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Anthony Trollope's *Castle Richmond*: Famine Narrative and "Horrid Novel"?

1

Castle Richmond, first published in 1860, has become one of the better-known of Trollope's Irish novels.¹ Written in 1859, on the eve of Trollope's departure from Ireland, the novel is set in south-west Ireland and covers the period 1846-7, what Trollope calls "the famine year."² Famine details provide the back-drop to a conventional story of upper-class love while the threat of illegitimacy hanging over the novel's hero and the related blackmail plot represent the other narrative concerns. Criticism of *Castle Richmond* has centred on the relationship between the famine and love plots. One of the novel's first reviews, published in the *Saturday Review* on 19 May 1860, anticipates other critiques in its condemnation of Trollope's mixture of subjects: "It is of course impossible to persuade him to give up a practice which he appears to have adopted in principle, but the milk and the water really should be in separate pails."³ The unsigned notice differs markedly, however, from later opinion regarding the novel's treatment of famine as of primary interest:

Perhaps the most curious part of the book is that which relates to the Irish famine. It is impossible not to feel that that was the part of it about which Mr. Trollope really cared, but that, as he had to get a novel out of it, he was in duty bound to mix up a hash of Desmonds and Fitzgeralds with the Indian meal on which his mind was fixed as he wrote. (pp. 113-4)

Most critics instead view the novel's references to famine as "peripheral", possessing only a casual link with the narrative's main issues.⁴ Yet in dismissing *Castle Richmond*'s famine material as

1. Anthony Trollope, *Castle Richmond* (1860; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); "The World's Classics" series. All subsequent page references will be given in the text.
2. Trollope lived in Ireland from 1841 to 1850, and for periods of time in the 1850s until his final departure in 1859.
3. Unsigned notice, *Saturday Review*, 19 May 1860, pp. 643-4, quoted in *Trollope: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Donald Smalley (London, New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Barnes and Noble, 1969), p. 114.
4. E.W. Wittig, "Trollope's Irish Fiction", *Eire-Ireland* 9.3 (1974), p. 108; further examples of critical opinions on *Castle Richmond* may be found in Hugh Hennedy, "Love and Famine, Family and Country in Trollope's *Castle Richmond*", *Eire-Ireland* 7.4 (1972), pp. 48-66.

secondary, accounts of the novel fail to examine the precise nature and context of Trollope's representation of famine, revealed, in particular, by his characterisation of famine victims. As an enduring narrative of the Irish famine and a novel recently declared one of "the world's classics", *Castle Richmond* warrants a more careful reading.

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I feel that apology is due for such a subject; but you will remember that the Irish newspapers of the time teemed with the recital of such horrors, —that the air was said to be polluted by unburied corpses; that descriptions were given of streets and lanes in which bodies lay for days on the spots where the starved wretches had last sunk; and that districts were named in which the cabins were fabled to contain more dead than living tenants. The Irish press is not proverbial for a strict adherence to unadorned truth; and, under the circumstances, it was perhaps not surprising that writers habituated to disdain facts should exaggerate and compose novels; but those horrid novels were copied into the English papers, and were then believed by English readers.⁵

Between August 1849 and June 1850, the *Examiner*, under the editorial control of John Forster, published seven letters by Anthony Trollope. Accounts of "the subject of Ireland, her undoubted grievances, her modern history, her recent sufferings, and her present actual state" (p. 8), these articles represented Trollope's response to a series of letters on the state of Ireland, written by Lord Sidney Godolphin Osborne and published by the *Times* in June and July 1849. In his autobiography, Trollope recalled the purpose and unhappy fate of his letters:

I was anxious to show that the steps taken for mitigating the terrible evil of the times were the best which the Minister of the day could have adopted ... They were favourably entertained, — if the printing and publication be favourable entertainment. But I heard no more of them. The world in Ireland did not declare that the Government had at last been adequately defended, nor did the treasurer of the *Examiner* send me a cheque in return.⁶

Echoes of the letters appear in *Castle Richmond*: like Trollope, the novel's narrator was at the time of the famine "in the country travelling always through it", regards the measures taken by the government as "prompt, wise, and beneficent", blames the idleness of

5. "The Real State of Ireland", *Examiner*, 6 April 1850, p. 217; six of Trollope's letters to the *Examiner* are reproduced in Lance Tignay, *The Irish Famine: Six Letters to the Examiner 1849-1850* (London: Silverbridge Press, 1987). All subsequent references to the *Examiner* letters are from Tignay's edition.
6. Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography* (London: Blackwood and Sons, 1883), p. 84.

Irish tenants, and uttered such opinions "at the time with a voice that was not very audible" (p. 69). Other readers of *Castle Richmond* have observed parallels between Trollope's novel and letters in their interpretation of famine's causation; the *Examiner* letters, however, also include an interesting discourse on the nature of famine representations. These passages have remained unnoticed by Trollope critics and their significance for *Castle Richmond* ignored.

In his first letter to the *Examiner*, published 25 August 1849 and titled "Irish Distress", Trollope mentions the "fearfully graphic" and "awfully familiar" pictures of famine and plague given by Osborne and "by almost every class of people able to narrate what they have seen" (p. 6). While conceding that "much good has arisen from these vivid narrations", he strictly limits their potential significance: "what do such tales, true as they are, prove to us, but that there has been a famine and a plague in the land?" (p. 6). By 6 April 1850, when the third letter appeared, Trollope's attitude to the "vivid narrations" and "recital of horrors" by contemporary newspapers has clearly changed. Rather than "true" tales, they are condemned for their exaggeration and inaccuracy: "During the whole period of the famine I never saw a dead body lying exposed in the open air, either in a town or in the country" (p. 14). In a deliberate challenge to newspapers' claims to provide factual accounts, Trollope characterises their representations of famine as "horrid novels" (p. 14).

Earlier in the letter (April 1850), Trollope emphasises his own credentials as "eyewitness" to the misery of the period but curiously defines this role as one in which he may "point out what did not happen, and tell of scenes which were not of frequent occurrence" (p. 14); his function, thus identified, is to bear witness to what was not seen and to expose others' fictions. These letters show clearly that, as early as 1849-50, Trollope was firmly situated in a debate, not merely involving the causes and effects of famine, but also concerning famine's representation in narrative. These comments in the *Examiner* provide a valuable context for a rereading of *Castle Richmond* both as famine narrative and as a response to the "vivid narrations" of its time.

2

Castle Richmond, set in the area around Mallow in north Cork, contains three central characters, Clara, Owen and Herbert; the relationship between these characters constitutes much of the story of the novel. Clara, sister of the young Earl of Desmond and member of a bankrupt, previously "great" family, is initially attracted to Owen, member of a younger branch of the Fitzgerald family; Herbert is heir to the Fitzgerald name and property, a position threatened for much of the

novel because of the possible illegitimacy of his parents' marriage. The novel details the obstacles to Clara and Owen's relationship, Herbert's supplanting of Owen as suitor, and the eventual securing by Herbert of both his inheritance and love-object. The event of famine first connects with the love plot in the distraction it provides for Clara following her family's refusal to allow marriage to Owen; from the beginning, emphasis is placed on the benefits of philanthropic work for Clara herself: "She had devoted herself from the first to do her little quota of work towards lessening the suffering around her, and the effort had been salutary to her" (p. 75). Famine also provides the means through which the future lovers, Clara and Herbert, are brought together. As the narrative progresses, Herbert's work in famine relief emerges as a crucial factor in his becoming "champion" (p. 72). Trollope clearly faces difficulty in transferring Clara's and, possibly, the reader's initial attraction to the more "rugged" Owen onto the character of Herbert, described by Trollope himself in his autobiography as a "prig". Herbert's efforts to relieve the sufferings of those affected by famine have a crucial narrative function, serving to support his claims to the status of hero.

The narrative's other plot, the threat to Herbert's family fortune and status, also develops simultaneously with the spread of famine; when the Fitzgerald patrimony is most in danger, the famine is at its worst. The text records a link between the suffering and death experienced by the Fitzgerald household and by the poor, on two occasions: "At any rate, there was the famine, undoubted now by anyone; and death, who in visiting Castle Richmond may be said to have knocked at the towers of a king, was busy enough also among the cabins of the poor" (p. 345); the narrator, however, anxiously seeks to prevent this relationship emerging as causal. On the second occasion, the narrative comes perilously close to suggesting that the ill-fortune of the tenants derives from their landlord: "To them, the Miss Fitzgeralds, looking at the poverty-stricken assemblage, it *almost* seemed as though the misfortune of their house had brought down its immediate consequences on all who had lived within their circle; but this was the work of the famine" (p. 361) [my emphasis]. The narrator dismisses this possible responsibility by determinedly blaming the famine, a force located outside the Fitzgerald family. The relationship between lower-class famine victim and upper-class family, however, continues to trouble the narrative.

In chapter 7, *Castle Richmond's* narrator provides a lengthy discussion of the famine and its causes, taking issue with prevalent interpretations of the famine as caused by "the idolatry of popery, or of the sedition of demagogues, or even mainly by the idleness of the people" (p. 67). He attributes "the destruction of the potato" to the "work of

God", dismisses any suggestion that this is an "exhibition of God's anger" yet argues that famine exemplifies "exhibitions of his mercy" (p. 65). His argument firmly places blame for the famine on the existence of an "idle genteel class", those who profited from the system of sub-leasing: "The scourge of Ireland was the existence of a class who looked to be gentlemen living on their property, but who should have earned their bread by the work of their brain, or failing that, by the sweat of their brow" (p. 67). Within this discourse on the "Famine Year", Irish society emerges as a structure in which two very different classes exist:

And thus a state of things was engendered in Ireland which discouraged labour, which discouraged improvements in farming, which discouraged any produce from the land except the potato crop; which maintained one class of men in what they considered to be the gentility of idleness, and another class, the people of the country, in the abjectness of poverty. (p. 68)

Since the idleness of one and the poverty of another originate in the same "state", the classes possess opposed yet interdependent interests. Similarly, the narrator notes the related presence of money and mortality in Ireland at that time:

It may probably be said that so large a sum of money had never been circulated in the country in any one month since money had been known there; and yet it may also be said that so frightful a mortality had never occurred there from the want of that which money brings. It was well understood by all men now that the customary food of the country had disappeared. There was no longer any difference of opinion between rich and poor, between Protestant and Catholic; as to that, no man dared now to say that the poor, if left to themselves, could feed themselves, or to allege that the sufferings of the country arose from the machinations of money-making speculators. The famine was an established fact, and all men knew that it was God's doing ... (p. 344)

Here the narrator's succeeding comment limits the implications of his initial observation; shared opinion covers over differences in entitlements; suffering is attributed only to "famine" and to God.

The narrator's discourse thus contains some striking tensions; in addition, his analysis possesses a paradoxical relationship with elements of the story. Ironically, the closest example within *Castle Richmond* to the "genteel idler" castigated as the cause of famine could be considered to be Herbert, the novel's hero. Herbert is not a tenant; yet he comes to resemble those Irish tenants who set themselves up as gentlemen since he too emerges as one "who owned no properties and had no places when the matter came to be properly sifted" (p. 67). Although certainly not a "cotter" (p. 68) or landless labourer, he

temporarily shares their fate of emigration, moving to London to find employment. The story does not cause Herbert to be "cut up root and branch" as befalls the "idle, genteel class" (p. 68); yet, for the time that he is nameless and without a career, he is perilously close to "the gentility of idleness" (p. 68). The narrative's restoration of Herbert's name and position clearly limits such an interpretation of his character. Yet a curious contradiction remains in the text between the "gentility" which marks the story's hero and that which identifies the villains who have caused famine.

Herbert's work to relieve the sufferings of famine victims thus serves to refute the charge of "idleness" and responsibility potentially levelled against this "gentleman" hero; rather than cause of famine, the narrative proposes Herbert as famine saviour. With the emphasis on Herbert's activity comes a corresponding emphasis on the "idleness" or apathy of famine victims. This portrayal occurs as part of a broader shift in narrative focus, after chapter 7, towards representations of the victim. References to apathy occur at strategic moments in the narrative. The narrator's recognition of the existence both of money in circulation and "frightful" mortality, cited above, is followed by an extended attack on the apathy of the poor:

And now the great fault of those who were the most affected was becoming one which would not have been at first expected. One would think that starving men would become violent, taking food by open theft — feeling, and perhaps not without some truth, that the agony of their want robbed such robberies of its sin. But such was by no means the case ... The fault of the people was apathy. It was the feeling of the multitude that the world and all that was good in it was passing away from them; that exertion was useless, and hope hopeless. (p. 345)

"Fault" now characterises famine victims in their apathy and lack of hope; significantly the narrator avoids exploring the origins of such despair. The idleness of a would-be genteel class disappears as an object of blame, giving way to the apathy, dullness and idleness of the famine poor.

Two episodes in *Castle Richmond* aim to reinforce this characterisation of Herbert as famine saviour and apathetic victims who are the recipients of his aid. Since famine relief-works provide the location for both scenes, the story carries the potential to suggest the opposite to that intended: active workers and their idle upper-class visitor. Trollope's presentation of famine victims counters this possibility, in particular through the use of stereotype. However, as a close reading of the text reveals, both scenes release curious ambivalences regarding power and its operation.

In chapter 18, Herbert meets a gang of labourers waiting to begin

work on cutting away a hill, as part of a project to earn food. The narrator's introduction of the men implies their threatening natures: "wretched-looking creatures, half-clad, discontented, with hungry eyes, each having at his heart's core a deep sense of injustice done personally upon him" (p. 201). Yet their characterisation also includes more passive qualities: "melancholy, given to complaint, apathetic, and utterly without interest in that they were doing" (p. 202). Their reported speech, transcribed in dialect form, such as the explanation of their inability to start work because "we did not exactly know whether yer honer'd be afther beginning at the top or the bothom" (p. 205), emphasises their comic stupidity and situates them as objects of ridicule. Although two of the men described receive names, "Thady Molloy and Shawn Brady", the narrative frequently infers general Irish traits from the scene. These traits are obvious stereotypes: "An Irishman as a rule will not come regularly to his task.... No irregular effort is distasteful to an Irishman of the lower classes ... He prefers work that is not his own" (p. 203). The narrator's tone includes indulgent humour, ridiculing the ignorance of men who "had been told to come early, and they had been there on the road-side since five o'clock. It was not surprising that they were cold and hungry, listless and unhappy" (p. 203). The repetition of apathy and lack of discipline as key characteristics, however, also serves to imply that the men have contributed to their own wretchedness: one man "cold, however, as he was", would "do nothing towards warming himself, unless that occasional shake can be considered as a doing of something" (p. 202). Yet later we are told that "an Irishman would despise himself" for the "low economy" (p. 286) of putting down a wheelbarrow while speaking.

These stereotypes of listlessness and extravagance of energy clearly contradict each other, in what Homi Bhabha has called the "productive ambivalence of the object of colonial discourse."⁷ In Trollope's depiction, an Irishman finds irregular effort to his "taste" but is too lazy or apathetic to feed himself. Undisciplined energy, or idle apathy, the presentation remains ambivalent. Yet in both cases, the characterisation implies that a controlling or motivating force, a colonising intervention, is necessary. The confusion within colonial stereotypes carries over to those holding colonial authority: thus the representative of the imperial power, the engineer of the relief works, is "bewildered" (p.205). Interestingly, the engineer also initially fails to distinguish Herbert, holder of colonial power and privilege, from the labourers: "He had not observed, or probably, had not known Herbert Fitzgerald" (p. 204).

7. Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question", *Screen* 24.6 (1983), p. 19.

The suggested link between Herbert, as upper-class spectator, and the men he observes becomes clearer in a later encounter also occurring on the site of relief-works. The position of the meeting in the narrative is significant: Herbert is on his way to acquaint the Desmonds with his loss of fortune and his loss of the "things which money buys": "outward respect, permission to speak with authority among his fellow-men, for power and place, and the feeling that he was prominent in his walk of life" (p. 284). When he meets the gang of road-destroyers, Herbert receives the chance to recover his status, "to be in advance of other men" by entering into dialogue with the men and by allowing them the chance to voice their complaints. Significantly he is now on foot, and thus is dangerously close to the men. He refuses to provide the satisfaction of listening, of "discoursing": "On ordinary occasions Herbert would listen to them, and answer them, and give them, at any rate, the satisfaction which they derived from discoursing with him, if he could give them no other satisfaction" (p. 287). In refusing such discourse, "running the gauntlet through them as best he might, and shaking them off from him, as they attempted to cling round his steps", he denies himself the opportunity to demonstrate his continuing privilege; by seeking to distance himself from the famine victims he comes closer to their position. Their encounter thus illustrates the characters' interdependence, with significant implications for the operation of power. Herbert's "feeling" of being "prominent" does not exist in and of itself; instead he depends on others assigning him this position. His dependence on others' recognition illustrates Homi Bhabha's observations on the colonial relationship, that colonial "subjects are always disproportionately placed in opposition or domination through the symbolic decentering of multiple power-relations which play the role of support as well as target or adversary."⁸ Trollope's presentation of the encounter of different men similarly demonstrates that power-relations are produced by "discoursing"; they are acts of enunciation which require an assenting audience.

3

Trollope's characterisation of famine victims in *Castle Richmond* occurs within a series of encounters between the central characters, Herbert and Clara, and those directly affected by the famine. The episodes produce various pairings between the upper and lower classes: male and male in the scenes described above, female and female, or male and female representatives. The representation of female famine victims, however, involves a close physical scrutiny; nowhere in the

8. Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question", p. 24.

narrative is there an equivalent scrutiny of a man's body. As the narrative progresses, women's bodies increasingly become the object of the male gaze of narrator and character; thus Trollope images famine's effects most graphically through the construction of female spectacles.

The narrative's pairing of upper and lower-class woman occurs not in the roadworks, an exclusively male location, but in a little store where the three women, Clara and the two Fitzgerald sisters, sell food to non-labourers, women and old men. As Trollope emphasises, they sell food because the political structure forbids the giving of food free. Upper-class women thus dispense the political decisions of governing men, while they receive from lower-class women the coins earned by their male relations. Within this female exchange of the currency of men, Clara, an upper-class woman, and a poor woman suffering from famine, also exchange words.

The description of the lower-class woman contains motifs such as motherhood and quasi-nakedness which recur throughout contemporary representations of female famine victims: "a woman came into the place with two children in her arms and followed by four others of different ages. She was a gaunt, tall creature, with sunken cheeks and hollow eyes, and her clothes hung about her in unintelligible rags" (p. 84). The structure of the passage pairs Clara and the poorer woman; the woman rubs her "forefinger" in the food and invites Clara to do likewise. Clara obeys, "looking into the woman's face, half with fear and half with pity, and putting, as she spoke, her pretty delicate finger down into the nasty daubed mess of parboiled yellow flour" (p. 85). Clara's feelings of fear and pity produce an ambivalent reaction: towards sympathy yet against identification. The narrator's view initially follows a similar oscillation, allowing the woman "reason for her complaints", but seeing her as "one of many thousands" with similar complaints (p. 86).

As the episode progresses, however, the dominant aspect in the characterisation of the poor woman becomes her ingratitude. Her lack of appreciation, we are told, represents part of the "hardest burden which had to be borne by those who exerted themselves at this period" (p. 86). In a lengthy intervention, the narrator acknowledges some basis for this ingratitude yet quickly restrains the force of his comments by detailing the "hard task" of other, more "delicate" women:

To call them ungrateful would imply too deep a reproach, for their convictions are that they were being ill used by the upper classes. When they received bad meal which they could not cook, and even in their extreme hunger could hardly eat half-cooked; when they were desired to leave their cabins and gardens, and

flock into the wretched barracks which were prepared for them; when they saw their children wasting away under a suddenly altered system of diet, it would have been unreasonable to expect that they should have been grateful. Grateful for what? Had they not at any rate a right to claim life, to demand food that should keep them and their young ones alive? But *not the less* was it a hard task for delicate women to work hard, and to feel that all the work was unappreciated by those whom they so thoroughly commiserated, whose sufferings they were so anxious to relieve. (p. 86) [my emphases]

The passage begins as a forceful articulation of the "rights" of the starving but veers sharply away from the consequences of this sympathy with an extraordinary attempt to render equally sympathetic the efforts of rich, "delicate" women. Such a comparison disguises the very different resources possessed by the two groups; in portraying both donors and receivers as less than strong, it ignores the more lethal "delicacy" of the woman who is starving. The structuring of the comparison also illustrates their interdependence since one's sufferings results from the other's ingratitude. The other side of this equation, that the poor woman's hunger may originate in the behaviour of those such as Clara, is not stated; instead the narrator is at pains to illustrate the upper class women as "anxious to relieve" sufferings. Thus Clara, as philanthropic woman, exists as an example of her class's dedication and power — to give charity. Yet, constructed in a position of intimacy, even interdependence, with her opposite in station, the victim retains the power to reveal another aspect of their relationship. Her presence in the narrative carries a power which the text fails to control, suggesting what the narrator may have attempted to obscure: that she who may relieve suffering may also carry responsibility for its origin.

The second encounter with a famine woman involves both Herbert and Clara; the text offers not only their perspectives but the observing gaze of the male narrator who closely examines the woman's body. In reading the episode, the work of Laura Mulvey on visual spectacle and Foucault's observations on the "hysterization" of women's bodies help to redirect one's own gaze.⁹

Towards the end of the chapter entitled "The Path Beneath the Elms", Herbert and Clara encounter "a sight which for years past had not been uncommon in the south of Ireland, but which had become frightfully common during the last two or three months" (p. 189). The "sight" is a woman's body, experienced from the beginning of this

9. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", *Screen* 16.3 (1975), pp. 6-18; Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, vol. 1 (1979; London: Peregrine, 1984).

episode as spectacle, and which receives from the narrator's gaze an unprecedented scrutiny. The description emphasises both her rags and the nakedness which they have failed to conceal from the narrator's eye: "A woman was standing there, of whom you could hardly say that she was clothed, though she was involved in a mass of rags which covered her nakedness. Her head was all uncovered, and her wild black hair was streaming round her face" (p. 189). Like the earlier "unintelligible rags" (p. 86), a complex phrase such as "involved in a mass of rags", can only partially cover the nakedness exposed by the narrator's perspective. The narrative continues with an examination of the woman's lack of "comeliness" and a close scrutiny of her body: "She was short and broad in the shoulders, though wretchedly thin; her bare legs seemed to be of nearly the same thickness up to the knee, and the naked limbs of the children were like yellow sticks" (p. 189). The individual and grotesquely physical description then gives way to a general meditation on "the kinds of physical development among the Celtic peasantry in Ireland"; yet the controlling factor within the narrator's discourse remains "what is attractive to the eye":

It is strange how various are the kinds of physical development among the Celtic peasantry in Ireland. In many places they are singularly beautiful, especially as children; and even after labour and sickness shall have told on them as labour and sickness will tell, they still retain a certain softness and grace which is very nearly akin to beauty. But then again in a neighbouring district they will be found to be squat, uncouth, and in no way attractive to the eye. (p. 189)

Significantly, the group of which the woman is part is a biological species named "Celtic"; her male counterparts, in their relation to the world of waged labour, are part of a political grouping named "Irish" (p. 203).

Throughout the scene, the male narrator as observer carries the power to stare and judge, to define and experience what is attractive and repulsive. His perspective on the female character provides a clear illustration of "woman as image, man as bearer of the look" as defined by Laura Mulvey in her work on narrative cinema: "in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female."¹⁰ Trollope's representation of the famine woman's quasi-naked, ugly and maternal body also enacts what Foucault calls "the hysterization of women's bodies":

a threefold process whereby the feminine body was analyzed — qualified and disqualified — as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality; whereby it was integrated into the sphere of medical

10. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", p. 11.

practices, by reason of a pathology intrinsic to it; whereby finally, it was placed in organic communication with the social body (whose regulated fecundity it was supposed to ensure), the family space (of which it had to be a substantial and functional element), and the life of children (which it produced and had to guarantee, by virtue of a biologicico-moral responsibility lasting through the entire period of the children's education): the Mother, with her negative image of "nervous woman", constituted the most visible form of this hysterization. (p. 104)

Trollope's description of her child, "its little legs seemed to withered away; its cheeks were wan, and yellow and sunken, and the two teeth which it had already cut were seen with terrible plainness through its emaciated lips" (p. 191), makes explicit the suggestions of diseased bodies, potential objects of the "pathology" of which Foucault speaks. The famine woman's importuning, together with the wildness of her appearance, constitute her both as "Mother", and "nervous woman".

The episode continues with Herbert and Clara's conversation with the woman, a dialogue dominated by Herbert's interrogation but which also conveys the differing reactions of male and female spectators. Both Herbert and Clara initially fail to recognise the woman, although she insists "Shure an' it's yet honour knows me well enough; and her ladyship too" (p. 190). Clara, to whom the woman initially directs her appeal, reacts with sympathy: "Clara looked at them piteously and put her hand towards her pocket. Her purse was never well furnished, and now in these bad days was usually empty. At the present moment it was wholly so" (p. 190). Like the begging woman, Clara lacks money and joins her in beseeching Herbert to intervene. Both women's appeals go temporarily unanswered by Herbert, possessor of money and the caretaker of political argument. The poor woman's decision to appeal to Owen, her belief that he will be generous to her because of her identity as one of Clara's family's tenants, further links the two women.

Herbert's interrogation of the woman is mediated by larger arguments of political economy, particularly the view that charity in the form of money must not be given. "Herbert had learned deep lessons of political economy and was by no means disposed to give promiscuous charity on the road-side" (p. 190). The episode exposes these political arguments to be untenable, a revelation whose full potential to undermine the narrative's presentation of famine relief is never admitted: "But the system was impracticable, for it required frames of iron and hearts of adamant. It was impossible not to waste money in almsgiving" (p. 192). A gender as well as economic difference thus separates this encounter with a begging woman from Herbert's encountering of men at work on the roads. To give work and wages to a male labourer involves a relationship near to the type of waged

economy desired by the narrator, however useless or deliberately unproductive the work. To give money to a mother is charity and, intriguingly, "promiscuous". The reference to promiscuity, with its connotations of casual sexual relationships, attributes to the woman a lack of chastity in begging, a suggestion reinforced by the description of her nakedness. Yet the phrase contains an interesting ambiguity as to whether donor or recipient of charity is "promiscuous".

In this encounter, Trollope's narrative configures issues of sexuality and charity, of the sexuality of the object viewed and the charity of the spectator, in such a way as to suggest that the act of giving reinforces deviant or uncontrolled sexuality. Thus the giver becomes implicated in the notion of promiscuity. Anxiety increasingly characterises Herbert's reaction to the woman; she represents not only a threat to the existing system of famine relief but also the threat of uncontrolled sexuality, of one economically problematic *because* she is sexually different. Laura Mulvey writes that "woman as icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look, always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified" (p. 13). In Mulvey's analysis, the original anxiety concerns sexual difference; in Trollope's narrative, the woman represents both economic and sexual difference, threatening the fragile discipline of the male observer and of a political system.

Later in the novel, in a chapter called "The Last Stage", a similar episode occurs which furthers the power of the male character and in which a woman's body even more clearly functions as icon and spectacle. In this scene, Herbert is the sole observer. The picture of a female victim filters through his perspective much more than in the earlier scene; as male protagonist he both "articulates the look and creates the action."¹¹ The resulting tensions between male gaze and observed woman are particularly disturbing.

A description of Herbert's ride through the countryside prefaces the encounter. Nameless and fortuneless, he is on his way to see Clara on the day before his departure to England; he takes a circuitous route, prolonging the gratification of his meeting with her. Herbert enters the cabin; his "glance" and body frame the description of what is inside: "Beneath his feet was the damp earthen floor, and around him were damp, cracked walls, and over his head was the old lumpy thatch" (p. 369). After some time he perceives

the place was inhabited. Squatting in the middle of the cabin, seated on her legs crossed under her, with nothing between her and the wet earth, there crouched a woman with a child in her arms. At first, so dark was the place, Herbert hardly thought that the object before him was a human being. (p. 369)

11. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", p. 13.

From the first lines, the woman is scarcely human: squatting animal-like, her eyes "gleaming" with a "dull, unwholesome brightness" (p. 369). Closer scrutiny by the male spectator reveals her nakedness.

And then he looked at her more closely. She had on her some rag of clothing which barely sufficed to cover her nakedness, and the baby which she held in her arms was covered in some sort; but he could see, as he came to stand close over her, that these garments were but loose rags which were hardly fastened round her body. Her rough short hair hung down upon her back, clotted with dirt, and the head and face of the child which she held was covered with dirt and sores. On no more wretched object, in its desolate solitude, did the eye of man ever fall. (p. 369)

Herbert's gaze controls the spectacle of the woman's body; the perspective from which we are told that rags "barely sufficed to cover her nakedness" is clearly his, "the eye of man". The narration of this encounter between upper-class male and female famine victim enacts, in Foucault's terms, the power inherent in the deployment of sexuality:

this form of power demanded constant, attentive and curious presences for its exercise; it presupposed proximities; it proceeded through examination and insistent observation; it required an exchange of discourses, through questions that exhorted admissions, and confidences that went beyond the questions that were asked. It implied a physical proximity and an interplay of intense sensations ... The power which thus took charge of sexuality set about contacting bodies, caressing them with its eyes, intensifying areas, electrifying surfaces, dramatizing troubled moments. It wrapped the sexual body in its embrace. (p. 44)

As Herbert comes to "stand over" the woman (p. 369), his gaze wraps her body "in its embrace"; only his turning his face away can "relieve her from her embarrassment" (p. 373).

The narrative discourse next moves outside the particular "wretched object" to a general meditation on famine bodies. The narrator offers an interesting mixture of omniscient analysis and personal comment, first constructing a pathology of "legible" signs: "In those days there was a form of face which came upon the sufferers when their state of misery was far advanced, and which was a sure sign that their last stage of misery was nearly run...." (p. 369). The narrator then appears in the first person to recount how a friend has taught him to read the faces of famine victims correctly: "And then she pointed out to me the signs on the lad's face, and I found that her reading was correct" (p. 370). This intervention highlights Herbert's misreading in believing there is "hope" for the woman while instruct-

ing the reader how to read correctly signs of the "mark of death". The gap between character and reader serves to intensify sympathy for Herbert who is unable to prevent what the narrator carefully deems to be unpreventable. Thus we are encouraged to see the woman as one for whom "the agony of want was past", as "listless, indifferent, hardly capable of suffering, even for her child, waiting her doom unconsciously" (p. 370).

From "insistent observation", Herbert proceeds to an interrogation, a series of "questions that exhorted admissions", to which the woman responds with silence or in monosyllables. This interrogation also implies interesting insights into Herbert's own position. The narrator stresses, repeatedly and sympathetically, the discomfort and dilemma caused for Herbert by the woman's lack of communication:

for a while Herbert stood still, looking round him, for the woman was so motionless and uncommunicative that he hardly knew how to talk to her. That she was in the lowest depth of distress was evident enough, and it behoves him to administer to her immediate wants before he left her; but what could he do for one who seemed to be so indifferent to herself? (p. 371)

A note of censure emerges in accounts of her indifference and her failure to "show any of those symptoms of reverence which are habitual to the Irish when those of a higher rank enter their cabins" (p. 370). Ironically the narrator fails to acknowledge that, at this position in the narrative, Herbert has lost his "higher rank" and fortune! The wording of Herbert's dilemma exposes a crucial feature of their relationship: Herbert does not possess the all-encompassing power one might expect from one in his position; instead he depends on the object of his gaze to speak and act. Because of her silence and lack of response, he does not know how to behave.

For a minute or two he said nothing — hardly, indeed, knowing how to speak, and looking from the corpse-like woman back to the life-like corpse back to the woman, as though he expected that she would say something unasked.... He felt that he was stricken with horror as he remained there in the cabin with the dying woman and the naked corpse of the poor dead child. But what was he to do? He could not go and leave them without succour. The woman had made no plaint of her suffering and had asked for nothing.... (pp. 371-73)

The operation of Herbert's power in giving charity thus depends on her articulation of a request; as in earlier passages, the relationship of famine victim and potential donor emerges, not as a simple form of superiority, but as a complex form of interdependence.

Other moments in the episode serve to re-establish Herbert's

power: in order to see the woman's child, he moves the straw with "the handle of his whip", a graphic symbol of his power and control (p. 371); the movement of his body controls both the light and perspective from which the body of the child may be seen "stripped of every vestige of clothing" (p. 371). The woman's characterisation, meanwhile, sinks further into animal terms, with farcical results: "and sinking lower down upon her haunches ... pushing back with it the loose hairs from her face, *tried to make an effort at thinking*" (p. 371) [my emphases]. In the following passage, the most horrific event occurs:

And he stood close over her and put out his hand and touched the baby's body. As he did so, she made some motion as though to arrange the clothing closer round the child's limbs but Herbert could see that she was making an effort to hide her own nakedness. It was the only effort that she made while he stood there beside her. (p. 373)

In touching the child, Herbert not only approaches even closer to the woman's body but, through the child's position at her breast, touches her body. Significantly the "only effort" she makes is to seek to hide her nakedness from his enquiring eye. It is not hard to realise the intrusion, even violence, which his touch and gaze constitute; Herbert's power to cause embarrassment in a woman previously described as almost dead is horrifically clear. The paragraph disturbingly evokes the power-relations operating within the discourse of their encounter; "Power operated as a mechanism of attraction; it drew out those peculiarities over which it kept watch."¹²

Herbert's actions in the closing of the scene are extraordinarily ineffectual. He places a silk handkerchief over the dead child's body, barely overcoming his disgust, and gives "a silver coin or two" to the mother. Again the narrator suggests censure in his recording of her response: "These she did take, muttering some word of thanks, but they caused her no emotion of joy" (p. 374). Trollope ignores the absurdity of giving coins, themselves only symbols of help, to a woman who lacks the opportunity, even life-energy, to exchange them. The closing lines of the chapter, "her doom had been spoken before Herbert had entered the cabin" (p. 374), seek to remove any individuals, including Herbert, from blame. The woman's actual death is silenced, not to be explicitly enacted in this chapter, but happening outside the narrative. The narrator's omniscient voice frames the scene and declares the woman's death inevitable. Within the episode, however, the reader encounters a representation disturbingly close to being what Laura Mulvey calls a "moment of erotic contemplation" (p. 11), the construction of a female famine

12. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, p. 45.

spectacle through the operation of a powerful yet anxious male gaze.

Neither of the famine women, objects of scrutiny, reappear; their representations function in the narrative as spectacle or icon. However, both encounters crucially contribute to the narrative's main concern, the relationship between Clara and Herbert. Earlier in the chapter in which Clara and Herbert meet the famine woman, Clara's misgivings regarding Herbert, her continuing attraction to Owen and her dreaming or longing for "woman's subjugation" (p. 182) are detailed. As the famine scene progresses, Clara increasingly "implores" Herbert, a sharp transformation from the earlier characterisation of Herbert as the giver of "sweet honeyed compliments", and realises her "spirit's wish" to "feel itself subdued" (p. 182). The episode thus not only solidifies the relationship of Herbert and Clara because of her recognition of his generosity, but more problematically enacts, using the body of a woman of lower station, the subjugation of both famine women; meanwhile Herbert's position in the narrative becomes increasingly central.

In her study of the role of female spectacle in film, Mulvey shows how the male protagonist both dictates the gaze and the narrative action: "the split between spectacle and narrative supports the man's role as the active one of forwarding the story, making things happen" (p. 12). The end of chapter 23 provides a clear contrast between female spectacle, the fate of the famine woman, and the narrative as represented by Herbert. On his way to Desmond Court, Herbert draws the following moral from the scene.

Whatever might be the extent of his own calamity, how could he think himself unhappy after what he had seen? how could he repine at aught that the world had done for him, having now witnessed to how low a state of misery a fellow human being might be brought? Could he, after that, dare to consider himself unfortunate? (p. 374)

This meditation ensures that the immediate consequence of the episode is a restoration of Herbert's happiness, even pleasure, in the recognition of his superiority; in Foucault's terms, "the pleasure discovered fed back to the power that encircled it" (pp. 44-5). Herbert's encounter with Clara in the succeeding chapter illustrates a more significant consequence, releasing the "erotic" suggestions implicit in the preceding famine scene.

He came towards her respectfully, holding out his hand that he might take hers; but before he had thought of how she would act she was in his arms. Hitherto, of all betrothed maidens, she had been the most retiring. Sometimes he had thought her cold when she had left the seat by this side to go and nestle closely by his sister. She had avoided the touch of his hand and the pressure of

his arm, and had gone with him speechless, if not with anger then with dismay, when he had carried the warmth of his love beyond the touch of his hand or the pressure of his arm. But now she rushed into his embrace and hid her face upon his shoulder....
(p. 380)

The change in their relationship is ostensibly because of Herbert's loss of fortune. However, the main focus of the passage concerns the previously unacknowledged sexual tension between the aggressive Herbert and the retiring Clara; this crucial change in their physical relationship occurs immediately after Herbert's encounter with the dying famine woman. In both encounters, Herbert moves forward to touch a woman; the repressed eroticism of a woman, visually "embraced" in the earlier scene, emerges in his meeting with Clara. From her initial identity as famine donor, Clara has come to adopt the position of famine women in *Castle Richmond*, asserting Herbert's power and attraction against suggestions to the contrary.

Trollope's depiction of the causes and victims of famine raises questions concerning power and responsibility which are never fully resolved. The spectacle of the female body, used to characterise famine, may thus be seen as a means of evading what Foucault calls the "disjunctions and contradictions" released by the narrative's account of the operations of power (p. 92). Female famine victims, in *Castle Richmond*, represent the unstoppable force of famine, serving to excuse and defend those whose efforts have failed: Herbert, his government. In bearing the signs of economic and sexual difference, the female spectacle *contains* the power to expose the failure of a political system, both possessing and restraining that power. Studies of images of women in various types of narrative demonstrate how the female image is set up as a guarantee against the difficulties of representation itself. In her discussion of cinema, Jacqueline Rose cites films which "set up the image of woman as cinema" in "such a way as to simultaneously refer to and disavow the problem of cinema."¹³ Trollope's imaging of famine as female spectacle similarly functions to ensure that the problem of famine, its causation and responsibility for its prevention, is at once communicated and obscured.

4

In the April 1850 letter to the *Examiner*, quoted above, Trollope castigates Irish and English newspapers for their publication of inaccurate and exaggerated famine accounts. Possible candidates for the identity of "horrid novel" include the letters of Sidney Godolphin

13. Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality and the Field of Vision* (London, New York: Verso, 1986), pp. 220-22.

Osborne whose publication directly prompted Trollope's own articles; the much-reproduced letter by Nicholas Cummins, addressed to the Duke of Wellington and published in the *Times* on 24 December 1846; and the Earl of Dufferin's *Narrative of a Journey from Oxford to Skibbereen during the Year of the Irish Famine*, published in 1847.¹⁴ In direct contrast to Trollope's accusation of fiction, these narratives voice a shared concern with "truth": the Earl of Dufferin describes his aim "to ascertain with our own eyes the truth of the reports daily publishing of the misery existing" in Ireland; Nicholas Cummins similarly seeks "personally to investigate the truth of several lamentable accounts" while Osborne strongly indicates his frustration with famine discourse: "Sick at heart with reading the accounts of Irish horrors, still more sick of the everlasting disputes as to the accuracy of this or that tale of misery." Controversy regarding the representation of famine clearly does not begin with Trollope's letters; instead disputes regarding the accuracy of famine reports directly motivate the investigations of Nicholas Cummins in late 1846, the visit to Ireland by the Earl of Dufferin in March 1847 and that of Osborne in June 1849.

The horrors of famine, as described by Cummins and Dufferin, include unburied corpses, decaying bodies, corpses devoured by rats. Thus Cummins writes:

The same morning the police opened a house on the adjoining lands, which was observed shut for many days, and two frozen corpses were found, lying upon the mud floor, half devoured by rats.

A mother, herself in a fever, was seen the same day to drag out the corpse of her child, a girl about twelve, perfectly naked, and leave it half covered with stones.

Dufferin's description of bodies "lying putrifying in the midst of the sick remnant of their families" is a graphic example of the type of horror with which, according to Trollope, Irish newspapers "teemed", inaccurately. Trollope's *Examiner* letters clearly aim to refute the accuracy of such narratives; yet their relationship to *Castle Richmond* is more complex. Within his letters, Trollope is quite defensive as to his own credentials as spectator:

Now it may be said that if I did not enter cabins, I could not see the horrid sights which were to be met within; but such a remark cannot apply to that which is said to have been of such frequent

14. Sidney Godolphin Osborne, letters to the *Times*, 14 and 21 June, 5 and 9 July 1849; Nicholas Cummins, letter to the *Times*, 24 December 1846, p. 6; Earl of Dufferin and Hon G.F. Boyle, *Narrative of a Journey from Oxford to Skibbereen during the Year of the Irish Famine* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1847).

occurrence out under the open sky. The whole period was spent by me in passing from one place to another in the south and west of Ireland.

Interestingly, when later writing his famine novel, he presents his hero, in the narrative's most detailed famine scene, entering an Irish cabin; at such a moment, narratives such as Osborne's and others exist as a source to be challenged. In representing the "horrid sights" to be met within, however, Trollope betrays a more direct relationship with contemporary famine narratives.

In the narratives of Cummins, Dufferin and Osborne, representations of individual women victims constitute some of the most significant descriptions. Cummins reluctantly writes:

decency would forbid what follows, but it must be told. My clothes were nearly torn off in my endeavour to escape from the throng of pestilence around, when my neckcloth was seized from behind by a grip which compelled me to turn. I found myself grasped by a woman with an infant just born in her arms and the remains of a filthy sack across her loins — the sole covering of herself and baby.

Motifs such as the woman with an infant in her arms, her scantness of clothing and, particularly, the woman's power to trouble and arrest the narrator, have interesting parallels with Trollope's descriptions. Dufferin's account contains more direct verbal echoes of *Castle Richmond* in the description of the woman's "crouching" and the absence of "articles" in the hut:

We entered another at no great distance; over a few peat embers a woman was crouching, drawing her only solace from their scanty warmth; she was suffering from diarrhoea: there seemed scarcely a single article of furniture or crockery in any part of the hut. The woman answered the enquiries of Mr. Townsend in a weak and desponding voice; and from what we could gather, there appeared to be several other human beings in different corners of the hovel, but in the darkness we were totally unable to distinguish them.

In comparison, Trollope's portrayal expands the "enquiries" of the male visitor and limits the woman's response.

Osborne's description of his entrance into a cabin and his encounter with a woman and children also resembles Trollope's narrative. His account differs significantly, however, in its concept of charity: the giving by the visitor of a loaf of bread, its detailing of the woman's forceful care for her dying child and its characterisation of the woman's terrible blessings rather than ingratitude.

It had been my habit from time to time to leave my car and enter the cabins by the road side; it was enough to melt a heart of stone to see the people in them; in one instance, under the remains of the roof of a 'tumbled down house', I found a mother and some small children; the latter, some of them quite naked, mere skeletons, but with that enlargement of the abdomen now so common amongst them.... I gave the woman a loaf of bread; in one moment she had torn a piece out of it and placed it in her own mouth; I was just about to point to her to give some to the children, when, with a look I shall never forget, she placed her finger in her mouth, drew out the moistened bread, and at once began to place it between the child's lips.... As I turned to leave the cottage she sprang on her knees, and her very blessings were terrible; the loaf had just cost me *twopence*.

As in *Castle Richmond*, the representation of famine victims serves to reinforce the author's view of the relief system and how it can operate. Like Osborne, Cummins and Dufferin present attitudes to relief very different to those voiced by Trollope: Cummins implores the Duke of Wellington to "break the frigid and flimsy chain of official etiquette"; Dufferin calls for "prudential foresight" to be "sacrificed to the urgent necessities of our fellow-creatures" and replaced by "simple and trustful generosity". In contrast to Trollope, obstacles to relief are characterised as "frigid and flimsy"; generosity can be trustful rather than risking "promiscuity"; images of women articulate the necessity rather than impossibility of change.

A reading of *Castle Richmond* both as famine novel and in the context of contemporary accounts reveals that, in spite of Trollope's earlier fierce criticisms of "horrid novels", his own is firmly situated within the genre. While he refutes some of the motifs found in contemporary writings, he employs and expands their female images. The result is a representation of famine's effects, through the construction of a female spectacle, more extensive and disturbing than any of its predecessors.