

# Irish fiction



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## **Introduction**

An idealized representation of an Anglo-Irish house is at odds with realities in a period with profound economic and historical upheavals. In the face of these upheavals, the Dysarts, the positive Ascendancy family at the middle of the narrative, are integrated in their Big House, Bruff. The Irish Big House novel contains a number of characteristics in which to build the altercation between Ascendancy house and hostile Irish landscape. The novel highlights a reckless or improvident protestant male landlord who is a little bit violent and rebellious.

In relation to his inept attempts at photography, Stevens, points out that Christopher Dysart is unable to see either the full picture or at the back of the picture of Ireland because of his distance from the object of his gaze. It can be argued that failure to see the picture of Ireland causes Christopher to lose the vigorous and engaging heroine Francie. Consequently this fails to rejuvenate the Dysart family line.

As a protagonist, Christopher lacks strength and agency, but it is clear that his house, Bruff is well taken care of without economic threats and fears or disobedient tenants. The land agent is believed to have been robbing from the estate accounts, but Christopher reacts with composure, the calmness of assured wealth. The Anglo-Irish women, Pamela and Lady Dysart, are equally presented with tender but scornful affection and approval by Somerville & Ross. In General, both of them prove themselves to be inherently civilized and kind in their dealings with Irish Catholic tenants and servants, guests and Protestant neighbors.

Strangely, for late nineteenth-century Anglo-Ireland is securely ensconced within the Irish setting, usually an antagonistic place for the Ascendancy house. The *Real Charlotte* novel leads readers to disregard the main subject of the text: Protestantism. According to Lewis, the novel focuses on the face of Irish Protestantism within a range of class on the social sphere. While the estrangement of the top rung shows the disenfranchisement of the tradition within the Irish state, the focus rests on the religious predicament of the whole society.

The crisis in the novel is neither political nor economic, but is religious at a point when the economic and political status of the Anglo-Irish was on its verge of collapse. It is an intentional ideological position on the part of Somerville and Ross not to embark on such a crisis. The strategies they set out to evade any demonstration of this crisis make the novel, the most enlightening of all the texts of Anglo-Ireland. Kreilkamp observes that, in their other literature, Violet Martin, who hails from a land-owning family in the west of Ireland, could be idealistic and in dissent about the impending collapse of the colonial relations. However, her associate and life-partner, Edith Somerville was realistic about the risks for her own class in the New Ireland. Kreilkamp embraces the writings from the confines of Anglo-Ireland. However, Edith Somerville gives a tough-minded dream of how history works itself out for victims of colonization.

In spite of casting Charlotte in the traditional position of the acquisitive tenant farmer, there is a crucial point of difference here in view of the conventions of the big house theme in the novel. Charlotte is her one victim of dispossession and a Protestant. Julia Duffy is a Protestant too and the

daughter of a farmer who married his own Catholic dairy woman. This is an example of miscegenation that unsettles the natural arrangement of the Protestant Ireland. Julia is placed in her farm by the intrigues of Charlotte, who understands better than most of the workings of the Land League. Declan Kiberd asserts that, with no representative of the growing Catholic middle-class in the novel, Somerville and Ross are permitted to imply, with a feeling of Ascendancy arrogance that the decline of Anglo-Ireland had nothing to do with any social forces outside its own.

The Real Charlotte denies the reality of social change. It contains its version of Anglo-Ireland within the confines of a wholly Protestant landed class where keeping the Catholic peasant and servant class is confined to the margin. Kreilkamp asserts that the Anglo-Ireland's failures invoke a vision of a lost principle and an unsuccessful cultural purpose, social accountability, enlightened landlordism, and their historical role as exploiters of a native population denied them. The novel concludes with a moment of violent death. The accident is a consequence of Charlotte's eviction and land-grabbing. Here, something is being suggested about the fate of the Ascendancy. Neither Lambert nor Charlotte heard what she said, but the terror of calamity came like a vapor and faded the hatred in their faces.

The cultural and political revolution at the end of the nineteenth century provides an insightful look into the relationship. In the 20th century, some elements in Irish fiction were starting to grapple with modernism. Much of new literature could not make people see a need to treat Irish life directly. Somerville and Ross were brought up in a Protestant Anglo-Irish family and were unmarried daughters who belonged to families whose status had gone

down. Some of their privileges in religion, politics, and society were overturned. Having been placed to record challenges of everyday life in the ‘Big House’, the pair began writing, and soon after was their first literary venture, *An Irish Cousin*, a fiction which started life as a Gothic. This was a thrilling novel, but progressively developed into a more realistic picture of Big House life.

The short novel *Castle Rackrent* by Maria Edgeworth was published in 1800 and is regarded the first historical novel or the first Anglo-Irish novel. It is also perceived to be a first novel to use the device of a narrator who is deemed unreliable and an observer other than a player in the actions documented. It is almost impossible to learn the literature in Ireland in the nineteenth century with no history, social issues, religion and politics. The novel also highlights that absentee landlords who had appointed agents that were corrupt and persecuted tenants and squeezed every last penny from them. This fueling the resentment felt by the disappointed tenants who had already endured under the Penal Laws. The book identifies violence that was institutional possessed by the agents, landowners, middlemen and the Law. The book also terms inevitable violent response by tenants as agrarian violence.

In the period between 1921-1923 Great Britain was experiencing violence, turmoil, and political opposition. There were debates over religion and Home Rule, where the Irish Free State divided the small island nation to many factions that fought in the streets of Dublin and also across the countryside. Liam O’Flaherty, produced literature amidst turmoil which explained in vivid,

the details of horrors of war and its effects on violence that could have on civilians and soldiers.

O'Flaherty explains the scene as “ enveloped in darkness but for the dim light of the moon Republicans and Free Starters were initiating civil war. The central character is an unnamed soldier who waits at the rooftop while hungry and tired, to kill. He favors Home Rule and fights for unification of Ireland. O'Flaherty is a Free Starter, one who believes in the separation of six counties of Northern Ireland.

The Big House became a recurring theme in their literary output. Their critical welcome, however, wavered from tremendous popularity in England, and criticism in Ireland. In Ireland, their humorous fiction earned them harsh criticism from nationalist reviewers. England could have disapproved their work in Ireland since they regularly made fun of Irish country life. In 1894, Somerville and Ross came up with the *Real Charlotte*, the finest depiction of Irish society, which was during a decade of rapid decline, and overlooked for a long time. The *Real Charlotte* is a brilliant book analyzing the multifaceted relationship between language, culture, and imperialism towards the end of nineteenth-century in Ireland.

Comparisons have been made with Ireland's foremost modernist of the early twentieth century, where chronicles Ascendancy culture decline, a typical Sunday afternoon in a protestant quarter of the north side of Dublin are proleptic of the pathos of Joyce's representation. The novel was criticized though, by many, even in more recent years, dismissed as dull traditional nostalgic illustration of the Big House era. Somerville and Ross were simply “

traditional” novelists who gave a realistic demonstration of Irish life at the turn of the century.