



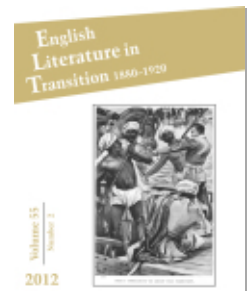
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Irish Autobiographical Fiction and Hannah Lynch's *Autobiography of a Child*

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IN 1933, A READER of the bibliographical journal the *Irish Book Lover* wrote to request information on an intriguing Dublin author of the previous generation, Hannah Lynch: "Has any biographical notice of this popular authoress ever been published? Besides several novels she wrote *French Life in Town and Country*, and was a well-known contributor to magazines about forty years ago."¹ This reader knew more than most but still gave little sense of the range of Lynch's achievements. Not only a novelist, Lynch was a translator, literary critic, columnist, author of short fiction, and travel literature. Her life was exciting, peripatetic, and brief, most of it spent travelling between London, Dublin, and the Continent before finally settling in Paris, where she died aged forty-four in January 1904. A few months later, the *Irish Book Lover* published its response. Much of this was gleaned from a copy of the Dublin *Evening Herald* (September 1918), the author of which confirmed that "Hannah Lynch is little spoken of in her own country to-day."²

Had they found a copy of the 1904 obituary tribute to Lynch published by her friend Frances H. Low, readers would have discovered that this critical neglect had started much earlier.³ For Low, Lynch's lack of profile was emphatically not the result of lack of talent. Rather, it was the consequence of her satirical and pugnacious style, which had made "cruel enemies" among Ireland's "literary gods."⁴ Yeats had been one of the targets of this satire in an article published in 1888, when Lynch pilloried him as "Augustus Fitzgibbon" a rather ridiculous young man idolised by his circle of acolytes.⁵ During her career Lynch also attacked Decadent authors—including her compatriots Wilde and George Egerton—oafish "Saxons," anti-Dreyfusards, misogynists, the army, and the Catholic Church. Born and raised a Catholic, Lynch fre-

quently criticised what she viewed as the deeply oppressive elements of this institution, with the energy of an aggrieved insider. In the non-fictional *French Life in Town and Country*, she aligned herself with noted Catholic rebel Victor Charbonnel—a move that didn't prevent one reviewer in the *Catholic World* from claiming that such a hostile account could only be the work of an English woman, probably a Protestant.⁶ The provocative quality of Lynch's writing was even remembered by the author of the *Evening Herald* article, who noted the "flutter" generated by a "volume of unconventional gossip about her early years in Dublin."⁷

The only book that fits this description is *Autobiography of a Child*, the main subject of this article. Lynch's unpublished correspondence with her Parisian friend Cécile Vincens⁸ gives a taste of just how contentious this book was when first published:

Dear Madame Vincens,

I send you a copy of the "Autobiography of a Child" which threatens to make a terrible scandal. Rome is at my heels, bishops are barking and threatening me with actions and who knows what. I hear I am to be dreadfully hounded [?] in the Catholic and High Church papers. I await my doom in fear and trembling.

I should like to hear what you think of the book.⁹

Lynch's dramatic account of the reception of *Autobiography of a Child* was not exaggerated. The book generated considerable critical comment in the mainstream press in England, France, America, and Ireland as well as in the ecclesiastical papers. It was Lynch's seventh full-length work, initially published as a serial in *Blackwood's Magazine*, almost simultaneously with Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.¹⁰ Its powerful first-person narrative follows the story of a young Irish girl from her earliest memory to around twelve years of age, tracing the shaping of "the Dublin Angela" into "the English Angela" and ultimately Angela of Lysterby, "the Irish rebel."¹¹ This tale is told from the perspective of her older self, now "a hopeless wanderer"¹² with youth and optimism behind her.

The narrative opens with a startling sketch of Angela's mother, "a handsome, cold-eyed woman, who did not love me," before relating fragmented memories of an idyllic time spent in rural Kildare while "put out to nurse" until the age of seven. This "nursery biography" is followed by reminiscences of life in a prosperous Dublin household populated by this brilliant, intolerant, and violent mother, a kindly but ineffectual stepfather and a crowd of sisters and stepsisters who had

been left “to grow up without love or moral training, cuffed and scolded, allowed illimitable liberty from dawn to dark ... [and] were more like boys than girls.”¹³ Marked by her paternity and her extreme sensitivity, Angela suffers an “infancy in hell,”¹⁴ alternately cowering and furiously rebelling. As a result of the latter, she is sent to an English convent in the fictional town of Lysterby, where the pattern of trauma and abuse is repeated in a different institutional context. A key episode in this pattern—a pivotal moment in the story as well as the focal point for the “scandal” Lynch outlined in her letter to Vincens—is the brutal whipping instigated by another beautiful but vindictive woman, the young nun Sister Esmerelda.

The account of Angela’s convent experience is interrupted by a reminiscence of her first return home, where she finds herself an object of curiosity because of her English accent and boarding school tales. The setting for this home visit is Dalkey, the out-of-town residence of her parents. It provides an occasion to describe some of her sisters, to evoke the antics of a large, unruly and unsupervised family, to allude to her mother’s “colossal intelligence”¹⁵ and to exotic and glamorous visitors, some with Fenian connections. Conspicuously, a couple of these are named: Jeremiah O’Donovan Rossa¹⁶ makes a brief appearance. Avid reading as well as storytelling shape Angela’s rebel Irish identity, as the condition of being Irish in England and a girl in Ireland is held up for scrutiny by a narrator who revisits the past through the innocent eyes of her younger self.

As even a brief summary suggests, *Autobiography of a Child* was a troubling work in terms of its content. However, just as much critical interest was stirred up by questions of genre. In December 1899, the *Academy* issued the following “somewhat amusing” explanation to a reader who had protested its omission from its survey of notable books for the year: “General literature and fiction were entrusted to different critics, one of whom omitted *Autobiography of a Child* because he thought it was fiction, the other because he thought it was not.”¹⁷ This question continues to preoccupy scholars who have paid attention to the book more recently.¹⁸

In this article, we aim first to open up further discussion of genre and of national, gender and identity politics. Ala Alryyes has argued that by “underscoring the loss and suffering prevalent in national narratives, children become the loci of vulnerable cultural memory ... determinants of the future of the race and, hence, the nation.”¹⁹ We will explore ways in which *Autobiography of a Child* connects with this observation

through its attempts to resurrect such suppressed “cultural memory,” replete with the losses and sufferings of Irish history and of young Irish women within that history. We will also draw on recent scholarship on Irish autobiography and autobiographical fiction in our discussion of the autobiographical resonances of the text and its metanarratives. This analysis offers new perspectives on the genre and suggests connections with the writings of Lynch’s better-known contemporaries, including Joyce, Moore, and Conrad. The direct allusion to and rewriting of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* forms another of the narrative layers to be discussed.

How do we read a book that contains such a plethora of generic signatures and intertextual references that is self-consciously engaged with the difficulties of writing a memoir of childhood and is, equally self-consciously and explicitly, not straightforwardly autobiographical? How do we approach a text that creates such powerful impressions and yet constantly questions its own validity, exploring its own conditions as a narrative and the impact of narratives as a way of structuring experience? These questions, we will argue, must be central to a reading of this complex and richly suggestive work.

§ § §

From the outset, the genre of *Autobiography of a Child* was left carefully and tantalizingly uncertain. One of the earliest announcements of the serial publication appeared in the *Athenaeum* on 24 September 1898. This statement was carefully qualified, avoiding the question of attribution while emphasising both the originality and literary lineage of the text: “The new serial in *Blackwood*, ‘The Autobiography of a Child’ ... will be on entirely new lines. It is, we believe, the faithful narrative of an actual experience, the work of a powerful writer whose identity is but thinly veiled. The story of an unhappy childhood will be told without reserve, with an intensity akin to that of the sisters Brontë, but with nothing of their gloom, the various incidents being narrated with piquancy and wit.”²⁰ The idea that the work was a “faithful narrative,” told “without reserve” by an author “but thinly veiled” clearly indicated something autobiographical. But all the same, it also allowed for uncertainty—“we believe”—and facilitated the displacement of authorial identity practiced in the initial, anonymous publication. From its earliest appearance, then, *Autobiography of a Child* was framed as a text “faithful” to “actual experience” but very different

from straight autobiography. For some, this ambiguity was of relatively little consequence.

One of the principal sources of interest in the book was in its value as a study in child psychology, a popular topic at the end of the nineteenth century, one which routinely drew upon both fictional and factual resources. In its review of *Autobiography of a Child*, the London *Bookman* observed that “there seems to be a fashion at present for books treating of the psychology of childhood,” noting that “among the books we have read, what strikes us most is the utter unhappiness which is generally represented as the child’s lot.”²¹ Later critics also analysed the book with this signature in mind, paying particular attention to the unusually hostile relationship between the young Angela and her mother.²² For Penny Brown, for instance, this vision of maternity is what singles the text out, since it genuinely “subverts all literary stereotypes.”²³ But the extremity of the experiences that *Autobiography of a Child* recounts, in addition to Lynch’s “powerful” narration, and the inclusion of historical figures, encouraged other critics to assert their conviction that the text must be autobiographical. “That this is a record of personal experience no one who reads Hannah Lynch’s book can doubt,” wrote the reviewer in the American *Literary World*.²⁴ The same position was taken by Vincens in her review of the French translation, a review which appeared in the Parisian *Journal de Débats* in July 1902. By this point Lynch’s identity as author was known. But rather than following the text in its careful separation of author and narrator, Vincens described the sections referring to Angela’s home life as being absolutely autobiographical. She also emphasised the originality of the book—“unique dans son genre”—congratulating its writer on her survival of a childhood that would have destroyed others:

Histoire vraie, comme l’indique le titre, et histoire poignante. Une petite fille était détestée de sa mère, sans raison, parce que c’était ainsi. Ces choses-là arrivent. L’enfant était rouée de coups. Elle n’entendait jamais une parole, ne recevait jamais un regard, qui ne remplissent son petit cœur de désespoir et d’épouvanté.... Miss Hannah Lynch a eu le courage de redescendre par la pensée dans cet enfer de la maison maternelle, et il en est résulté un livre qui est unique dans son genre. Il est admirable de vie, il vous serre le cœur, et il est en même temps plein de fantaisie et de gaieté; l’auteur est Irlandaise, et l’on n’est jamais Irlandais, en vain.²⁵

Vincens argued for the fearless veracity of *Autobiography of a Child*’s representation of family life. And, once again, there might well have been some truth in this assertion. Certainly, the extended family of sisters and stepsisters, the stepfather, the moderately wealthy back-

ground, the convent education away from Ireland and the Fenian sympathies at home were all drawn from personal experience. Two of the girls from the Lynch-Cantwell family were sent to a convent in Coventry as well as a convent near Paris.²⁶ Indeed, the fact that “Lysterby” was identifiable as “Coventry” was the source of one final interpretation. Lynch’s initial note to Vincens referred not only to a general response, but to a specific threat made by a senior clergyman who felt that text was libellous. The letter in question, preserved in the archives of William Blackwood & Sons, was sent by a legal firm representing the then Bishop of Birmingham. It outlined the Bishop’s conviction that the convent school depicted in *Autobiography of a Child* was actual and recognisable. As such, the actions described in the book reflected extremely badly upon this institution and upon the order of nuns that still ran it. Worse still, those actions could be attributed to specific individuals, some of whom were still alive at the time of publication. The letter emphasised the personal interest that the Bishop had taken in the case, the enquiries he had made, and the extent of the libel that he felt had been committed. In other words, it conveyed an unambiguous warning to those who would bear the legal consequences of a prosecution.²⁷ This reading recategorised the book once again, arguing for it as fiction maliciously but plausibly presented as autobiography. And it is this hostile classification that formed the backdrop to Lynch’s only published statement on the genre of *Autobiography of a Child*.

The Bishop’s action clearly put Lynch and her publishers in a tricky position. Their response was a letter, signed by Lynch, which appeared in the *Academy* on April 22. The same notice was circulated in the American press a few months prior to the publication of the Dodd & Mead edition via the *American Bookman*.²⁸ Once again, this statement trod a careful line, as Lynch was not only replying to speculation about the truth of the story and its relation to her own autobiography but evading potential legal action. In it, she categorically denied any suggestion that the book was “history”:

Sirs: My unpretentious little story, *Autobiography of a Child*, has been referred to as history. May I protest against the misapplication of a title so solemn and serious to matter so fragile and fugitive as a tale of childhood? The story is essentially a work of imagination, an effort to interpret the vision and mind of a child and tell her story from her point of view as I imagined she would tell it. Such a task has nothing at all of the nature of history. Its concern is impressions and pictures, not facts. In the drama of existence facts are of comparative insignificance. The important thing is not what is relatively true, but what we believe to be true, since this alone

reveals temperament and character. Shelley and an Oxford don would hold very different opinions of Oxford as an institution, and both would be equally sincere and worthy of attention in their expression of their diverse opinions.²⁹

Here Lynch reinserted some necessary distance between her position as author and the implications of the term “autobiography,” a distance that had existed comparably, although not identically, through her initial anonymity. In addition, to placate the “barking” Bishop, the letter was also framed by a disarming, if slightly unconvincing, feminine modesty. Without saying so explicitly, it reminded the readers—designated as male—that tales of childhood—“unpretentious,” “fragile,” and “fugitive”—were predominantly the province of women. However, what might have started as a simple exercise in damage limitation soon developed into a more rigorous exploration of the relationship between the writing of fiction and the writing of nonfiction. Having first presented her work as ephemeral, Lynch then turned the assertion back on itself, positioning “imaginative” writing at the very centre of an understanding of the “drama of existence.” Her point—that “impressions and pictures” trump “facts” when it comes to the essentially subjective nature of experience—confirmed the specific technical commitment to a kind of literary impressionism. In 1897, Conrad had instructed readers that they would find meaning in his writing “according to [their] deserts,” and in a similar vein, Lynch pointed out the way in which interpretation “reveals temperament and character” rather than objective fact.³⁰ This undermined the Bishop’s legal position, while not divorcing her text from the “glimpse of truth” so central to the function of art in Conrad’s preface. More potently, particularly for an Irish writer, while the letter established that *Autobiography of a Child* was not a potentially libellous historical document, it also drew attention to the coexistence of opposing historical perspectives—albeit by way of the very English analogy of Shelley and the Oxford don. One reviewer, in the American *Outlook*, commented directly on the role that *Autobiography of a Child*’s status as an Irish text had to play in this ambivalence: “the Irish sketches are particularly good, while the introduction of more than one notorious—or should we say famous?—personage, lends an air of almost historical accuracy to what we have been told by the author is “essentially a work of imagination.”³¹ Vincens had implied that Lynch’s writing was identifiably Irish by virtue of its shifts in emotional register. Here, the reviewer took a more politically conscious approach, hinting at the difficulty of writing unified history

within a divided or embattled culture, in which the same individuals could be at once “famous” and “notorious.”

This controversy and Lynch’s public response to it provide essential insights into the various faces that the book presents to its readers. What it does not do is to provide an interpretative solution by demonstrating that it is, or is not, autobiographical. Reading *Autobiography of a Child* through a single critical lens inevitably limits interpretation for a text that freely draws upon a wide range of related discourses—not only autobiography and child study, but biography, memoir, fiction, *bildungsroman*, *künstlerroman*, rebel tale, gothic thriller, Victorian classic, and fairy tale.³² This sense of uncertainty, of the coexistence of multiple and potentially conflicting interpretations, is a key element to bear in mind when approaching both the text of *Autobiography of a Child* and its heated contextual commentary. If the Bishop’s reading constructed the text as fiction masquerading as fact, other readers continued to uphold the opposite opinion following Vincens’s line and asserting their conviction that the book was “authentic autobiography.” J. W. Foster’s recent reading is more cautious and more attentive. It considers genre in the context of issues of nation and gender by reading the book alongside Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: “If *Autobiography of a Child* is fiction, it reads with the unflagging honesty of autobiography.” It presents “a reverse of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: the artistic ambition has been killed not roused by adversity, for Angela is a girl and thus already labours under disability.”³³ While Foster could have extended the comparison by reference to Lynch’s brush with questions of libel, a further comparison with another contemporary Irish text is also apparent—George Moore’s *A Drama in Muslin* (1886).³⁴ In this novel Mrs. Barton’s brutal treatment of her plain and clever daughter, Alice, in favour of the more beautiful and thus more marketable Olive might be seen as a precursor for Angela’s mother. Recent scholarship on Irish autobiographical writing provides a further, even more nuanced approach. For example, Michael Kenneally’s classification of the “autobiographical novel” as a form “with supra-personal goals which have more to do with society than individual history” which nonetheless offers an “imaginative liberation of the self” connects Lynch directly to Joyce and to Moore.³⁵ It also resonates with Richard Coe’s assessment of the genre.³⁶ The events and experiences of the narrative—the removal of a small child from her idyllic rural life with a nurse back into the fraught household of her Dublin family, the traumatic transition to boarding school in a foreign country

where the most important lesson learned is resistance to cruelty and hardship—are rooted in Lynch’s own past. But these details are not provided as a means to disclose the self, though aspects of the self are revealed through the narrative process, but as a disclosure and critique of Dublin society, of relations between England and Ireland and of the doubly cruel and unjust circumstances for girls. This critique of social and political conditions is enabled by the immediate remodelling of generic expectations through the narrator’s extraordinary and seemingly unnatural declaration of antipathy towards “My mother ... who did not love me” in the opening pages.³⁷ The subversion of assumptions at the heart of late-Victorian society about relations between mothers and children establishes another narrative of “unnatural” conditions, and these are the shaping or moulding of young women for their limited career choices.³⁸ But once again, the fact that this is late-Victorian Irish society is crucial. In an outburst that marks a slippage from the fictional “I” to a voice more typical of Lynch’s feminist nonfiction, the narrator describes Ireland as “the very wretchedest land on earth for woman, the one spot on the globe where no provision is made for her, and where parents consider themselves as exempt of all duty, of tenderness, of justice in her regard, when her lot as daughter, wife, and old maid bears no resemblance to the ideal of civilization.”³⁹ This lack of provision results in a system of exploitation and double standards, where “Irishmen go to America, marry, and make their fortunes; but the landlord and shopkeeper at home are paid by the savings of the peasant-girls, without a ‘thank you’ from their parents....’Tis but her duty, to be sure.”⁴⁰ While the flaws in the institution of marriage are only glimpsed at through the reference to a family servant who “had fallen from petted servitude into troubled servitude” having left her role to wed an “exacting” Englishman, Lynch launches her most pointed attack on the inadequate education of girls who are then sent out “impoverished and illiterate daughters to go abroad and support the family” as “martyrs abroad”⁴¹—in other words, as governesses. Once again, this attack is rooted in personal experience—she and her sister Nannie both worked as governesses in Ireland and in Europe.

Her critique of the conditions of the Victorian governess extended beyond the economic deprivations and exploitations they faced to emotional and sexual vulnerability. The embedded tale of the innocent and beautiful Molly O’Connell, who is seduced by her employer, resonates with numerous other earlier and contemporary texts, from Brontë to Hardy to the New Woman novels of the 1890s. The blame for her fate

(prostitution and consumption) is firmly attributed to her flawed, even useless education from “the nuns of Southampton.”⁴² Molly O’Connell dies as a result of a woefully inadequate education that makes her vulnerable to every kind of exploitation. But once again, Lynch connects this narrative of vulnerability and exploitation to the wider condition of Ireland. Jim, Angela’s “everyday papa” in Kildare, will also die of consumption, “the ruthless disease of the Irish peasant,” before he has “lived half his life through.”⁴³

Lynch’s feminist critique of the Irish situation invites strong comparisons with the strategies of other Irishwomen autobiographers who tend to “deflect centrality within the self-narrative from themselves onto another person or persons.”⁴⁴ Taura Napier’s outline is highly suggestive for a reading of *Autobiography of a Child*, not only due to its multiple layers of displacement, but for its handling of the relationship between autobiography and fiction. For example, Napier argues that Mary Colum, indebted to Proust and Goethe, sought “a fusion of the autobiographical *künstlerroman* and fictional self-creation” in her 1947 work *Life and the Dream*.⁴⁵ This is of particular interest when considering Lynch’s text, and even her defence published soon after its serialisation. For in this letter Lynch does not deny the facts are there, but what is important is how they have been imagined, and by extension, how they have been recreated. The older Angela highlights this in her recognition that the memory of her monstrous mother does not cohere with her later relationship with her: “I recall this feeling, to-day quite dead, as part of my childhood’s sufferings, and I wonder that the woman who inspired it should in middle life appear to me a woman of large and liberal and generous character, whose foibles and whose rough temper in perspective have acquired rather a humorous than an antipathetic aspect.” This observation follows her puzzling over “the most vivid recollection of those early years,”⁴⁶ a train journey to Cork, which does not seem rooted in reality at all. The narrator’s inability to distinguish fiction from reality in her memories alerts us to its inevitable blurring in any kind of memoir. Later in the narrative the older Angela describes her own vivid imagination as a young girl, her propensity to spin yarns: “I embroidered fact and invented fiction with the readiness of the fanciful traveller,”⁴⁷ hinting at the possibility that this same vivid imagination might still be at work. The reference to fancy is also suggestive of Lynch’s deployment of the fairy-tale mode⁴⁸ throughout the narrative (one of many examples is Angela recalling her mother as “worse than the traditional step-mother of fairy tale”⁴⁹)

as a way of invoking the child's perspective, especially the imaginative and artistic child, and also as another form of distancing and displacement. These self-conscious modes of narration destabilise the idea of any clear classification of the text.

An important element of this strategy is the way in which *Autobiography of a Child* draws attention not only to the nature of memory and its creative distortions, but to the question of narrative, of storytelling itself.⁵⁰ The narrator muses on childhood and memory in the opening chapter, outlining the method for her own memoir in the following key paragraph:

I have always marvelled at the roll of reminiscences and experiences of childhood told consecutively and with coherence. Children live more in pictures, in broken effects, in unaccountable impulses that lend an unmeasured significance to odd trifles to the exclusion of momentous facts, than in story. This alone prevents the harmonious fluency of biography in an honest account of our childhood. Memory is a random vagabond, and plays queer tricks with proportion. It dwells on pictures of relative unimportance, and revives incidents of no practical value in the shaping of our lives. Its industry is that of the idler's, wasteful, undocumentary, and untrained. For vividness without detail, its effects may be compared with a canvas upon which a hasty dauber paints a background of every obscure tint in an inextricable confusion, and relieves it with sharply defined strokes of bright colour.⁵¹

Lynch sets out to reproduce this effect of "pictures" and "broken effects" through a series of portraits of times, places and people, beginning with the image of the narrator's mother as she recalls her: "The picture is clear before me of the day I first walked."⁵² Her idyllic childhood in Kildare, the torments of being back in Dublin, then England, and the household in Dalkey are all fragments of memoir with vividly realised characters and events, often half-glimpsed and only half-understood by the child Angela. But the portraits all form the "sharply defined strokes of bright colour" against the "inextricable confusion" of the past. The painterly analogy is a self-reflexive one too. Early on Lynch hints at one of the subjects of her narrative through the image of the butterfly, and that is art, writing itself: "So the child, the poet tells us, is always mother of the woman, and not even the sane and sobering influence of the years has taught me that serious matters are of greater consequence than the catching of some beautiful butterfly."⁵³ Revising Wordsworth so that his words might fit with her themes of female lineage, the butterfly is an allusion to her "first subject," Mary Jane, "my dearest friend" who "lived in a little cottage at the top of

the village.”⁵⁴ She is the first subject of the little Angela’s dominion in the little rural village she is sent to nurse in, but it is also the first portrait she draws in the narrative of her life: “Upon my memory she is eternally impaled.”⁵⁵ Tracing the awakening of the little girl’s artistic sensibility at several points in the narrative, the narrator directly connects this awakening, the nature of childhood and the love of horror and terror: “Deep down in the heart of childhood—even bitterly suffering childhood—is this dramatic element, this love of sensation, this vanity of the artist. So much of childhood is, after all, make-believe, unconscious acting. We are ill, and we cannot help noting the effect of our illness upon others. The amount of sympathy we evoke in grown-up people is the best evidence of our success as experimental artists with life.” Later she notes: “Not to imagine oneself afraid is to miss the peculiar zest of enjoyment.”⁵⁶ The relationship between fear, sensation and artistic development are made most strikingly in the centrally gothic section of the novel, the prelude to and description of the brutal whipping of the child Angela in chapters XIV and XV, “The White Lady of Lysterby” and “An Exile in Revolt.” This section is worth examining in some detail, not only because it is a meeting point for many of the central themes and preoccupations of the text, but also because it was the section that prompted the most contemporary comment.

The narrator introduces the tale of her brutal punishment instigated by Sister Esmeralda, the “Grand Inquisitor” and “exquisite monster”⁵⁷ through a recollection of learning to read, of her convent environment, and the sparking of her own potent imagination:

I learnt to read with amazing rapidity, and my favourite books were of a kind liberally supplied by the convent library—Tyburn, wonderful tales of the escapes and underground adventures of Jesuits, double walls, spring-doors, mysterious passages, whitened bones in long-forgotten boxes. Thanks to my ingenuity and vivid imagination, our days became for us all a wild romance. Relegated to the infirmary by prolonged illnesses, the result of semi-starvation naturally, I had leisure to read laboriously various volumes of this edifying literature.⁵⁸

Angela’s reading skills are developed through an appetite for tales of horror, specifically through her reference to tales associated with the torture and murder of Catholics in England. Her appetite for reading is enhanced by literal starvation, part of the harsh conditions she endures at school. Physical starvation, subsequent illness and time spent in the school infirmary—which is described as “a chamber of legend”—paradoxically feed her imagination, and ultimately her rebellious spirit. Thus she begins her own “stupendous fiction that was to com-

municate its thrill even to some of the big girls.”⁵⁹ The gothic setting of the convent itself, an old manor house, also offers the perfect stage for Angela’s drama of cruelty through which Lynch critiques at once Catholicism and the British. When Angela is falsely accused of breaking a statue of an angel by a little boy called Frank, her refusal to confess results in a beating. This says something about the rule of the Church, but also about the empire, as the mature narrator reflects on what Frank might be doing now: “Noble youth, future pillar of the British empire, I picture you an admirable hypocrite and bully!”⁶⁰ While the encounter with Frank crystallizes Angela’s nascent rebel identity, the seeds for such rebellion had been sown by a much earlier and more positive childhood influence, Mary Jane. Mary Jane is a crucial figure in the very early portions of the text in which the narrator connects the fragmentary quality of childhood memories, their “broken effects,” to the political condition of Ireland at the time. Mary Jane’s conversation innocently reveals the sharp edges of such fragments, demonstrating that even idyllic rural Ireland is marked by poverty, emigration and resistance. The narrating Angela recalls her friend as being possessed of “inexhaustible gifts, including a complete knowledge of the views of New York, an enthusiasm for that mysterious being Mary Stuart, and an acquaintance with national grievances vaguely embodied in a terror of Queen Victoria’s power over her Irish subjects.” When her step-sisters hear that Angela is about to be sent to England, they tease her by telling her that “I should be submitted to insult, perhaps torture, because I was Irish.”⁶¹ Mary Jane shares this opinion. However, she counsels bravery, her tearful response foreshadowing another crucial, and devastating, separation:

Mary Jane was weeping on the steps. She handed me a bag of gingerbread and two apples, and told me I was not to be “down.”

“Tis yourself that’s worth all the English that ever was born,” she asserted, and I dolorously assured her that whatever happened, even if the Queen came in person to hang me, I would keep “up.”⁶²

The text’s interest in this power of telling, in the resistant power of girls, their habits and passions as readers, the brutal deprivations they can endure, and even the overtones of gothic, also connect *Autobiography of a Child* to *Jane Eyre*. The *Athenaeum* and the *Academy* were overt in their comparison with Brontë, while the *Bookman* observed that there was “something Brontësque” about the vicious treatment Angela receives.⁶³ In her discussion of *Autobiography*, Sally Shuttleworth uses this comparison to illustrate the overlap between literary

texts and studies of child psychology, describing *Autobiography of a Child* as a “rewriting of *Jane Eyre* under the influence of the Child Study movement.”⁶⁴ This overlap was also apparent at the time, and not only to literary reviewers. In his “Bibliography of Child Study for the year 1899,” Louis Wilson observes that the book was “Written in an interesting style” and might be “of some value on several child study topics.”⁶⁵ As the range of works collected under Wilson’s rubric, as well as his interest in “style” suggest, the movement between literary interpretations of childhood and scientific narratives of early development was very much two-way.⁶⁶ Within *Autobiography of a Child*, these mutual aims would have been supported by the reference to a highly regarded literary text—one that had also troubled the category of “autobiography,” had been considered shocking on its initial publication, and whose author had an Irish heritage.⁶⁷ And it is this final aspect of Lynch’s appropriation of *Jane Eyre* that seems most resonant. For, although *Autobiography of a Child* lacks many of the elements of Brontë’s text, the most specific moments of comparison—the events leading up to her beating—connect directly to politics.

In the famous scene from chapter two of the first section of *Jane Eyre*, Jane is confined in the large, abandoned “red room” at Gateshead Hall. Her crime is having tried to defend herself against the spoiled and vindictive John Reed, who is something of a template for Frank, and who also makes a false accusation against her. Trapped with her rage and anxiety, forced into an awareness of her position as a “heterogeneous thing,” “an interloper,” and a “revolted slave,” Jane considers whether she should protest against the injustice of her position by running away, or “never eating or drinking more, and letting myself die.”⁶⁸ The ensuing “mental battle” drives to her to the edge of hysteria, to a “species of fit,”⁶⁹ and finally to unconsciousness. In *Autobiography of a Child*, events unfold rather differently. As a result of Frank’s accusation, Angela is confined to “the old community room ... a big white chamber, with a good deal of heavy furniture in it” and told by Sister Esmerelda to wait until she is released. Driven by “the influence of that terrible exasperation injustice always provokes in me”⁷⁰ she takes action:

My desire was to thwart her in her design to free me when she had a mind to. My object was to die alone and forsaken in that big white chamber, and so bring remorse and shame upon my tyrants ... I dragged over to the door all the furniture I could move. In my ardour I accomplished feats I could never have aspired to in saner moments. A frail child of eight, I nevertheless wheeled arm-chairs, a sofa, a heavy writing-table, every seat except a

small stool, and even a cupboard, and these I massed carefully at the door as an obstruction against the entrance of my enemy.

And then I sat down on the stool in the middle of the chamber, and tore into shreds with hands and teeth a new holland overall.⁷¹

Although this scene does engage with psychology, it could also be read as the dramatisation of a moment of radicalisation, as the solitary prison of the earlier novel becomes a theatre of protest. Like Jane, Angela considers a hunger strike⁷²—hunger is a theme that runs through Lynch’s text—but in *Autobiography of a Child* this is more overtly about turning her punishment on her captors. Far from begging to be released, as Jane will do, Angela constructs a barricade, turning her confinement in the room into an ownership of it. And finally, in action that could be viewed both as the act of a violent, uncontrollable “wild cat” and of a prisoner using the only tools at her disposal, Angela symbolically shreds her brand new overall with “hands and teeth.” When Sister Esmerelda gloatingly extracts her, Angela picks up the stool and hurls it in her face:

My wickedness was past sermonising. I was simply led up-stairs to a brown cell, and here the red-cheeked lay-sister, a big brawny creature, stripped me naked. Naked, mind, though convent rules forbid the whipping of girls. I was eight, exceedingly frail and delicate. The superioress took my head tightly under her arm, and the brawny red-cheeked lay-sister scourged my back with a three-pointed whip till the blood gushed from the long stripes, and I fainted.⁷³

This time, the beating leaves her hospitalised and unconscious, creating a different sort of rupture in her memory, and consequently in the narrative. However, she emerges from this traumatic break with a newly shaped identity, forged out of unjust accusations and violence and then a passive act of resistance: “I never uttered a groan, and I like to remember this infantine proof of my pride and resolute spirit.”⁷⁴ In stating this, the narrator also notes a corresponding shift in the genre of the tale: “Little Angela of Kildare and Dublin, over whom I have invited the sympathetic reader to weep, was a pallid and pathetic figure. But Angela of Lysterby held her own—more even than her own, for she fought for others as well as for herself, and gave back (with a great deal more trouble at least) as much pain and affliction as she endured.”⁷⁵ An important element of Angela’s Irish identity emerges through her experiences in England, a combative self that is forged through a different sort of conflict to that she has experienced as the internal “exile,” the “scape-goat of the nursery” in the home. Notably, this self fights

as part of a collective, rather than out of purely individual interest. This marks another phase in Angela's transition from child to adult, since she begins to act according to principle. It reminds the reader of Angela's earlier association with the more politically aware Mary Jane, who, the older narrator comments, "must have grown up to be a woman of principles."⁷⁶ When the demonic Sister Esmerelda calls Angela a "common Irish thing" some time after this incident, Mary Jane's parting words suddenly return to her, their meaning and purpose finally understood: "I'm not a common Irish thing, I'm as good as Lady Adelaide—or you."⁷⁷

This dramatic point also throws new light upon the text's references to political rebellion and punishment, and upon the "notorious—or should we say famous?—personages" who appear on its pages. One of these, her godfather, is recalled in another brief encounter: "He bore himself gallantly, wore top-boots, a long coat with several little capes to it, and carried a smart riding-crop in his hand.... I had never seen him before, and to my lasting regret I have never seen him since. He was out in '48, was proscribed, and had wandered about in strange lands. He died in China, having first sent my mother a pretty case of Imperial tea...."⁷⁸ Here the exiled rebel—"out in '48" refers to the 1848 uprising—is depicted as the very image of courtly masculinity.⁷⁹ The "pretty case of Imperial tea" not only reinforces the thoughtfulness and delicacy of an individual implicated in violent rebellion, but once again links the so-called feminine, domestic sphere with the masculine sphere of political action. This overlay is made most apparent, however, in Angela's recollection of a visit to Kilmainham prison. The trip is made in the company of her mother, her stepfather, and a beautiful young woman who is staying with them. As the drive continues, the woman becomes increasingly upset, and Angela is "riveted" by the spectacle:

We drove along the Kilmainham road, I now know, and as we went farther north, the pretty girl's tears flowed more freely, only she did not cry as we children cry. She bit her lips, and every moment thrust her handkerchief angrily into her eyes. My mother seemed to scold her for having wished to come that way, and I thought wanted to divert her attention from something the girl was evidently anxious to see. We stopped near a large building, and there was my stepfather turned towards us and speaking a strange jargon. From dint of puzzling over each word, I arrived at the extraordinary conclusion that somebody this young girl loved was in prison, that it was not wicked apparently to be locked up in prison, and that the woodwork they were gazing at, my stepfather with his hat in his hand, was something bad men were getting ready for her friend's destruction. The young girl stared up at the woodwork with streaming passionate

eyes, and then buried her face in her handkerchief, and rocked from side to side in a dreadful way.⁸⁰

The defamiliarising power of this passage is acute, humanising what certain English newspapers would have called a “Fenian conspirator.”⁸¹ The narrator goes out of her way to note that she did not, in fact, understand this “mystery” until many years later, spelling out an order of events which many readers would surely have guessed. This explanation permits the execution to take its place unambiguously within the narrative—to take place twice as does Jim’s death from consumption which is also described through the perspective of the young Angela and then explained by the older narrator—but it also allows the narrator to continue to use the device of innocence in order to reframe a history of struggle. This struggle is not only related to the reference to Tyburn and its Catholic martyrs, rather ambiguously bracketed by gothic narrative devices and historical distance. It is also connected to specific and more present memory, held just at the brink of what it is tolerable to recall. But, once again, the specificity of this memory within the text does not necessarily link *Autobiography of a Child* seamlessly into Lynch’s own autobiography. While the mention of the sweetheart once again recalls Emmet, a figure who has haunted Angela’s imagination from her earliest moments, there are no records of Fenian executions taking place at Kilmainham during Lynch’s own early childhood.⁸² Instead, the wooden scaffold and the tearful young woman are more reminiscent of the 1883 trials and executions of “the Invincibles,” in particular Joe Brady, who had been found guilty of assassinating Burke in Phoenix Park.⁸³ Both this scene and Angela’s imprisonment and beating represent a sort of montage from the cycle of violence and repression that has engulfed both child and nation. This cycle turns history into reiteration, further removing the possibility of autobiography as a linear sequence, collapsing any distinction between the personal and the political.

It is on this final point that Shuttleworth’s observations on the effect of “child study” upon the text, *Autobiography of a Child*’s political commentary, and *Jane Eyre*’s account of the problems experienced by passionate and vulnerable young women coalesce. Angela is profoundly shaped by her upbringing, but where did the dividing line between nature and nurture fall?⁸⁴ The critic to struggle most directly with this question, and to draw national identity into it, was Mary Robinson.⁸⁵ As a close friend of Lynch in Paris, Robinson’s review was, understandably, positive.⁸⁶ She drew particular attention to the book’s account of

the lasting psychic damage effected by routine emotional and physical abuse: “A cuff and a blow at home, years of neglect at school, alternated in the education of Angela, and the proud little spirit grew up hurt and thwarted, maimed by the cruelty of its initiation into life.”⁸⁷ However, while noting this violence, she also determined that the doubled narrative perspective enabled the adult self to intervene on behalf of the mother figure:

Yet over and over again, by an effect of that curious double vision which is the most remarkable distinction of a remarkable book, the grown-up Angela intervenes and protects the harsh mother from the arraignment of her child. The daughter of five and thirty observes in the mother she forgives qualities which necessarily escaped the observation of the bruised and battered little scapegoat of eight. She sees the fine side of the harsh and violent Scotswoman who made her, after all, so Irish, while correcting in her, too severely, but not without noble result, the natural deficiencies of the Irish temper.⁸⁸

Robinson’s interpretation clearly sought to preserve something of the ideal of motherhood—indeed it was she, rather than Lynch’s narrator, who seemed more intent on protecting the mother from “the arraignment of her child.”⁸⁹ But alongside this ran a corresponding anxiety with regard to the role that Angela’s national identity played in her upbringing. Robinson’s response was inherently contradictory on this point, as her account of the “harsh” mother attempted both to criticise and to condone. She argued that Angela had both been “made ... so Irish” and laboured under “natural deficiencies” in need of correction, that this correction was both “too severe,” but “not without noble result.” This contradiction reflected an ongoing unease about how to designate—not to mention how to discipline—“Irishness” as much as it did a desire to preserve some redeeming element of Angela’s mother’s behaviour. Lynch’s text had directly attacked the idea that all mothers were nurturing, revealing the violent hierarchies of family life in unsparing detail—she warned that readers for whom “motherhood is sacred” would “not like to read of it.”⁹⁰

Such a revision had implications for late-Victorian maternal ideology at a different level, simultaneously undermining the idea that the female head of a “family” of nations would automatically understand, love, and respect her “children.” This was, after all, a theory that Mary Jane’s fear of Queen Victoria had already thrown into doubt. But Robinson’s unease was also an effect of the “curious double vision” she sought to describe. Her review seems to refer most closely to chapter XXVI, “The Shadows,” in which the older narrator observes that as “it

would appear that the Irish habit of boasting is an incorrigible weakness.... I am glad to acknowledge the priceless debt of common-sense to a Scottish mother.”⁹¹ This is the same chapter in which the narrator reiterates her “outsider” status within the family, and describes the depression she still experiences as a “mark of my unblessed race.”⁹² Throughout, the text had warned the reader that it would not be able to reproduce a faithful account of childhood experience due to the particular nature of children’s perception, the blurring of fact and fantasy, and the persistence and resonance of cultural narratives. As a result, the adult narrator is at a loss to produce a unified interpretation of her past, and hence of her present. This is reinforced in Angela’s case by the layers of prejudice to which she is exposed as an Irish girl, prejudices that shape her responses to others, and theirs to her, in very specific directions. Even after her rebellion in the convent as a child, the older Angela is still prone to blaming her unhappiness on her “race,” finding a crumb of comfort for her brutal upbringing in the idea that it will have suppressed what “would appear” to be peculiarly Irish failings before they have had a chance to develop. Robinson’s struggle to decide whether Angela was born or made “Irish” hits the mark while missing the point: in order to make a decision both the narrating Angela and the reader would need the sort of omniscient perspective that the book refuses to provide. Instead of answers, the text presents questions, requiring that, if we must make decisions about “character and temperament,” we do so with our own “character and temperament” equally in mind. In other words, *Autobiography of a Child* not only enacts but significantly troubles the recovery of lost histories Alryyes imagines.

§ § §

Nature and nurture, imagination and memory, past and present constitute some of the lenses through which the formation and the fissuring of identity are explored in *Autobiography of a Child*. As it demonstrates, Angela’s experiences are not simply textured by her gender; they are also determined by various readings of her nationality and by struggles for autonomy that apply to both. Fracture and plurality are also conditions of the narrative itself and, as such, the multiple generic signatures of *Autobiography of a Child*—reworking of a classic text, political and social exposé, act of literary impressionism, autobiographical fiction and marketable work by a woman writer—exist in dialogue. This conflicted dialogue, like many other conflicts, resists easy resolution. Unlike *Jane Eyre*, or even *Portrait of the Artist*, *Autobiography*

of a *Child* refuses an ending that promises personal happiness or anticipates artistic fulfilment. Instead, the narrator remains a “hopeless wanderer” like her godfather, haunted by the “inexorable word ‘failure.’”⁹³ Whether or not this “failure” also refers to the condition of Ireland or the position of women towards the end of the nineteenth century can only be speculated upon. What is certain is that Lynch’s text, unsparing though it is, constituted the most enduring success of her career. As such, it marks an ideal entry point into the work of a powerful and challenging author long marginalised from the literary canon of her home nation,⁹⁴ whose complex perspective troubles and enriches revisionist readings of the late-nineteenth-century literary landscape.

Note

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1. P.Ó.C. “Notes and Queries,” *The Irish Book Lover*, XXI (July–August 1933), 89.
2. Cited by P. Mac Craith in “Hannah Lynch: A Dublin Novelist,” *The Irish Book Lover*, XXI (November–December 1933), 134.
3. Frances H. Low, “The Late Miss Hannah Lynch,” *Freeman’s Journal*, 2 February 1904, 6.
4. “But I cannot close this article without referring to her unflagging wit and gaiety ... to her astonishing powers of mimicry, which made her, alas, so many cruel enemies...” See Low, “The Late Miss Hannah Lynch.” Without naming names, Low made it apparent that, in her opinion, one of these enemies was Katharine Tynan. She repeated this assertion in “A Woman’s Causerie” in the *Speaker*, 15 December 1906, 319–20. This piece alluded indirectly to Lynch’s spoof and the offence it caused certain “little literary gods.” Tynan defended herself on both occasions.
5. Lynch published this anonymously: “A Dublin Literary Coterie: Sketched by a Non-Pretentious Observer,” *Evening Telegraph*, 18 January 1888. An excerpt is included in the first volume of Roy Foster’s biography of Yeats, *W. B. Yeats: A Life, Volume I: The Apprentice Mage 1865–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), I: 73.
6. Victor Charbonnel was a radical priest, whom Lynch warmly invoked in *French Life in Town and Country*. Her reviewer observed: “It is most unfortunate that a writer of such merit should so markedly betray her English prejudices. She does not state in any part of the book that she is a Protestant ... but she writes with such Protestant leanings and tendencies that it is difficult to class her religiously. What other conclusion could be drawn from what she says about the Abbé Victor Charbonnel, who was excommunicated by the Archbishop of Paris for his attack on Rome.” Rev. P. Farrelly, “French Life in Town and Country,” *Catholic World*, 1 September 1902, 759.
7. “Hannah Lynch: A Dublin Novelist,” 134.
8. French journalist and historian who wrote under the pseudonym “Arvède Barine,” Vincens was an influential contact. Joint editor of the *Revue de Deux Mondes*, she was a regular contributor to the *Journal des Débats* and to the *Figaro*.
9. Lynch to Vincens, MS letter, NAF 18345. Bibliothèque Nationale de France.
10. The first installment was published in October 1898, and it ran in every number until April 1899. In September 1898 Lynch was named as author of the nonfiction article “The Spaniard at Home,” which appeared in the same number as Conrad’s “Youth.”
11. Hannah Lynch, *Autobiography of a Child* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1899), 211, 141.
12. *Autobiography of a Child*, 194.

13. *Ibid.*, 2, 4, 49.

14. *Ibid.*, 51.

15. *Ibid.*, 251.

16. Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa (1831–1915) was a leading member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood and was notorious in England for his organisation of the “dynamite campaign” of the 1880s. The *Freeman's Journal* drew attention to the fact that *Autobiography of a Child* contained an “interesting reference to O'Donovan Rossa as he appeared in his young days.” Anon., *Freeman's Journal*, 7 November 1898, 5. This reference also demonstrates the discontinuities between the time frame of the text and Lynch's own biography. *Autobiography of a Child* describes a teenage boy just starting to grow a moustache, while O'Donovan Rossa would have been twenty-eight in the year Lynch was born. In *Irish Novelists and the Victorian Age*, James Murphy comments on the easy shifts between fact and fiction in this work: “The anchors of fact are loose as far as Angela is concerned. She claims she has known a pleasant young boy called O'Donovan Rossa and at one stage imagines she has married him. What is palpably real is feeling.” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), galley copy unpaginated. We are grateful to James Murphy for giving us access to the sections on Lynch in this forthcoming book.

17. Anon., “The Literary Week,” *Academy*, 16 December 1899, 711.

18. *Autobiography of a Child* is the only work of Lynch's to have retained critical attention into the late twentieth century and beyond. For example, critics such as James Murphy, J. W. Foster and Elizabeth Grubgeld have indicated the significance of Lynch's writing in their books, *Irish Novelists and the Victorian Age*, *Irish Novels: New Bearings in Culture and Fiction 1890–1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) and *Anglo-Irish Autobiography: Class, Gender and the Forms of Narrative* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2004) respectively. See also our “From ‘Wild Irish Girl’ to ‘Parisianised Foreigner’: Hannah Lynch and France” in *War of the Words: Literary Rebellion in France and Ireland*, Eamonn Maher and Eugene O' Brien, eds. (Haute Bretagne: University de Rennes 2, 2010).

19. Ala Alryyes, *Original Subjects: The Child, the Novel, and the Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 208.

20. Anon., “Literary Gossip,” *Athenaeum*, 24 September 1898, 422.

21. Anon., “Autobiography of a Child,” *Bookman* (London), May 1899, 55.

22. Not all these readings were supportive, either of the genre or of *Autobiography of a Child* as a representative of it. In her 1901 article “The Literary Cult of the Child,” Louise Betts Edwards mocked the narrative of the “infant martyr,” the popularity of which was waning but to which she felt that the “apocryphal” *Autobiography of a Child* belonged. See *The Critic*, 39.2 (August 1901), 167.

23. Penny Brown, *The Captured World: The Child and Childhood in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing in England* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 133. Claudia Nelson also discusses Lynch's depiction of an abusive, “cold and unloving” middle-class mother in *Family Ties in Victorian England* (Westport: Praeger, 2007), 65–66.

24. Anon., “Minor Notices: Juveniles,” *Literary World*, 11 November 1899, 376.

25. Cécile Vincens (“Arvède Barine”), “Très veridique histoire d'une petite fille,” *Journal des Débats*, 6 July 1902, 3.

26. We are grateful to Michael Counahan, grandnephew to Hannah Lynch, for generously providing us with biographical information. Drawing on his father's notes about the family, he goes on to say that the school in Coventry “provided a background to *Autobiography of a Child*.” E-mail to authors, 24 July 2008.

27. “Papers of William Blackwood & Sons,” National Library of Scotland, MS 30069.77 17.18.

28. The *Living Age* also made a note of her authorship in “Books and Authors,” *Living Age*, 13 May 1899, 467.

29. Lynch, letter in the *Academy*, 22 April 1899, 465. Reprinted in “Chronicle and Comment,” *Bookman*, June 1899, 97.

30. Joseph Conrad, “Author's Note” to *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus,’ The New Review*, December 1897, 628–31.

31. Anon., “A Bitter Childhood,” *Outlook*, 27 May 1899, 558.

32. Rosemary Lloyd's study of the child in nineteenth-century French literature provides a further useful context here, particularly as it discusses works by both George Sand and Pierre Loti, two authors

well known to Lynch. Lloyd notes the many narrative problems common to writing about childhood, concluding that “there can be little doubt that in attempting to resolve these problems writers drew on familiar literary patterns.... Romanticism’s image of the sensitive individual as outcast, the world of the fairy-tale, the paradigm of the Bildungsroman, the stories of adventurers, saints, and martyrs, the medieval accounts of heroic children performing mighty deeds, are only some of the threads....” *The Land of Lost Content: Children and Childhood in Nineteenth-Century French Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 119–20.

33. John Wilson Foster, *Irish Novels 1890–1940: New Bearings in Culture and Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 277.

34. Another interesting comparative study is suggested by the commentator in the *Evening Herald* (September 1918), who noted that Lynch’s satirical “Augustus Fitzgibbon” portrait of Yeats and his circle (*Evening Telegraph*, 1888) “may well have been the picture she drew of the superficialities of that little house-party—as she judged them—that inspired the style of George Moore’s *Hail and Farewell* of a more recent period.” See *The Irish Book Lover*, XXI (November–December 1933), 134.

35. Michael Kenneally, “The Autobiographical Imagination and Irish Literary Autobiography,” in *Critical Approaches to Anglo-Irish Literature*, Michael Allen and Angela Wilcox, eds. (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smyth, 1989), 144.

36. Richard Coe’s influential study of writing about childhood draws attention to the way in which the “autobiographical novel of childhood”—the “roman de l’enfance” or “enfance romantisée”—“permits adjustments to that precarious balance between literal and symbolic truth that is so difficult to maintain in autobiography pure and simple.” See *When the Grass Was Taller: Autobiography and the Experience of Childhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 86.

37. *Autobiography of a Child*, 1.

38. A good counter example would be Frances Power Cobbe’s 1894 autobiography. Cobbe celebrated the accessibility, softness, and generosity of the maternal body, best demonstrated by her mother’s fulfillment of the “sacred duty of motherhood,” feeding her own children rather than sending them out to nurse. From *The Life of Frances Power Cobbe*, in *Records of Girlhood: An Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Women’s Childhoods*, Valerie Sanders, ed. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 183–84. Lynch’s narrator reverses this ideal, taking for granted the fact that not all women will love their babies or vice versa, and advocating wet-nursing as an opportunity for such children to experience affection: “My nurse loved me devotedly, and of course spoiled me.... Women who do not love their children do well to put them out to nurse” (*Autobiography of a Child*, 2). Once again, Grubgeld’s critique seems pertinent here, as her description of Angela’s mother as both “a victim and a frightening fixture of the parental house” reminds the reader of the double meaning of “confinement” in the period. See “Class, Gender and the Forms of Narrative: The Autobiographies of Anglo-Irish Women,” in *Representing Ireland: Gender, Class, Nationality*, Susan Shaw Sailer, ed. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), 143. Lynch’s narrator roundly criticises “Irish virtue” (*Autobiography of a Child*, 218), leading to large families of often unwanted children.

39. *Autobiography of a Child*, 217.

40. *Ibid.*, 218.

41. *Ibid.*, 75, 218.

42. *Ibid.*, 290.

43. *Ibid.*, 6, 7.

44. Taura S. Napier, *Seeking a Country: Literary Autobiographies of Twentieth-Century Irishwomen* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001), 12.

45. Napier, citing Coe, asserts that “Goethe was the first autobiographer to address the relationship between the ‘truth’ of lived experience and the ‘truth’ of that same experience transposed into literature.” *Seeking a Country*, 84.

46. *Autobiography of a Child*, 15, 12.

47. *Ibid.*, 225.

48. For further insight into preoccupations with the child and fairy tale at the *fin de siècle*, see Caroline Sumpter’s “Innocents and Epicures: The Child, the Fairy Tale and Avant-garde Debate in *fin de siècle* Little Magazines,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 28/3 (September 2006), 225–44.

49. *Autobiography of a Child*, 4.

50. James Murphy highlights this too, noting that: “Lynch’s is perhaps the strongest instance where fact is fictionalized and where fictional autobiography’s recognition of the constructedness of all autobiography renders the boundary between it and supposedly factual autobiography porous” (*Irish Novelists and the Victorian Age*, unpaginated galley).

51. *Autobiography of a Child*, 5–6.

52. *Ibid.*, 1.

53. *Ibid.*, 18.

54. *Ibid.*, 8.

55. *Ibid.*, 18.

56. *Ibid.*, 42, 70.

57. *Ibid.*, 152.

58. *Ibid.*, 146–47.

59. *Ibid.*, 147, 148.

60. *Ibid.*, 196.

61. *Ibid.*, 18–19, 113.

62. *Ibid.*, 118–19.

63. Brontë’s book, which was highly regarded by the end of the nineteenth century, had first appeared under the generically ambiguous title *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*, edited by Currer Bell. See Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, Jane Jack and Margaret Smith, eds. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), xxiii. Its publication had ignited a similar, high-profile debate on the identity of the author and the status of the text.

64. “To read it is to gain a strong sense of personal emotion which is refracted through the concerns of the Child Study movement and novelistic texts.” See Sally Shuttleworth, “Inventing a Discipline: Autobiography and the Science of Child Study in the 1890s,” *Comparative Critical Studies*, 2/2 (June 2005), 157.

65. Louis N. Wilson, “Bibliography of Child Study for the year 1899,” *Pedagogical Seminary*, 7 (1900), 542.

66. The texts that Shuttleworth names as part of the “invention” of the discipline include George Sand’s autobiography, Pierre Loti’s *Roman d’un Enfant*, and James Sully’s *Studies of Childhood*—Sully was also a close friend of R. L. Stevenson. Lynch deeply admired Sand, Stevenson, and Loti, and her acquaintance Gabriel Monod published the French translation of Sully’s work in 1898. All these factors strongly endorse Shuttleworth’s reading of the text as part of the emerging discipline of child psychology, and of the way in which this engagement addressed Lynch’s literary, biographical and social concerns.

67. *Jane Eyre* also appears in George Egerton’s *The Wheel of God* (London: Grant Richards, 1898), a book which outlines the experiences of a young Irish girl, and which provides an interesting counterpoint to Lynch’s text. On the opening pages, the narrator recalls having recently read the book and being “still a-quiver with the strangeness of it” (3).

68. *Jane Eyre*, 13, 14, 12, 13.

69. *Ibid.*, 16.

70. *Autobiography of a Child*, 153, 154.

71. *Ibid.*, 153–54.

72. Hunger striking became a tactic of the suffragettes who were both English and Irish between 1909 and 1914. See Maud Ellmann’s *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing, and Imprisonment* (London: Virago, 1993) for further investigations of interwoven psychoanalytic, political, and literary instances of hunger and self-starvation, with a focus on Irish contexts.

73. *Autobiography of a Child*, 155, 157.

74. *Autobiography of a Child*, 157. However, the adult narrator is careful to point out that this self emerges because it must; it is a product of the injustices and deprivations that Angela endures. When one of the nuns treats her well, she returns the behaviour: “Wickedness dropped from me as a wearisome garment, and, divested of its weight, I trotted after her heels like a little lap dog (*Autobiography of a Child*, 161). To this nun’s dismay, such fully domesticated “good behaviour” does not prevent Angela from defending herself—and her nationality—in the exchange outlined on pages 277–78.

75. *Autobiography of a Child*, 142–43.

76. *Ibid.*, 18–19.

77. *Ibid.*, 278.

78. *Ibid.*, 69–70.

79. The failed “Young Ireland” uprising of 1848 was led by William Smith O’Brien, and many of those involved were forced to flee Ireland, including Lynch’s stepfather, James Cantwell.

80. *Autobiography of a Child*, 81–82.

81. This phrase became increasingly popular as anxiety in England grew. See, for instance, the *Penny Illustrated Paper*’s front-page image: “Smart Arrest of the Reputed Fenian Conspirator in Liverpool,” 18 June 1881.

82. “I shut my eyes, and I am back in the little parlour with its spindle chairs, an old-fashioned piano with a green silk front, its pink-flowered wall-paper, and two wonderful black-and-white dogs on the mantelpiece. There were two pictures I loved to gaze upon—Robert Emmet in the dock, and Mary Stuart saying farewell to France” (*Autobiography of a Child*, 1). Emmet makes a similar appearance in *The Wheel of God* as one of the pictures pinned to the “wonderful fourfold screen” in the nursery. However, he is accompanied by a wider range of images: O’Connell, Grattan, Sir Robert Peel, Frederick the Great, Fanny Essler, and early nineteenth-century fashion plates (4).

83. J. B. Hall, an Irish reporter who attended the trial of the Invincibles and sketched several of the accused, including Brady, recalled: “a pathetic figure in the front of the gallery was a gentle-faced young girl, said to be his sweetheart, and whose tearful eyes were riveted upon him to the end.” See *Random Records of a Reporter* (London: Simpkin Marshall and the Fodhla Printing Co., 1928), 181.

84. Elsie Michie argues for a similarly central uncertainty in *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and even Charles Kingsley’s “simianized” depictions of the Irish. Have characters such as Hindley and Heathcliff been created, as “the Irish have been made chimpanzees by the English treatment of them? Or is Heathcliff inherently savage, as racist caricatures imply the Irish are?” See *Outside the Pale: Cultural Exclusion, Gender Difference, and the Victorian Woman Writer* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 55.

85. Mary Robinson (1857–1944), poet, essayist, critic and famous “salonnière” in London and Paris, was married to French Orientalist James Darmesteter from 1888 until his death in 1894. She then married the biologist Emile Duclaux in 1901.

86. Mary Darmesteter [Mary Robinson], “Autobiography of a Child,” *Academy*, 13 May 1899, 527.

87. *Ibid.*

88. *Ibid.*

89. “It would be a bold and inhuman assertion to make, and certainly one I am far from maintaining, that harsh treatment is the proper training of children” (*Autobiography of a Child*, 262).

90. “Among the mysteries of my life nothing seems so strange to me as the depth of this physical antipathy to my mother. The general reader to whom motherhood is sacred will not like to read of it” (*Autobiography of a Child*, 14). Rather more lightheartedly, she comments towards the end of the book: “My father, who, I am told, was a very kindly, tender-hearted man, died some months before my birth. Had I been given the choice beforehand, and known what was in store for me, I should greatly have preferred it had it been my mother who died many months before my birth” (287).

91. *Autobiography of a Child*, 262–63.

92. *Ibid.*, 255, 258.

93. *Ibid.*, 297.

94. Neither the groundbreaking Field Day anthologies of Irish women’s writing (see *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, Volumes IV & V: Irish Women’s Writing and Tradition*, Angela Bourke, ed. [Cork: Cork University Press, 2005]) nor Mary Pierce’s more recent *Irish Feminisms, 1810–1930* (London: Routledge, 2009) include examples of Lynch’s work.