

A Vagabond's Scrutiny: Hannah Lynch in Europe

The narrator of Hannah Lynch's best-known work, *Autobiography of a Child*,¹ describes herself both as 'a born traveller' and as 'a hopeless wanderer' (1899: 134, 194). Although Lynch refuted suggestions that this novel was in any way autobiographical, the figure and perspective of the traveller, the wanderer and the vagabond feature in much of her writing. The predominance of this trope in her work, published between 1885 and her death in 1904, is deeply rooted in her own experience of growing up during a period in Ireland when class, religion and gender all contributed to a sense of exclusion and difference. She was born in Dublin in 1859; her Catholic middle-class upbringing was both intellectual and nationalist, generating political and literary contacts that would shape her later career. In addition, her position as a single woman with literary leanings and the need to make an income for herself (and possibly for her extended family) necessitated taking employment as a governess in and around Europe, which provided some of the sources of her travel writing.²

Hannah Lynch's vagabondage began earlier, as she travelled from Dublin to attend a convent school in France (and possibly England

1 Lynch's publications were all out of print, with the exception of her critical appraisal of George Meredith (*George Meredith: A Study*, 1891) reprinted in 2006, and *Autobiography of a Child* from which extracts have been selected for *Jane Eyre: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents*. In 2010 the British Library digitised and reissued these works.

2 In her memoir Katharine Tynan briefly describes the distinctly cosmopolitan education of the Lynch sisters – 'They had seen, were seeing a world far beyond my ken, for they had all gone to convent schools abroad' – and their experiences as governesses in several European countries. (1913: 78).

too).³ Her work with Anna Parnell's Ladies Land League⁴ involved shuttling between Dublin and London, and she continued to travel after the dissolution of the League in 1882. This peripatetic lifestyle saw her move between Ireland, London, France, Spain, Greece and the Canary Islands; if she settled anywhere, it was in Paris, where she died while still in her early forties. This 'hopeless wandering,' even as a schoolgirl, informed the settings of her novels, as well as being the subject of her much of her journalism. *Daughters of Men* (1892) is set in Greece, while *Rosni Harvey. A Novel* (1892) features Greece and Ireland, *An Odd Experiment* (1897) is situated in England, *Clare Monro* (1900) in England and Venice. Numerous short stories take place in France – one contemporary reviewer accused her of trying to 'annex a French colony to English literature' (Canton 1896: 857). Ireland and Fenianism are the setting and subjects of her first two novels (*Through Troubled Waters*, 1885 and *The Prince of the Glades*, 1891), but other fiction set in Ireland is often narrated from the perspective of a foreigner. In addition to her two travel books, *French Life in Town and Country* (1901) and *Toledo: The Story of an Old Spanish Capital* (1898), several articles on continental Europe appeared in a range of periodicals and newspapers in Ireland, Britain and America.⁵

Travel writing by both men and women was extremely popular during the nineteenth century. A glance at recent work on the subject (e.g. Buzard 1993, Hulme and Youngs 2002) gives a sense not only of this popularity, but of the diversity of publishers involved, and the range of travels made –

3 Biographical details about Lynch are limited, with memoirs such as Tynan's providing the most detailed insights into her life. See Faith Binckes's entry on Lynch in the *Dictionary of National Biography* and the entry in Rolf and Magda Loeber's *A Guide to Irish Fiction 1650–1900*, p. 785.

4 Articles about and advertisements for the Ladies Land League confirm that Hannah Lynch was secretary of the London branch, her sister, Nannie Lynch was secretary for the League in Dublin. Her stepfather, James Cantwell, was one of the 'Men of 1848'.

5 For a useful discussion of Irishwomen writing and publishing during the nineteenth century, see Rolf Loeber and Magda Stouthamer Loeber's 'Literary absentees' in *The Irish Novel in the Nineteenth Century*.

from European countries to the Caribbean, from America to West Africa and beyond. The position of the Victorian woman traveller, in relation to other genres, to male writers, and to the 'new' space they occupied in this field, is already complex, and numerous critics have highlighted 'the range of tones and discourses in women's travel writing of the late Victorian era' (Anderson 2006: 14). Maria Frawley, for instance, outlines a number of motivations and consequences for women travelling and writing during this period. It offered an escape from the confines of the private sphere, a possibility for exploring and expressing independence, a means of intellectual survival, and a way of asserting and connecting with cultural authority. Travelling also became a potential mode of social criticism, in which 'writing about other societies enabled women to critique their own' (Frawley 1994: 35). In addition:

That so much of the travel writing of the period was written by women suggests that publishing houses and editors of periodicals were willing and eager to capitalize on the ostensibly different perspective that women were able to bring to literature about the wider world. Women travellers, in turn, were eager to capitalize on the publicity that their activities abroad could bring. Often a series of travel essays published by a reputable journal would later be published in book form ... (Frawley 1994: 28)

However, the majority of current scholarship is focused on women whose identity and perspective are shaped by their connection with England as home and as a colonial power against which, or along with which, they write. For such authors, distance from 'home' could be liberating, giving leeway to criticise, but also creating a conceptual space through which ideas about nation and selfhood could be re-imagined. This focus has been valuable in establishing the field and in opening up a critique of colonial agendas, and particularly in noting that feminist principles and anti-imperial sentiments did not necessarily go hand in hand. However, it can generate a sense that the only women authors of any significance were, to all intents and purposes, writing through 'British' eyes. This inevitably marginalises the narratives of those such as Lynch, Emily Jane Pfeiffer or Somerville and Ross, whose national identities – Irish, Welsh and Anglo-Irish respec-

tively – complicate such established parameters.⁶ As Lynch makes clear in most of her travel writing intended for English or American readers, ‘home’ and the identity of the writing self are elsewhere. The idea of a ‘double-voiced discourse’, which is seen as typical of women writing in the nineteenth century and characteristic of their travel writing too (Frawley 1994: 31), becomes particularly apposite in relation to her work. Yet this is not a double voice developed only in response to gender and class differences, but in simultaneous relation to national identity. Lynch examined the formation of such a split identity in *Autobiography of a Child*, which traced, among other things, the shaping of ‘the Irish rebel’. This takes place ‘on Saxon shores’ (1899: 141) as Angela of Lysterby, as the narrator calls herself, learns to hold her own, both as ‘the English Angela and the Dublin Angela’ (211).

In this way, the intersection between Irishness and feminism, nation and gender, is essential to the formation of what might be described as Hannah Lynch’s double or even multiple literary identity. But perhaps even this designation of a writing ‘self’ is too simple, in that it does not take into account the publishing imperatives Frawley notes, nor the generic demands of travel writing, nor the fact that as an unsupported woman writer, Lynch needed to be saleable in order to survive. This complex set of negotiations – between the market, the requirements of a particular publishing outlet, her commitment to issues of gender, the shifting nature of her nationalist agenda, her literary aspirations, her financial needs, and the contingencies of opportunity – all shape the way in which individual articles appear. As a result, reading Lynch’s work is a matter of remaining open to sometimes contradictory inflections rather than enumerating singular, or static, positions. Thus, while she currently occupies the margins of canonical nine-

6 Emily Jane Pfeiffer (1827–1890) was a Welsh poet whose travel book *Flying Leaves from East and West* contained descriptions of social and political conditions across Europe and in the United States. Some of Somerville and Ross’s best-known European travel writing includes *In the Vine Country* and the novel *French Leave*. See Anne Jamison’s (Oakman) comparative commentary on their European and Irish travel writing.

teenth-century Irish literature,⁷ Lynch’s position could be said to be central to the ways in which such literature might be reconsidered.

‘A Tramp through the Forest of Fontainebleau’, initially published in the English, Christian periodical *Good Words* and reprinted in the American *Living Age* in 1900, is a good illustration of the way in which Lynch worked through and beyond generic and gendered conventions, placing herself simultaneously as a highly literary author as well as a politicised one.

The article opens with an assertion of the narrator’s familiarity with Fontainebleau, the forest on the outskirts of Paris and celebrated haunt of the *plein air* painters of the mid-nineteenth century. It also indicates that, in spite of the proximity of Paris, this excursion is not intended to be a ladylike stroll:

It is some time now since I have projected a prolonged tramp through the forest of Fontainebleau, but have never been able to carry out my plan, for lack of a comrade. Women may bicycle, but, alas! the tramp’s vocation is rarely revealed in them. They do not like idle exercise through miles of wood, though they will gladly wear shoe-leather for hours at a stretch on pavements lined with shops. Their general understanding of Fontainebleau is a ‘Murray’ or a ‘Baedeker’ superintended visit to the Palace ... and an unusually long hotel bill. (1900b: 464)

Lynch frames her vagabondage in terms of her gendered particularity. She makes play of her difference from other ‘women’ among whom she has failed to find a single ‘comrade’. Even modern women of 1900 who, as she notes, ‘may bicycle’ don’t like to walk, but she quickly corrects the implication that this is because women are physically unsuited to exercise. Instead, it is because most have been trained to treat travel as something to be consumed – rather like the windows of those rows of shops, or the items laid out on that long hotel bill. Similarly, they are not the authors of travel writing but are ‘superintended’ by respected travel guides. These stand as

7 This marginalisation is being redressed in recent scholarship on memoir, New Woman fiction and Victorian education, including discussion of Lynch’s work. See Kelleher and O’Leary, Elizabeth Grubgeld and John Wilson Foster’s *Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel* and latest book, *Irish Novels 1890–1940*. Lynch is also mentioned, though briefly, in various histories of the period.

the discursive equivalents of the 'blue arrows and rigid instructions' (464) which are posted throughout the forest, and which the narrator declares she intends to ignore. However, the narrator's difference from other women does not, particularly for a family magazine such as *Good Words*, extend to morally questionable behaviour. When she finally does find a companion, a young Frenchman called Alexandre, she is initially quick to quash any suggestion of a romantic association:

Chance one evening led to my door the ideal comrade: a youth, not so young as to fill me with alarm of spirits and enthusiasm pitched too high for my own more cynical and more sober hour; not so old as to cause misgivings on the score of scandal, propriety or sentiment. (464–465)

It is made clear that although he has joined her on this expedition, and not the other way around, their investment in it is to be equal. He is selected as a 'comrade' because he is 'neither effaced nor aggressive in character' (465). Furthermore, as the trip progresses, so their comradeship advances, as they both begin to suffer equally from thirst and hunger, and experience the same distress when they run out of cigarettes:

It is surprising how easily books may be dispensed with when you take to vagabondage. On the other hand, food and liquid refreshment assume quite a disproportionate importance. Alexandre and I, lounging under a tree, miles away from a restaurant, took a gruesome satisfaction in bringing the water of envy to one another's mouths by talking of the ices and iced drinks we yearned for ... Tobacco was our chief delight, and it was a melancholy moment when we discovered in the very heart of the forest that we had come to the end of our double supply of cigarettes. (467)

As their journey continues, the mock-heroic tone intensifies, as it becomes increasingly apparent that the narrator has a 'defective knowledge of the length of a kilometre' (467), and that the walk will take them not only the entire day, but half the night as well:

We had arranged to follow the long, long Melun road and there catch the night train to Paris. That Melun road I never can forget. The more we advanced the longer it seemed to grow. I had imagined a kilometre to be a small affair and began to regard it as a league. I had tramped that morning since eight, and nine at night still found me trudging senselessly and dinnerless alongside my unfortunate comrade, whose

business it soon became to drag me like baggage suspended from his arm ... But I was bound to reach Paris that night, and made a gallant, I may say superhuman effort. (467)

Lynch's text plays on the tropes of travel writing to comic effect, while avoiding making herself the butt of the joke. The epic trek takes place within a day's walk from 'lamplit and noisy Paris' (467), yet is genuinely arduous. It is only with 'superhuman effort' that she completes nearly fourteen hours on foot, and yet she keeps her promise that she will be back home within the day. Her status as a woman, very different from those who would be content to stay on the beaten track, is thus confirmed. However, the equality and comradeship she shares with Alexandre do not extend to physical parity as she – older, as well as female – might be 'gallant', but still has to be dragged 'like baggage' in the closing stages of their trip. Significantly, Lynch notes the way in which 'books may be dispensed with' when engaging in this sort of expedition. This assertion mirrors her deliberate disregard for travel guides, but has a wider resonance within Lynch's oeuvre, as several of her fictional works also discuss the relative limitation of texts as 'guides' to, or substitutes for, living. But within the context of the article itself, it returns to an earlier moment in which the narrator unsuccessfully attempts to imbue their journey with a literary flavour:

I more poetically recalled the wanderings of Consuelo and Joseph Haydn. But Alexandre had not read 'Consuelo'. He professes to despise George Sand. You see, he is so young! His god is Wagner, and he would persist of an evening, when the stars were out, and the youth of an earlier generation would have recited poetry and mused upon his lost love, in humming different choruses from 'Parsifal' and 'Tristan', till exasperated nerves could no longer stand the test ... He imperturbably regretted my inability to rise to the grandeur of Wagner's choruses ... It is doubtful if Wagner himself would have appreciated the interpretation any more than I did. (465)

Sand, a groundbreaking, independent, and occasionally scandalous woman, was a writer who Katharine Tynan recalled Lynch and her sisters reading at home, in the original French (Tynan 1913: 79). This allusion, alongside Alexandre's corresponding, yet opposing, affection for Wagner, allowed the text to assert its access to high culture, and to claim its place within a canon of literary travels which preceded the commodified era of organised

tourism. But their disagreement, and Alexandre's musical performance, also punctures any pomposity associated with this position – a technique shared with Somerville and Ross, as well as with Isabel Armstrong's *Two Roving Englishwomen in Greece* – humorously drawing attention to differing perspectives and conflicting narratives, which can co-exist despite being less than harmonious.⁸ The cosmopolitan range of allusion recurs in Lynch's work, constructing her position within the international literary field, and offering a different way of reading the politics of 'home'.

It seems, then, that 'A Tramp Through the Forest of Fontainebleau', while engaging with issues of tourism and gender, and emphasising its own status as a literary text, leaves the thornier issues of national identity aside. Considering its audience, perhaps this is unsurprising. But looking more closely, the reader can discover further resonances that work against this interpretation. Central to this reading is the fact that Lynch's piece is framed by two earlier articles on Fontainebleau, published by the well-known novelist and travel writer, Robert Louis Stevenson. It is Stevenson's Fontainebleau that the narrator has in mind as she approaches Madam Siron's, an inn famous for housing artists during Barbizon's artistic heyday. Today, however, she notes,

you pay eight francs a day for the privilege of sleeping in a tidy, brand-new bedroom where you may gaze at a few daubs on the dining-room walls understood to be so many strokes of homage to the ancient resort and shelter of art. The landlady assured us, with a look of relief, that the painters had all forsaken Barbizon, and only Marlotte had the misfortune to harbour a stray animal from time to time. The foundations of the artistic colony lie, alas! in ruins. (466)

Her reference to Barbizon's 'artistic colony' is a reference to Stevenson's description of the village as 'a painter's colony', which, if it becomes too popular, will have 'intruders' such as 'the bourgeois and the tourist ... knocking at the gate' (Stevenson 1884: 270). But this piece, published in the *Magazine of Art* in March 1884, was not simply about the inevitable

degradation of a place once it becomes a travel destination. It also specifically named the 'intruders', noting that the 'great influx of Anglo-Saxons had begun to affect the life of the studios' (Stevenson 1884: 270). Like Lynch, Stevenson keeps the tone light and ironic, but the observations are telling nonetheless:

It would be well if nations and races could communicate their qualities; but in practice when they look upon each other, they have an eye to nothing but defects. The Anglo-Saxon is essentially dishonest; the French is devoid by nature of the principle that we call 'Fair Play'. The Frenchman marvelled at the scruples of his guest, and, when that defender of innocence retired over-seas and left his bills unpaid, he marvelled once again; the good and evil were, in his eyes, part and parcel of the same eccentricity; a shrug expressed his judgment upon both. (1884: 271)

When read with this piece in mind, Lynch's 'grievously disappointed' (466) portrayal of Barbizon, with painters relegated to the status of the 'odd stray animal', operates as more than just a critique of the impact of commercial imperatives upon the world of art. The overlay reveals a greater emphasis on nationality, in particular on the 'essentially dishonest' Anglo-Saxon, who, under the guise of a being a 'defender of innocence', intrudes upon the colony and leaves it with debts unpaid and promises broken. For Lynch, the image of the ruined colony conjures not only the sense of fragmented artistic ideals, but hints at her sense of disillusion with political conditions in Ireland. It also connects to her sense of the way in which an 'odd stray animal' might, against the odds, survive.

Earlier in the piece, in fact, she has pointed out that fragments of this colony might still exist, but hidden, or 'elsewhere': 'The Fontainebleau of tradition ... seems to be a thing of the past, or is hiding itself 'discreetly from the vagabond's scrutiny' (466). While questioning to what degree this tradition was ever free of a sense of the 'theatrical', Lynch's mention of straying, of strangeness or aloneness is resonant with her own self-construction as somehow 'comradeless' and different. And this strangeness is only emphasised by one of the most ambiguous passages in the text, in which she observes the special treatment she and Alexandre receive because they are assumed to be 'in disguise':

8 For instance, Armstrong's text repeatedly satirises the idea that she and her companion are putting their lives in danger by exploring the country without an organised travel party.

deeming us illustrious foreigners in disguise, owing to my Britannic metal countenance and Alexandre's gray felt hat and tan shoes, it was awarded us a little dining-room all to our two selves. We may have been taken for bride and groom for anything I know. (466)

The description is typically Lynchian in its interest and assumptions. In this case, these assumptions are linked simultaneously to gender – specifically the notion that she and Alexandre might be a couple, which earlier in the piece she had been at pains to point out was all but unthinkable – and to nationality. But on the latter score we realise that the inn-keeper's conclusions about their 'disguise' might not be too wide of the mark. The narrator's 'Britannic metal countenance' does not refer to her actual face, after all, but to the fact that she's carrying English money – the Britannic countenance in question is Queen Victoria's, not her own. This leads to the correct assumption of a 'disguise' not because Lynch is a wealthy Englishwoman travelling incognito with her much younger husband, or even lover, but because she is an Irish 'stray animal', misleadingly represented by Anglo-Saxon currency because her 'colony' lacks a currency, or a government, of its own.

This curious moment, embedded in a piece that implies literary connections with writers such as Sand and Stevenson – the latter author of an article on Scotland's position within Britain entitled 'The Foreigner at Home' (Stevenson 1906)⁹ – is characteristic. So is the centrality of France, and in particular, Paris, to her travel-writing persona and its critique of politics and gender. Arguably, this is explored most fully in her book, *French Life in Town and Country*. This was the first title in the series 'Our European Neighbours', initially published by Newnes in England, then by G. P. Putnam's Sons in the United States. Widely publicised in the American press, it was advertised in a frontispiece as being 'descriptive of the Home and Social Life of Continental Peoples, by authors whose long residence on the Continent enables them to write with fullness of knowledge and with impartiality'. Lynch establishes her impartial credentials by framing her comparative reading of the English and the French in the following terms: 'I, who am neither French nor English, can tes-

tify to the magnanimous recognition of national virtues of both to each other' (Lynch 1901: 23) – a rather different observation from that made by Stevenson. The second chapter of the book turns on a comparison of Paris and London, and of their inhabitants. Here, Lynch displays an in-depth knowledge of both capital cities and, having highlighted her outsider status as a 'Parisianised foreigner' (47), she once again claims the freedom and authority to comment on both. Her criticism of British imperialism, in the figure of 'the British virtuous youth, [who desires] to mould all humanity upon his own stiff and starched effigy' (45), is made slightly, inserted into a comic narrative of the characteristic types of both nations. Lynch's 'impartial' commentary and satire becomes both more witty and acerbic when she considers and compares gender issues, however. Recounting an incident in the French countryside where her impulsive departure from a group to pick blackberries prompted comments about improper behaviour, she notes that 'I suggested writing, with their aid, the things a man and a woman (especially a woman) cannot do in France, but on consideration found it would make too large a volume' (22–23). Earlier in the text, she pointed out the role women played in the rural economy, and the resistance they encountered upon trying to enter the professions:

It would be difficult to find a people to whom modern feminism is more repugnant than the French, and hard to name one that owes more to the intelligence, good-will, and incessant labour of women. Frenchmen object to women in the liberal professions, and make a desperate hue and cry the day a talented lady seeks leave to wear the lawyer's toque and gown. Yet the fields are tended by women; flags are waved at railway gates by them; in the lower ranks they bravely do all the rougher work of men, and nobody lifts a voice in protest. (13–14)

Lynch's desire to record the deeds of such women is matched by her insistence in pointing out the continued misrepresentation of women in male-authored literature. Her supposedly disinterested, yet apparently eyewitness, accounts in *French Life* are pitted against the notion of women that one might derive from reading modern French novels:

9 Stevenson's piece was originally published in the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1881.

The foreigner who only judges that *rôle* from the novels he reads ... will be all at sea as regards the part woman plays in French life. He will conceive her first playing the hypocrite up to the doors of marriage, and living without restraint ever afterwards ... (200)

This observation chimes both with Lynch's predominantly counter-Decadent stance, and with her consistent mockery of male literary fantasies, a critique which encompassed writers as different as Browning and Zola.¹⁰ But while Lynch's commentary on issues of sexual equality and representation in France were able to lay a particular claim on impartiality, her writings on Ireland resounded with an undisguised and personal anger. It is difficult to read her work, and particularly her non-fiction, without detecting her disappointment – not only with the political status quo vis-à-vis the continued presence of the English in Ireland, but with the political status quo vis-à-vis men and women in Ireland. If, like Anna Parnell, she considered the fate of the Ladies Land League as indicative, then the two issues were absolutely interconnected.¹¹ However, while some women publishing in explicitly nationalist outlets expressed their frustration in a manner designed to conceal or deflect overt criticism of men in deference to the wider struggle, Lynch's criticism was often direct in its content, if

¹⁰ Lynch's critique of Decadence forms the subject of some of her fiction, *Dr Vermont's Fantasy*, for example, and several of her literary reviews and articles. The most well-known attack is a satirical portrait of W. B. Yeats as 'Augustus Fitzgibbon' in a piece she published in the Dublin *Evening Telegraph* in 1888 (cited in Foster, R., 1997: 73). The two male protagonists of 'Brases', one English, the other French, can cite quantities of highly idealised poetry about women by Browning and Sully Prudhomme. In "Fécondité" versus "The Kreutzner [*sic*] Sonara", or Zola versus Tolstoi, Lynch commented on two 'diametrically opposed' visions of marriage, motherhood, and family life. The 'terrible naturalist ... would have every woman married at seventeen, and the mother of no less than twelve or fourteen children. That is his panacea for every ill on earth.' (Lynch 1900a: 69–78).

¹¹ In the wake of the Kilmainham Treaty, Charles Parnell made use of his legal entitlement to the monies raised by his sisters, in order to bring the activities of the Ladies Land League to a close. Anna Parnell's response to what she viewed as an ideological and a personal betrayal is recorded in *The Tale of a Great Sham*, written in 1907 but unpublished until the 1980s.

more indirect in context. In fact, it generally took place on the pages of the sort of large-circulation London magazines which might not have wished to publicise hostile comments on English imperialism, yet held no such objection to a critique of the way in which the Irish treated 'their women'. This in itself gives a problematic complexion to Lynch's ironical, or openly frustrated, depictions of conditions in her home country.

Clearly, this issue – of what, where, and for whom, Lynch was writing – is another major consideration when addressing her travel writing. And yet, it is not the case that Lynch necessarily had more latitude when writing for an Irish audience than for an English one, or that her perspective remained constant throughout her career. In 1885, for instance, three years after the termination of the Ladies Land League and immediately prior to the publication of her first novel, Lynch set off on the long voyage to Greece, sending fairly regular letters back to her friend Thomas Dawson in London. Dawson was a Catholic priest, and a friend of the American promoter of a united Ireland, Henry George. Despite declaring herself 'an infidel' in this correspondence, Lynch was evidently glad of the connections Dawson could provide. He found a convent for her to use as a base during her stay, during which she published pieces such as 'The Ursulines of Tenos', and she was secure in the knowledge of their shared politics. Her letters from this period record her struggle to learn the language, her sense of liberty – 'I enjoy perfect freedom' – but also her interest in the political history of Greece. In another letter she observed: 'The Greeks fight wars between themselves, but they all united splendidly against the Turks. The [impression?] is that all the Greeks regarded the Turks as their enemies & only some of the Irish think so of the English.'¹²

However, when Lynch published two articles on Greece, based on her stay in Tenos and written specifically for the *Irish Monthly*, these political sentiments were entirely absent. This Catholic literary magazine, edited by the Jesuit Matthew Russell 'had been founded in the 1870s and published

¹² Hannah Lynch, manuscript letter to Thomas Dawson, 11 November 1889. Thomas Dawson correspondence, Brotherton Library. Lynch's handwriting is difficult to decipher and words that are unclear have been placed in square brackets.

poetry, fiction, and articles on social and literary issues. Its agenda was the vindication of Irish respectability within Victorian discourse' (Murphy 2003: 53). As such, Lynch's essays, 'The Ursulines of Tenos' and 'November in a Greek Island', both published in 1886, are particularly personal and picturesque, taking the form of an informal dialogue between Lynch abroad and 'my readers' (1886b: 272) at home, rather than deploying the voice of the sharp-witted and feminist outsider of her other travel pieces. But even then Lynch seems not to have purged her work of all its radical elements, stating in a letter to Dawson in the February of 1886 that Russell had doubts whether her pieces conformed to the agenda of his magazine: 'You need not watch the *Irish Monthly*. As Father Russell is convinced that I am bent on demoralising a credulous public he fights shy now of associating my name with his religious newspaper'.¹³ Whether it was Lynch's habit of spending Sundays 'wandering about on foot' (1886a: 381) or on muleback, freely expressing herself to her guide about the state of the roads, or purchasing antiquities from a Greek priest on a Sunday that caused offence, there is no record of any later publications by Lynch in this magazine. Although she published for a 'home' audience, then, religious conservatism rather than imperial self-interest dictated a particular writing persona for Lynch.

This persona is thrown into sharper relief by the fact that Lynch's writings on Greece recur later in her career, not only in the novels of 1892, but in an article published in the London *Academy* in June 1902 and later reprinted in the *Living Age*. 'On the Acropolis' takes as its subject a return visit to perhaps the most iconic of all Greek monuments, and a recently commissioned painting of Renan 'saying his famous prayer on the Acropolis' (Lynch 1902: 610). While noting the difficulty of the subject – 'Nobody on earth is of any significance on the Acropolis' – and observing how her perceptions have altered in the intervening years, Lynch soon shifts her attention to other monuments and artefacts. Principally, these are a stele recently shown to her by an 'American excavator at Corinth' (1902: 610),

and Alexandre Falguière's memorial to Byron. Perhaps remembering her experiences writing for the *Irish Monthly*, Lynch turns first to the stele:

on which were carved three figures, two nobly draped and seated, the third in shabby clinging garment, knotted at the waist, and standing. 'I judge that fellow must have been a Christian', said the professor of archaeology contemptuously, 'from the mean and humble look of him.' And my companion, herself a devout Christian, had become so far demoralized by admiration of all left of a dead faith, as to add, in reluctant acquiescence: 'They were so fond of playing the martyr, those Christians.' (610–611)

While not overtly critical of contemporary Christianity, Lynch the 'infidel' is definitely apparent here, the 'Pagan' atmosphere of Greece completing the 'demoralising' project she thought Russell had detected in her work in 1886. But further transgressions were to follow as she contemplated Byron. She observed that the 'statue is where it should be, for where should Byron be if not on Grecian soil', and that the 'Greeks are grateful, lastingly grateful to Byron' (611). However, as she examined the topic of nationalism more closely, so her tone shifted:

watching a group of British tourists arrested in front of this commemorative statue in honour of an Englishman's disinterested death in an alien cause, I marvelled as we ever must at every turn of life, at the glaring inconsistencies of nations and individuals, remembering the tone of some Imperialist papers of London upon the action and death of Villebois Mareuil who, like Byron, adopted a quarrel not his own and died for a people who were not his. But after all it is possible the Turks found for Byron a contemptuous term the equivalent of 'foreign mercenary' with which the sacrifice of the French officer was gracelessly tossed off in England. (611)

While paying tribute to a wayward but brilliant Englishman, Lynch slips in a daring slice of anti-imperialist critique. Villebois Mareuil was a French colonel who had taken up arms against the English in the Boer War, dying in April 1900 after a heroic last stand at the Battle of Boshof. Writing as a 'Parisianised foreigner' championing a Frenchman, rather than as an Irishwoman championing a fellow countryman, perhaps gives her more licence, but the point against not only 'Imperialist papers' but imperialism itself is pointedly made. As in her earlier letter to Dawson, England is compared not to civilised and courageous Greece, but to the Turkish

13 Hannah Lynch, manuscript letter to Thomas Dawson. Thomas Dawson correspondence, Brotherton Library.

empire the English press had consistently vilified. But, once again, there is another way to approach this text, as it is not simply British imperialism which is being attacked, but the 'glaring inconsistencies' generated by jingoistic self-interest in general. Lynch dearly wanted self-government for Ireland, but her writing refused to ignore the fact that designating individuals according to their nationality, or to their sex, was a divisive project.

This idea is explored in her 1892 travel piece 'On Board a Spanish Steamer'. It appeared in the Dublin *Freeman's Journal*, a paper with a republican readership, which had formerly supported the Land Leagues. In this context, Lynch was under no obligation to consider the feelings of English readers or to observe any religious niceties – and it shows. She notes just how frequently the Spanish passengers spit – there is 'not a clean spot as large as a penny on the whole vessel' – and the even worse offence caused by her encounter with another 'appalling young man', who is 'holding forth on glorious Britain and Spanish savages':

However, I was able to assure myself on landing at Las Palmas that the expectorating Spaniard is not by any means the worst thing in male humanity. At the worst, he is only a dirty gentleman, but the clean, well-washed English cad who swaggers about a foreign hotel, informs the foreign waiter who understands English that there is nothing decent or civilised, no honesty (save the mark!) out of England, is so greatly his inferior ... that I am almost reconciled to the spitting. (1892b: 6)

'On Board a Spanish Steamer', then, in common with *French Life in Town and Country*, incorporates a direct attack on masculine, imperial arrogance into its discussion of cultural difference. However, as in 'On The Acropolis', there is another aspect in play. The piece then goes on to relate a conversation with 'an amusing Scotch engineer':

He had travelled the world over and found no place like Scotland, no race like the Scotch race, and no liquor like Scotch whiskey. But for Scotland, he asserted, England would be nowhere, as all her men of genius were Scotch. He was convinced that there was Scotch blood in Shakespeare's veins ... In fact, the refrain of the national lyric was that the Scotch is the finest race in the world (pronounced with rolling r's), has made the greatest mark, is the most successful, and has never been beaten by England. This is a sore point to insist upon to an Irishwoman; but tenderness has

never been a feature of the Scotch character. As a balm, he was kind enough to say that he preferred the Irish to the English, and that in Scotland our men of genius are more appreciated than those of our mighty enemy. (1892b: 6)

Lynch's outline of her conversation with the Scottish engineer certainly implies the idea of England as a shared 'enemy', and does not depict his 'race-conceit' as being quite as obnoxious as that of the young Englishman. But simultaneously, the desire to claim national ascendancy and to indulge in supremacist discourses, particularly when in conversation with a person of another nation, and of another sex, is held up to unsympathetic, albeit equally amusing, scrutiny. One 'sore point' is the exclusionary nature of his diatribe, the fact that it precludes the possibility of the Irish being as superlative as the Scottish, and even hints that the Irish *have* been 'beaten' by England. All these demonstrate a lack of 'tenderness', of fellow-feeling or identification, with his interlocutor. But, worse still, the determination to beat England at her own game fails to displace the 'mighty enemy' from the centre of his conversation, or to detect the ways in which he is reiterating the slightly crazy drive towards deterministic dominance. In other words, despite drawing attention to 'national character and the character of nations', and demonstrating the manner in which not all international relations were based on 'magnanimous recognition', Lynch notes the dangers inherent in being guided by a simplistic nationalist fervour that takes on the worst attributes of the imperialism from which it seeks to liberate itself.¹⁴

Lynch's travel writing, therefore, explores how the discourses of gender and nation inevitably touch on parallel issues of power and representation, issues which an Irishwoman such as herself could ill afford to elide or to ignore. But these issues extend to Lynch's awareness of her representation as an author. Texts such as *French Life*, 'A Tramp Through the Forest of Fontainebleau', and 'On the Acropolis', in addition to generating a very

14 See Seamus Deane (1996: 49). Deane argues compellingly for travel literature as a predominantly political discourse which makes 'use of the mask of foreignness' to 'bring home' charges of 'corruption, fanaticism, irrational behaviour and practices, institutions and individuals' (1996: 6).

necessary income and providing the opportunity to make her voice heard, also contributed to her position in the literary marketplace, a position made clear by the journalist Katherine De Forest in her article for *Harper's Bazaar*, 'Recent Happenings in Paris':

Still running over the remarkable people in Paris of whose intimate life I know something, I think of Miss Hannah Lynch, who is said to be the most gifted woman Ireland ever produced, and whose strongest characteristic is that she has sacrificed everything else in life to literature. She writes regularly the Paris literary letter for the *London Academy*, a month or two ago had articles in the current number of three of the great English reviews, while at the same time her famous 'Autobiography of a Child' was appearing in a French translation in *La Revue de Paris*. (1902: 813).

This recollection of literary brilliance and self sacrifice is offset by a rather different account in Gertrude Atherton's prim and self-congratulatory *Adventures of a Novelist*, which contains a highly unflattering portrayal of Lynch's 'Bohemian' lifestyle in Paris, and in particular her tendency to appear at the breakfast table still in her nightgown. And yet even this description gives a kind of snide credit to her achievement in living independently in a city she loved:

She wrote exquisite prose and her intellect was of a high order, but she had neither imagination nor charm; a few critics lauded her but to the public she was not even a name. She was poor and plain and embittered, but she got something out of life, for she lived in the Paris she loved and had distinguished and devoted friends. 'And she manages to travel a lot', said Henriette, who was making faces behind Hannah's back. 'Travels all over Europe on sixpence a year. Wish she'd tell me her secret.' (Atherton 1932: 253)

De Forest's account highlights both Lynch's literary productiveness and a prominence among her contemporaries that is reflected elsewhere in reviews and articles. For example, her reputation as an outspoken critic and feminist is comically revealed in a notice in the notoriously anti-feminist magazine, *Punch* (Anon. 1891: 282):

SAD FINISH. – We see advertised, 'George Meredith, A Study. By HANNAH LYNCH.' Poor GEORGE! 'Taken from life', of course. There's an end of him! *Lynch'd*.¹⁵

Both De Forest's and Atherton's accounts of Hannah Lynch in France, with their differently inflected references to sacrifice and poverty, provide a glimpse into her as yet little documented life, one highlighting success, and the other, written well after her death, financial hardship and obscurity. While her position in the Ladies Land League means her name appears in histories of the period, and scholars of autobiographical fiction or George Meredith might have encountered some of her work, Lynch's travel journalism has remained largely obscure until now. And while its recovery does provide some examples of 'exquisite prose', more compelling are the insights this genre of writing offers into the necessary construction of her 'vagabond' identity and writing persona, as a way of voicing political and feminist critique, of retaining a sense of literariness, and in order to publish and therefore survive economically. Lynch's vagabondage is consistent with many of the tropes of women's travel writing of this period – an assertion of distance between the adventurer/ traveller and the mere tourist; without offending decorum, portraying the journeys of a solitary female traveller; offering insights into the private, domestic and feminine of another culture, often as a way of generating a broader, sometimes feminist point. Like her contemporaries she might have been 'a born traveller', but it is her shifting identity as a 'hopeless wanderer', a Parisianised Irish woman writer, that gives her writing its distinctive perspectives. Lynch's 'vagabond scrutiny' is as much applied to the social and political conditions that shaped her, as it is to her European subjects and landscapes.

15 Lynch's study of George Meredith, one of the first on his work, is an admiring one, especially in his treatment of female characters, claiming that all women should read George Meredith 'as a healthy antidote against the nauseous and abominable traves-ties of themselves and their species circulated by the libraries' (Lynch 1891: 168).

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