenant has a bit of ground about his house, more or less of it, according to the number there are at home to look after it; and the rest of the land – it’s mainly a good-sized block lying round the lough – they work on cooperatively. Then at the end of the year we divide the profits. Everybody has a fixed share, because everybody pays part of the rent, but over and above that, each tenant’s share is proportionate to the quantity of labour and so forth he has contributed. And the rent goes back into the land. We find the plan a success, and the interest in the Big Lands goes on increasing. (114)

The positive developments at Glenore are subsequently by Port Maguire peasant, Christy McQuaide, who remarks to one of his neighbours that the ‘little houses’ there are

a sight to behold. Standin’ separat they are mostly – there’s only a very few of them in a row – and a little garden round aich, and its bit of land handy near by. First-rate land, too. Ne’er a stony field I seen thereabouts. ‘Twould do your heart god to be puttin’ down a crop in it. (186)

This peasant’s comments about how the land is worked in Glenore also underline that the changes Barlow envisages do not merely involve the idea of benevolent landlords, but a wholesale change in the system of ownership. None of the tenants are

put off wid ould bits of bog and shingle stones, where a sheep ‘ud starve, if she wanted the wit to stray away out of them. Bedad, them that works on the land at Glenore, as good as owns it very nearly, you’say... The crops they grow are surprisin’; and horses and ploughs they have of their own, and mowin’-machines, and rapin’-machines, and all manner, that they joined all together and got themselves. (186)

⁹⁴ Later on in the novel we learn that Sir Ben and Kerrigan have constructed a school for local children which they named ‘Miss Merle’s Cottage’.

In the third and final section of the novel – of Purchases – we learn that the landlord of Shanabawn, Sir Herbert Considine, is selling the property. The sale has been forced on Sir Herbert due to his own ‘decadent life [and] early follies’ (193), and that of several other male members of the family.

A neighbouring landlord, Lord Fintragh of Barnaglen Castle, who hopes to gain ownership of Shanabawn, is also portrayed in a highly negative light – his fault being that he has no desire to improve his estate or the lot of his tenants, whereas Sir Herbert is well-disposed to his tenants but completely incapable of any effective management. Lord Fintragh intends to purchase Shanabawn, in part, to prevent Kerrigan’s and Sir Ben’s polices from spreading outside Glenore. ‘How’d you like to have a settlement of their precious peasant proprietors’ ornamental pigstyes – residences for the new country gentry – planted over there,’ he asks his daughter, ‘sticking up their filthy chimneys in front of our windows?’ (198)

At this stage in the novel Hanmer receives news that he has been left a sum of forty-five thousand pounds in a will by a client who has recently passed away. Upon reading the advertisement for Sir Herbert’s land, he arranges a visit to Glenore to see Sir Ben and Kerrigan to inform them that he intends buy ‘Sir Herbert Considine’s grass lands and let the people have it in small holdings at low rents.’ (225).

In Barlow’s aforementioned - undated - letter to Wallace in which she expresses her admiration for his land nationalisation plans, Barlow referred to an idea she had for a story in which ‘a reforming landlord’s family’ attempt to have him declared a lunatic and committed to a mental asylum. This plan is incorporated into the final section of *The Founding of Fortune*: to counteract the purchase of the land by Hanmer, a group of men (who include Lord Fintragh and Hanmer’s brother-in-law Dr Moloney) plot

to have him committed to Salville House – a private lunatic asylum. Their plan is scuppered when the peasantry of Port Maguire come to Hanmer's aid, and ensure his attempts to purchase the Shanabawn estate are successful. Work on the property begins as soon as the sale of the land goes through, and the novel closes with the disappointingly formulaic news of an impending marriage: Hanmer proposes to Sir Herbert's daughter and the reader is left with the impression that the well-intentioned but hapless Considines will be able to remain at Shanabawn House, which prospect, is greeted with satisfaction by the peasantry of Port Maguire.

While Barlow's two novels *Kerrigan's Quality* and *The Founding of Fortunes* may have disappointing, unrealistic endings. This does not negate the fact that in the preceding sections the novelist highlights a range of contentious socio-political issues to do with the hardships of peasant existence, unjust tenant/landlord relations, evictions, and emigration. Furthermore, through the character of Merle, especially, we have seen how Barlow's work gives expression to the author's radical views on the contentious nineteenth century subject of landownership.

Conclusion

As the ‘recovery’ of writings by neglected Irish women writers continues, Ingman wisely warns against the temptation to ‘situate’ their work solely by reference to existing critical frameworks. We need to appreciate these writers ‘on their own terms’, she advises, ‘and look at what they are actually writing about, rather than attempting to scrutinise their work for identifiable Irish themes’ or, indeed, ‘corral them into any feminist grand narrative.’⁹⁵ The analysis of Jane Barlow’s early fiction in this study has sought to do just that. It has highlighted the relevance of political and gender related issues to an understanding of her fiction, but always, hopefully, by responding to that work ‘on [its] own terms’.

Barlow was writing at a time of great upheaval in Irish affairs, and at a time when the representation of Irish life was an especially ‘politically-loaded’ practice. The stories contained in *Irish Idylls*, like the novels *Kerrigan’s Quality* and *The Founding of Fortunes*, make little direct reference to contemporary political developments. Nevertheless, I have argued, they give full expression to the extremely difficult socio-economic conditions that many people had to endure.

The hardships associated with peasant life in the latter half of the nineteenth century are emphasised throughout her remarkable short story collection. Many of the stories in *Irish Idylls* highlight the physical isolation of peasant communities in the west of Ireland, the barely-habitable cabins in which people struggle to raise their families, and the poor quality of the land from which they eke their living. The collection also draws attention to the complex ‘inner lives’ of these characters, and

⁹⁵ Ingman, *Irish Women’s Fiction from Edgeworth to Enright*, xv.

the strong sense of community that prevails despite the poverty and hardships they suffer.

The political relevance of stories such as ‘Lisconnel’, ‘A Windfall’, ‘One Too Many’, and ‘Herself’ is apparent in terms of how they challenge contemporary stereotypes of Irish character as indolent and self-pitying by representing the Irish peasant – both male and female – as, instead, enterprising, hard-working, and extraordinarily resilient. Several of these stories, and others such as ‘A Wet Day’, ‘Between Two Lady Days’, and ‘Backwards and Forwards’, also draw attention to the difficulties associated with potato-farming in the west of Ireland, the harrowing legacy of the Great Famine of 1845-50, the effects of emigration, the continual fear of the blight, and of eviction.

The political import of her writing is equally-evident in the novels considered here: *Kerrigan’s Quality* and *The Founding of Fortunes*. As with *Irish Idylls*, these works highlight problems associated with peasant poverty, precarious livelihoods, and evictions, but – unlike her short story collection – the novels also address the question of land-ownership, the single most contentious political question of the post-famine period. Not only is this issue a central theme in both works, both works clearly illustrate the author’s support for the extremely progressive land-ownership policies of Alfred Russel Wallace.

Barlow’s early fiction, we have seen, is especially noteworthy on account of how it challenged conventional attitudes towards women, and the role they played in the families and wider communities in which they lived. *Irish Idylls* contains a cast of strong-minded and enterprising women-characters: the widow M’Gurk, Mrs Kilfoyle, Big Anne, Biddy Rafferty, Stacey Doyne, and Mrs O’Driscoll, among

others. It is primarily through their interconnected stories that Barlow highlights how the inhabitants of the village of Lisconnel manage to survive the continually difficult socio-political conditions in which they find themselves. The manner in which Barlow's writing challenged conventional attitudes towards women is also evident in her novels. Though a relatively minor character in *Kerrigan's Quality*, the radical ideas concerning land-ownership that emerge in this work, and in *The Founding of Fortunes*, are directly inspired by Merle Clariston's views on this most political of subjects.

The unconventional representation of women in Barlow's fiction is one of the most noteworthy ways in which her work gives expression to issues of contemporary political relevance. Her writing, we have seen, challenged conventional attitudes towards women, and the role they played in the families and wider communities in which they lived. The manner in which Barlow's writing gives expression to the frustrations and hopelessness that so often animated women's lives is a striking feature of her work, but we have seen that she also highlights their individual resilience, intelligence, and the community-spirit that helped them to endure. 'Private narratives', personal relationships, home-life, are all deeply-cherished realities in Barlow's fiction.⁹⁶ Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of her achievement as a writer, and the most important facet of her legacy today, is that she so effectively drew attention to the connections between these supposedly private areas of life and the broader – more obviously political – contexts in which they unfold.

⁹⁶ 'Characteristic features of Irish women's fiction are its acknowledgement of competing voices within the Irish nation and its prioritising of private narratives as sources of truth over public histories.' Ingman, *Irish Women's Fiction from Edgeworth to Enright*, xiv.

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