

IMPERIAL RHETORICS: FRANCES POWER COBBE'S ANSWERING OF THE IRISH
QUESTION IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY PERIODICAL PRESS

by

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
AddRan College of Liberal Arts
Texas Christian University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

December, 2012

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2012

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have helped me complete this project. First, I want to thank my mentors and friends at TCU. To my committee, director Charlotte Hogg and readers Karen Steele, Ann George, and Linda Hughes, thank you for your guidance and thoughtful critiques. Thank you for taking my work so seriously. It offered a gentle and much needed corrective to my customary self-deprecation. To my friend Martha Kate Wiant, thank you for the emotional support during my time in Fort Worth and for all the discussions over lattes at Starbucks. I also want to thank my friends in the wintry north, especially Dani Kvanvig-Bohnsack and Darren Buttke, whose long conversations over the telephone helped sustain me for those four years so far away from home. And to Ben Ferguson, thanks for all the support over these last few months, the toughest part of the process: your patience and time (especially our long writing sessions over coffee) helped me finally finish this long project.

But most of my gratitude must go to my mother, Pamela (Truman) Cameron. I know I could not have reached this goal without your unwavering love. I dedicate this project to you.

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CHAPTER 1

A HYPHENATED RHETORICAL IDENTITY: LOCATING FRANCES POWER COBBE
AS AN ANGLO-IRISH VICTORIAN WOMAN RHETOR

Frances Power Cobbe was an important figure in Victorian letters, a woman whose metaphorical and literal immensity had transcended Ireland, the country of her birth, and England, the country of her heritage and relocation. Yet until recent years, her fame did not transcend her own era. But if we look back to the periodicals of the nineteenth century, we can see how Cobbe loomed large across Victorian print culture. One example is Louisa May Alcott's description of her encounter with the reformist writer at the home of Mentia and P.A. Taylor, who were activists on behalf of abolition and women's suffrage. Alcott created a vivid portrait of Cobbe as part of her series "Glimpses of Eminent Persons," which was published in the American newspaper *The Independent* on November 1, 1866. Alcott's characterization offers valuable insight into how Cobbe was viewed by her contemporaries:

The door suddenly flew open, and in rolled an immensely stout lady, with skirts kilted up, a cane in her hand, a fly-away green bonnet on her head, and a laugh issuing from her lips, as she cast herself upon a sofa, exclaiming breathlessly: "Me dear creature, if ye love me, a glass of sherry!" ... I had imagined the author of *Intuitive Morals* to be a serious, severe lady, of the "Cornelia Blimber"¹ school, and was much surprised to see this merry, witty, Falstaffian personage. For half an hour she entertained us with all manner of droll sayings, as full of sense as of humor, one minute talking earnestly and gravely on the suffrage question ... Cheery, sensible, kindly, and keen she

¹ Cornelia Blimber is the prim school mistress in Charles Dickens's *Dombey and Son*.

seemed; and when she went away, talking hard till out of the gate, and vanishing with a hearty laugh, it was as if a great sunbeam had left the room.

(Alcott 18)

Alcott's portrait is a generous one, and multi-layered. Cobbe's theological work that marked her entry into professional writing is noted, as well as her investment in women's suffrage. But another means of characterizing Cobbe functioned more as subtext than direct description. Alcott highlighted Cobbe's Irishness without even mentioning her nationality in a short sketch. Alcott's emphasis on Cobbe's green bonnet, her love of good drink, and her mirthful nature is so suggestive of Irishness that Alcott need not even use the term. It is hard to imagine that her Irish upbringing did not shape Cobbe's personality in important ways.

Indeed, biographer Sally Mitchell noted that the Cobbe family's Irish servants would have had a greater role in raising young Frances than either of her aristocratic parents: "One cannot help wondering if it was from Irish servants that Fan learned the outgoing warmth and garrulous friendliness that so many acquaintances noted" (28). She would also be exposed to Irish folk customs through her relationships to various Irish nannies. For example, "Mary Malone had treated temper tantrums by locking Fan out of the nursery and threatening her with bogeys" (Mitchell 28). Ever watchful, Cobbe would draw upon her childhood experiences in her later writing. While Cobbe absorbed the details and dialogue of Irish life, she would also have been aware of the vast differences between her station and that of her beloved Irish nanny. How did this awareness translate into her presentation of herself as a persuasive writer on the tumultuous relationship between Ireland and England during the mid-nineteenth century?

Cobbe was an activist writer who found herself—through good fortune and her own momentum—positioned at the intersection of several conversations in the mid-to-late nineteenth-century. Even the sparest details of Cobbe’s life reveal that she was a woman who experienced many personal and cultural shifts. She was born in Dublin on Dec. 4, 1822, near her family’s estate, and died on April 4, 1904 in Hengwrt, Wales, in a house on the family estate of her “special woman friend” Mary Lloyd (qtd. in Mitchell 351). Cobbe’s life was long, especially by Victorian standards: she had been alive during the reign of four monarchs, including the 63-year-long reign of Queen Victoria. During her lifetime, she had been the pampered only daughter of an Anglo-Irish landowner, the household manager of her family’s estate, the self-described “exile” from her father’s home after a bout of religious apostasy, and the young woman who voyaged out from her home as an independent traveler of the world. As a writer, she was the young, anonymous author of an ambitious theological work, *Intuitive Morals*, which most reviewers assumed was written by a clergyman (Mitchell 79). She was a working journalist and essayist in London’s busy print culture, producing around, by my estimate, 1,000 leaders for *The Echo* and over 110 essays for various periodicals. Throughout her professional life and well into her retirement, Cobbe actively campaigned for women’s suffrage and equal treatment under the law, most notably in her journalism in support of the Married Women’s Property Act of 1870 and the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1878. The only cause that competed with women’s emancipation for the bulk of Cobbe’s energies was anti-vivisectionism. In fact, Cobbe cut off contact with several of her feminist colleagues when they would not support her anti-vivisectionist efforts (Caine 3).

As a literary celebrity, Cobbe was an active commentator on the social issues of the Victorian age, widely recognized for her intelligent, witty analyses of issues as wide-ranging

as abolition, women's suffrage, animal rights, poverty, and colonialism. In her autobiography, Cobbe offered an assessment of her time writing lead stories for *The Echo* that recognized the rhetorical power available to a journalist:

Journalism is, to my thinking, a delightful profession, full of interest, and promise of ever-extending usefulness. . . . It is preeminently healthy, being so full of variety and calling for so many different mental faculties one after another. Promptitude, clear and quick judgment as to what is, and what is not, expedient and decorous to say; a ready memory well stored with illustrations and unworn quotations, a bright and strong style; and, if it can be attained, a playful (not saturnine) humor superadded—all of these qualities and attainments are called for in writing for a daily newspaper; and the practice of them cannot fail to sharpen their edge. *To be in touch with the most striking events of the whole world, and enjoy the privilege of giving your opinion on them to 50,000 or 100,000 readers within a few hours*, this struck me . . . as something for which many prophets and preachers of old would have given a house full of silver and gold. (390, emphasis mine)

Cobbe worked for *The Echo* from 1867 to 1875 and also published her essays in most of the major periodicals of the age (and a few of the less prestigious ones, as well). The £300 per year she earned through her *Echo* leader writing alone would have provided her a decent living in the Victorian age, but Cobbe's interest in journalism extended beyond economic remuneration: the occupation also provided her the means of accessing the minds of thousands of readers, a priceless opportunity for a woman who had educated herself on a wide variety of subjects and was unshakably confident that her opinions mattered.

We need only look at countless references to Cobbe and her work in British and American periodicals to see evidence that her confidence was not unfounded: from 1863 to 1904, Cobbe's name appears in the table of contents of several periodicals and newspapers, including the bylines from her original and re-published essays and the reviews and advertisements of books. The sheer number of entries—over a thousand—in the British Periodicals I and II databases proves that Cobbe was an important rhetorical figure from the beginning of her career to her death. The fact that many of the entries were not authored by Cobbe shows that she had a wide sphere of influence: whether they were using her arguments to bolster their own, attempting to dismantle her claims, or merely mentioning her in passing, many Victorian writers discerned Cobbe's ability to comment persuasively on the issues of the day. Many noteworthy writers and thinkers of the age—including Theodore Parker, John Stuart Mill, Charles Darwin, Frances Willard, Louisa May Alcott, Elizabeth Gaskell, Matthew Arnold, and Fanny Kemble—found themselves in her orbit through friendship and activist networks.²

Yet her name is seldom found among the long list of Victorian authors who are considered literary celebrities today. However, in recent decades, Cobbe has reemerged as an important figure in feminist and Victorian studies. Scholars in Victorian studies have published numerous books and articles on Cobbe's activist and philosophical writings, representing almost the entire spectrum of Cobbe's wide-ranging interests. In 1999, Margaret McFadden included Cobbe in her book *Golden Cables of Sympathy: The Transatlantic Sources of Nineteenth-Century Feminism*, which examines an international nineteenth-century network of feminist activism. Rose Collis discussed Cobbe's proto-lesbianism in

² Late in life, the only notable Victorians she lamented never meeting were George Eliot and Harriet Martineau (O'Connor 187).

Portraits to the Wall: Historic Lesbian Lives Unveiled in 1994. In 2002, Sandra J. Peacock published *The Theological and Ethical Writings of Frances Power Cobbe, 1822-1904*. My own project relies heavily on Mitchell's definitive biography, *Frances Power Cobbe: Victorian Feminist, Journalist, Reformer*, published in 2004. Other recent publications show an increased interest in Cobbe's work on subjects that fall outside feminism and theology, the two major Cobbian concerns that have attracted the most scholarly interest thus far. In 2010, Maureen O'Connor published *The Female and the Species: The Animal in Irish Women's Writing*, which devoted a chapter to Cobbe's anti-vivisection activism. In 2004, Susan Hamilton included Cobbe in her study *Animal Welfare and Anti-Vivisection, 1870-1910: Nineteenth-Century Woman's Mission*. Scholars have also begun to look to Cobbe's Irish heritage as source of scholarly interest in itself. O'Connor's article, "Frances Power Cobbe and the Patriarchs," explored the connections between Cobbe's contradictory social conservatism, her feminist activism, and her Ascendancy background. Cobbe has also been included in anthologies of Irish women's writing, including Maria Luddy's *Women, Power, and Consciousness in Nineteenth Century Ireland: Eight Biographical Studies* published in 1995. My project continues the goal of expanding how we look at Cobbe as an Irish writer by examining her rhetorics on the subject of Irish nationalism in the middle-class literary miscellanies published in the mid-Victorian period.

SCOPE OF STUDY

How does Ireland, then, figure into the making of this activist writer, and what are we to do with her writings on Ireland, which represent only a small part of her prodigious literary and journalistic output? The answer to this question lies in Cobbe's self-fashioning as a rhetor: everything that made up Cobbe the person—her gender, her race, her class, her

religion—would impact her construction of herself as a writer and speaker. Much work has been done in the gender and religion pieces of the question, leaving Cobbe's race and class to be more fully explored. In her essays on Ireland, the questions of race and class come to the forefront. Two central questions guide my research, questions that were borne out of the conflicts of the Victorian era, the Woman Question and the Irish Question. Any group that was attempting to disrupt the hegemony of the middle- or upper-class white English man during this period was categorized as a "question" rather than the perhaps much more honest "problem." Cobbe, as a feminist and a member of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, had economical, ideological, and emotional investments in both questions and used the periodical press as a means of answering them.

Cobbe was a writer who performed a number of identities, a writer through which we can follow several lines of inquiry: we can look to her writing as evidence of women's agency within a culture that sought to repress women's expression; or we can look to her writing as evidence of the perspective of a loyalist Anglo-Irish woman writing about the ongoing conflicts between Ireland and England. I propose to do both because I argue that Cobbe's most persuasive strategy hinges on her ability to fashion an identity that uses her experiential knowledge as an Anglo-Irish woman in order to persuade. Her strategy of identity construction is perpetually constitutive: her purpose is to persuade her audience that England's control over Ireland is natural, necessary, and worth preserving, while the preservation of England's colonization would preserve Cobbe's own identity, upon which her construction of herself as a credible speaker and writer depended.

My overall argument is that Cobbe used the available means of the Victorian periodical to extend her influence beyond the limited sphere usually allowed women: it

enabled her emphasize or hide certain aspects of her identity which facilitated her identifications with her intended audiences, identifications that would have been much more difficult to make in Cobbe's other rhetorical outlets which included oratory, autobiography, and political pamphleteering. My central thesis is that Cobbe used the periodical press to rearticulate the position of cultural "other" as a location of rhetorical power by constructing an identity that would speak from an authoritative position in between or even outside of paradigmatic and often opposite positions. By shifting the power to a space outside the location usually invested with power in Victorian culture—read: white, male, middle-class or above, straight Englishman—Cobbe could speak persuasively in multiple and shifting contexts. For example, Cobbe alternated between English or Anglo-Irish dependent on context and purpose. My major interest in Cobbe's periodical writings on Ireland is how she used the interstitial space of the periodical press to participate in a culture that valued women's silence and passivity, thus helping to create a new role for women in public life, while at the same time maintaining the status quo in relation to her class status. The periodical press allowed Cobbe to speak without the protected status of wife or mother, the two most acceptable means for nineteenth century women to harness rhetorical power, while maintaining her unique position as a member of Ireland's landed gentry, a position that enabled her influence over Victorian readers.

My methodology is fairly straightforward. I perform a qualitative rhetorical case study analysis on six of Cobbe's periodical essays, which all focus on the subject of Irish nationalism. According to Mary Sue MacNealy, a case study is simply "an investigation of a specific event or person or small group of people at a particular period" (53). Five of the six essays were originally published in London, while one was published in Boston and London.

All the periodicals I examine here could be described as “family literary magazine[s],” which were aimed at middle-class audiences and attracted both genders (Phegley 5). These magazines proliferated in the mid-nineteenth century, while the “weighty” and “serious” political and quarterly reviews that were directed at university men were on the decline (Phegley 6). The family literary magazine was aimed at women as the largest consumers of literature and “the disseminators of culture within the home,” meaning that families would often read periodicals aloud together (Phegley 6). For the editors and writers of the family literary magazine, that meant shaping their content to fit a wide audience. In *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*, Hilary Fraser, Stephanie Green, and Judith Johnston describe the nineteenth-century periodical culture as “a central medium for ideological exchange:” “As the chief form of nineteenth-century public media, it [periodical culture] locates and manifests a great tension between diversity, congruence, and polarization of opinion, offering a methodological meeting place between historicity and textual analysis” (198). The particular period I am investigating spans roughly 30 years, from Cobbe’s move from her family’s Irish estate into London and her entry into professional writing in the early 1860s, to her retirement to Wales and the publication of her autobiography in 1894, ten years before her death. While my methodology is simple, the woman I am studying certainly was not, nor was her construction of her identity in response to the rhetorical situations presented by the middle-class English journals for which she wrote.

In this chapter, I introduce Cobbe to an audience that may not be familiar with either her feminist writings or her writings about Ireland and lay the theoretical groundwork necessary to draw together three disciplines—women’s rhetorics, Irish studies, and periodical studies—that have rarely informed each other. Most of the critical attention surrounding

Cobbe focuses on her commitment to feminism. However, I argue that Cobbe's commentary on the conflict between Ireland and England during the nineteenth century, which arose from the resistance of many Irish people to colonial rule and their attempts to establish an independent Ireland, is an equally fruitful source of evidence for a discussion of not only hierarchies of gender, but hierarchies of race and class. I bridge the two lines of inquiry, women's rhetorics and Irish studies, by examining Cobbe's periodical writing on the Irish Question through a rhetorical lens: specifically, I claim Cobbe as a feminist rhetor and examine her periodical writings as evidence of women's rhetorical contributions to the history of rhetoric.

My dissertation explores how Cobbe created a space for women to become cultural commentators, despite facing a difficult reception from a society that celebrated women's silence and passivity. My project demonstrates how Cobbe used the available means of the periodical essay to shape her imperialist arguments for different audiences at different historical moments and how Cobbe capitalized on the genre conventions of the periodical essay in order to build her ethos as a commentator on a wide range of social issues that impacted Victorians, including colonialism. When it came to weighing in on the Irish Question, the most useful tools in Cobbe's rhetorical toolbox were her experiences as an Anglo-Irish woman. How she honed those experiences and put them to use in her imperialist rhetorics was not simply strategic, but the strategy itself.

IDENTITY AS A MEANS OF PERSUASION

Writing, for a woman during the Victorian era, can be viewed as a feminist act in itself, despite the often conservative or contradictory content of her message. To assert their viewpoints into the public sphere, women needed to construct an identity that their audience

would find persuasive. My exploration of Cobbe's persuasive identity relies heavily on Dana Anderson's *Identity's Strategy: Rhetorical Selves in Conversion*. Through Anderson, Kenneth Burke's theories about persuasion and identity become a clear and coherent means of examining how rhetors construct "selves" within language that are designed to persuade, which Anderson describes as "the rhetorical strategy of *identity*, the influencing of others through the articulation of our sense of *who we are*" (4, emphasis in original). To Anderson, identity does not exist *a priori* language and is always contextual, not merely biographical, but a rhetorical construction:

One way of viewing identity rhetorically, as I am suggesting, is to view it as a kind of persuasive strategy, as a means of moving audiences toward certain beliefs or actions. ... Identity matters less as something that one "is" and more as something that one *does* in language; or, more exactly, identity matters as something that one does to an audience through the expression of who or what one is. (4, emphasis in original)

Cobbe seemed fully aware that the "self" was constructed in language. At the end of her autobiography, she asked readers to consider the Welsh churchyard where she would one day be buried, writing, "There, in that quiet enclosure, will, in all probability, be the bourne of my long journey of life, with a gray headstone for the '*Finis*' of the last chapter of the Book which I have first lived, and now have written" (648). For Cobbe, life was something to experience and something to communicate to others.

She also displays an almost postmodern awareness that her written self, her "real LIFE," was contingent on many factors, including gender, class, and time. In her preface, she wrote:

I have tried to make it the true and complete history of a woman's existence *as seen from within*; a real LIFE, which he who reads may take as representing fairly the joys, sorrows, and interests, the powers and limitations, of one of my sex and class in the era which is now drawing to a close. The world when I entered it was a very different place from the world I must shortly quit, most markedly so as regards the position in it of women and of persons like myself holding heterodox opinions, and my experience practically bridges the gulf which divides the English *ancien régime* from the new. (iv-v, emphasis in original)

Cobbe also recognizes that her construction of her identity is dependent on audience reception: if her readers did not judge her accounting of her life to be “true and complete,” to “represent fairly” the life of an Anglo-Irish woman in the mid-to-late Victorian period, they would not find her rhetorical performance persuasive. As Anderson points out, one's experiences often serve as evidence of a rhetor's credibility: “Identities express what can be called the personal truths or personal realities of an individual's experience. And because personal experience is *personal*, directly accessible only to the person who has experienced it, the identities we build out of our personal experiences are unique points of rhetorical authority” (10). Cobbe brought this awareness to her journalism, as well.

Cobbe's complicated identity also typifies the potential problems in looking at the personal for verification of a rhetor's credibility. The myth that one's essential self remains the same no matter the changing social conditions is a powerful one. Anderson notes the postmodern dismantling of traditional conceptualizations of “identity”:

A pronounced effect of this perspective has been the virtual abandonment of “identity” as a valid theoretical concept. The word smacks of a certain naïve modernism, of enlightened, unified, atomistic individuals freely doing and becoming as is their fancy. The “essentialist” conception of the human person that identity seems to connote—of an agential self that exists prior to and ultimately outside the forces of language, culture and history—has become a favored target of critical theory since poststructuralism. (5)

In many ways, the “death of the author” poses problems for rhetorical studies, concerned as we are with issues of character in a speaker or writer. Accountings of “personal truths” and “personal realities” are constructions of actual events and feelings; they are suspect in terms of evidence and proof because they cannot be verified by empirical methods. Such an essentialist idea of “identity” does not account for the multiple forces putting pressure on individuals, including familial, political, and economic systems. Anderson suggests we take a rhetorical view of “identity” that offers an alternative to the poststructuralist dismantling of the author and the traditional view of identity as stable and fixed.

Cobbe’s work in the Victorian periodical press provides us with the ideal material to test Anderson’s theory. Cobbe’s identity in the periodical press changes in accordance with her subject matter, audience, social context, and the journal’s style. Laurel Brake describes Victorian periodical culture as representing different extremes: “What we are forced to conclude upon consideration of the Victorian periodicals is that variety, not uniformity, of style reigns, for the most part between periodicals, but sometimes . . . within a single journal” (13). The identity she constructed in most of her pieces was often humorous and conversational, but always authoritative. Her writings on Ireland largely followed the same

pattern. In the six pieces I examine in this project, Cobbe's identity was bound up in the question of nationhood. She could be Irish, English, or both, depending on what information she emphasized and what she left out. Her strategy of constructing a specific (or in some cases, a deliberately non-specific) identity enabled her to persuade her audiences that she was an expert on the Irish Question. The authority she constructed in her essays was dependent upon her presentation of herself as a woman writer. For a Victorian woman, the act of writing was part of a larger question about women's roles in society.

THE ORDERING OF COBBE'S VICTORIAN ENGLAND

Though Cobbe was born in Ireland, the bulk of Cobbe's working life was spent in bustling London. A strong feeling of English supremacy was in the ether as Cobbe's career began and flourished. England was at the center of the British empire, its values and customs radiating outward to its colonies. The role of women was in flux during the mid-to-late nineteenth century, and Cobbe was one of the many agents of that change. It may be tempting to view the Victorian woman as the "the middle-class 'angel' or moral salvator" of Coventry Patmore's poetic imagination, the monolithic Angel in the House who was the "passive" figure "which complemented that of the active, public man" (Langland 62). However, the reality was different for many Victorian women, depending on where they fell in the social hierarchy. In *Daily Life in Victorian England*, Mitchell notes that Victorian society, "in the strictest legal sense," was organized into two classes: "aristocrats (who inherited titles and land) and commoners (everyone else)" (17-18). However, most Victorians recognized that theirs was a "three-tiered" social system, where the working classes, comprising three out of four people, did "visible work" that was "physical and often dirty," while the middle classes "did clean work, which usually involved mental rather than physical

effort” (Mitchell 18). The upper classes “did not work for money,” their income stemming from investments and renting their land (Mitchell 18). Cobbe’s family, of English pedigree but living in Ireland, numbered among the landed gentry.

Where did women fit into this paradigm? Working class women physically labored as hard as their male counterparts: “They worked in brickmaking, chainmaking, and collecting trash from the city streets. It was not unusual for women who did heavy and dirty work to wear trousers and appear almost indistinguishable from men in the same trades” (Mitchell 47). Though middle-and-upper class women more closely resembled Patmore’s Angel, they worked, too, though their labors were not as physically taxing and not necessary for their very survival. The wife and daughters of landed gentlemen “would visit poor people, provide layettes for new babies or soup for the elderly, and probably teach a class in the Sunday school” (Mitchell 24). As a young woman in Ireland, Cobbe would fulfill many of these duties in the village where many of the workers on her family’s estate lived. Middle-class women performed a range of work, often outside the home: “Women increasingly found clean and respectable work in shops, offices, and telephone exchanges and as schoolteachers” (Mitchell 21). Married women worked as well, managing their domiciles for capital that was more ideological and actual: “The labor of bourgeois women was understood as managerial rather than menial, rewarded by social harmony rather than cash” (Langland 66). A woman’s social position was tied to her husband’s. If she did not have a husband, it was tied to her father’s. One was born into a social system and stayed there even if personal circumstances changed. By the midpoint of her life, Cobbe would live out this paradigm: she was, as she described it, “a child well born,” who later depended upon her income as a working

journalist, a career increasingly open to women beginning in the 1840s (Fraser 14). Though Cobbe remained upper class, her mental labors became very visible to a wide reading public.

Regardless of her class, women's legal status was fairly circumscribed in Victorian culture. An unmarried woman had greater freedom than her married sister. Once a woman married, she effectively gave up her citizenship: "She could not sign a contract or make a will. She had no standing before a court in any legal action because, in the eyes of the law, she had no separate existence [from her husband]" (Mitchell 103). He decided how her earnings and inheritance were spent; he decided where they would live (Mitchell 103). She had no legal rights to her children: in the event of a separation, the father's right to custody was "unalienable" (Mitchell 103). Cobbe felt that the subsumption of a woman within her husband's legal identity rendered domestic abuse an invisible crime, a topic she repeatedly addressed during her time as a leader writer for the middle-and-working class newspaper *The Echo*. However, life gradually improved for women throughout the century. In 1870, Cobbe actively promoted the Married Women's Property Bill in her journalism (*Frances Power Cobbe* 198). When it passed in a watered-down form, it provided even working women some control over the wages they earned after marriage (*Frances Power Cobbe* 199). Cobbe, of course, had no use for such a bill in her own life but continued to speak out in the hopes that the law would be improved. A strengthened version was passed in 1882 (Mitchell 104). Continually, Cobbe used her position as "other" woman to comment powerfully on the status of all women, regardless of class, within the empire.

THE WOMAN QUESTION

In the January 1895 edition of *The Westminster Review*, A.G.P. Sykes laments, "It is not possible to ride by boat or rail, to read a review, a magazine or a newspaper, without

being continually reminded of the subject which lady-writers love to call the Woman Question” (396). Even today, scholars of Victorian feminisms use the phrase so often that it is only rarely defined for its 21st century audience. However, in *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question*, Nicola Thompson offers a working definition: the Woman Question was “the ongoing Victorian discussion about woman’s nature and societal role” (1). The question was treated the same in the Victorian press, suggesting that it was common enough that the editors assumed their readers would grasp the meaning. The “Woman Question” appeared frequently in the table of contents of many periodicals, including Charles Dickens’s *All Year Round*, which published an essay titled, “The Woman Question in Black Letter,” in the May 29, 1869 edition. The writer purported to review an Elizabethan book, *The Laws Resolutions of Women’s Rights, or the Lawes Provision for Women*, but in reality uses the book as a means of expressing anxiety over the changing role of women in contemporary society: “Whether she will succeed or no, rests, with other mysteries of the future, in the lap of time. The great danger in the woman question now, is, that the women and their partisans will go too far, and create a reaction towards injustice by the exaggeration of their demands” (615).

All this tension and controversy revolved around the figure of the New Woman, another trope that figured prominently in the periodicals and newspapers of the age, particularly during the later decades of the nineteenth century:

The widespread nervousness over the Woman Question that had characterized the century thus intensified at its end, primarily through a clash of perspectives on separate spheres, degeneracy, immorality, and feminism. . . . The New Woman was a primary cause of this discursive maelstrom, for she provided a

readily identifiable and conveniently localized site for the Victorian discussion about gender roles. Opponents maligned the New Woman for initiating the downfall of civilization; proponents lauded her for attacks on the restraints that kept women from achieving occupational, educational, and behavioral parity with men. (Murphy 3)

Cobbe's powers of influence were at their peak during the mid-1800s, meaning that she was only at the cusp of being labeled a New Woman herself. Instead, Cobbe was labeled "the grandmother of the New Woman" by *Northern Echo* editor W.T. Stead, in his "Character Sketch" (qtd. in Mitchell 342). Patricia Murphy offered an expansive description of the New Woman that encompassed Cobbe almost perfectly:

Despite attempts of some Victorian writers to do so, New Women cannot be unproblematically defined in broad terms, even though they did share many concerns and qualities. ... New Women were primarily members of the middle class, yet they differed in assigning priorities and energies to the overall agenda of better educational programs, greater marital rights, and unimpeded entrance into masculine professions. (Murphy 10)

Murphy notes that many New Women "accepted the essentialist designation of masculine or feminine traits, eliding biological sex and gender" but a minority questioned these assumptions (10). Cobbe used those essentialist designations as tropes in her writing about the Woman Question, but in her writing on the Irish Question, she would refigure these essentialist designations of "male" and "female," coalescing the two binaries into a persuasive rhetorical strategy. She would do the same with the designations of "English" and "Irish."

THE IRISH QUESTION

At the height of Cobbe's writing career, the idea of empire was at the forefront of Victorian thought. According to Mitchell's *Daily Life in Victorian England*, the empire grew "slowly and haphazardly" until around 1870, after the opening of the Suez Canal allowed a further colonization of lands in Southeast Asia (284). Queen Victoria was made "Empress of India" by an 1876 Act of Parliament, an event that further reminded her subjects of how far England had expanded its government, economy, and culture. By 1900, the pinnacle of the British empire, the queen had extended her symbolic and literal powers from Australia to Hong Kong, from Canada to the Virgin Islands (Mitchell 284). During the 1880s, Africa had been "carved up" between England, France, Belgium, and Germany, "territory grabbed, governments installed, and troops sent to protect the new colonies from their original inhabitants, who wanted their land back" (Mitchell 284). This method of conquest had already begun closer to England's own shores, centuries ago.

Today's Ireland has been an independent republic since leaving the Commonwealth in 1949, though six of its original counties were ceded to Great Britain in a 1921 treaty and are still part of the United Kingdom, now called Northern Ireland. However, nineteenth-century Ireland was still part of Great Britain. England had a presence within Ireland since 1169, when the Normans invaded, marking the beginning of England's colonization of the region: "Their reasons were both economic and strategic. They wanted to enrich themselves through land ownership and taxation, and they wanted to prevent Ireland becoming a base from which rival European powers or contenders for the English throne could attack England" (Curtis 1). By 1685, English settlers had claimed 80 percent of the land, and "most of the Irish were pushed onto the poorer land or were reduced to tenant status" (Curtis 1).

The Ireland of the mid-nineteenth century remained “undeveloped,” a “colonial farmyard supplying beef, butter, grain, and cheap labour to England” (Curtis 4).

A few key events loomed over the Ireland of Cobbe’s journalistic renderings. The first happened before her birth. In 1798, the nationalist group the United Irishmen started an uprising, enlisting the French for support. French fleets landed at Killala Bay in western Ireland, but the uprising was quashed. The consequences of the uprising were severe: The Act of Union of 1799 “greatly curtailed Irish independence by eliminating Irish parliament and subsuming the country as part of Great Britain” (de Nie 3). Beginning in 1845, potato blight caused a series of crop failures that came to be known as the Great Famine. An estimated million Irish people died as the result of starvation, typhus, and cholera, while a million and a half emigrated, many of whom were Irish-speakers, their loss “a devastating blow” to the culture of Ireland (Curtis 59). The English government did little to aid the Irish in their suffering, adhering to laissez-faire economic policies in which “commercial considerations came first” and “nothing must be done which would interfere with private enterprise” (Curtis 41). Individual landlords and English civil servants attempted to alleviate the effects of the famine, but could not stem the tide against larger government inaction. Throughout the famine, tons of food in the form of livestock and corn³ continue to leave Ireland for England’s shores.

In the few years before Cobbe left her native land to begin her journalism career in England, a new nationalist movement was forming in Ireland and America. In 1858 in Dublin, James Stephens formed the Irish Republican Army (Boyce 176). Around the same time, John O’ Mahoney, finding “a strong and embittered nationalism among the famine

³ In England, “corn” is wheat, barley, and oats (Curtis 42).

emigrants” established the Fenian Brotherhood in New York (Boyce 176). Both were secret societies that championed militant action to reclaim Ireland from English rule. Some of these activists would settle for nothing less than Ireland’s complete removal from the United Kingdom, while others would have been satisfied with a separate Irish Parliament, the system that was in place before the Act of Union (Boyce 176). The Home Rule movement, beginning in 1870, followed the latter tack. Its adherents formed the Land League, hoping to gain parliamentary independence through constitutional rather than militant means. The leading figure for the movement was a man Cobbe detested, Meath Minister of Parliament Charles Stewart Parnell, a member of the Anglo-Irish gentry class whose loyalties were aligned very differently than Cobbe’s.

All of the above was the backdrop against which Cobbe addressed the Irish Question in the pages of the Victorian periodical press. The country of Cobbe’s birth haunted the margins of her essays, even the essays that did not directly address the political and social problems posed by England’s rule over its island colony located just 50 miles across the Irish Sea. Like the Woman Question, the Irish Question was another turn of phrase popular during the mid-nineteenth century. Also like the Woman Question, a straightforward definition is not easy to come by, as users of the phrase—speaking from the 1800s and today—assume readers know the meaning. Michael de Nie offers a definition from the context of the Victorian age: “The Act of Union was widely regarded by the British press as an opportunity to remodel Ireland politically, economically, and morally. After the act was passed, the ‘Irish Question’ came to focus largely on how Britain might reconstruct in its own image” (3). During the height of Cobbe’s journalism career, stretching from the 1860s to the 1880s, the

phrase appeared regularly in middle-class miscellanies, including *Fraser's*, *MacMillan's*, and the *Cornhill*, where Cobbe's work would also appear.

So omnipresent was the question that it appeared in numerous advertisements during the same period. For example, *The Athenaeum* Feb. 12, 1870 edition featured four advertisements for books that addressed the topic. Three of the advertised authors openly used "question" as a means of organizing their arguments under an instantly recognizable banner. One trumpeted, "Irish Land Questions plainly stated and answered, by John MacCarthy of Cork" (218). Another read, "*History, Principle, and Fact in Relation to the Irish Question* by Henry Dix Hutton" (218). Yet another offered the perspective of a colonial subject who was not Irish: "*The Land Question in Ireland, Viewed from an Indian Stand-point*, by a Bombay Civilian" (218). The fourth addressed the question indirectly, raising essentialist ideas about race, rather than focusing on the legalities of land ownership. It read, "*Saxons and Celts*, 2nd edition, in 8vol. with maps and diagrams: *The Pedigree of the English People, An Argument, Historical and Scientific, an English Ethnology, showing the Progress of Race Amalgamation in Britain from the Earliest Times with especial references to the Incorporation of the Celtic Aborigines* by Thomas Nicholas, M.A., Ph.D., F.O.S." (218).

These advertisements show that the periodical-reading public was not only interested in the Irish Question, they were interested in multiple perspectives on the subject. The inclusion of a book written by an Indian subject (though anonymous) illustrated the idea that imperialism itself was an open question for the Victorians and that many writers were attempting to provide their own answers to the question. Though this sampling is small, it represents different positions within the colonial spectrum: one perspective comes from an Irish subject from Cork, another from an Indian subject, whose country, under British rule

since 1818, had been experiencing its own nationalist movement and the violent uprisings that went with it. The perspective of Thomas Nicholas reveals that *Athenaeum* readers were interested in the opinions of educated experts, as well. Indeed, this advertisement takes up the most space, perhaps to fit in all of the author's honorifics. It also reveals that the English were not only concerned about concepts of land ownership, but about theories about race: they were looking to history and natural science to explain their own place in the colonial hierarchy. By answering the Irish Question, they would answer questions about themselves. But one perspective is missing from this representative sample of advertisements: none of the writers was obviously a woman.

COBBE'S IDENTITY AS "BIG HOUSE" DAUGHTER

In a real sense, Cobbe's Irish past began 100 years before her birth, when her great-great-grandfather Charles Cobbe, the youngest son of an English landed family, came to Ireland to be a chaplain in the Anglican church (*Frances Power Cobbe* 12). Only 25 years later, he was Archbishop of Dublin (*Frances Power Cobbe* 13). In 1736, he began construction on Newbridge, the family's estate just outside of Donabate (*Frances Power Cobbe* 13).⁴ In 1809, Cobbe was born to another Charles Cobbe, the great-great-grandson of the archbishop, and his English-born wife, Frances Conway.⁵ Cobbe was a member of the Ascendancy class, which means, in the simplest sense, that she was Anglican in a country that was predominantly Roman Catholic. Her family bore witness to centuries of upheaval

⁴ Newbridge is still standing today, operating as a working farm that is open to visitors.

⁵ Frances Conway's national identity is perhaps even more complicated than her daughter's. Mitchell labels Conway's mother as "German," though she points out that her maternal grandmother, who lived with them until Conway was eight, was French (25). It is also unclear whether Conway's first language was English, French, or German (26). Conway's complicated identity is a reminder that labeling someone as "English," "Irish," or even "Anglo-Irish" may sometimes be an oversimplification.

between England and Ireland. Penal laws that discriminated against Catholics perpetuated a system that benefited Cobbe's family. Because Catholics were barred from buying land, they often toiled on land that was not their own: "The ascendancy landlords and absentee landlords living in England amassed enormous wealth from the rents they imposed on the Irish peasantry. They built great houses and lived in luxury while many peasants and poor townspeople lived in hovels and suffered recurrent famines" (Curtis 3). As Anglo-Irish landlords, Cobbe's father (and later her brothers) were part of this system, though they were not absentee and spent most of their time on their Irish estates.

Cobbe had her own particular role to play in the colonial order. In "Gender and Nation," Mrinalini Sinha articulated the role of women in a colonial society: "Women—more often than not—have had to carry the more complex burden of representing the colonized nation's 'betweenness' with respect to precolonial traditions and 'Western' modernity" (329). Cobbe fulfilled this role in Ireland in what Margot Gayle Backus would term her position as "Big House Daughter" (205). This designation quite literally meant that she lived in what would have been termed the "Big House" on an estate that also contained the cabins of the Irish commoners who worked on her father's land. When Cobbe was a young woman, she took over housekeeping when her mother fell ill, and remained in this position until her father's death. This experience often put her in direct contact with the poorer classes of Irish as she was often the intermediary between them and the Big House, directing the servants who worked in her father's home and educating the children of the nearby village. But while Cobbe benefited materially from her family's position, she always played a subordinate role to her father and brothers. Backus identified the role of "Big House Daughter" as one of

“perpetual economic dependency,” who did not have the automatic claims to their family estates that their brothers took for granted (205, 172).

Tropes of sibling rivalry also played out in the wider relationship between England and Ireland. Cobbe would often dip into this well of meaning, at various points describing the Anglo-Irish and indigenous Irish as classed siblings within Ireland, and Ireland and Wales as Celtic siblings within Great Britain, all competing for the attention of its colonial parent, England. The Anglo-Irish had an often vexed relationship with England, which “stemm[ed] from their position of conscious but resented dependence. . . . The Ascendancy were prey to fears that England would let them down by breaking their monopoly” (Foster 173). The twin themes of dependence and resentment played out within Cobbe’s own family, where she was the last child, born when her mother was 45. Cobbe suggested that her surprise arrival was compounded by the fact that her mother had already given birth to four sons: “A girl was by no means welcome,” Cobbe wrote in her autobiography (I:4, 31).

There were clues that Cobbe never felt completely secure in her parents’ affections: her mother was sickly and bedridden (and therefore, somewhat absent in her daughter’s life) while her father was an imperious, difficult man. Mitchell suggested that Cobbe’s mother viewed Ireland with distaste due to her English, upper-class background, using a notebook owned by Conway, most likely as a school girl, as evidence that the concept of race as a means to organize groups of people—even people of the same color and the same country—would have been in circulation even within Cobbe’s own household. The notebook contained an essay titled “Character of the Irish,” which arranged the English, the Anglo-Irish, and the Irish in a hierarchy: “The polished minority of the nation is one hundred years behind England in refinement & the rude majority of it is at least five” (qtd. in *Frances Power*

Cobbe 22). The “native” Irish were described as descendants of “Aborigines” (qtd. in *Frances Power Cobbe 22*). In Cobbe’s writing about Ireland, we can see how these ideas may have impacted her identity as part of the “polished minority.”

Although Cobbe was groomed to be a mistress of an estate such as Newbridge, to play her role in replicating the land-owning class into which she was born, she never seriously considered marrying a man. She also had an intellectual streak despite an indifferent education, taught at home by governesses until she attended a boarding school in Brighton, England as a teenager (where she was miserable and longed for Newbridge). Upon her father’s death, Cobbe was afforded a new measure of freedom, quickly setting out on a world tour that would inspire many of her later periodical writings. However, Cobbe would soon realize that her father maintained his patriarchal power from the grave: he left her part of his estate, but not enough for Cobbe to maintain a household, assuming that she would live as a ward of one of her brothers. So, even if she did not marry (and at 36, that was looking less and less likely, though Cobbe would later enter into a partnership her father would never have envisioned), she would still be dependent on a man. In order to live the independent life that she wanted, Cobbe would need a career. From that point, Cobbe would leave behind some of the material comforts of Ascendancy life, but never the privileged social position. From the height of that privileged position, she would view the structures of Victorian society.

INTERROGATING THE ANGLO-IRISH LABEL

In the chapters to come, I delineate the different ways that Cobbe enacted her hyphenated identity in her periodical writings, but first, a grounding in Cobbe’s origins will help us understand how the most obvious hyphenate—the label of Anglo-Irish—may have

helped shape Cobbe as a rhetor. Though she was born in Ireland, Cobbe is often claimed as an English writer. For example, though Susan Hamilton addresses Cobbe's Anglo-Irish background in *Frances Power Cobbe and Victorian Feminism*, she introduced Cobbe as the "only English woman who earned her living by writing regularly in the Victorian established press" (2). Hamilton's labeling of Cobbe as an English writer seems connected to the fact that most of Cobbe's writing took place after she moved to England. Deirdre Raftery argues that the elision of Cobbe's Anglo-Irish identity is due to the fact that her "feminist commitment . . . was most evident during her life in England" (92). Raftery does not see Cobbe's "life in England" as being separate from her life in Ireland. Rather, she views Cobbe's Irish life as the genesis of her writing: "In fact her feminism had its genesis in the domestic ideology, the philanthropic interests, and the passion for learning to which she was exposed on the family estate" (92). I tend to agree with Raftery. Throughout Cobbe's writing life, whether she was living in England or Wales, Cobbe continually used Ireland as a reference point. Her Irish past was a means of understanding the present. However, to discuss Cobbe as an Irish writer means we must interrogate the label.

Though she is often claimed as an "English" writer, Cobbe did not often openly label herself as such, mostly identifying herself as "Anglo-Irish" when she claimed any national identity at all. However, the label "Anglo-Irish" is "fluid," argues R.F. Foster (170). In *Modern Ireland*, Foster notes the varied terms for Ireland's upper classes—called alternatively "the landed gentry," "the Ascendancy," or the "Anglo-Irish." Along with the varied terminology come varied definitions of what constitutes the "Anglo-Irish" class. Contrary to popular belief, argued Foster, it does not necessarily entail Protestantism or English lineage: "The definition revolved round *Anglicanism*: this defined a social elite,

professional as well as landed, whose descent could be Norman, Old English, Cromwellian or even (in a very few cases) ancient Gaelic. Anglicanism conferred exclusivity ... and exclusivity defined the Ascendancy, not ethnic origin” (170, italics in original). There is also debate about whether the “Anglo-Irish” saw themselves as distinctly “English” or “Irish.” Cobbe’s own writing is evidence that there existed a third possibility: a classed community that was considered—and perhaps more importantly—considered itself a class apart from both the “native” Irish and the English.

A HYPHENATED NATIONAL IDENTITY: THE ANGLO-IRISH WRITER AS NATIVE INFORMANT IN THE PERIODICAL PRESS

In Imperial Co-Histories: National Identities and the British and Colonial Press, Julie Codell discusses the nineteenth-century periodical culture as a site where often conflicting ideas about imperialism were worked out between writers and editors and the reading public. Codell argues that imperialism was by no means “commonsense” or accepted without question during the nineteenth century: “Empire was by no means unanimously applauded by British citizens; publications describing various wars, policies, events, celebrations, and ethnographic discoveries contained sometimes-virulent debates” (18). Because “the British public often had to be won over,” the periodical became a site of persuasion (18). In this paradigm, the “native informant” was often one of the persuaders (212). Codell identifies the “native informant” as a figure who has been widely represented as, at best, a lackey for colonizing agents or, at worst, a traitor to his or her race. Codell, however, offers an alternative definition. It is often the native informants who use their class position and education to act as both mediator and agent of change in an imperialist system:

It is precisely because they acquired the use of English, and acquired it so well, that these authors could also acquire the privilege to appear in the press and advocate their positions. . . . [They] were both resistant to, and affiliated with, their British colonizers; the affiliation afforded them the power to express their views and gain a place in the press to address British readers. (212-13)

As an Anglo-Irish writer with deep knowledge of Irish history and politics and connections to members of the Irish underclass, Cobbe fulfilled this role for her English readers.

Others have examined the periodical press as a rhetorical podium for writers seeking to build a nation. In her dissertation *Miscellany Rhetoric(s) of Nationalism: Postcolonial Epideictic and the Anglophone Welsh Press, 1882-1904*, Sarah Yoder examined how Welsh nationalist writers used periodicals to construct a national identity in response to English colonization. Yet others have looked specifically at the nationalist press in Ireland during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, taking a feminist and postcolonial lens on the concurrent issues of imperialism and women's rights. In *Women, Press, and Politics During the Irish Revival*, Karen Steele examines how women writers in the advanced nationalist press addressed their audiences based on the ideological position of the periodical. Steele's discussion of Alice Milligan's co-editorship of the *Shan Van Vocht* is a good example of the intersection of periodical studies and rhetorical theory. Steele describes how Milligan, an upper-class Protestant, had to negotiate both her class and gender positions in order to co-edit a nationalist periodical in late nineteenth century Belfast. According to Steele, Milligan used stereotypes of femininity in order to make female editorship acceptable and as a means of advancing her arguments in an increasingly factionalist society. However, Milligan also recycled and re-made those stereotypes for her own use, a strategy that scholars of women's

rhetorics have argued was in wide use among women writers and orators during the nineteenth century. My work on Cobbe's periodical writings is a departure from these projects because it examines how a writer used rhetoric to argue against nation-building, instead seeking to defend the borders already in place.

Other writers have looked to the further reaches of the English Dominion in order to glean the rhetorical content of periodicals. In her book *The Woman's Page: Journalism and Rhetoric in Early Canada*, Janice Fiamengo discusses how women used the periodical press in strategic ways to advance their own social agendas. Fiamengo also sees the potential of the periodical press for women to practice "diverse forms of self-fashioning ... during a period of transformation and public debate" (16). Fiamengo offers a compelling example of self-fashioning that supports my own thesis about Cobbe, arguing that First Nations writer Pauline Johnson used the periodical press "to resist, mimic, and strategically deploy a range of positions and poses," including what Johnson terms "the regulation Indian maiden" found in many works written by whites (12-13). Johnson was "acutely aware of how identity was produced through representation" (Fiamengo 12). By performing her Native identity in strategic ways in the Canadian press, Johnson wrote powerfully from the position of cultural "other."

Like Johnson, Cobbe's national and racial identity is not incidental to her rhetorical performance. To play upon Johnson's phrase, Cobbe did not find it useful to perform "the regulation Irish maiden." In fact, if she had decided to speak from that position, she would have faced a different set of circumscriptions on her speech. In nationalist contexts, women were often rendered as silent symbols of Ireland, such as Mother Ireland, Erin, or Hibernia, rather than speaking, acting agents of revolution. At the turn of the century, given the

conflation of Mother Ireland and the Virgin Mary made “speaking out doubly transgressive” for Catholic Irish women: it meant rejecting “a female’s most important role model, the Virgin Mary” (Steele 96). Cobbe did not face the same circumscriptions as the Catholic Irish women who populated the villages near Newbridge. Instead, Cobbe spoke from her position on the border of a few different identities, fashioning a persuasive self by emphasizing what was powerful about each position and minimizing what was not. The same factor that shapes her rhetoric about the Woman Question shapes her rhetoric about the Irish: her privileged class position becomes the center around which her other identities—(Anglo)Irish-lesbian-woman—revolve, enabling her to function successfully as a nineteenth-century woman rhetor.

THE WOMAN OTHER SPEAKING FOR THE IRISH OTHER: HOW COBBE USED THE

PERIODICAL PRESS AS A MEANS OF ASKING BOTH QUESTIONS

Declan Kiberd defined the nineteenth-century English-Irish relationship in psychoanalytic terms:

The image of Ireland as not-England had been well and truly formed. Victorian imperialists attributed to the Irish all those emotions and impulses which a harsh mercantile code had led them to suppress in themselves. Thus, if John Bull was industrious and reliable, Paddy was held to be indolent and contrary; if the former was mature and rational, the latter must be unstable and emotional; if the English were adult and manly, the Irish must be childish and feminine. In this fashion, the Irish were to read their fate in that of two other out-groups, women and children; and at the root of many of an Englishman’s

suspicion of the Irish was an unease with the woman or child who lurked with in himself. (30)

Though Cobbe enjoyed a privileged position within the Victorian social hierarchy due to her Ascendancy background, she did inhabit a position of “otherness” that set her apart from complete cultural dominance. I borrow Anita Levy’s definition of “other” because it aptly describes the position Cobbe inhabited, as she was “‘other’ than normal, desirable, and English,” in a “negative” relationship to the “rational, middle-class, white Englishman” (4). Traditionally, the cultural “other” was placed in the subject position, rendered powerless and mute by the writer, who was always positioned closer to power. One seminal example was Edward Said’s description in *Orientalism* of Flaubert’s courtesan: “She never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. *He* spoke for and represented her” (6). In many ways, women and the Irish were rendered in Victorian discourse as mute and powerless, posed as questions to be sorted out by English men. Cobbe, however, as an intermediary between those in power and those without it, wielded the power of representation. Though this project will examine the ways that Cobbe was a social “other,” she was positioned close enough to power to fashion a self that could speak persuasively on behalf of those without it.

Though women and the Irish were both groups classified as “questions” for the mid-Victorian reading public, the two questions usually circulated apart from each other. Cobbe would implicitly draw the two questions together in her essay, “Social Science Congresses, and Women’s Part in Them,” published in London-based *Macmillan’s Magazine* in December 1861. Because it focuses mainly on the Woman Question, it is not an essay I cover as one of my case studies. However, as one of Cobbe’s first published essays, it serves as a

useful introduction to Cobbe's writing because it offers an important example of the intersection between women's rhetorics, periodical studies, and Irish studies I explore in this dissertation. The main thrust of the essay is Cobbe's justification for women's participation in the creation of the new discipline of social science by speaking publicly at public conferences. The congresses in question were events akin to modern academic conferences, where speakers would read their essays about subjects pertaining to sociological subjects. Many Anglo-Irish took part in the Association for the Promotion of Social Science, which began in 1857 in London but held meetings in different British cities every autumn, including two meetings in Dublin.

Even this early in her career, Cobbe traded on her celebrity status in order to create a space for women to speak. She is not only given a byline, but is noted as the "author of 'An Essay on Intuitive Morals' and 'Workhouse Sketches'" (81). In her essay, Cobbe ties the Irish Question to the Woman Question by equating the Englishman's treatment of the Irish with their treatment of women through a discussion of the rhetorical tactic of the joke. The joke, just as it is today, was a common means by which male writers would diminish the speech of women:

There is a whole mine of jokes to be found at all times by the destitute in the subject of women. Readers may remain in unmoved gravity while *men*, however absurd and ridiculous, are the subjects of sarcasm; but *women!* ... A silly old woman in a mob cap, or a silly young one in a crinoline, a Belgravian mother,⁶ or a "pretty horsebreaker," women who know Greek, and women who cannot spell English, ladies who do nothing but crochet, and ladies who

⁶ Belgravia was a fashionable district in London.

write two hundred letters a day for Borriboola Gha⁷—it is pretty much the same; who can resist the fun of the thing, even if it be repeated rather frequently? (87, italics in original)

Ever aware of the medium in which she is writing, Cobbe playfully admonishes essayists and their editors (almost always male) for relying on the same well-worn jokes about women as the most simpleminded men: “We do, indeed, sometimes figure to ourselves the employer (we cannot say originator) of such a jest as a person not naturally of a lively disposition, but rather as one whom the requirements of a despotic editor compel sometimes to become jovial” (88). Here, Cobbe illuminates a systemic devaluing of women, while dryly pointing out that not everyone is capable of making a successful joke. By poking fun at the skills of male writers, she lessened their power of representation.

Then, in a rather pointed digression, she raises the plight of the Irish: “The very dullest of Englishmen can always find a laugh for the stories of Irish beggars, Irish bulls, and Irish cars. Possibly it may chance to be because he *is* dull that the quickness and brightness of the Irish mind strikes him as so amazing” (88, italics in original). According to the Oxford English dictionary, the Irish bull is “a statement that is manifestly self-contradictory or inconsistent, especially to humorous effect.”⁸ Cobbe is likely referencing the work of another

⁷ Cobbe may be referencing Charles Dickens’s serialized novel *Bleak House*.

⁸ Edgeworth gives several examples of “bulls,” including this one: “‘I hate that woman,’ said a gentleman, looking at a woman who had been his nurse. ‘I hate that woman; for she changed me at nurse’” (15). Edgeworth offered a lengthy analysis of the humor of the statement: the man’s ire was fallacious, because the baby who was changed by his nurse and the man who was speaking were in essence two different people, as the adult speaking was imbued with adult consciousness. Edgeworth discussed the Lockian idea that identity, the “I” or “me,” is dependent on the ability to reason, which unfortunately I do not have the space to explicate at length.

notable Anglo-Irish writer, Maria Edgeworth,⁹ who published *Essay on Irish Bulls* in 1802, which discussed the sense of “monopolizing pride” that colored the English view on the rest of the world (14). Edgeworth notes that this sense of confidence, “which inspires one nation with the belief that all the rest of the world are barbarians, and speak barbarisms,” was bound up in the act of speaking (14). Edgeworth identifies how wielding language in specific ways was a necessary strategy for maintaining dominance within a colonial system:

[It] is evidently a very useful prejudice, which the English, with their usual good sense, have condescended to adopt from the Greeks and Romans. They have applied it judiciously to their treatment of France and Ireland. ... It is the refinement of this sort of policy, to instill into a nation the belief, that they are superior in intellectual abilities to their neighbours. Impute a peculiar incurable mental disease to a given people, show that it incapacitates them from speaking or acting with common sense, expose their infirmities continually to public ridicule, and in time probably this people, let their constitutional boldness be every so great, may be subjugated to that sense of inferiority, and to that acquiescence in a state of dependence, which is the necessary consequence of the conviction of imbecility. (14-15)

Edgeworth’s underlining of the language of colonial power is instructive on how we should view Cobbe’s rhetorical performances in the periodical press. Cobbe understood the language of colonial power and used it to advance her own imperialist rhetorics, rhetorics that questioned how society could be improved within the bounds of the hierarchy already in

⁹ Edgeworth’s father, Irish landowner Richard Lovell Edgeworth, is credited as co-author, though how much he actually contributed to the book is the subject of some debate.

place. Cobbe always displayed an interest in the welfare of societal others while also maintaining an interest in maintaining her own position within that hierarchy.

In the configuration Edgeworth described, the Irish are rendered as unable to function independently of the English, due to their undeveloped intellect. Six decades later, Cobbe's deceptively casual linking of the Irish and women illustrated how language functioned as a means of codifying hierarchies among social groups. "But to return to the women," Cobbe writes after a short paragraph describing the bull. What is seemingly a digression in Cobbe's train of thought is a strategic move to link the devaluing of women's speech to the devaluing of Irish speech. Through this systemic devaluation of their speech acts, the Irish and women are rendered inferior to the English man. Cobbe's compliment to the nimbleness of the Irish mind reveals her complicated position in the colonial hierarchy. As an Anglo-Irish woman, to commend the wit of the Irish man and to criticize the English man is a gesture of national solidarity *and* a feminist rebuttal. Her use of the Irish as a means to discuss the position of women forecasted her complicated positions in relation to the designations of gender and Irishness that she would negotiate throughout her writing career.

Cobbe's discussion of women's roles in the social science congresses strikes at the heart of the public discussion surrounding Victorian women's rhetorics. By openly addressing negative reception to women's public speech, Cobbe reveals what was at stake for women speaking and writing during the nineteenth century. I delineate her thoughts on this subject at length as they establish the tenor for my argument that the periodical press provided a safer space for women to speak about societal issues. Cobbe addresses the issues women needed to consider as they approached public speaking, in terms of what subjects they addressed and how they shaped their rhetorical performances:

If the woman choose a subject belonging especially to men's concerns; if she fail to bring forward something worth hearing; if her manner be dictatorial or presumptuous, laying down the law like a man, instead of appealing for it like a woman; if she have too feeble a voice to be heard; or too great nervousness to speak loud; in all these cases, we feel, she is in the wrong place. And still more decidedly, do we feel that in no arena of angry debate—no position in which, *if she were a man*, she might expect to meet public disapprobation and contention—has any right to be. (92, emphasis in original)

In the above passage, Cobbe chose a strategy of speaking to the middle, which she used when discussing a myriad of issues, including the Irish Question. Instead of strongly disputing all the points made by her opponent—in this case, those opposed to women speaking in public—she acknowledges moments of agreement, while also addressing the fundamental unfairness of the double-bind women orators experienced.

Cobbe, ever pragmatic, recognizes that women would need to conduct themselves in a traditionally authoritative manner in order to speak persuasively in the public sphere, while at the same time pointing out how difficult it was for women to tread the fine line between confident and aggressive. Cobbe believed women should be judged on the same merits as male rhetors: “In reality, nothing can be more ungenerous than the act of a woman by which she provokes opposition and disapproval as a man might do, and then appeals for defence [sic] and consideration as a woman” (92). But Cobbe shows a keen awareness that rhetorical realm was slanted in favor of men, flipping the common assumption that women speakers received special protection from negative backlash given their status as the weaker sex.

Instead she suggests that it was most often men who took for granted an exemption from criticism, due to their positions of power, power that women could not access:

But do the opponents of feminine public speaking wholly forget that by far the larger part of the addresses to which we all listen are made by *men* under circumstances which more effectually preclude reply, opposition, and the expression of disapproval, than we can require to guard even the silliest lady orators? Do not even the clergy of all denominations read to us, or speak to us, from their pulpits, in the enjoyment of the most sublime immunity from the chance of a groan or an ironical cheer, a reply that “that fact is not true” or “that argument is good for nothing?” (92-93, emphasis in original)

In “Social Science Congresses,” Cobbe was not only arguing for women’s presence within the burgeoning movement of social science congresses, she was also arguing for women to take a larger role as cultural commentators. Her essay is important evidence when considering women’s public speaking during the latter half of the nineteenth century, as Cobbe offers a justification for women’s participation in public speaking engagements. More widely, Cobbe was arguing for a place for women to speak credibly in public life, while acknowledging the limits on public oratory to achieve it. The place for women to speak most effectively, Cobbe seems to suggest, was the periodical press, and Cobbe used a periodical essay to delivery that message in order to prove her point. For a woman to even hope that her rhetorical performance would be judged on the same merits as a man, she should seek a platform that would emphasize her words and reputation, and not her gender.

COBBE’S JOURNALISM AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY WOMEN’S RHETORICS

In “Social Science Congresses, and Women’s Part in Them,” Cobbe enters a larger debate about women’s public expression. As Schroeder argues, “In the Victorian period, a woman’s speaking voice was thought to be naturally unfitted for public delivery. A ‘feminine’ voice ... was (and often remains) a distraction from, or negation of, the ‘content’ of her speech” (“Speaking Volumes” 98). Schroeder notes that even nonradical women faced a difficult reception and cites Cobbe as an example: “Even public speakers associated with a more moderate or ‘polite’ tone ... routinely received a mixture of moral censure and ridicule, causing them to question the value of publicity—both print and platform—for the feminist cause” (“Self-teaching” 149).

Much of the current scholarship into Victorian women’s rhetorics has focused on women’s oratorical performances in an attempt to rectify what scholars have seen as an over-reliance on printed texts to gauge women’s rhetorical practices. In *Well-Tempered Women: Nineteenth-Century Temperance Rhetoric*, Mattingly argues that women writing for publication were taking less of a risk than women who spoke in public: “Often, women who spoke at conventions were more likely to be progressive than those who sought the relatively safe space of the written word” (7). Lindal Buchanan, in *Regendering Delivery*, points to the manuals of rhetorical instruction as evidence that women and girls faced a better reception through the printed word than through oratory, as much more space was devoted to *pronuntiatio*, which encompasses the voice, than *actio*, which encompasses gesture and movement, suggesting that “women’s disembodied or domestically bound voices became acceptable long before their public bodies did” (37). When women did speak within the public sphere, they necessarily had to adopt a softer, more conversational tone than most male rhetors.

Even women writing during the 1800s were painfully aware of the public speaking/private writing paradigm. In *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, American writer Margaret Fuller uses the voice of the conservative male to illustrate women's limited rhetorical agency within the public sphere: "That can never be necessary,' cry the other side. 'All men are privately influenced by women; each has his wife, sister, or female friends, and is too much biased by these relations to fail of representing their interests; and, if this is not enough, *let them propose and enforce their wishes with the pen*'" (34, my emphasis). Buchanan describes "feminine" rhetoric during the nineteenth century as being particularly conversational and soft, while "masculine" rhetoric was authoritarian and more bombastic: there was also room for emotional display in women's rhetoric, while men's rhetoric was seen as more measured (and therefore, objective). Buchanan argues that feminine rhetoric was a more persuasive tactic for women during the nineteenth century and that women who adopted a more masculine style were marginalized, their messages often disregarded. It is the women rhetors who spoke more forcefully (and thus, in a more masculine style) who are studied by scholars today, while more traditionally feminine rhetors have been forgotten.

Cobbe's rhetorics present a third possibility between masculine and feminine. In "Speaking Volumes: Victorian Feminism and the Appeal of Public Discussion," Schroeder noted Cobbe's ability to present controversial topics in a seemingly noncontroversial manner and her occupation of an alternatively gendered space: "For Cobbe, there seemed to be a middle register and a 'right place' for feminist speech that was neither male nor female" (110). Though Schroeder does not use the term "androgynous," I think it's an apt description of Cobbe's rhetorics, as it encompasses Cobbe's position as an independent (read: unmarried to a man), lesbian woman and her negotiation of this complicated position within the

periodical press. Cobbe was a woman rhetor who used both feminine and masculine styles in her periodical writings, always adopting an objective, high-minded tone, yet continually using personal experiences to build her argument. And while she was always straightforward about her opinion, she continually sought common ground with her opponents, always noting the points where their arguments converged.

More accurately, Cobbe's rhetorical performances fell between two dichotomous styles of delivery: the assertive "masculine" style and the passive "feminine" style. I use quotes around those terms advisedly because I want to trouble easy dichotomies of "masculine" and "feminine" rhetoric. I do not want to discount the importance of these labels: they have been a persuasive means of celebrating women's strengths as rhetors and as a means of denigrating them. They also serve as a useful starting place for alternative theories of women's rhetorical practices. I examine how the genre of the periodical essay allows Cobbe to use both traditionally masculine and feminine rhetorical styles: she speaks from her lived experiences as a woman, yet cloaked her personal voice in the objective, "default masculine" editorial style of the middle-class English periodical. Cobbe's ability to speak effectively from her marginalized gendered position within the periodical press also facilitates her ability to speak from her marginalized national position.

CONVERSATION IN THE PARLOR: THE VICTORIAN PERIODICAL AS A RHETORICAL SPACE FOR WOMEN

Because the cultural prescriptions for female behavior had so much power in determining where and how a woman could speak in a given space, conceptualizations of space are important to discussions of women's rhetorics. Because nineteenth century periodical culture offered a cacophony of voices and viewpoints, an organizing metaphor

would help us draw together periodical studies and rhetorical studies and offer us a way of understanding the periodical press as a rhetorical space for Victorian writers. Kenneth Burke famously described discourse as entering a parlor where a lively party is going on:

When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. . . . You listen for a while, until you decide you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you. (*Philosophy* 110-1)

His parlor metaphor is a fitting description of the Victorian periodical press, where Cobbe “put in her oar” on a multitude of subjects in a multitude of journals. Anderson described Burke’s own theoretical struggle with the concept of identity: “His problem of identity thus asks for something more ambitious than solutions. It asks for our continued interest in probing human symbol use to find the spots where this ‘problem’ arises, where grammatical, rhetorical, and symbolic transformations of identity can and do transpire” (33). The Victorian periodical is such a spot, but Burke’s parlor does not factor in the different ways that women had to navigate physical and metaphorical spaces that constitute rhetorical space.

In *The Gendered Pulpit*, Roxanne Mountford discusses how physical spaces designed for men impacted women’s entry into the masculine realm of preaching. Rather than focus on metaphorical spaces, Mountford looks to the “rooms, lecterns, auditoriums, platforms, confession booths, and classrooms, all of which are interpreted by participants through social expectations but which also have material dimensions that affect what we do there” (17). In *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life, 1866-1910*, Nan Johnson views space as

helping shape the rhetor's persona: "rhetorical theories and rhetorical practices" are "cultural sites where we can observe the interdependence of codes of rhetorical performance and the construction of conventional identities, particularly but not exclusively gender identities" (1). For Johnson, the rhetorical space of the parlor is both the literal space mostly occupied by women and the powerful cultural idea of that space. My use of "space" is guided by Mountford's and Johnson's theories but is more amorphous and flexible, sometimes a literal place but often a metaphorical place. A periodical is a site where the literal meets the metaphorical: it's a material collection of multiple genres of writing and a figurative meeting place for writers with multiple points of view.

Hilary Fraser, Stephanie Green, and Judith Johnston describe how the tumultuous decades of the Victorian period gave rise to the periodical, a conduit for multiple voices speaking on a wide range of issues:

These were unstable and transitional times, when the old absolutist certainties were giving way to a more relativist culture which encouraged the proliferation and diversification of perspectives on the modern world. This was reflected in the generic development of the periodical press in the course of the century, from the small number of monumental quarterlies which may be said to characterise [sic] its beginnings to the vast welter of slighter and more ephemeral monthlies which typify the magazine culture of its end. (3)

Fraser, Green, and Johnston noted that it is "de rigueur" for journalists to speak from their own ideological positions: "Whether their platform was the Liberal *Edinburgh Review* or the Tory *Quarterly*, or later the radical *Westminster Review* or the feminist *Victoria Magazine*, Victorian journalists typically employed an explicitly polemical discourse which the practice

of anonymity only encouraged” (3). This veritable cacophony of clashing viewpoints anticipated the theoretical parlor Burke imagined in the mid-twentieth century. The Burkean parlor seems oddly public for a space that is typically viewed as a room within the home. What is missing from Burke’s metaphor is any discussion of the parlor as a traditionally feminized and, thus, private space.

As Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald and Johnson point out, the parlor is often viewed as a particularly feminine space, given its ties to the domestic sphere. Even when women were not writing from the parlor, they often evoked it in their public rhetorics in order to justify their speech or writing. For women writers, the periodical press functioned as either a single-gendered space, such as *The English Woman’s Journal*, that was composed of an audience that reflected their values and experiences (with perhaps a few sympathetic men, as well) or as a space where the genders mixed, the attitudes and ideologies a bit more difficult to deduce. While Cobbe wrote for both of these spaces, she concentrated most of her efforts on the “promiscuous” audiences of the miscellany journal. While Burke’s parlor does not factor in gendered conceptualizations of space, the discussion of the parlor within women’s rhetorics has perhaps overemphasized the connection between feminization and privacy. In her discussion of American Victorian middle-class culture, Karen Halttunen offers a description of the parlor that is useful to my examination of women’s writing in the periodical press. While Halttunen views the parlor as a feminine space, she describes the parlor as an interstitial space, “a third social sphere, lying between the public world of strangers ... and the private family circle” (59). It was in this third space, which was both public and private, that women often performed their rhetoric: “Within the cult of

domesticity, the parlor provided the woman of the house with a ‘cultural podium’¹⁰ from which she was to exert her moral influence over American society” (Halttunen 59).

Where my project departs from Johnson’s and Halttunen’s is that I am not as concerned with the literal space of the periodical press; rather I am concerned with the metaphorical space of the periodical press, in how it functioned as a site where multiple arguments circulated. What Halttunen’s analysis lends to my argument is her construction of the parlor as a space between the putative danger of the public arena and the supposed safety of the family home, enabling them to address the public without the problems that would arise from inserting their female bodies into public space. The metaphorical parlor of the periodical press represented a borderland for women writers between the private (letters and journals) and the public (oratory). Cobbe navigated this borderland with dexterity, which is unsurprising given her hyphenated identity that only began with her complicated nationality.

*CONSIDERING THE RHETORICS OF THE PRIVILEGED: WHY COBBE’S ANSWERING
OF THE IRISH QUESTION MERITS RHETORICAL STUDY*

My project on Cobbe converges and diverges with current studies in women’s rhetorics in important ways. My project is most informed by research done in the fields of nineteenth-century women’s rhetorics. Because women’s rhetorics (and rhetorical studies in general) has been a mostly American discipline thus far, early work into women’s rhetorical acts has focused on American women, usually women who were activists in favor of women’s suffrage and abolition. I intend to widen our focus by taking a more transatlantic view of women speaking and writing during the nineteenth century. Cobbe is a perfect case study for this kind of endeavor because she spoke on behalf of many of the same issues as

¹⁰ Halttunen credits Kathryn K. Sklar with defining the parlor as a cultural podium for women.

American women speaking and writing at the same time, yet from a raced and classed perspective that is distinctly different.

My inclusion of Cobbe in the rhetorical tradition should raise important questions. Why study the rhetorical performances of yet another woman of privilege, of the same religious and ethnic background of many of the women we have already recovered, who even used her position to argue for the continued subjugation of a nation and its people under colonial rule? My answer is multi-layered. First, a woman's relative privilege often enabled her rhetorical performances, giving her the time, space, and education needed for the creation of written texts and speeches. In the most practical sense, the rhetorical products of Victorian middle-and-upper class women comprise accessible materials that are available for study.

Though Cobbe is not mentioned in Heidi Hansson's collection, *New Contexts: Reframing Nineteenth-Century Irish Women's Prose*, Hansson's discussion of the characteristics of many Victorian Irish women writers could easily include her: "Women in nineteenth-century Ireland normally spoke from a position of privilege. Like most women writers in the past, they were located in the middle of the class structure, enjoying the independence of the middle and upper classes and usually the privilege of English language and culture *as members of the Anglo-Irish collective*" (10, my emphasis). The fact that many of the Irish women writing during the nineteenth century were Anglo-Irish has often been "a sufficient motive for ignoring their work since it is easy to see them as simply an extension of the colonial power, if not actively practising colonialism, at least condoning it and enjoying its rewards" (Hansson 10).

My reclamation of Cobbe is also my attempt to position the periodical essay as an important genre in the study of women's writing. The novel and poetry genres have received

the bulk of critical attention from scholars looking at the nineteenth century in Great Britain and America. However, other genres provide information and insight that is just as important and illustrative in different ways. Hansson argued that we must read nineteenth-century women writers “contextually”: if their works were important in their own time, they should be important to today’s scholars, even if our standards for what can be counted as “good literature” are much different (5-6). Cobbe’s essays reached a wide audience from Great Britain to America, meaning that she found a willing audience with a wide range of her contemporaries. If we ignore Cobbe’s work due to her privileged class position and choice of genre, we lose access to a viewpoint that many Victorians considered important to their understanding of the world around them.

Part of that understanding will require an open mind toward Cobbe’s imperialist ideology, which is a problematic position among twenty-first century scholars examining her work through a postcolonial lens. Though Cobbe’s position is an unpopular one, it is worth researching in order to glean a more accurate picture of the multiple perspectives that were circulating during this time period. After all, there would be no Irish nationalism if there were no imperialist ideology to dislodge, no “tiny and fantastically privileged minority” that owned most of the land and reaped much of Ireland’s material bounty (Garvin 19). Why should this privileged minority continue to receive the bulk of scholarly attention, as well? Scholars of Irish literature, such as Emer Nolan, have asked a similar question about the attention paid to the writing of the statistically small minority of the Protestant Ascendancy at the expense of the writing done by the Catholic majority (xi). Cobbe does not fit into the paradigm identified by Nolan in important ways. She did not write fiction and has thus received little attention from scholars of Irish literature. In many ways, she has also passed as

an English writer until the last two decades, meaning her work has not been regularly included in a larger tradition of Irish writing or closely examined as evidence of a particular Irish point of view.

One important example of how Cobbe was treated as an Irish writer is her inclusion in the fourth volume of the *Cabinet of Irish Literature* anthology that was first published in 1879. Though one of the editors, T.P. O'Connor, expressed concerns about Cobbe's focus on women's rights, he saw fit to include her essay "Chivalry of the Period," reprinted from her collection *Re-Echoes*. However, when nationalist poet and novelist Katherine Tynan edited a new edition of the four volumes of *Cabinet* in 1902, Cobbe's work disappeared from the table of contents. Margaret Kelleher noted that several writers were deleted from Tynan's edition to make way for newer writers (83). Perhaps they were also victims of Tynan's focus on the genres of poetry and the novel at the expense of what she termed "dry-as-dust" oratory and scholarly writing (qtd. in Kelleher 85). Tynan's cutting of Cobbe could also signal "a political and denominational bias," as other imperialist writers were also cut (Kelleher 84). Cobbe's inclusion in and later removal from the *Cabinet* signals her contested identity as an Irish writer. My project not only reclaims Cobbe as a woman rhetor, but as an Irish writer. Examining how that imperialist ideology informed the rhetorics of one woman speaking and writing during this age adds to our body of knowledge of Irish writing.

MAKING A CASE FOR COBBE'S INCLUSION IN WOMEN'S RHETORICS

In "Telling Evidence: Rethinking What Counts as Rhetoric," published in 2002, Carol Mattingly weighed in on an ongoing debate within women's rhetorics on what kind of research we should be doing within our relatively new field, pointing out in concrete terms just how much time we have devoted to the study of male canonical rhetors: "Aristotle, 2300;

Augustine, 1600; Ramus, 430; Blair, 200” (99). The approximately three decades we’ve spent studying the written and oral rhetorics of women obviously does not favorably compare to the centuries we have devoted to the study of men’s rhetorics. Mattingly’s article is an appeal to scholars of women’s rhetorics to take more time gathering and studying the primary texts of women, women who may not have been seen as rhetors in previous generations: “Since traditional definitions of rhetoric have been constructed around notions of masculine rhetoric, many rhetorically sophisticated women simply do not fit neatly into the rhetorical tradition. What has counted for evidence fails to recognize women’s excellence” (“Telling Evidence” 104).

Mattingly argues that we are still at the recovery stage of our endeavors, which means we need to focus our efforts on discovering the texts of women that have been neglected by traditional rhetorical studies and are at risk for being lost to history. According to Mattingly, we are not yet at a point when we can theorize a concrete, single methodology of research, as to do so would potentially shut down the recovery efforts that are currently being made. We also cannot treat the rhetoric of women the same way that we have traditionally treated the rhetoric of men because societal expectations of women’s oratory and writing have been so different. That also means that our research methods and what we consider as evidence must necessarily be different. Mattingly’s charge is clear:

We must immerse ourselves in a broad range of historical texts, across genres, including but not limited to texts of speeches, to gain a clearer understanding of both the politically active women in our history and the evidence that demonstrates their facility with rhetorical matters. . . . We must seek new

perspectives, and a fuller examination of extant texts can help us do so.

(“Telling Evidence” 105)

Cobbe’s periodical writings on the Irish Question demonstrate one example of what texts Mattingly wants us to recover and claim as evidence of women’s rhetorical facility and political engagement. Cobbe’s work represents a “new perspective,” one of many, that would only add to our knowledge base about women’s rhetorics.

As a rhetor, Cobbe was both an orator and a writer, though she privileged her writing over her oratory. I privilege her periodical works not because I believe that writing is more important than speech, but because Cobbe’s writing is what is available to me as a scholar in 2012 (and I have yet to uncover any evidence that Cobbe addressed the Irish Question within her oratory). In “Speaking Volumes,” Schroeder notes the difficulty of studying the speech of Victorian women due to the “impossibility of recovering the actual sound of the voices of most women speakers” (98). Because of the lack of sound recordings of nineteenth-century women rhetors, we must rely on their printed texts and written accounts of their speeches, as well as interpretations of their speech by their audiences. Cobbe’s role as a public speaker will necessarily be subsumed under her role as a journalist in this dissertation due to both practical *and* thematic considerations. The genre of the periodical essay allowed women to “say” in print what they might not have been able to say in speech.

Though I focus solely on Cobbe, my intent is not to reify the masculinist privileging of the individual that informed rhetorical studies until the intervention of feminist critics. Of course, feminist rhetorical studies has not been immune from privileging the individual as the sole site of rhetorical agency. While I focus on Cobbe as an individual who was in many ways exceptional, I also point out the many ways that Cobbe was *not* exceptional, where she

was representative of a larger group. As my project is in part a reclamation project, it is necessary to elucidate the reasons Cobbe was an important rhetor during the nineteenth century. Due to the sheer number of Cobbe's essays on multiple subjects, and the relative dearth of scholarly focus on those essays, I need to hone in on Cobbe at this moment of recovery. Joining Cobbe in conversation with women of similar position and nationality is beyond the scope of this study. But I hope to start a discussion on Cobbe's similarities to other women writing during the nineteenth century. Just as I find myself continually asking the question, "But what about Frances Power Cobbe?" as I read scholarly works on women's rhetorics or Victorian Irish women's writing, it is my wish that other scholars will read my work on Cobbe and the rhetorics of her periodical writings and ask the same question about other largely forgotten women writing during the nineteenth century.

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE: THE DEBATE IN WOMEN'S RHETORICS BETWEEN FIGURE STUDIES AND COLLECTIVE PRACTICES

A single focus on Cobbe's work does not mean that I intend to ignore the societal forces that shaped that work. Anderson's work on persuasive identity construction in *Identity's Strategy* offers one way to bridge a growing divide between figure studies and studies of collective practices because he asserts that what we call the individual is composed by a multitude of rhetorical choices and social forces. My project enters into a debate over research methodology within women's rhetorics that has been ongoing for almost two decades, beginning with the 1989 publication of Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's *Man Cannot Speak for Her: A Critical Study of Early Feminist Rhetoric*, a two-volume study of texts by women writing and speaking during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in America. The volumes offer both an anthology and critical analyses of women's civic rhetorics during

this time period, focusing mainly on the women's suffrage movement, briefly touching upon movements that fed into and informed it, such as the temperance and abolition movements. *Man Cannot Speak for Her* functions as an example of feminist "recovery" work: Campbell was attempting to make a space within the established rhetorical canon for women by identifying what she terms "key texts," texts that may have been long extant, but had not been considered as "rhetoric" due to their subject matter and the gender of their authors. *Man Cannot Speak for Her* is, above all, designed to be instrumental: women's rhetorics scholars are meant to put it to use as a compilation of primary sources, as a means of positioning women within the rhetorical canon, and as a means of extrapolating theories of women's rhetorics that can still be used today.

However, not everyone thought that Campbell's methodology was the best way to enter into a discipline that has been dominated by men and their writing and speaking for millennia. It is this instrumentality that concerned Barbara Biesecker the most in her article "Coming to Terms with Recent Attempts to Write Women into the History of Rhetoric," published in 1992. Biesecker argues that Campbell, rather than "subvert" our "received tradition" of rhetoric, is attempting to "supplement" it by adding notable women, who were inherently different from other women because they were speaking in the public sphere (140). Biesecker resists Campbell's call to simply add women to our accepted rhetorical tradition and instead urges us to do something much more difficult: completely re-imagine how we perform feminist rhetorical methodology. While Biesecker views Campbell's work as a "landmark" (144), she suggests that Campbell is reinforcing masculinist views of canon formation by focusing on the individual contributions of "token" women, women who have been approved by male gatekeepers as being somehow above the rest of their sex; this has the

effect of breaking bonds between women and limiting their capability of communal action. Biesecker criticizes Campbell's work as being too focused on the individualistic and positivist, as Campbell looks for individual rhetors and theoretical patterns to emerge from history according to the criteria she brings to her research.

Biesecker expresses distrust about using lived experiences "as the basis for a theory of change" (152). Rather than from lived experiences, theories of change should be constructed through a complex network of social "forces." Biesecker positioned herself as a poststructuralist critic, relying on the ideas of Foucault and Derrida in order to disrupt the idea of the stable "self" that work such as Campbell's relied upon: instead, "subjects are effects of their sociopolitical, historical, economic, and cultural contexts" (154). In Biesecker's poststructuralist framework, the "act" is what is important, not the actor. The "self" is not the sole maker of meaning; the self is constructed by a number of different discourses. Biesecker suggests that researchers in women's rhetorics revisit the idea of *techne*, derived from the Greek term *tekhné*, which can be translated as "the art" (Pernot x). However, the ancient definition encompasses much more than our limited sense of the term: *techne* is "a reasoned method, a system of rules meant for practical use, a technical production, and a craft" (Pernot x).

Biesecker discusses how the study of *techne* helps us come to an understanding of how rhetors both form and are formed by their cultures, and how they function within such a framework:

[B]y scrupulously working within and against the grain of the word's *historically constituted* semantic field, *techne* can be used to refer to a kind of "getting through" or ad hoc "making do" by a subject whose resources are

necessarily located in and circumscribed by the field within she operates, but whose enunciation, in always and already exceeding and falling short of its intending subject, harbors within it the possibility of disrupting, fragmenting, and altering the horizon of human action out of which it emerges. (155, emphasis mine)

While Biesecker offers an important critique of recovery efforts that simply add women to a masculine rhetorical canon without complicating the very concept of “canon” at all, her theory is purposefully abstract, leaving others to provide concrete examples.

I propose Cobbe’s imperialist rhetorics in the periodical press as an example of how to bridge the divide between figure studies and the study of collective practices. Anderson’s theory of first-person constitution, “how individuals constitute their identities in texts,” depends upon the rhetorical product to generate the rhetor’s identity (38). The periodical press was the means Cobbe used to bring her rhetorical identity into being. The intersection of rhetorical theory and periodical studies provides an ideal means of studying how *techne* of a rhetor functions within, in Biesecker’s terms, a “historically constituted” field. In her work, *Educating the Proper Woman Reader: Victorian Family Literary Magazines and the Cultural Health of the Nation*, Jennifer Phegley raises the same concerns about privileging the individual author in the burgeoning field of periodical studies:

A disciplinary emphasis on individuality and solitary authorship encouraged literary scholars to neglect the highly communal and eclectic form of the periodical. Even today, many scholars of periodicals feel the need to justify their work by organizing it around canonical literary figures or focusing on

periodicals only as they enrich our understanding of already revered writers.

(11)

But periodicals can also be used as a means to discover what ideas were circulating within the larger culture, and what role periodicals — and their writers — took in shaping those ideas. My project is informed by Biesecker and Phegley’s concerns about the reification of the individual, canonized author, yet I recognize that the idea of individual agency was persuasive in the Victorian culture and continues to be persuasive in our own. To deny that women have the power to construct a persuasive rhetorical self is to deny them agency in the face of multiple social and historical forces. Even a brief study of the women who have been reclaimed as part of the rhetorical tradition tells us that such a denial is inaccurate and insulting. A study of Cobbe’s rhetorical identity avoids the trap of overemphasizing the individual as the source of meaning, instead examining how the individual is composed by her responses to multiple forces. In each of my chapters, I examine those forces, whether they come in the form of editorial style, popular genre conventions, historical events, or personal circumstances.

CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

In Chapter Two, “‘The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland’: Cobbe’s Strategic Use of Rhetorical Silence,” I delve deeper into the question of Cobbe’s complicated identity as an Anglo-Irish, lesbian woman, and how she negotiates this position by entering into the debate on Celticism through her essay “The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland” in the December 1877 issue of *Cornhill Magazine*. Cobbe uses silence as a strategy to build a persuasive identity in order to address the various audiences of the *Cornhill*, a general interest journal addressed to a wide audience. Though Cobbe must use the “default” masculine voice of the

periodical house style—disinterested and cool—she relies on her own experience of female marriage to a member of the Welsh gentry to build her argument that Wales is a locus of civility in the Celtic world. Speaking from this position of civility enables her to make an imperialist argument that would surely gain a receptive hearing from a middle-class, English audience. However, the means through which she gained her deep knowledge of Wales and its people—her experience of female marriage—would have faced a much less certain reception.

In Chapter Three, “‘The Fenians of Ballyboggmucky’ and *The Life of Frances Power Cobbe by Herself: The Intersection of Journalism and Autobiography*,” I explore how Cobbe continues the tradition of Anglo-Irish autobiography within the periodical press by using her autobiography as a rhetorical strategy to build her ethos as a commentator on the Irish Question. Using personal experience as evidence was a common rhetorical strategy for women during the nineteenth century, and continues to be a popular strategy for women rhetors today. Examining Cobbe’s autobiographical and journalistic writings will also help forge connections between the disciplines of women’s rhetorics and periodical studies, as it will show how Cobbe negotiates the genre conventions of journalism while still writing in a “personal” style.

In Chapter Four, “Cobbe as a ‘Stranger-Guest’: Travel-writing as Political Commentary in ‘Ireland and Her Exhibition in 1865’ and ‘Life in Donegal,’” I use Susan Jarratt’s feminist reconceptualization of the theories of sophistic rhetoric, specifically Jarratt’s connection between the “stranger-guest” sophists and women rhetors, to explore Cobbe’s intersection of travel-writing and journalism. In two articles that Cobbe published in 1865, she creates the persona of experienced traveler, choosing not to identify herself as

distinctly Irish or even Anglo-Irish. I draw connections between journalism and travel writing, revealing where Cobbe's periodical writings offer a compelling convergence between the two. I also connect Cobbe's imperialist rhetorics to Susan Jarratt's feminist reconceptualization of sophistic rhetoric, which allows fluidity between ideological and geographical positions. I show how Cobbe uses the ambiguity of sophistic rhetoric and the objective tone of print journalism in order to create a disinterested persona that could argue persuasively for England's continued rule over Ireland.

In Chapter Five, "'The Fenian Idea' and 'Ireland for the Irish': How Cobbe Negotiates Competing Definitions of Irish Identity" I explore how Cobbe negotiates two periodicals aimed at two different audiences, the former an American audience, the latter an English audience, by performing an ambiguously gendered form of rhetoric. Lindal Buchanan argues that nineteenth-century rhetoric was gendered as male, characterized as being agonistic, forceful, and impersonal (the latter feature marking its similarity to the "default masculinity" mentioned above), or as female, characterized as being conciliatory, conversational, and emotive. Cobbe's initial concession to the correctness of some of her opponents' points may initially mark her rhetorics as feminine, but her then point-by-point refutation of their arguments may mark her as a distinctly masculine rhetor. By striking the midpoint between masculine and feminine, Cobbe presented a particularly androgynous form of rhetoric and provides a new model for us as we continue to reclaim nineteenth-century women as rhetors.

In Chapter 6, "Re-positioning Frances Power Cobbe: A Move Toward A Transnational View of Nineteenth-Century Women's Rhetorics," I conclude my project by discussing more fully Cobbe's influence on America, making the case for a more

transatlantic focus within the field of women's rhetorics. Theorizing Cobbe as a global rhetor helps expand our vision of the networks and contexts of women's rhetorics in the nineteenth century. My project has focused on two questions that circulated widely in the nineteenth-century, the Irish Question and the Woman Question, and how Cobbe fashioned persuasive identities in response to those questions. My conclusion lays the groundwork for discerning the multiple identities that Cobbe created in response to many other questions that were asked during this time period.

CHAPTER TWO

“THE CELT OF WALES AND THE CELT OF IRELAND”: COBBE’S STRATEGIC USE
OF RHETORICAL SILENCE

In Cobbe’s autobiography, she recounts a meeting that would change the course of the second half of her life:

One day when I had been lunching at her house, Miss Cushman¹¹ asked whether I would drive with her in her brougham to call on a friend of Mrs. Somerville, who had particularly desired that she and I should meet,—a Welsh lady, Miss Lloyd, of Hengwrt. . . . We happily found Miss Lloyd, busy in her sculptor’s studio over a model of her Arab horse. . . . Then began an acquaintance, which was further improved two years later when Miss Lloyd came to meet and help me when I was a cripple . . . and from that time, now more than thirty years ago, she and I have lived together. Of a friendship like this, which has been to my later life what my mother’s affection was to my youth, *I shall not be expected to say more.* (V2: 359, emphasis mine)

Cobbe mostly succeeded in not “saying more” about the woman who would be her companion for the next four decades of her life. Cobbe was circumspect when it came to Lloyd, only mentioning her in personal letters and her autobiography, never in her public writing. Cobbe’s relative silence belied how important Lloyd was in her life. Cobbe met Lloyd in 1862, during Cobbe’s voyage out from Newbridge after the death of her father.

¹¹ Charlotte Cushman was one of the richest and most famous American actresses of the nineteenth century, though she spent most of her life in England and Italy (Marcus 197). Playing Romeo was her most acclaimed role (Marcus 197). She also lived a fairly open life as a lesbian, having domestic partnerships she termed marriages with feminist author Matilda Hayes and sculptor Emma Stebbins (Marcus 197).

Lloyd was in Rome working at her sculpture, “without any family member or chaperone,” making her as independent as Cobbe (*Frances Power Cobbe* 125). Where Cobbe was round and jovial, Lloyd was “thin, intense, [and] dark” (*Frances Power Cobbe* 125). There is not much evidence surrounding Lloyd’s sculpting career, though the fact that one of her submissions, *Horses at Play*, was accepted into the annual Royal Academy of Arts exhibition in 1865 proves she had some prowess (*Frances Power Cobbe* 154). However, it seems that Lloyd’s sculpting career never came to the prominence of her partner’s writing career, or at least it was never as lucrative.

Because Lloyd came when Cobbe was at a crossroads between her past as the domestic manager of her father’s estate and her future as a professional writer, Lloyd represented Cobbe’s transition from being a citizen of Ireland to being a citizen of Great Britain and even the world. While Lloyd represented a widening of possibilities in Cobbe’s life, Cobbe never left her class associations completely behind, beginning her life and ending it in a Big House, the first owned by her father in Ireland, the second by Lloyd in Wales. Though she owned neither house, Cobbe’s labor had helped sustain them both. During her time in Ireland, her domestic management helped her father’s estate when her mother took ill. After retiring to Wales, she and Mary were making arrangements to rent out Lloyd’s house and live in a smaller, less expensive cottage when a group of London anti-vivisectionists organized to elicit donations for a retirement annuity for Cobbe, allowing the pair to live out the rest of their lives in Lloyd’s home, Hengwrt. Because Cobbe did not begin her autobiography until she moved permanently to Wales, Hengwrt figures prominently in her thinking as she constructs her life:

The friendly reader who has travelled with me through the journey of my three-score years and ten, from my singularly happy childhood in my old home at Newbridge to this far bourne on the road, will now, I hope, leave me with kindly wishes for a peaceful evening, and a not-too-distant curfew bell; in this dear old house, and *with my beloved friend for companion*. The view of Hengwrt, which forms the frontispiece of this volume, gives a good idea of the house itself, but can convey none of the beauty of the rivers, woods, and mountains all round. No spot in the kingdom . . . unites so many elements of beauty as this part of Wales. (VS: 645-646, emphasis mine)

Like Newbridge, Hengwrt became another reference point from which Cobbe viewed the structure of Victorian society. From her Welsh vantage point, Cobbe weighed in on the Irish Question, organizing the colonized spaces of Wales and Ireland within Great Britain. Though Cobbe wrote her essay before her permanent removal to north Wales in 1884, she and Lloyd spent considerable time there throughout the year.

Whether the act of writing the *Cornhill* essay “The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland” occurred in London or Llanelltyd, Cobbe spoke from the location of small Welsh village where she and Lloyd spent their happiest hours. The essay recounts Cobbe’s experience at an eisteddfod, a traditional Welsh contest where singers and orators competed for prizes. The essay is a blend of travelogue and autobiography, topics I will discuss more fully in later chapters. What I explore in this chapter is Cobbe’s strategy of persuasive identity construction in a rhetorical context that compelled her to remain silent about issues that were central to her life. Cobbe’s otherness in the context of the *Cornhill* is bound up in her gender and her lesbianism because she was speaking as a woman in response to the

rhetorics of a powerful man, Matthew Arnold, using the experiences that stemmed from her domestic partnership with a woman.

In this chapter, I describe the ways that Cobbe used her experiences that were a direct result of female marriage as a means of making an imperialist argument. However, those direct experiences are mediated through several layers of editorial constrictions, audience expectations, and self-editing. Cobbe uses Wales to describe her ideal vision of the United Kingdom: England would remain in power, while the Celtic countries could exist as subsidiary spaces. In “The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland,” the location of Wales symbolizes a “third space” between Ireland and England, where Cobbe could speak powerfully from her position as cultural “other.” This chapter examines how Cobbe used her otherness as a strategy to fashion a rhetorical self that could argue persuasively for Ireland’s continued colonization in the face of the nationalist movement within Ireland. I begin by intersecting theories of identity construction with theories of rhetorical silence. I then offer a brief history of Victorian female marriage, connecting it to a more specific history of Anglo-Irish female marriage in Wales and its connection to imperialism. I then offer a brief history of the Celticist discourses of Matthew Arnold and Ernest Renán before concluding with a discussion of Cobbe’s imperialist construction of Wales as the ideal Celtic country.

Cobbe’s “The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland” raised the issue of female domestic partnerships by not directly raising the issue of female domestic partnerships. Instead, Cobbe relies on her ethos as a commentator on the Irish Question and her knowledge of her audience to evoke certain feelings about Wales, to locate a specific kind of civility within Wales, a civility that has everything to do with the position of women in British society. But it is in such a reading that Cobbe’s choice of genre obfuscates instead of

enlightens. Though Susan Hamilton does not specifically address “The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland,” she provided a queer reading of Cobbe’s “What Shall We Do With Our Old Maids?” which lends much to my analysis of Cobbe’s *Cornhill* essay. “What Shall We Do With Our Old Maids?,” published in *Fraser’s Magazine* in 1862, was Cobbe’s answer to William Rathbone Greg’s essay “Why Are Women Redundant?,” which argued for the transportation of single women to the colonies so that they might become a useful tool in spreading English influence by marrying Englishmen and creating more English children. Hamilton argues that Cobbe necessarily had to use oblique language to address the subject of female marriage in the periodical press:

If the opacity of Cobbe’s vision here obstructs a ready-made queer reading of her work, we need also to remember that this opacity or ambiguity is, at least in part, the opacity of this kind of source. What we can read in an article published in a prestigious, established journal is necessarily less intimate, and so differently rewarding, than what we might be able to read in a diary or a letter to an intimate friend. In Cobbe’s case, such intimate or personal sources do not exist. (40)

Hamilton argues that Cobbe used her experience of female marriage as an ethos-building move in order to comment persuasively on the inequities in marriages involving men and women. Cobbe’s rhetorical strategy in her periodical essay is much different than her strategy in her autobiography, as she does not, or cannot, raise the issue of her relationship with Lloyd at all.

THE INTERSECTION OF IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND RHETORICAL SILENCE

I opened this chapter by quoting Cobbe's autobiography because it supplies the information that is missing from her journalism and thus, is an important source of how she shaped persuasive identities in each of her periodical writings. Though he focuses on autobiography as a genre, Dana Anderson's theory of persuasive identity construction helps us fill in the gaps left between the conventions of the periodical essay and autobiography. In *Identity's Strategy*, Anderson notes that rhetors quite necessarily could not narrate all the events of their lives and how those events shaped their rhetorical transformations (74). Anderson seems to suggest that the information left out by his subjects is barely worth mentioning, because if the reader does not or cannot know the missing information, the information itself does nothing to persuade the reader that the writer is a credible source and is, therefore, unimportant in the overall scheme of identity construction as a persuasive strategy. I do the inverse in this chapter, arguing that what the writer leaves out of her self-construction can be as meaningful as what she includes. As Buchanan and others have argued, when it comes to the rhetorics of nineteenth-century women, *how* a rhetorical performance was constructed is as important as the performance itself. For Victorian women rhetors, by looking at the information they leave out, we can determine their different strategies when speaking from positions that were considered less powerful.

In this chapter, we will look specifically at what Cobbe left out of her self-construction in her journalism on the Irish Question: her life-time partnership with another woman. Yet this information informed Cobbe's shaping of her rhetorical identity as an expert on Ireland in ways that I delineate in this chapter. I use "The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland" as a means of examining how Cobbe's lesbianism informed her positionality within Victorian culture. Cobbe's "privileged otherness"—as an Anglo-Irish lesbian—allowed her a

unique perspective on the conflict between Ireland and England because she used her privileged position at the margins as a means of building her ethos. Her privileged position allowed her entry into the public sphere of journalism; however, her marginalized position meant she had to construct her authorial persona with care, emphasizing points of commonality with her audience, while remaining silent on any point that may be perceived as a mark of difference.

In the case of Cobbe, the medium is just as important as the message. Hamilton argues that scholars interested in nineteenth-century feminism have focused on writing that is overtly feminist in tone and intent. Such an approach, according to Hamilton, is limiting both in terms of content and material. By solely focusing on writing that directly appeals for legislative changes in the status of women, such as pamphlets and speeches, we have left out other kinds of writing. The periodical press has “been either overlooked or mined simply for ‘content’ and statements of feminist objectives, rather than understood as forms of writing shaped by location and address” (Hamilton 2). We have much to learn, argues Hamilton, from the writing of feminists that is not straightforwardly written for feminist aims. For one, it reminds us that many women writing for the nineteenth-century periodical press were doing it to make a living and that writing opened doors for women’s professionalization when most careers were closed. Thus, women often had to address a general audience and adjust their arguments accordingly. Hamilton also reminds us that feminist writers had varied interests and that feminist thinking can inform writing that is not directly appealing for change. Cobbe’s “The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland” is an example of a piece of writing that is not overtly feminist in tone, but that is informed by feminist concerns, no matter how problematic its statement on Britain’s role as imperialist parent.

Anderson's theory of persuasive first-person constitution dovetails in productive ways with theories of strategic rhetorical silence. In *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*, Glenn explores the rhetorical implications of an absence of language or speech, arguing that, too often, silence has been equated with submission, and thus, with femininity: "Throughout Western social history, all people gendered feminine (or weaker) have been systematically muted if not silenced" (10). Glenn, however, argues that silence can function in two ways: "silence as a strategic choice, or silence as an enforced position" (13). What Glenn calls "a rhetoric of concealment" enables a woman rhetor to remain silent on points that would hurt her position or even endanger her body (2). Glenn's rhetoric of silence, like many rhetorical practices, is dependent upon diverse markers of identity: "Often, silencing is an imposition of weakness upon a normally speaking body; whereas silence can function as a strategic position of strength. In gendered terms, then, this means that silencing can be 'feminine,' while purposeful silence can be 'masculine'—depending, of course, on the power differential in play" (xix). The "power differential" is often gender, but not always: "Masculine discourse has been the monologue of a male-dominated ruling class, while feminine discourse has spoken the perspectives of the dominated: the poor, the disabled, the 'raced,' the foreign, and, of course, the female" (Glenn 21). Cobbe spoke from the ruling class, but as a gendered, foreign, and lesbian "other." Her complicated position meant she could be quite vocal about some positions, while remaining silent about others.

Though Glenn concentrated on oratory and not print, the periodical press is often described as a cacophony of voices, a conversation with multiple points of entry, while the periodicals themselves are said to have distinct "voices" that set them apart from their competitors. Cobbe was one of those individual voices, attempting to negotiate the

communal voice of the *Cornhill*. While Glenn viewed silence as either a signal of subversion or as the marker of power, in Cobbe's case silence functions as a marker of both: she enacted "a rhetoric of concealment" that allowed her to enter the masculine space of public writing and to make an argument that would face an uncertain reception. Her silence on certain subjects marks her position as cultural "other" and her privileged position. As a member of the elite, she could speak within the public sphere, but as a woman who defied heteronormative parameters, could not speak about just *any* issue related to her life. Because so much was left, to use the words of Glenn, "unspoken," I must first draw together some widely circulated discourses in order to state what Cobbe deliberately leaves unstated, examining how Cobbe's class identity intersected with her sexual identity. Exploring this intersection will help us visualize how Cobbe constructed a persuasive identity based on material she could not openly discuss in the periodical press.

CONCEPTUALIZING VICTORIAN LESBIANISM

Cobbe lived with Lloyd for decades in a relationship she referred to as a marriage, beginning over a decade before she wrote "The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland." Given Cobbe's verbosity on multiple subjects, she remained relatively silent about Lloyd. However, Cobbe did speak about Lloyd, if only to shut down the conversation about her private life: "Of a friendship like this ... I should not be expected to say more" has the effect of putting the relationship in sharp focus. Sharon Marcus describes Cobbe's restrained rhetorical strategy as "paralepsis," the act of talking "about something by stating that one is not going to discuss it" (52). As we saw in Chapter 1, Cobbe's identity was complicated by several factors: though she was privileged through her connections to the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy class, her agency was limited by her gender. Cobbe's sexual identity was another important

factor, but unlike her position as an Anglo-Irish woman, Cobbe could never openly speak from it in order to marshal rhetorical power. That did not mean she did not use the experiences that stemmed from it to build her identity as an expert.

Although Cobbe was groomed to be a mistress of an estate such as Newbridge, to play her role in replicating the land-owning class into which she was born, she never seriously considered marrying a man and seemingly faced no parental pressure to do so, experiencing a life that “was completely untouched by heterosexual romance” (*Frances Power Cobbe* 53). However, because sexuality was not openly spoken about in Victorian England, we cannot easily categorize Cobbe as gay, straight, or other in modern terms. While the homosexual man and the lesbian woman were individually stigmatized as social deviants, women in female marriages “had a place in a social system as acceptable variations on legal spouses” (Marcus 226). In fact, it may be anachronistic to label Cobbe as a lesbian at all because “the lesbian was not a distinct social type during the years 1830 to 1880,” the period when Cobbe did much of her writing (Marcus 6). According to Marcus, only doctors and pornographers “wrote openly about sex between women,” which meant that lesbian sex “came to seem less embedded in the social world of domestic conjugality,” thus had no role in how the public perceived female marriage (6). Still, I typically refer to Cobbe’s discourse on female marriage as lesbian simply because it is a recognizable categorization for my readers. Susan Hamilton, whose work on Cobbe’s coded discourse I will rely on heavily in this chapter, openly refers to Cobbe and Lloyd’s relationship as “lesbian” (35). I also feel the term describes Cobbe’s relationship more accurately, as Lloyd was not a companion or roommate, but a romantic partner.

Because this project is a rhetorical study, I am much less interested in the question of whether Victorian women in female marriages were indeed having sex,¹² as sexual behavior is not always a determinant in how a relationship is labeled. However, to use the term “lesbian” is to imagine how sexual practices shape one’s life and identity. Yet definitions of lesbianism have emerged in the late twentieth century that broadened the term in order to include philosophical and theoretical conceptualizations of female-centric behaviors. In 1981, Lillian Faderman sparked debate with the publication of *Surpassing the Love of Men*, where she included the Victorian “romantic friendship” between women in a broad definition of lesbianism, arguing that experiencing genital contact with a woman was not the only marker of lesbianism and that a romantic relationship without sex was no less serious or intense than a sexual relationship (19). As Sheila Jeffreys noted in “Does it Matter if They Did it?,” critics of the book raised concerns about the desexualization of lesbianism: “Lesbianism cannot be subsumed beneath the good feelings of handholding sisterhood. This leaves no space to talk about specifically lesbian oppression and gives us little chance to build up the history and culture of lesbianism which we need for our pride and our survival” (214).

Yet Jeffrey acknowledged that, in order to build a lesbian history, we need to render visible the lesbians living before the 1920s, when theories of sexuality codified homosexuality and heterosexuality (215). To demand evidence of sexual activity is to hold female marriages to a higher burden of proof than we hold heterosexual marriages. As Marcus pointed out, “In Victorian England, sex was assumed to be part of a marriage, but

¹² Marcus points out that biographers of Cobbe and other Victorian women, such as Rosa Bonheur and Charlotte Cushman, “protested too much” that the relationships were “asexual friendships” until the 1990s (226).

could also drop out of marriage without destroying a bond never defined by sex alone” (44). Certainly some heterosexual spouses refrain from sex, yet we continue to label their partnerships as marriages. To leave women out of lesbian history because there is no direct evidence of sex not only privileges heterocentric definitions of sex (it *must* feature genital-to-genital contact), it reinforces compulsory heterosexuality:

The history of heterosexuality—and that is the only history we have been offered to date—does not rely on proof of genital contact. Men and women are assumed to be heterosexual unless there is “genital” proof to the contrary. Women who have lived in the same house and slept in the same bed for thirty years have had their lesbianism strongly denied by historians. But men and women who simply take walks together are assumed to be involved in some sort of heterosexual relationship. (Jeffreys 214)

Rather than focus solely on sexual behavior, Marcus focuses on the language surrounding female marriage: “We can best understand what kinds of relationships women had with each other not by hunting for evidence of sex, which even if we find it will not explain much, but rather by anchoring women’s own statements about their relationships in a larger context” (44). I follow the same method here, discussing sexual behavior only as far as writers on the issue of female marriage were often careful to suggest that these relationships were assuredly *not* sexual, thus assuring their readers that their topic was acceptable to a wide audience. I do not focus on any putative sexual relationship in order to focus on what material is extant. For Cobbe, that is always the written word. What we can know is how Cobbe constructed her relationship in discourse.

Due to Cobbe and Lloyd's class status, their relationship was largely accepted in their own sphere. Cobbe's famous acquaintances recognized her relationship with Lloyd as a legitimate partnership. For example, Lloyd lent Charles Darwin a pony when he lived near Cobbe and Lloyd while he wrote *The Descent of Man*, and when he wrote letters to Cobbe, he treated them as a couple, referring to "you and Miss Lloyd" (Marcus 223). Female marriage was something that would have been familiar to the famed naturalist, as Darwin's father had been an acquaintance of the Ladies of Llangollen, two Anglo-Irish women who lived in another famed female marriage in Wales (Marcus 223).

In order to understand how Cobbe's connection to Lloyd helped shape her rhetorical identity, I need to discuss the pair in the wider context of female marriage in Victorian Great Britain. According to Mitchell, Cobbe was all too aware of unions that were viewed as illegitimate in Victorian society. Her father's brother, a military officer stationed in India, married an Indian woman in a Muslim ceremony. This act of marrying a non-English, racially "other" woman was systematically frowned on by the East India Company and implicitly frowned on by families back home. Within Cobbe's family, her father was the guardian of his nieces and nephews yet did not acknowledge their family connection, using "Clermont" as their surname, direct evidence that "Charles Cobbe did not view his brother's children as legitimate" (*Frances Power Cobbe* 25). This early experience would have helped shape Cobbe's understanding not only of race and religion, but of how the institution of marriage conferred respectability upon individuals. Indeed, in one of her *Echo* articles, she would question why "the marriages of Englishmen with foreign women according to Mahometan or other rites" were not recognized as legal (qtd. in *Frances Power Cobbe* 25). How her own union was viewed in her culture was a great deal more complicated.

Marcus, in *Between Women*, argues that the definition of marriage was just as in flux during the nineteenth century as it is today: “The 1850s and 1860s were defined by arguments, not agreement, over what constituted marriage and family, and same-sex relationships informed those debates” (225). There is a difference, Marcus argued, between the “twentieth-century concept of homosexuality and the nineteenth-century custom of female marriage” (225). The Victorian female marriage included two women living together, sharing expenses, and providing emotional support in an arrangement that was closer to a modern marriage than a close friendship. Close relationships between women were often described as “friendships,” sometimes even as “romantic friendships” (Marcus 225). In a letter written during the last week of her life, Cobbe recounted an excursion she and Lloyd made into the Italian countryside during their initial acquaintance: “Do take a long drive in the Campagna, where the air does one’s very soul good . . . Mary and I made our friendship riding together alone all over it, so it is sacred ground to me” (qtd. in *Frances Power Cobbe* 125).

However, in her personal writings, Cobbe would just as often refer to her friendship with Lloyd as a “marriage.” While Cobbe deliberately leaves out many details about her relationship with Lloyd in her autobiography (at Lloyd’s request, Cobbe insists in her autobiography), other sources give us clues that suggest their relationship was a both romantic and domestic arrangement. In a letter from London to a friend, Cobbe writes that Lloyd, who had been staying in Wales, would be “returning home to me like a truant husband” (qtd. in *Frances Power Cobbe* 209). Cobbe also referred to Lloyd as “my old woman” and “my wife” (qtd. in Marcus 52). The “rhetoric of female marriage,” argues Marcus in *Between Women*, allowed Cobbe to move between the two poles of “husband” and

“wife” (52). This gender flexibility would be a prominent feature in Cobbe’s self-fashioning as a rhetor.

Though these relationships were often discussed in coded language, there was a space within Victorian culture for such relationships not only to exist, but to thrive. Marcus points out that female marriage “was a primarily middle- and upper-class phenomenon” (200). Working class women who chose female domestic partnerships often chose to disguise themselves as opposite-sex couples: one would dress as a man, one would dress as a woman (Marcus 200). An upper-class couple such as Cobbe and Lloyd would not face such circumscriptions within their own classed sphere. Her class position allowed her to live in a female marriage yet remain very much part of her culture. However, I do not want to overstate the permissiveness of Victorian attitudes toward same-sex attraction. The fact remains that Cobbe could not speak openly about her relationship. In order to reach a wide audience, Cobbe could not risk being labeled as a sexual deviant.

It is important for us to remember—from our relatively safe (or at least safer) vantage point in the twenty-first century, that Cobbe faced real threats to her survival as a writer (if not as a person) if part of her audience reacted negatively (or even violently) to what they deemed a threat to the social order. It is worth repeating Marcus’s assertion that individuals who engaged in what we would now term “homosexual” activities were seen as deviant, even if women in female marriages held a respectable social position. Though she and many of her contemporaries considered her partnership with Lloyd to be a marriage in the philosophical sense, the fact remains that she was not married in the legal sense. She was “outed” as such by the conservative *Saturday Review*, who called her a “half a woman” speaking “half-truths” due to her unmarried status after she gave a lecture supporting the right of women to

study at universities in 1862 (“The Ladies at Guildhall,” 14 June 1862). The reviewer, anonymously writing about Cobbe’s public speech, also disdained Cobbe’s hopeful vision of the future: “[Cobbe] is a fanatic who only looks at society as she would like it to be” (680). This gives the modern reader some idea of the hostile reception an overt envisioning of a culture that celebrated female partnership would have been received.

WALES AS A THIRD SPACE: THE LADIES OF LLANGOLLEN AND THE WELSH HISTORY OF FEMALE MARRIAGE

Cobbe’s time in Wales is no mere biographical fact, dropped casually into her autobiography, personal letters, and journalism in order to map her location or evoke fond memories. The space was overlaid with multiple meanings for Cobbe and her audience. Cobbe and Lloyd’s relationship is not the only incidence of Wales being evoked in the discourse of Victorian lesbianism. Cobbe and Lloyd bear remarkable similarities to another famous Anglo-Irish same-sex couple, Lady Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby, members of the gentry who, in nineteenth-century parlance, “eloped”¹³ from their families’ Irish estates to Wales to avoid marriage (with men) and live together in 1778. They became known as the Ladies of Llangollen after the Welsh village where they made their home. Their image was so powerful that “the Ladies served as muses for literary lesbians well into the 20th century” (Crowell 204). Indeed, Cobbe drew connections between her own relationship and the two women in a letter to one of her friends, signing, “We, ‘The Ladies of Hengwrt’ as undersigned—not to be confounded with the Ladies of Llangollen” (qtd. in *Frances Power Cobbe* 350). Lloyd even had personal connections to the two women, living for a time with a

¹³ The term “elope” would have had different meanings for a nineteenth-century audience. Generally, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, to elope would have meant “to run away” or escape. However, it also had a meaning that was closer to the current definition “of a woman running away from home with a lover for the purpose of being married.”

“maiden aunt,” Margaret Lloyd, who was friends with the pair. From her aunt, Lloyd inherited several books inscribed “M. Lloyd. The gift of Lady Eleanor Butler and Eleanor Ponsonby” (*Frances Power Cobbe* 140).

Though both of the Ladies were dead by the beginning of Queen Victoria’s reign (Butler died in 1829, while Ponsonby followed in 1831), the two women remained an object of interest for Victorians into the early twentieth century and were a subject in wide circulation within print culture. In “Ghosting the Llangollen Ladies: Female Intimacies, Ascendancy Exiles, and the Anglo-Irish Novel,” Ellen Crowell notes the double-edged cultural response to the women: “The Ladies stood as sexual rebels, and their choice to live together without men was regarded by the general populace with either contempt or celebration” (204). The two faced approbation from their own families and members of the Ascendancy class. Because the women absconded from Ireland into Wales, the pair’s elopement not only signaled a sexual transgression, but a transgression against their Anglo-Irish heritage:

By rejecting heterosexual union in favor of homosocial romantic friendship, Butler and Ponsonby secured for themselves a revered place in the lesbian/feminist historical imagination. But this rejection of a localized, hetero-colonial domesticity additionally ensured these Sapphic pariahs a place in the Anglo-Irish cultural imagination—as national traitors. By choosing to “elope” together, they pointedly rejected the role for which they were bred: the ascendancy lady, whose primary duty was to reinforce the Irish colonial enterprise (via marriage and reproduction, or via a useful spinsterial proximity

to such enterprises) against threats of indigenous revolution and internal cultural combustion. (205)

To Crowell, Ponsonby and Butler's action was a rejection of their role as "big house daughters." By refusing to act as "handmaidens to 'empire' ... they turned their backs on ascendancy" (Crowell 207). Though they were rejected by members of their own class, the women were largely well-received by a larger British audience. By 1801, they were celebrities, and a stop in Llangollen "was de rigueur on any well-to-do European's Welsh tour" (213). At their home, the women received political luminaries such as the Duke of Wellington and Edmund Burke and literary celebrities such as William Wordsworth and Sir Walter Scott.

Though Crowell asserts that the two women turned their back on their Irish past, two essays that appeared in English periodicals decades after their deaths reassert their Irish identities. The two essays, published 20 years apart, help make visible the culture Cobbe leaves invisible, giving us clues to how the rhetoric of female marriage circulated within the larger culture and why Wales may have figured so prominently in Cobbe's discourse. The first essay, "The Ladies of Llangollen," was anonymously published in November 1877 (a month before Cobbe's essay) in the London-based weekly journal *The Leisure Hour*. The journal's subtitle is instructive: the *Leisure Hour* was "A Family Journal of Instruction and Recreation," suggesting that *The Leisure Hour* was, like *Cornhill*, aimed at a middle-class audience of mixed genders. The subtitle is reinforced by the journal's content, which consists of anonymously published "moralistic, self-improving serial novels" ("Leisure Hour"). *The Leisure Hour* essay details Ponsonby and Butler's escape from Ireland to Wales, emphasizing their class position and their physical attractiveness:

Lady Eleanor Butler and Miss Ponsonby were Irish young ladies of rank and beauty, who loved each other with an affection so true that they could never bear the idea of the separation which the marriage of either would necessitate. They were therefore resolved on lives of celibacy, and, refusing many handsome offers, fled from home. They were, however, overtaken and brought back to their respective relations. ... In a short time the ladies eloped again, each having a small sum with her; and it is said that, although Lady Eleanor arrived at Llangollen in the natural aspect of a pretty girl, Miss Ponsonby accompanied her in the guise of a smart footman, in top boots and buckskin breeches. (710)

The women would dress in a more masculine fashion for the rest of their lives. As Carol Mattingly argued in *Appropriate[ing] Dress*, women's subversion of societal norms were more acceptable—and sometimes even celebrated—if the women had certain privileges. In her discussion of the popularity of the “bloomer” style of dress in the United States (which consisted of a “knee-length dress worn over loosely fitting trousers”), Mattingly noted that women who were conventionally pretty were not treated as harshly for wearing the new dress and were even the objects of fascination (37). Butler and Ponsonby were privileged with status and feminine good looks. Their decision to thwart conventions of gender are seen as either “eccentric” or “romantic,” the adjectives used to describe the pair within “The Ladies of Llangollen” (710): their decision to live apart from men was refigured in terms that would not be seen as threatening to the status quo. Cobbe, too, dressed in a more masculine fashion

for most of her adult life.¹⁴ As Marcus describes her, Cobbe was “indeed mannish: she identified with the masculine world of politics, wore her hair short, and adopted streamlined fashions perceived as male” (52). Though Cobbe was not conventionally attractive, her class status made her unconventional appearance more acceptable. The rhetoric of female marriage allowed Cobbe to inhabit a more masculine role in her self-fashioning.

The ability of the Ladies of Llangollen to move between the spheres of masculinity and femininity was even seen as an asset by Victorian commentators, as it allowed them the flexibility to navigate the divide between the gentry and common classes. Though Crowell asserted that the women were rejecting their role “as handmaidens of ‘empire,’” the writer of the *Leisure Hour* piece saw their elopement to Wales as an extension of their colonial roles. In the *Leisure Hour*, the women’s ability to make a home in their adopted country is celebrated, as the setting of Llangollen is described as a model for benevolent colonization. They bought a small estate that they quickly improved, creating an edenic scene of “gardens, pleasure grounds, rural walks, and bridges” (710). They were also described as “all-powerful intercessors with the magistracy and government” on behalf of the Welsh peasantry (711). *The Leisure Hour* recounted the story of Lady Butler interceding on behalf of a woman whose son was sentenced to death for the crime of forgery. It’s important to note that the women’s influence is not figured in feminine terms. Instead, *The Leisure Hour* celebrates and explains the women’s power in imperialist terms: “May their memory be long cherished as virtuous exponents of that *paternal* and sympathetic life of the upper order which knits class

¹⁴ According to Sally Mitchell’s *Daily Life in Victorian England*, women’s dresses during the 1860s and 1870s generally consisted of a tight-fitting bodice and long, full skirt, which would sometimes include a crinoline (a “hoop skirt”) or padding (139-40). A woman of Cobbe’s class might even wear more “elaborate clothing made of fragile fabrics, which made moving difficult and required a servant’s help to dress” (139).

to class, and has a strong refining influence on the poor and lowly” (710, my emphasis).

Ponsonby and Butler are propagating distinctly patriarchal values by asserting their agency as members of the Anglo-Irish gentry.

Two decades later, the Ladies of Llangollen were still intriguing to Victorian readers. The second essay about the pair was published in *The Pall Mall* in 1899, over 20 years after Cobbe published “The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland.”¹⁵ The author is Fenella F. Armytage, an upper-class Englishwoman who wrote on various subjects for late Victorian periodicals. *The Pall Mall Magazine* was an upmarket London-based monthly journal that featured popular fiction. Notable writers including Arthur Conan Doyle and Rudyard Kipling contributed to the journal, as well as a few Irish writers, including W.B. Yeats and Katharine Tynan. Armytage is afforded a lot more space in the *Pall Mall* than the anonymous writer of *The Leisure Hour*. The title, “The Ladies of Llangollen: Two Eccentricities of the Past,” again emphasizes the class position of the two women: because they are members of the upper class, they are merely “eccentric” rather than dangerous. Armytage also placed them firmly within history, as their eccentricities happened in the “past.” Her introduction also reinforces her consignment of the Ladies of Llangollen to the past, as she describes their estate as an attraction for tourists who want to relive the “quaint ways” of their “funny household” (328). Armytage relied on tropes of Irishness and emphasized the class of the women even more often than *The Leisure Hour*. She detailed the women’s preference for wearing “riding clothes,” the marker for the gentry class in general, and the Anglo-Irish in particular, and their insistence on wearing their family medals on their lapels. However, she

¹⁵ Though the essay was written after Cobbe’s journalism career was over (indeed, she would die two years later), I feel it provides evidence of how timeliness and subjectivity informs how women writers would deal with the subject of lesbian marriage.

did not use the label “Anglo-Irish,” instead referring to the women as “members of old Irish families in County Waterford” (328). However, their class is made apparent by the inclusion in the narrative of their faithful servant, Mary Carryl— from the “neighboring village” in Ireland—whose “pugilistic nature” led to her nickname of “Molly the Bruiser” (330).

Armytage shared one detail that revealed how the labor of the Irish underclass supported the lifestyle of the Anglo-Irish: “Mary Carryl appears to have bought some ready money with her from Ireland, as the first purchase of house and grounds was in her name, and in her will she bequeathed the land and all her money to Lady Eleanor” (330). Cobbe would never make such an acknowledgement in any of her own writing on Ireland. In Cobbe’s construction of the gentry-villager relationship, goods and services were given to the Irish peasantry by the Irish upper class, never the other way around.

Armytage, like the anonymous author of *The Leisure Hour* essay, described the Ladies of Llangollen in terms of celibate friendship, even calling their estate, Plas Newydd, “a shrine of friendship” (337). However, she also delves more deeply into the nature of their relationship, calling it a “romantic attachment” (330). She pondered the reasons the women made the choice to leave behind Ireland and their expected futures: “Rumour assigned many reasons why Lady Eleanor was determined to break through all the traditions of family responsibilities, duties, and position, to strike out an independent line with her *chosen companion*, to seek complete *retirement* from the outside world, and to live for each other alone in some sweet spot of *retirement*” (328-29, my emphasis). Though Armytage repeated the word, it seems that the Ladies of Llangollen did not live in retirement at all. Instead, they were an integral part of the world in which they lived. The fact that writers such as Armytage felt the need to perpetuate the myth that women who chose female partnerships lived in

seclusion, away from society, despite all the evidence to the contrary, is central to my argument about Cobbe's rhetorics in "The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland," as Cobbe was very much a part of the Victorian mainstream, despite her (in modern parlance) "alternative" lifestyle. While Armytage takes more risks than the anonymous writer of *The Leisure Hour*, she nonetheless felt the need to cloak her language about lesbian marriage in the discourse of female friendship. Though she voices doubts that either Butler or Ponsonby were "disappointed" by male suitors (always a popular explanation for lesbianism, apparently even during the nineteenth century), hastening their elopement to Wales, she continued to feel the need to follow prescribed norms for describing female domestic partnerships. Even the visual rhetoric of the essay follows these patterns: on the first page, above the title, a photograph depicts "Lady Eleanor's Bedroom." Presumably, we are to understand that Lady Eleanor Butler and Miss Sarah Ponsonby were not sharing a bed, and that assumption is meant to inform the way we read the entire essay.

The Leisure Hour and the *Pall Mall* essays give two examples of how discourse about female partnerships circulated within the mid-to-late Victorian culture. *The Leisure Hour* essay recounted the Ladies of Llangollen through the lens of scientific discovery: the piece arose out of a meeting of the British Archeology Association, which had taken a trip to Plas Newydd. Armytage recycles many of the well-worn details about the two women that were repeated by *The Leisure Hour* but dares to hint at the possibility that their relationship was more complex than the discourse of "female friendship" would allow. Twenty-two years earlier, Cobbe—writing from her own subject position—would have faced even more circumscriptions when writing about female marriage. Though the image of Cobbe and Lloyd's predecessors circulated widely in nineteenth-century culture, Cobbe could not make

her literal and spiritual connection so directly in her public work. Yet the theme of benevolent colonialism connected her work in “The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland” to the image of the Ladies of Llangollen that was still in circulation in Victorian culture. By creating a space for Anglo-Irish female marriage within Wales, the Ladies helped maintain imperialist bonds between Wales, Ireland, and England. Though the Ladies and their spiritual descendants, Cobbe and Lloyd, did not reproduce colonialism in traditional ways—through heterosexual marriage and the bearing of heirs—they reproduced it through language. The Ladies of Llangollen were written about, while Cobbe wrote about Wales as a safe space between English civility and order and Irish incivility and chaos.

ENTERING THE CELTICIST CONVERSATION IN *CORNHILL MAGAZINE*

While Crowell asserts that the Ladies of Llangollen had chosen to live outside the colonial system, the evidence suggests they were very much a part of the empire, living as Anglo-Irish women within their adopted Wales. While commentators on the Ladies of Llangollen asserted that the women brought Anglo-Irish, and thus, English, civilization to Wales, Cobbe constructed a Wales that was a bastion of Celtic civilization while remaining in the fold of the British empire. As Fraser, Green, and Johnston described it *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*, the periodical “offer[ed] a methodological meeting place between historicity and textual analysis” (198). By gleaning a glimpse of Wales through Cobbe’s writing, we can determine how she constructed her own identity in response to historical events.

“The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland,” published in 1877, encapsulated a specific point in Welsh and Irish histories, a historical moment just before a nationalist movement that came to the forefront in the early 1880s. The Wales that Cobbe described was

a very different place than Ireland during the same time period. Legislation had made Wales part of Great Britain in 1536, more than 150 years before a similar act had made Ireland part of the kingdom. According to Kenneth O. Morgan, until the early 1880s, upper-class families, such as the Lloyds, enjoyed a relatively harmonious relationship with the tenant farmers and the domestic workers who worked on their estates: “At the start of the eighties, the relations of these great landowners with rural society in Wales were very different in tone from the conflict that marked the Irish countryside at the same period. There were, as yet, no land leagues, no boycottings, no agrarian ‘plans of campaign’ in rural Wales” (10).

According to Morgan, “By the early 1880s, a sense of Welsh nationality and of national distinctiveness within the wider framework of the United Kingdom was present as never before” (90). Cobbe’s essay seemed to capture this sense of burgeoning national identity a few years early.

At any rate, the emerging nationalism that Cobbe identified in Wales was nothing like the strong currents of nationalism shaking the foundations of English-Irish relations at the same period. Even as a sense of national identity began to blossom, “this national emotion remained vague and unfocused. It could hardly be claimed that the Welsh, until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, possessed anything that resembled an articulated or coherent view of nationalism. The contrast with the history of Ireland at the same time was stark indeed” (Morgan 90-91). The Wales of Cobbe’s imaginings is culturally its own, while remaining within the United Kingdom, which was exactly, in her view, where it belonged. Cobbe’s ability to hit a middle register between two extremes—here, a Wales that is completely independent from England and a Wales that has lost its culture under colonial

rule— enabled her to persuasively fashion an imperialist rhetorics in response to the issue of Irish nationalism.

Her imperialist rhetorics would find a willing audience in *Cornhill Magazine*, first published in January 1860. Laurel Brake described the magazine as “urbane and well-paying” (41). Indeed, the *Cornhill* was known to be a journal directed at the middle-class: “The magazine’s message was defined by its promotion of all things middling: middle-brow culture, middle-class power, and a middle-of-the-road political stance” (Phegley 73). The *Cornhill* is classified as a “miscellany” because it published a variety of materials, including serial novels, literary reviews, and articles about natural history and scientific discovery (“Cornhill Magazine” 3). Like *Macmillan’s*, another periodical for which Cobbe wrote, the *Cornhill* “made its reputation with excellent fiction” (Hamilton 115). The inclusion of both literature and scientific essays signals that the journal had a wide audience: indeed, Phegley designates the *Cornhill* as a “family literary magazine,” meaning it was a publication that families could read together (6). Victorian novelist William Thackeray was initially editor of the magazine and quickly established how the editors and writers would appeal to a wide audience: “There are points on which agreement is impossible, and on these we need not touch. At our social table we shall suppose the ladies and children are always present” (qtd. in Phegley 71). Thackeray was acknowledging a periodical’s function as a rhetorical space, evoking rhetorical stasis—the point at which points of agreement are exhausted and the argument stops—as justification for avoiding controversy within the pages of the *Cornhill*. Thackeray’s statement also has implications for both readership and authorship, as it is clear that the readers are feminized in this figuration, while the writers and editors who have invited them to the table are masculinized: it is the men at the table (the writers and editors)

who must refrain from raising indelicate topics of conversation in the presence of women and children (the audience).

The fact that Cobbe—a woman writer who did not write anonymously—is featured in the journal troubles Thackeray’s metaphor. Cobbe’s initials, F.P.C., mark the end of her piece. This spartan byline actually signaled that Cobbe had a certain amount of celebrity by the time “The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland” was published in 1877, about 15 years after she began her journalism career—the editors could assume that the readers would recognize her initials. Cobbe’s essay is evidence of women’s rhetorical aptitude during the nineteenth century, not because Cobbe advances particularly brilliant or ground-breaking ideas about the Irish Question, but because of her facile negotiation of the rhetorical situation of the *Cornhill*: she must not only account for the imagined audience of the journal, but for the journal’s “house style,” a style that required writers to adhere to standards that maintained the distinctive “voice” of each journal. In *Subjugated Knowledges*, Brake argues that a writer’s relationship with the journal for which he or she writes is “complex” and that scholars must take into account “a journal’s house style and the effort the author makes to meet it, and the audience of the periodical (particularly its gender(s) and class), and the extent of revision by the editor, as well as the subject and the author’s preferred style” (13).⁶ We do not know how Cobbe’s editor revised her piece, but we can make educated guesses about her audience’s gender and class-based ideologies. We can also begin to analyze how Cobbe’s style in “The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland” matched, or departed from, her style in her other periodical essays about the Irish Question.

Hamilton labeled Cobbe as “the only English [sic] woman who earned her living by writing regularly as a *feminist* in the Victorian established press” (Hamilton 2, emphasis in

original). As a feminist who continually addressed the mixed audiences of several middle-class literary miscellanies such as the *Cornhill*, Cobbe would need to be adept at negotiating the diverse audiences of general magazines, not the ostensibly single-gendered, ideologically similar audiences of feminist journals such as *The Englishwoman's Review* (for which she also wrote). It is significant to my analysis that the editors of most journals, including the *Cornhill*, were male: the house style would by default be male and would reflect cultural values that were gendered male in Victorian culture, such as objectivity and logic. The gentlemanliness—obviously a trait only males could aspire to obtain—that Thackeray ascribes to the journal in his “social table” metaphor would also be applied to its house style in his assertion that the journal would avoid subjects too controversial to bring up in mixed company. However, Cobbe was a writer who delved into controversial topics on a regular basis. She used the house style of the *Cornhill*—a style designed to quell dissent—to advance arguments that evolved out of her own marginalized experiences as an Anglo-Irish, lesbian woman. Cobbe’s experience of imperialism as the daughter of an Anglo-Irish landlord lent her a unique perspective on England’s role as a colonial parent. Her experiences as a lesbian also lent her a perspective on being distinctly “other” within Victorian society. However, Cobbe’s status within this society allows her to live outside of heteronormative boundaries: her position as a privileged “other” allowed her to envision alternative ways of being, even while living within established imperialist and gender systems. This perspective is reflected in her periodical writings on Ireland, as they reflect the accepted ideologies of the middle-class literary magazines for which they are written. Yet her essays also reflect Cobbe’s positionality in relation to those ideologies.

Though they spoke from various positions, others had written on the Irish Question before Cobbe, and others would write about it after her. Cobbe's addressing of the Irish Question did not signal a subversion of the journal's editorial restrictions against controversy. Instead, it proves that the Irish Question was circulated so widely within Victorian culture that its inclusion in a family literary magazine would not have raised eyebrows. Phegley notes that Thackeray, the journal's original editor, hoped that the magazine would be "educational" by including a proper balance of "novel reading with the contemplation of serious articles on science, law, history, biography, literature, culture, art, and social institutions" (76). In keeping with this didactic spirit, Cobbe uses the rhetorical space to instruct her audience about the culture of Wales in comparison to its Celtic sibling, Ireland.

As a rhetor, Cobbe was addressing an audience that would be accustomed to reading about the Irish Question in the pages of Victorian periodicals: in rhetorical terms, she was relying, to use the words of Krista Ratcliffe, "on that which has comfortably come before" (18). The rhetorical tactic of depending on shared knowledge between a rhetor and his or her audience is known as the enthymeme, which asks the audience to use deductive reasoning in order to glean the content of the writer's argument. Ratcliffe described it as a means for the rhetor and audience to come together in order to make meaning:

Although understanding every particular audience member's psyche may be an impossible endeavor, understanding some cultural assumptions of an audience is not; different kinds of understanding may be achieved via study, reflection, and lived engagement. And it is from this cultural common sense

that an interlocutor may accrue unstated assumptions that may, in turn, be used to construct enthymemes as well as to fill in unstated parts. (277)

Unfortunately, when Cobbe entered an ongoing conversation about Celticism in the *Cornhill*, the “cultural common sense” and “unstated assumptions” dictated a view of the Irish that was often racist. Michael de Nie discussed the treatment of the Irish in the nineteenth century English periodical press: “The eternal Paddy” was “forever a Celt, a Catholic, and a peasant,” an “Irish yahoo” who was “the missing link between man and the gorilla” (5, 11). Even the “urbane” writers of the *Cornhill* were not immune to the negative depictions of the Celt that were circulating throughout the periodical press.

Those negative images circulated alongside more positive depictions of the Celt. In “Celticism: Macpherson, Matthew Arnold and Ireland,” George J. Watson described the duality of Celticism: “If Celticism had a patron saint, it would have to be the Roman god Janus, who faces both ways at once” (150). Watson posited Celticism as less systematic and coherent than Said’s definition of Orientalism: “Celticism, as I am going to use the term, is an ideological construction, originating in the eighteenth century, an attempt to recreate or assert a cultural identity for the people of Ireland, Scotland, and Wales which will distinguish them from the majority inhabitants of the British Isles, the English” (148). According to Watson, Celticist discourse could be invoked by the powerful outsider to Celtic culture, or by Celtic people themselves: “It may be generated internally, or imposed by the centre externally, as may be seen to this day in the common and contentious appellation of these three nations as “the Celtic Fringe”” (148). Celticist discourse cast the Celt as the binary opposite of the Anglo-Saxon: where the Celt is feminine and irrational, the Anglo-Saxon (usually English) is rational and masculine. In the year that Cobbe published her essay, there

were five entries that referenced Ireland, Wales, or Scotland listed in the table of contents in the *Cornhill*.

One in particular, a serialized essay by Letitia McClintock, was titled “Folk-lore of the County Donegal.” A “big house daughter” like Cobbe, McClintock was an active commentator on the Irish Question within the Victorian periodical press, contributing an essay “Fairy Superstitions in Donegal” to the *University Magazine* in Dublin during August 1879 and “Some Superstitions of the Ulster Peasant” to *The Gentleman’s Magazine* in 1899. Unlike Cobbe, McClintock was known for her fiction, authoring “Big House” novels such as *A Boycotted Household*, a novel known as being specifically “anti-Land League” (Kelleher 79). The Land League was the organization formed by Charles Stewart Parnell that encouraged tenant farmers to not pay rent to their English or Anglo-Irish landlords. Cobbe would also speak against Parnell in her periodical writing. McClintock clearly shared Cobbe’s imperialist ideology: though her *Cornhill* essay avoids the loaded term *superstition* in favor of the more neutral and scholarly term *folklore*, the native Irish remain the objects to be studied—and represented—by members of an elite upper class. What is important about McClintock’s work in the context of this project is that it proves that Cobbe was part of a larger discourse about the Irish Question. What is more, it shows that women were speaking and writing about Ireland from both a nationalist and a loyalist position, addressing the Irish Question within the *Cornhill*. Cobbe could comfortably give her answer to the Irish Question in the *Cornhill* because other women had already made a space for her to do so.

THE RHETORIC OF A POWERFUL MAN: ARNOLD’S CELTICISM IN THE CORNHILL

While other women wrote about the Celtic world in the *Cornhill*, Cobbe’s piece was more likely written in response to the rhetoric of a powerful man. Cobbe’s attention to the

masculine is fitting, as it is not the Celticist writings of Cobbe—or any other woman writer—that are the foundational documents of the discourse and continue to be objects of study for scholars today. What is compelling about Cobbe’s “The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland,” seemingly an ephemeral piece, is that she was offering her own answer to the Celticism of a powerful contemporary male writer, Matthew Arnold, whose work *Culture and Anarchy* continues to be studied for its theories of literary criticism today, along with the work of his predecessor, Renán.¹⁶

As Phegley notes, although Thackeray wanted to avoid controversy, the *Cornhill* did not uniformly skirt contentious issues: the inclusion of essays covering the Irish Question is evidence of this incomplete avoidance of controversy. Perhaps it is more accurate to describe the editors and writers of the *Cornhill* as rhetorically savvy: they could advance controversial ideas so long as they paid due attention to their audience. Cobbe not only had to negotiate the house style and the expectations of her audience, she had to negotiate a historical situation—the ongoing conflicts between England and Ireland—that had largely been commented on by men. Cobbe’s essay was published in the *Cornhill* during December 1877. Ten years earlier, it was the *Cornhill* that published in serial form poet and critic Matthew Arnold’s essay “On the Study of Celtic Literature,” in which Arnold attempted to “know” the Irish and the Welsh by analyzing their ancient literatures. Though Cobbe took a similar ideological stance, the material conditions surrounding the publication of their essays were different. Arnold’s celebrity exceeded Cobbe’s: he was given much more space to unwind his argument than Cobbe, who wrote only a one-off piece that seemed to lack the weight of Arnold’s essay,

¹⁶ Interestingly, Arnold relies solely on ancient Welsh tales recovered, translated, and transcribed in 1838 by Lady Charlotte Guest, an aristocratic Englishwoman. Ernest Renán used the same source material. Perhaps not surprisingly, Guest has not received the same critical attention as Arnold, and by extension, Renán.

which was serialized in four parts. Cobbe's essay could have easily been disregarded as a simple Christmas remembrance, as it was published in the December issue and was set in Wales at a holiday celebration. While Arnold takes a compassionate tone toward the "Celts," he ultimately advances a pro-imperialist argument about England's presence within Ireland and Wales: he wanted to improve England's treatment of its Celtic colonies but not dismantle the Empire, which he felt would lead to chaos. But the two essays converge in another, more obvious way: Cobbe and Arnold use the Welsh *eisteddfod*—a contest where singers and orators competed for prizes—as a place, both physical and metaphorically, from which to speak about Irish nationalism.

Cobbe echoes Arnold's views in "The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland," only she would not take such a conciliatory tone toward the Irish. What ties Arnold's and Cobbe's pieces together thematically was the authors' reliance on ideas about Celticism to make a comment on issues that were then ongoing in Ireland. Cobbe relied on the common assumption that the "Celtic" world was chaos, while the English world was ordered. French philosopher and historian Ernest Renán published his essay, "The Poetry of the Celtic Races," in 1860. In it, he advances ideas about the Celtic world—composed of Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and Brittany—that proved influential to Victorian writers: Cobbe directly references Renán's work in "The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland," while not directly addressing Arnold's work at all.

Perhaps the most influential idea advanced by Renán was the specific gendering of the Celtic and Saxon worlds. Renán's feminized the Celtic race: "If it be permitted us to assign sex to nations as to individuals, we should have to say without hesitance that the Celtic race ... is essentially a feminine race. ... No other has conceived with more delicacy

the ideal of woman, or been more fully dominated by it” (8). This feminization was surely intended to be celebratory. Renán extends his feminization by using the metaphor of “family” to explain the social networks of the Celt:

It is before all else a domestic race, fitted for family life and fireside joys. ... Every social institution of the Celtic peoples was in the beginning only an extension of the family. ... [L]ife is not for these people a personal adventure, undertaken by each man on his own account, and at his own risks and perils; it is a link in a long chain, a gift received and handed on, a debt paid and a duty done. (6)

Arnold would also treat the Celtic world as a means of respite from everyday life, relying on theories of difference that stemmed from their language and literature. For Arnold, the Welsh had retained a poetic spirit that had long dissolved in their colonizers: “Wales, where the past still lives, where every place has its tradition, every name its poetry, and where the people, the genuine people, still knows this past, this tradition, this poetry, and lives with it, and clings to it; while, alas, the prosperous Saxon on the other side, the invader from Liverpool and Birkenhead, has long ago forgotten his” (282). For both Renán and Arnold, the Celt is a figure rooted in the past, which made envisioning them functioning independently of the empire difficult.

Cobbe was less interested in Welsh poetry than Arnold. Like Renán, Cobbe would use gender as a means of categorization in her own *Cornhill* essay, although she would use it much more subtly. Such an approach was necessary, as Cobbe was actually making a fairly sophisticated argument about women’s place in imperialist Great Britain, an argument that not every member of her audience would accept, or even understand. But to make that

argument, she would need to be silent about her experiences, the evidence she used to construct her identity. In the context of the *Cornhill*, that identity was of an expert on Wales.

ANSWERING THE RHETORIC OF A POWERFUL MAN: COBBE'S IMPERIALIST
RHETORICS IN THE *CORNHILL*

“The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland” is important evidence of how Cobbe used her experience of same-sex marriage in order to comment upon social issues, even though she never openly referred to the subject at all. This mere fact of biography positioned Cobbe within the actual physical space of Wales, an event that may never have happened had she never met Lloyd or began a life-long domestic partnership with her. Without female marriage, Cobbe may never have been in the position to comment upon the differences between the Welsh and the Irish in the English press in the first place. Their “outsider status” as lesbians and as national “others” gave Cobbe the unique opportunity to make meaning of the conflict between Ireland and England, using Wales as a physical and ideological third place between the two. The overall purpose of Cobbe’s essay was to inspire associations of civility and class in the minds of her readers when they visit, or even just imagine, Wales.

From her introduction to “The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland,” we can begin to garner clues about what information was widely circulating within Cobbe’s audience at the time she was writing. She referred to her observations as “themes *so familiar* as the characteristics of the two countries” (663, emphasis added), acknowledging that she is relying on so-called commonsense assumptions of the Celt, essentialist beliefs about national characteristics arising from the very blood of a people. However, she also questions whether these assumptions fully explain cultural differences: “Either the laws of heredity are not exactly what we have of late been led to suppose, or the causes which have interfered with

their action on so large a scale and in so decided a manner deserve to be carefully investigated” (663). Despite the tumultuous relationship between Ireland and England, Cobbe still felt the need to validate the publication of an essay comparing Ireland and Wales in an English periodical, taking up much valuable periodical space with a rather long justification for her project. Julian Moynahan warned that Anglo-Irish writers could not assume their English audiences would care about the topic of the Irish Question: “The strength of the position is that the writer speaks with authority of a world unknown to the reader. The weakness of the position is that the reader may not care to know about it” (40). Cobbe’s long passage of justification is evidence that Cobbe was aware she could not take her audience’s interest for granted. Yet Cobbe’s rhetorical choices are curious given her apparent need to attract her audience’s interest. She admitted that she has no “novel observations” to add to the conversation about the Celt, which she clearly acknowledged was a well-worn topic.

What she added was a comparison between Ireland and Wales based on her own lived experiences of each place. Early in her piece, Cobbe set up her central thesis—that Wales is culturally and economically superior to Ireland, thus proving that Celtic regions can survive and thrive within the scope of empire—but underplays her own personal knowledge. The fact that she is using her own experience may seem fairly apparent, given the first line of her essay: “On Christmas-night last, the present writer witnessed a little spectacle which, trifling in itself, seems, for the reasons to be presently related, not unworthy of description and consideration” (661). Cobbe displaced herself with the label “this present writer,” a rhetorical move that suggests distance and objectivity and does not even hint at Cobbe’s deep connections to both Ireland and Wales. Her concealment of her deep personal connections to

Wales—and its people—is a strategic rhetorical move, one that speaks to her privileged yet marginalized position within Victorian society.

The events of 1877—failed harvests, starvation in Western Ireland, rumblings over the Home Rule bill—may have reminded Cobbe about the tales she had heard about the 1798 United Irishmen uprising as a child at home on her father’s Irish estate, and where there had been intermittent threats of rebellion by local villagers during her childhood and young adulthood. Cobbe, recognizing the signs in the political climate, perhaps felt the need to warn her English readers. Cobbe published her essay when the debate over Home Rule was dominating the conversation between Ireland and England. The Home Rule movement, led by Irish MP Charles Stewart Parnell, would have established a separate Irish Parliament that would have made local decisions but would still have pledged allegiance to the English crown.¹⁷ To address such an overtly political issue within a journal such as the *Cornhill*, Cobbe would need to use a particularly literary style, which to readers of the *Cornhill*, would signal masculinity.

Cobbe seemed aware of the masculine tone of the entire periodical. In one of the opening paragraphs of “The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland,” she addressed the imagined audience of *Cornhill* magazine:

Without pretending to offer novel observations on themes so familiar as the characteristics of the two countries, I think that an attempt to lay them side by side in parallelism may not be without a certain interest, and possibly not without use. . . . Could Ireland be rendered prosperous, contented, and loyal as

¹⁷ Parnell was the son of an American aristocrat mother and an English gentleman who owned an estate in Ireland, a fact Cobbe never failed to point out when mentioning Parnell in an attempt to negate his Irish identity. His family also owned an estate in New Jersey.

Wales, could the Irish be clothed, and educated, and inspired with the same hopeful industry as the Welsh, no greater boon could befall the Empire. ... Whether we are to look for the cause of the difference in the wrongs and miseries of past ages or in the existing economical, political, or religious conditions of the countries, is therefore a problem fairly claiming the attention of *every thoughtful Englishman*. (663, my emphasis)

Based on the available evidence about the *Cornhill's* readership, we know she was addressing not only the “thoughtful Englishman” but the thoughtful Englishwoman, as well. “Invoking the audience” is a widely used rhetorical device where rhetors gain the good will of their audiences by complimenting them, gaining a receptive hearing for their arguments, while instilling in their audiences the very quality that the rhetor ascribed to them in the first place (Lunsford and Ede 251). To borrow a phrase from Hamilton, her address functioned as an appeal to the “default masculinity” of the intended readership of the journal. The female audience of a journal was largely unspoken and unacknowledged. By referring to the acknowledged male audience of the periodical, Cobbe was addressing their status as middle-class and most likely moderate men and hoping to instill in them the values that she inscribes in her addressing of them as being “thoughtful.” Her subject matter, however, would be a clue that she was addressing a female audience, as well.

Cobbe’s mixed audience would perhaps leave “The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland” with very different ideas about its content, dependent on what knowledge they brought to their readings of it. Cobbe’s argument about Ireland’s place in the empire would be the most accessible to her middle-class audience. Both the Irish Question and the Woman Question could be discussed openly in the high Victorian periodical press, but writers could

only advance their arguments so far if they wished to gain a receptive hearing in a magazines aimed at a general audience. In the case of Cobbe's "The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland" and *Cornhill* magazine, it seems that her argument about the place of the Irish in British culture could be advanced more easily than her argument about women's place in British culture. Cobbe's implacably pro-imperialist stance that she maintained within her public writings throughout her life more than likely facilitated a warm reception within English periodicals: her stance on the Irish Question would not have been controversial, and she did not need to lay much groundwork before advancing her argument.

Though Cobbe emphasized the values and beliefs she believed she shared with *Cornhill* readers, she also dismantled some commonsense assumptions about the Celt in her essay, proving that Cobbe was willing to take certain risks as a rhetor or that she was respected enough as a public commentator to tweak old ideas about "the Celt," as she would describe the Welsh and Irish. The first assumption, of course, was the widely held view that the Welsh and the Irish are more similar than different. The second is that Celtic culture was dying. While Arnold uses the *eisteddfod* as a means of illustrating Celtic culture as on the decline, Cobbe asserts that is a lively tradition that arose out of an equally lively culture:

The scene was at night in a huge barn outside a village in a certain lonely mountain district in the heart of Wales. Not a fashionable tourist haunted village the reader is requested to bear in mind, but a scattering of some twenty cottages of the solid, almost Cyclopean Welsh stonemasonry. ... The assembly, though modestly announced ... as only a *Cyfarfod Llenyddol* (Social Meeting), was in truth a miniature Eisteddfod, or competition for prizes, by poets, essayists, singers, and *improvisatori*. Of course on reading

this, the English reader at once beholds with his mind's eye the energetic parson originating the whole scheme, working it up diligently to the honour of Christmas, laying the squire under contribution for prize-money, and employing all the young ladies in the neighbourhood in decorating the hall with texts in Gothic characters as undecipherable as Chinese to the parishioners. (661)

Cobbe then emphasizes that the *eisteddfod* was not a tourist trap devised by the village's upper class, but that it was a more organic expression of Celtic artistry arising from the *real* Celts, the peasants: “[It] was devised, paid for, and performed exclusively by and for the villagers themselves, the carpenter, the blacksmith, and a score of farmers” (661). Why is Cobbe so preoccupied with the concept of authenticity? Cobbe was using the concept of authenticity to build her ethos as a commentator on the Irish Question. When she emphasized that the *eisteddfod* was not designed to attract tourists, she was also emphasizing that she was deliberately not constructing herself as a tourist within this culture.

Instead, she constructs an authorial persona that has insider knowledge of the culture. For example, she could translate for her English audience the exotic (note her Orientalizing strategy here when she compared it to the Chinese), “undecipherable” Welsh language. Though she differentiates herself from the peasant class to whom she attributes the creation of the *eisteddfod*, she clearly positions herself as a knowledgeable insider with lived experience of the culture: she walked “*home* in the moonlight” silently comparing the “refined entertainment” of the Welsh to the “peasants of most other countries with whom [she] had acquaintance” (662). Though Cobbe took pains to emphasize that she was not a tourist, she left her national identity unfixed.

Nedra Reynolds, in *Geographies of Writing*, argues that one's physical mobility is dependent on one's "cultural mobility," which is "a combination of factors of race, class, gender, age, ability, or sexuality stretched across a range of other overlapping or interrelated differences" (45). While we may be tempted to view the concepts of borders and location in the postmodern sense, that is, to see them as unstable and unfixed, we would do well to remember that for many, dependent on all the factors Reynolds listed, borders and location *are* stable and fixed. For the Welsh and Irish villagers that Cobbe represented, their location in the colonial system was fixed (unless they struck out for other parts of the empire or America, but even then, their futures were far from certain). Cobbe is invested with the ability to represent them due to her cultural mobility. Cobbe's ability to live independently of men is also related as much to her class as to her sexuality: she was able to form a domestic partnership—with the emotional and financial benefits that can entail—with a woman of a similar social position. Mitchell argues that Cobbe and Lloyd, due to their class position and nationality, had a unique perspective on British social issues:

When Cobbe and Lloyd settled in London they had in common the experience of growing up as ruling-class outsiders in their native lands; and they remained outsiders by birth and "nationality" in the metropolis. This combination of class empowerment and outsider status, I suspect, gave both of them a critical perspective and an ability to see—and ignore—some of the boundaries taken for granted by other women. (*Frances Power Cobbe* 146)

One of the boundaries was marriage, by law and social custom an institution for opposite-sexed couples. Though she was a woman in the nineteenth century, which often meant being relegated to the private sphere, her cultural mobility enabled her to traverse borders that were

closed off to others. And while she was relegated to the domestic sphere until the death of her father, his death—and her decision to make a living through journalism—enabled her to enter the public sphere.

In “The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland,” Cobbe positions herself in a manner similar to Arnold, constructing a seemingly objective persona by claiming no national identity—she was neither English, Anglo-Irish, nor Irish—within the text, instead building her ethos as a commentator by asserting that she has spent considerable amounts of time in Ireland and Wales and, thus, was able to offer a fair and reasonable assessment of England’s relations with two of its colonies. Though she used the subjective “I,” she negates her national identity so that her message will face a better reception by readers of the *Cornhill*.¹⁸ In “The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland,” Cobbe performs the personas of social scientist, literary critic, economist, and travel writer in order to persuade her audience to view Ireland and Wales in certain ways, subjugating her nationality and her gender in order to present an objective ethos. Though her audience likely recognized Cobbe for her previous works, they would not necessarily be able to identify her country of origin. It’s likely her audience would have read her national identity as English, the default category for a writer for the English periodical press. Whether Cobbe’s elision of her national identity and gender

¹⁸ Seven years later, in a “Glimpse of Wales A Hundred Years Ago,” Cobbe would take the opposite approach. The first line reads, “In a paper entitled ‘The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland,’ published a few years ago in the CORNHILL MAGAZINE, I described the characteristics of the two races as they had impressed me from personal observation” (410). Though Cobbe’s name does not appear as a byline, her authorship is attributed by listing her previous essay. This attribution marks Cobbe as the author and acts as a means for Cobbe to capitalize on her reputation as a reliable commentator on issues surrounding England’s “Celtic” colonies. Cobbe focuses on the upper classes in “A Glimpse of Wales,” relying on the journal of an English housekeeper who worked for the debt-ridden landlord of Hengwrt. Perhaps because of her focus on the upper classes, Cobbe’s rhetoric is toned down. She refers to the upper classes of Wales and Ireland as charmingly rakish and spendthrift, not unlike the Irish upper class in Maria Edgeworth’s 1799 novel *Castle Rackrent*.

was her decision or a decision made by editorial default, both national identity and gender emerge in important ways throughout the article, operating as a subtext that speaks to Cobbe's position as a gendered "other" within an imperialist system.

MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE: COBBE'S ATTENTION TO THE CELTIC FEMININE

This subtext emerges in Cobbe's attention to women's roles in Welsh society. Though Cobbe chooses silence about her personal experiences in "The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland, she veers the closest to openly referencing her own life in her discussion of Welsh and Irish women: "Happy is the child who has an Irish nurse or a Welsh mother!" (670). Cobbe herself, as I noted in my first chapter, was largely raised by her Irish nannies, Mary Malone and Martha Jones. Mitchell also saw a glimmer of Cobbe's self in "The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland," supposing that Cobbe was drawing connections between the best qualities of the Welsh and Irish to Lloyd and herself: "They were similar in imagination and quick wits: both had a sense of humor and playfulness. Perhaps in that sense too, Mary was as Welsh as Cobbe was Irish" (146).

Though Cobbe's positive experiences may have informed her rhetorics in "The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland," her personal experiences remained largely subtextual. Though she did not reference her own personal experience with a specific woman from Wales, Welsh women emerge as an object of interest in Cobbe's piece. Like Renán, Cobbe uses gender as a classification system, though she does not use it in the same way. Unlike Renán, Cobbe does not feminize the Celts as a cohesive group: instead, she inflates the gendered characteristics of Irish and Welsh men and women in order to construct a valuation system that ranks Wales over Ireland and women over men. The first hint that gender is an

important factor in Cobbe's analysis of the *eisteddfod* is her discussion of women's roles as writers and performers. The event ends with a woman, "the wife of the carpenter of the village," reciting an essay titled "The Duties of Mothers to their Children" (662). Though Cobbe does not dwell on this detail, she felt it was important enough to include in her narrative. Cobbe was greatly interested in the act of women writing and speaking and argued for women's right to act as rhetors within the public sphere throughout her career: we saw evidence of this in my discussion of her essay "Social Science Congresses and Women's Part in Them" in Chapter 1. That Cobbe included the detail about the carpenter's wife shows she was alerting her readers to the fact that there was a space for women to write and speak publicly within Welsh culture. While the woman's speech may be circumscribed by cultural conventions about women's sphere of influence, the fact remains that the Welshwoman was able to participate in a public event that celebrates artistic expression, to be a meaning-maker within her culture. The performative nature of national identity played an important role in Cobbe's analysis of Celtic culture. She detailed the dress of Welsh women, praising them for maintaining their national costume for much longer than their Irish counterparts:

The red cloak has utterly disappeared from the grey Irish landscape which it once brightened; and even before the cloak, the red petticoat vanished. ... But even yet about one Welshwoman in fifty (bless her!) wears the dear old high-crowned broad-brimmed beaver hat, the tidy white cap, the cotton-bed gown, and the short stout linsey petticoat, leaving free the agile foot and ankle cased in strong shoes and home-made worsted stockings. (665)

While it may appear that Cobbe is sharing superficial details by focusing on the dress of Welsh and Irish women, she was actually investing women with a great deal of agency,

giving them the responsibility of maintaining their country's culture, viewing them as the keepers of Celtic heritage. In Cobbe's view, Welsh women are doing an admirable job of maintaining Celtic culture in a rapidly changing world, while Irish women are not keeping up their responsibilities. Of men's costume, Cobbe says nothing. Though Cobbe is critical of the Irish woman's failure to maintain visible markers of Celtic culture, her ascribing of agency to in the female population is complimentary.

However, Cobbe's representation of the Irish man was vastly different. Cobbe displayed an unfortunate racism towards Irish men that was in direct contrast to her gentler depictions of Irish and Welsh women, and even Welsh men. Sadly, racist depictions of Irish men were in wide circulation during this period, and reveal the reverse side of Celticist discourse, the side that rendered the Celtic man as irrevocably violent and animalistic. Rather than rely on her own experiences, Cobbe drew instead on the pseudo-science circulating within the larger culture. One important example was the "Index of Nigrescence," published by anthropologist John Beddoe in *Races of Britain* in 1862. Lest we think that Beddoe was a crackpot whose work only influenced a small minority, I should note that Beddoe was influential enough to be named as president of the Anthropological Institute, proof that Beddoe was part of the mainstream of Victorian thought (De Nie 10). His book ranks the population groups of Great Britain in a hierarchy based on the pigmentation of their skin: the lighter-skinned, orthognathous (straight-jawed) people were ranked the highest, while the darker-skinned, prognathous (heavy-jawed) people were ranked the lowest (De Nie 10). This scale was used to rank the Irish in context of Britain, meaning they were ranked lower than the English, and within an Irish context, as well, as the Irish who lived in wilder, craggier western and southern portions of Ireland were ranked lower than their more urban

counterparts. Beddoe even labeled the Celts he encountered in western Ireland as “European Negroes” (De Nie 10).

Such pseudo-science as Beddoe’s ranking system has long since been discredited. L. Perry Curtis, Jr. in *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature*, cited studies done on photographs of Irish people during the latter half of the nineteenth century that proved that the prognathous jaw, the heavy brow, and the long upper-lip found in Victorian illustrations were not often found in the actual photographic evidence. He also noted that the Irish rebels arrested by the British often wore beards, meaning that it would be impossible to tell what their actual jawlines would look like (90). The Irish rebel behind bars would be, in terms of his physiognomy, indistinguishable from his captors (Curtis 90). A more recent 2006 study supports Curtis’s theory, revealing that there are very few genetic differences between the people living in modern-day Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland (McConnell). However, to discount the influence these theories would have had over Victorian thought would be unhistorical. This pseudo-scientific method was reflected in artistic renderings of the Irish in the periodicals of the day. The Irish man was often depicted as a monkey or a gorilla in cartoons and illustrations (De Nie 10-11).

The dichotomous gendering of Irish men and women found in Victorian visual rhetoric is repeated in Cobbe’s written rhetoric in “The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland.” What Cobbe adds to the conversation is her own ranking of the Irish and another group of “Celts,” the Welsh. Cobbe seems to directly use the rhetoric of Beddoe when she describes the “Irishman’s frightful prognathous jaw” which she adds was “unknown in Wales” (666). Cobbe celebrated what she sees as the preservation in the Welsh of their unique physical appearance, “the very same form of skull and delicacy of the muscular

attachments that distinguished his progenitors” (666). However, she just as quickly castigated the Irish for the same reason: “His Irish cousin has managed to introduce (or preserve?) in the human countenance a mouth scarcely improved since the much remoter date when we were apes” (666). She discounted the idea that the meager diet of the Irish underclass has contributed to their physical appearance because both the Irish and the Welsh “have lived for ages on the same simple fare of oatmeal, milk, and potatoes . . . under equally rainy skies” (666). Cobbe was constructing vast differences between the Welsh Celt and the Irish Celt despite the assertions of many, including Renán and Arnold, that they are descended from the same genetic and cultural root.

While we know, here in the twenty first century, that the concept of “race” is a fallacy, that humans are 99.9 percent genetically similar (even though we often do not act on this knowledge), the theory that racial groups share not only physical traits but personality traits as well was persuasive to a Victorian audience. Cobbe strategically used the Welshman and the Irishman to question the source of what she saw as differences between them in their social and material conditions. Were those differences the result of “wrongs and miseries of past ages or in the existing economical, political, or religious conditions of the two countries” (Cobbe 663)? She ultimately left the question open. However, the solution was clear: England’s continued rule over Ireland and Wales. Cobbe’s use of passive voice effectively robbed the Irish of agency in their society improved: Ireland could potentially “be rendered prosperous, contented, and loyal as Wales¹⁹” and “be clothed, and educated, and inspired with the same hopeful industry as Wales” (663). The Irish people could not, in Cobbe’s

¹⁹ Here, Cobbe is echoing the language of Harriet Martineau in *History of the Peace*. Martineau wrote: “There must be checks and vicissitudes, before Ireland could become so cheerful, prosperous, and content as she ought to be” (qtd. in Logan ix).

figuration, render themselves prosperous, or clothe and educate themselves: it was the responsibility of the English to instill them with the values necessary to complete these tasks. While Cobbe argued that England had a paternalistic responsibility toward its colonial children, she removed any complicity by the English government or people in the “wrongs and miseries” of the Irish past or present. Cobbe’s appeal to her audience as conscientious loyalists, is almost complete (661). Cobbe is not only celebrating the Welsh at the expense of the Irish; she undercut the idea that social conditions such as poverty have anything to do with the less advanced physiology of the Irish: this essentially lets Cobbe, a member of the Anglo-Irish gentry, and her English audience off the hook for what she sees as the underdevelopment of the Irish people. Cobbe’s use of essentialist ideas about racial characteristics cuts both ways: she celebrated what she saw as the timelessness of the Welsh and demonized what she sees as the primitivism of the Irish.

Cobbe’s dichotomous construction of timelessness and primitivism also plays out in her analysis of the differences between the men and women of the Celtic world. Here, Cobbe was cognizant of the larger patterns of representation of the Irish woman. Hansson noted how the powerful figures of Erin and Hibernia functioned in Victorian society: “The latter was usually preferred by English journalists and cartoonists, and was fair, helpless, passive and angelic, a maiden threatened by loutish Fenians and looking to John Bull for protection. Erin was the image chosen by Irish cartoonists, and she differs from Hibernia in that she is dark-haired, more mature, and often a mother” (114). The Irish woman largely escaped the simianization directed at the men. Instead, she was celebrated as something ethereal and goddess-like. She was often depicted in symbolic terms, wearing Grecian dress, and carrying a harp. One illustration, titled “The Martyr Church” and published in *Judy, or the London*

Serio-comic Journal in 1869, depicts the Irish woman as Mother Ireland, clinging to a Celtic cross, her Romanized features stern, her long hair wreathed in flowers. In case the reader missed this obvious personification of Ireland, the woman was wearing classical garments bordered in shamrocks, the name “Erin” emblazoned on her hem.

Some of these ideas informed Cobbe’s depiction of Celtic women. She certainly defined them in contrast to the Irish man. Cobbe is largely complimentary towards the Irish woman: “The beautiful Irish eye—grey, with long dark lashes . . . has no analogue in the Welsh feature” (666). Welsh women and Irish women both “have special claims to beauty;” however, “Irish loveliness is always a little in the ‘free and unconfined’ *genre* of Nora Creina” (666). Nora Creina was the poetical figure beloved by the narrator of Irish poet Thomas Moore’s²⁰ nineteenth-century poem that is titled “Lesbia Hath a Beaming Eye” in *Irish Melodies* but later titled “Nora Creina” in other sources. Moore’s poem opens by addressing “Lesbia,” the pseudonym for the lover of classical poet Catallus, who was also a poet in her own right. Moore juxtaposed the majestic Lesbia, with her regal clothing and cutting intellect, with the homespun, earthy Nora Creina.

What is most interesting, of course, in terms of my discussion is Cobbe’s use of a poem that references Lesbia, a name that is evocative of the island of Lesbos, where the classical poet Sappho lived. While Sappho’s sexuality has been debated for centuries, with some insisting on her homosexuality, others insisting on her lesbianism, Glenn argues that it

²⁰ Sir Thomas Moore was a famous Irish poet in the early nineteenth century in both England and Ireland, though he is known mostly as a friend of Lord Byron today. He was an upper-class Catholic who was sympathetic to the cause of Irish nationalism though was not officially a member of any nationalist groups and did not take part in any open rebellions against Britain. His orientalist poems, especially *Lalla Rookh*, are seen as vehicles for his complaints about Britain’s rule over Ireland. Mitchell credits Cobbe’s childhood reading of *Lalla Rookh* as the origin of her interest in the Middle East.

is “clear that most of Sappho’s love lyrics were addressed to persons of the female gender and that the speaking subject of the poems was, indeed, a lover of women” (*Rhetoric Retold* 21). Cobbe’s reference to lesbianism is so muted that it is almost unnoticeable. Her readers would need to be in tune with certain cultural cues: she could either be referencing a well-known trope of Irish femininity or making a comment about female marriage, depending on what knowledge and experience her audience is bringing to the table. Either way, the essay functions as a statement that is decidedly pro-woman, placing women and their roles in society at the forefront of her readers’ thoughts.

Her treatment of Welsh women is complimentary, as well, but in a different way. Unlike the passive representations of Irish women that were circulating in the larger culture, Cobbe’s Welsh women are strong and capable. She acknowledged that they are not as superficially pretty as the Irish, but that they are made of sturdier stock: “A ‘Maid of Merioneth’²¹ belongs to the well-braced, sure-footed, self-reliant type, which might claim the eulogium of King Lemuel: ‘She girdeth her loins with strength, she strengthened her arms’” (666). Cobbe’s rendering of the Welsh woman could almost be read as a love letter to her lifetime partner, but such a thing was impossible in Cobbe’s chosen rhetorical platform. Significantly, Lloyd’s ancestral home was in Merionethshire, as was the village of Llangollen. In her feminist writings that did not deal specifically with Ireland, Cobbe makes it clear which type of femininity is superior. In 1881, Cobbe published *The Duties of Women*, which Hamilton refers to as a “conduct manual” for Victorian feminists (165). Cobbe “beseeches” women to “practise courage .. at least as diligently as you practise the piano. ... Make it a point of honor to be cool, collected, *self-reliant*, on all occasions” (83, my

²¹ There was also a popular ballad titled “The Fair Maids of Merioneth.”

emphasis). Self-reliance was the quality that Cobbe most emphasized about herself in her autobiography, noting her love of outdoor activities and her ability to travel without a maid. Her ascribing of this quality to Welsh women is the highest compliment. Her partner Lloyd was also clearly self-reliant, living apart from her family in Rome, making her way in the male-dominated field of sculpture.

STRATEGIC SILENCE: COBBE'S RESTRICTED RHETORICS IN THE *CORNHILL*

Cobbe constructed Wales as the locus of civility within the British world, based on her own experiences. Her essay could function as a didactic piece, constructing the Welsh as model the “good” Celt, industrious and well-behaved; but it also functions as a far more subtle, sophisticated example of how a woman could shape her life experiences as persuasive rhetorics in the periodical press. It would be easy to overlook Cobbe’s assertions of her lesbian identity, as it is coded in a language that would be acceptable to a middle-class audience. For Cobbe, civility and class are measured by how well women function in society. In Wales, Cobbe was free to live with her chosen life partner in comfort and prosperity. In “The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland,” she drew on popular ideas of the Celtic world but shapes them in a way that draws on her personal experiences, creating a piece of writing that makes multi-layered appeals to what is ostensibly the same audience. Cobbe was deft enough as a rhetor to recognize that her audience, representative of (to repeat Phegley’s description) “middle-brow culture, middle-class power, and a middle-of-the-road political stance,” would be broad enough to include a multiplicity of experiences and ideological positions (73).

“The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland” is an example of a woman rhetor’s self-fashioning through deflection and ellipsis. It is entirely possible that many of her middle-

class readers would be aware of the Welsh tradition of female marriage, given the fame of the Ladies of Llangollen; it is even possible that a small number would know that Cobbe herself, by then a famous writer, lived in such an arrangement. However, all we can know for certain is that Cobbe spent a great deal of time in Wales with her Welsh partner and that those experiences would serve as evidence in her imperialist rhetoric about Ireland. Cobbe constructed Wales as a third space between the civilized England and the wilder, rebellious Ireland. For Cobbe, Wales was a space of unification. As she described it in her autobiography, “No spot in the kingdom . . . unites so many elements of beauty as this part of Wales” (646). For Cobbe, the disparate parts of Great Britain came together in harmonious conjunction in Wales, functioning as a whole even as Ireland and Wales maintained their cultural uniqueness—in fact, they *should* maintain what made them culturally Celtic even in the face of modernization, while England would remain at the head of the empire. She used stereotypes of the Celt in order to emphasize the differences between the Irish and the Welsh, an argument that her audience would readily accept given the plentitude of ideas circulating within Victorian print culture.

However, if her audience is clued into other signals, they might walk away with very different associations. She uses autobiographical details—her life in Ireland, her life in Wales with her Welsh partner—as her available means to construct an argument, but necessarily had to subsume what we might call her “personal voice” under a veil of objectivity in order to match the style of the periodical and speak from specific experience that would not be well received by members of her audience. If she could achieve that delicate balance, she could speak powerfully from the position of “other,” using the unique knowledge she gained from

her experiences to craft persuasive arguments while avoiding being marginalized and, thus, completely silenced.

“The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland” encompasses what is positive about the periodical press as a site of rhetoric for Victorian women writers and what proved more constrictive. Knowing what we know about the missing parts of Cobbe’s identity, it is easy to see why Wales figured prominently in her autobiographical and journalistic rhetorics. Of course, even if she had wanted to be completely self-disclosing (which she did not, given the extant evidence), the genre of the periodical essay, particularly the middle-ground *Cornhill*, would not have allowed her to do so. “The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland” is evidence that Cobbe could do much with the means she had available but still faced limits on what she could expect to get away with as a woman writing for the mainstream Victorian periodical press. It also served as important evidence of the ways in which Cobbe’s complicated identity informed her rhetorical performances. As a feminist, she wanted to see women within the public and private spheres. As a member of the privileged classes, she had an ideological and material investment in the continuation of the empire. The answer for Cobbe was a shift in the status quo, but not a complete rend in the social order. Her rhetorics in “The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland” are a reflection of Cobbe’s appeal to the middle: she could speak *from* her experiences as a Anglo-Irish Big House Daughter married to a Welsh Big House Daughter, but not speak *about* them in any direct way. In the next chapter, we will examine further how Cobbe used the “personal” in her commentary on Ireland and how she constructed her personal experiences of Ireland differently for two periodical contexts. Though I have begun a conversation about how Cobbe’s autobiographical self-fashioning was linked to her journalistic self-fashioning here, in the next chapter I more directly discuss

the autobiography genre and how it intersected with journalism, and the impact of such an intersection on Cobbe's strategy of persuasive identity construction.

CHAPTER THREE

“THE FENIANS OF BALLYBOGMUCKY” AND *THE LIFE OF FRANCES POWER**COBBE, BY HERSELF*: THE INTERSECTION OF JOURNALISM AND
AUTOBIOGRAPHY

In her autobiographical musings on life in London, where she settled with Mary Lloyd in 1865, Cobbe writes about the lightness she felt at being free from the trappings of her Anglo-Irish heritage:

It was certainly an advantage to us in London to be, as we were, without any kind of ulterior aim or object in meeting our friends and acquaintances, beyond the pleasure of the hour. We never had anything in view in the way of social ambition; not even daughters to bring out! ... We had no rank or dignity of any kind to keep up. I think hardly any of our friends and *habitués* even knew who we were, from Burke’s point of view!²² I was really pleased once, after I had been living for years in London, to find at a large dinner-party, where at least half the company were my acquaintances, that not one present suspected that I had any connection to Ireland at all. Our host (a very prominent M.P. at the time), having by chance elicited from me some information on Irish affairs, asked me, “What do you know about Ireland?” “*Simply that the first thirty-six years of my life were spent there*” was my *reply*. (V2, 403, emphasis mine)

Contrary to Cobbe’s assertions in her chapter, “London in the Sixties and Seventies—Social Life,” she regularly called upon her life in Ireland in order to gauge her position within

²² Cobbe may be referencing Edmund Burke, a politician and writer with Irish gentry class roots.

Victorian society. In the same passage where she exults her new London life, Cobbe evokes Donabate: “In a country neighborhood the one prominent fact about me, known and repeated to everyone, would have been that I was the daughter of Charles Cobbe of Newbridge. I was proud to be accepted and, I hope, liked, on the strength of my own talk and books, not on that of my father’s acres” (403). The strength of Cobbe’s “own talk and books” propelled her to a prominent position among the Victorian literati, but her experiences as a Big House Daughter helped shape her perspective on Victorian society from the beginning of her writing career to the end. Cobbe’s autobiography clearly illustrates the tension she experienced as an Anglo-Irish woman writer, a tension that could never have been expressed so directly in her periodical essays. She continually used her personal experiences in and observations of Ireland in order to build her ethos as a speaker on the Irish Question, yet alternated between claiming Irish identity and negating that identity dependent on the context in which she was writing. Nowhere is this division of identity more apparent than in her periodical essay “The Fenians of Ballybogmucky” and her autobiographical chapters devoted to her life in Ireland.

The title itself evokes a very real situation that arose out of the conflict over Irish nationalism. The first chapter in her autobiography, “Ireland in the Thirties and Forties” is almost entirely recycled from “The Fenians of Ballybogmucky,” published in the *Argosy* in 1865, two years after Cobbe moved to England. “The Fenians of Ballybogmucky” and Cobbe’s autobiography were published almost 30 years apart and addressed two different issues in Irish history: “The Fenians of Ballybogmucky” weighed in on the burgeoning Fenian movement within Ireland, while Cobbe’s autobiography was published in 1894, when

the Home Rule debate was raging in Parliament.²³ In this chapter, I comparatively analyze the two pieces, the periodical essay “The Fenians of Ballybogmucky” and her autobiography, *The Life of Frances Power Cobbe, by Herself*, in the hope that we can reach a fuller understanding of how one Anglo-Irish woman writer used the “personal” as a means of negotiating her loyalist position in two genres that, at least on the surface, do not appear to have much in common.

Dana Anderson’s examination of how twentieth-century writers—including anti-poverty and labor activist Dorothy Day and Lakota medicine man Black Elk—constructed persuasive identities in autobiographical writings intersects with my focus on how Cobbe constructed persuasive identities in the periodical press in generative ways. While Anderson focuses solely on what could be described as traditional autobiography, I seek examples of persuasive identities in a genre that is not usually associated with self-revelation: the periodical essay. I show how Cobbe negotiates her position as a “big house daughter” by using the available means of the periodical essay. I do not treat the periodical essay as a lesser genre than Cobbe’s weighty two-volume autobiography, instead treating it as another form of Anglo-Irish autobiography. Like Cobbe’s official autobiography, the periodical essays use the details of Irish life in order to build an argument about Ireland’s inability to rule itself. Cobbe’s recycling and reshaping of the same material shows her savvy as a rhetor, as she is displaying her ability to anticipate not only the demographics of her audience, but

²³ The Fenian movement refers to the formation of the Fenian Brotherhood, formed in New York City by Irish exiles and to the formation of the Irish Republican Brotherhood in Dublin in 1858. The aim of both of these secret societies was to wrench Ireland from England by use of force (Curtis 62). The Home Rule movement began in 1870 when Isaac Butt formed the Home Government Association in Dublin. The movement called for the formation of an Irish Parliament that would oversee local affairs, while the English Parliament would continue to “control imperial affairs” (Curtis 84).

their expectations. Her use of the same material and her deletion and addition of certain passages displays her ability to subtly change her arguments to suit different audiences, genres, and historical moments. Examining autobiography as a flexible genre expands our vision of the periodical press as a rhetorical site where a woman could fashion a persuasive self from her own experiences and knowledge.

In this chapter, I examine how Cobbe constructs her Irish identity in her autobiographical and periodical writing and how she uses her life as an upper-class woman as experiential evidence to argue for England's continued control over Ireland and her inhabitants and for the continuation of the imperial system that benefited Cobbe so greatly. First, I review theories of women's autobiography and describe how Cobbe's autobiographical chapters on Ireland intersect with her journalism on the Irish Question. I then contextualize the *Argosy* by describing it as a space where popular genres mixed, making it the ideal spot for Cobbe's autobiographical journalism. I then explore "The Fenians of Ballybogmucky" as an example of autobiographical rhetoric, though it was published in a space not usually associated with life-writing. I conclude by discussing the chapters in *The Life of Frances Power Cobbe, by Herself* that describe Cobbe's life in Ireland, examining how they align and diverge from "The Fenians of Ballybogmucky," where much of the same material appeared decades earlier. I show that this alignment and divergence reveals the potential of the periodical press as a site of persuasive identity construction.

THEORIZING WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Viewing Cobbe's *Argosy* piece as autobiography requires an expansion our definition of what counts as autobiography. Leigh Gilmore describes the autobiography as a "discursive

hybrid” whose definition is “up for grabs” (17, 18). Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith offer a useful label that encompassed many genres: “the autobiographical occasion,” which can be a “performance or text,” is a “site on which cultural ideologies intersect and dissect one another, in contradiction, consonance, and adjacency” (xix). Scholars of women’s autobiography largely agree that it is difficult to discuss a tradition of women’s autobiography because it doesn’t exist or it’s diffused over multiple genres and written for multiple purposes. In *Autobiographics*, Leigh Gilmore posits the term “autobiographics” in place of autobiography because women historically did not have access to the masculinized forms of “identity and authority” needed to write an autobiography, which Gilmore calls “the closest textual version of the political ideology of individualism” (1-2). In that sense, we can only look for an “incoherence” when we look to advance a “feminist theory of autobiographical production” (Gilmore 13).

Linda Peterson, however, firmly sees Victorian women participating in life-writing as self-consciously writing autobiography, a genre that was emerging during their lifetime: “The term *autobiography* did not become established until the Victorian era, along with rising interest in the genre” (18). However, Peterson could not identify a linear history of women’s autobiography:

To write of the “origins” or of “traditions” of women’s autobiography in England is to create, perhaps inevitably, a past that never was. We do not know what Englishwoman produced the first autobiography; what women’s texts we have lost from the mid-seventeenth century, that moment which seems to mark the beginning of an unbroken English autobiographical tradition. (1)

Peterson's work assumes three categories of women's autobiography: spiritual, domestic, and artistic. Peterson briefly describes Cobbe's work, pairing her with Harriet Martineau, as an example of "spiritual autobiography," where women chose "to claim their place within a spiritual tradition as part of what we would now call a feminist agenda," electing to "minimize rather than give prominence to self-representational forms associated with gender" (16).

Even so, Cobbe's vast autobiography defies easy categorization, covering her childhood in Ireland, her religious apostasy and subsequent theological writing, her experiences managing her father's house and her connected work with the servants and villagers, her travels, her emigration to England and work with Mary Carpenter educating poor children, her start in journalism, her activism, and finally, her retirement to Wales. Peterson notes Cobbe's references to her work near the end of her autobiography, briefly connecting the work to artistic memoirs (98). However, parts of Cobbe's autobiography can just as easily be read as a work of domestic autobiography, which Peterson describes as a "literary manifestation of the doctrine of separate spheres—at best a form of commitment to the private and domestic, at worst a form of compensation for the loss of the public, professional, and political" (19). Though Cobbe was neither a wife in the traditional sense nor a mother, her domestic labors helped maintain the connections between her father's large estate and the surrounding community. Peterson notes that one marker of domestic memoirs is the construction of a woman's identity as being relational to the people that surrounded her. Cobbe's chapters on Ireland bear this marker, with one important caveat. On a more immediate level, Cobbe's identity is relational to her parents and the workers and villagers that populated Newbridge and the surrounding area. On a larger scale, her identity is

relational to what they represent: the Anglo-Irish ancestors she recounts in the introductory chapter, who established Newbridge and made a privileged space for their descendants, and the “native” Irish whose lives Cobbe spun into colorful anecdotes of homely charm and good humor or the threat of violent aggression.

Cobbe’s chapters about Ireland also position her autobiographical writing within another tradition. Peterson expands her heuristic beyond gender, suggesting that we look to “other possibilities,” understanding that “other allegiances (religious, regional, political, or social) may be equally important ... or that some women’s accounts may self-consciously invoke multiple traditions—these possibilities have been underexplored” (2). For Cobbe, those other allegiances were bound up in her identity as a member of the Ascendancy class. Elizabeth Grubgeld’s *Anglo-Irish Autobiography* explored the tradition of Anglo-Irish writers “draw[ing] from their family histories a sense of continuity and dissolution, influence and irrelevance, identity and nothingness” (xi). In the passage with which I opened this chapter, we can see all of these ideas in play, as Cobbe asserts her Irish identity by congratulating herself that her upper-class English peers had assumed she was English. Her insistence that her only knowledge of Ireland is “simply that the first thirty-six years of [her] life were spent there” is an ironic admission of how much Ireland shaped her identity as a person and as a writer. Her response to the question asked by a powerful man—“What do you know about Ireland?—is essentially “nothing” and “everything.” She claims Irish identity through her deft negation of it. By insisting that her Irish experiences in no way shaped her identity, she only draws attention to how much they did. After all, she devotes two chapters of her first volume to her life in Ireland and continued to reference it in her

second volume. Her disjointed response to the question also emphasizes the hyphenated aspect of her Irishness.

Though the upper classes of Ireland may have much in common with the upper classes of other countries, including England, Grubgeld argues that the Anglo-Irish used their experiences in specific ways to construct autobiographies that set them apart: “Whether or not Anglo-Irish constituted a culture in the anthropological sense, its life writing suggests that those individuals who wrote autobiographies perceived themselves as possessing a distinct culture and used it to differentiate themselves from others” (xvii). Grubgeld offers an encapsulation of Anglo-Irish writers that almost perfectly describe Cobbe’s writing on the Irish Question:

They rail against their own class, and they defend its attitudes and actions; they assert their place with an Irish nation, and they question its legitimacy. In every text, they query the nature of their identity and question the location of their true home. And against an overwhelming narrative of cultural decline, they engage in the struggle of self-making that is autobiography. (Grubgeld xi)

For Cobbe, the periodical essay functioned in the same way. In “The Fenians of Ballybogmucky,” these two meanings converge in ways that are instructive on how women used personal writing to reach wide audiences and speak on a variety of issues related or unrelated to the private sphere. As we have seen in the previous two chapters, the genre of the periodical essay is a crucial component of Cobbe’s rhetorical situation. Cobbe’s work in this area has been neglected as an area of study due to her loyalist ideology and her choice of journalism as a vehicle for her arguments. Cobbe’s Irish identity, though often ignored by

scholars, is a crucial factor in a close examination of her rhetorics, as it informed so much of her perspective on issues of gender, race, and class, issues that were at the forefront of Victorian thought.

As I discuss in Chapter 1, the periodical press offered women rhetors a safe space to reach mixed audiences, a middle-ground between the exposure of the public lecture and the confidentiality of private writing, such as letters and journals.²⁴ Cobbe's intersection of autobiography and journalism proves how Cobbe used the conventions of the periodical press to cross the border from personal to public, not only expanding her influence over Victorian society but creating a space for women writers to participate not just as passive receivers of the cultural values created by powerful men in the public sphere, but as active creators of those values. What recovering the writing of Cobbe adds to the body of knowledge surrounding the rhetorics of women in the nineteenth century is an expansion of the concept of "sphere," both in terms of rhetorical space and subject matter. Thanks to the recovery work of women's rhetorics scholars in the last two decades, the idea that women were participating in rhetorical culture throughout history is now a statement rather than a question.

Viewing Cobbe's periodical writing as a form of autobiography is not as much of a theoretical stretch as it may initially appear. For Watson and Smith, the site of the autobiographical occasion "is rife with diverse potentials" (xix). Gilmore suggests that, because women were left out of traditional forms of autobiography, we need to ask, "Where

²⁴ Again, I do not want to overemphasize the dichotomy between the public and private. After all, women often wrote letters and journals with the intention that they would be widely circulated. Cobbe, however, did not seem to fit into this paradigm. Mitchell noted her frustration that Cobbe asked her friends and relatives to destroy her letters (*Frances Power Cobbe* 6-7).

is the autobiographical? What constitutes its representation?” (13). While I disagree that a woman with the class credentials and literary fame enjoyed by Cobbe would have been excluded from the genre of autobiography, especially given that the term autobiography came into use during her own lifetime (as we have seen, Cobbe was ever ready to capitalize on current events and trends), this attention to the looseness of genre boundaries enables us to see autobiography happening even between the pages of a periodical, where writing the self was mediated through layers of editorial conventions and audience expectations. Cobbe’s periodical essay on Ireland is such an “autobiographical occasion,” a “discursive hybrid” that allowed Cobbe to reshape it to meet the conventions of two different genres: the periodical essay and the literary autobiography.

INTERSECTING JOURNALISM AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY: TWO SITES OF COBBE’S ANGLO-IRISH AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Cobbe’s writing on the Irish Question offered her readers an image of Cobbe the person, as it intersects with Cobbe’s autobiographical narration of her own life in compelling ways. It might be tempting to read Cobbe’s autobiography as the “real” Cobbe, as a self that is somehow more authentic than the persona that Cobbe creates in each of her periodical essays. Reading Cobbe’s autobiographical chapters about Ireland alongside her periodical essays proves that Cobbe’s autobiographical self is as much of a construction as her journalistic persona(s). In “Frances Power Cobbe’s *Life* and the Rules for Women’s Autobiography,” Sally Mitchell notes that reusing old material was “was not uncommon” during the decade that Cobbe published her autobiography (142). However, Mitchell seems to view Cobbe’s recycling as a clumsy maneuver to pad her autobiography, describing Cobbe’s act as “unacknowledged cannibalizing of earlier work” (142). Mitchell sees this act

of literary cannibalism as problematic due to Cobbe's failure to offer any context for her original work. While Harriet Martineau's autobiography uses two of her previously published works, she identifies them as such. Cobbe, however, fails to provide even the bare fact that the piece was previously published, let alone where and when it first appeared. As a biographer, Mitchell seems frustrated by Cobbe's eliding of publication information due to the fact that her account of Irish nationalism is not accurate. While Mitchell is, of course, well aware that the autobiographical "self" is a construction, her problem with Cobbe's recycling of "The Fenians of Ballybogmucky" is that the periodical essay was written at a very different point in history and had different aims:

The complications of this particular case demonstrate the difficulty, especially for an author closely engaged in contemporary political and social causes, of using her own essays as uncomplicated sources for her autobiography. "The Fenians of Ballybogmucky" might have been explicable in context, if examined as evidence of the political situation—and the fears of terrorism among middle- and upper-class English people—during the autumn of 1865, when demonstrations, arrests, and rumors of Fenian violence were reported almost daily in both London and New York newspapers, but it is misleading, both practically and emotionally, as a description of Ireland during the famine. (Frances Power Cobbe's *Life* 144)

What Mitchell is suggesting is that a periodical essay and autobiography are written for two very different purposes. A periodical essay is meant to address immediate issues and appeal to a specific audience, while an autobiography is meant to render a more or less accurate depiction of history and is written for a wider, more amorphous audience. I agree with

Mitchell that Cobbe's use of "The Fenians of Ballybogmucky" in her autobiography offers a problematic depiction of Irish history, but what is compelling about examining these two pieces as counterparts is not that Cobbe recycled much of the material from her periodical essay for use in her autobiographical chapter. As Mitchell points out, reusing previously published work was at least somewhat common during the late nineteenth century. Rather, it is *how* she shaped the same material for different audiences.

In "The Definitions of Self and Form in Feminist Autobiography Theory," Marjanne E. Gooz e posits two major ways that scholars typically study autobiography, either viewing it as "historical sources and documents" or focusing on aesthetic issues, "looking at the autobiographical text as an artistic work in its own right" (412). Mitchell and I are both interested in how Cobbe constructs herself as a writer, but our views of how Cobbe addressed historical events differ in slight but important ways. As a biographer, Mitchell examines how Cobbe constructs historical events; as a rhetorical scholar, I look at how Cobbe uses those constructions of historical events in order to persuade her audience. While I am interested in how Cobbe often slanted Irish history, I am more concerned with how her "misrepresentations" speak to her ability to assess her audience and the historical moment and to construct an argument her audience would find persuasive. Her rhetorical strategies reveal the malleability of the periodical essay as a means of expression for Victorian women writers and Cobbe's adeptness as a rhetor in recognizing that malleability and using it to expand her influence over multiple sites of cultural meaning-making, including the periodical and the autobiography (so very different on the surface). Cobbe's autobiography serves as direct evidence of how she negotiated the periodical press differently than other genres: while the genre poses certain challenges for women attempting to build their ethos (mostly

male editorship, masculine or gender-neutral house styles, to name just two), it also allowed women writers to leave out or emphasize aspects of their class, race, or gender in order to make appeals based on the demographics of their audiences, to fashion a self that would be persuasive to her audience.

For Cobbe, Ireland was the literal and metaphoric “ground” from which her identity as an Anglo-Irish writer emerged. To introduce the two pieces I examine in this chapter more fully, I extrapolate from a metaphor Cobbe employs in both pieces. In both works, Cobbe would describe the ground of the Irish village that surrounded her family estate as unstable. In *The Life of Frances Power Cobbe*, she writes, “The threat of rebellion rose higher, till even the calm people like ourselves began to wonder whether it was a volcano on which we were treading, or the familiar mud of Balisk” (140). It is a line she revised from her early *Argosy* essay; the only difference is that in her earlier piece, Cobbe used pseudonyms for herself and her family, and even changed the place name. Thirty years after “The Fenians of Ballybogmucky,” her earlier words continued to have meaning. The threat of Irish rebellion against British rule destabilized the ground upon which Cobbe stood, threatening to rend or crack the monopoly the Anglo-Irish had maintained in England for centuries, thus rending or cracking the classed identity that Cobbe constructed throughout her writing career.

Laurel Brake has warned in *Subjugated Knowledges* that we cannot necessarily fix the ideological positions of writers based on their periodical works, given the unstable nature of the periodical genre: “The appearance of an author in a periodical did not necessarily mean adherence to its collective ethos” (9). Due to the fact that Cobbe maintained an implacably imperialist viewpoint throughout her long writing career, it might be easy to assume that we can glean the *real* Cobbe from her periodical writings, that her journalistic

musings will somehow match exactly the thoughts about Ireland that Cobbe maintained in her private thoughts. It is safe to assume that Cobbe really did hold the imperialist beliefs she maintained throughout her writing career; it was only the tenor of those arguments that changed given a multitude of factors.

As Gilmore argues in *Autobiographics*, women's autobiography is a genre that has often been ignored: "Autobiography is what men write, and what women write belongs to some 'homelier' and minor traditions. . . . The projection of an all-too-familiar gender hierarchy onto texts through the terms 'major' and 'minor' has extended, in discussions of autobiography, to the persons who write" (2). Cobbe, certainly known as a "minor" writer if she is considered at all, wrote within the confines of the minor traditions of the periodical essay and autobiography, producing "The Fenians of Ballybogmucky," a piece that is very much focused on ideas of the personal and the home, however imagined or constructed.

Cobbe's periodical writing on Ireland is an autobiographical occasion because she uses her personal experiences to build her arguments, but constructs those experiences in a way that will persuade her audience to believe certain ideas about the Irish. As Susan Hamilton notes (and as discussed in chapter 2), the periodical essay is not a "confessional" genre, so many tropes that would be found in traditional autobiography are either missing or sublimated. For example, though Cobbe constructs an authoritative "I" within her periodical writing on Ireland, she does not always refer to herself as Irish or Anglo-Irish. In her periodical essay, "The Fenians of Ballybogmucky," she uses the pronoun "we" but uses pseudonyms to refer to herself and her family. However, three decades later, she would use the same material in her autobiography, but with the actual names of herself and her family members. The two texts become sites of contestation between genres and ideologies, where

Cobbe's feminist and imperialist ideologies "intersect and dissect" each other, functioning in seemingly contradictory ways. The privileged background that informed her racial and class biases is the same background that was the scaffolding supporting her brilliant writing career: her family's money and position allowed her access to education and reading materials, and the leisure time to read, take long walks around Newbridge, observe the villagers on her many charitable excursions, and travel the world, all events that later shaped her writing.

Cobbe's many privileges ran adjacent to the many elements of her identity that would disqualify her from privilege. As a woman who chose to live independently of men, she necessarily had to earn a living and was able to call upon her education and experience in order to enter the working world. Cobbe's writing life is the ultimate intersection of the public and private spheres. In this section, we have seen how the pressure of Cobbe's classed identity informed her intersection of periodical writing and autobiography in a theoretical sense; next, we will see how Cobbe's classed autobiographical rhetorics played out specifically within the pages of *Argosy*.

THE RHETORICAL SPACE OF THE *ARGOSY*

To gain a fuller understanding of Cobbe's imperial rhetorics in "The Fenians of Ballybogmucky," we must examine the context in which she was writing, looking at both historical events leading up to Cobbe's essay and the periodical for which she was writing. The *Argosy* was published in London from December 1865 to September 1901. Jennifer Phegley describes it as a "shilling monthly" and "solidly middle-brow" (Phegley 187).

“The Fenians of Ballybogmucky” appeared in its inaugural issue. The *Argosy* was surely meant to appeal to a middle-class English audience. Editor Isa Craig²⁵ offered a poem titled “On Board the Argosy.” The title and the poem’s placement in the first volume suggests that Craig surely meant the poem to function as a mission statement. Craig’s poem relies heavily on maritime imagery: indeed, the Oxford English Dictionary defines “argosy” as “a merchant vessel of the largest size and burden, especially those of Ragusa and Venice.” What is most interesting about the *Argosy* is that two women were, at different times, at the helm as editors: Isa Craig was actually Isabella Craig, while “Mrs. Henry Wood,” or Ellen Price Wood, later used the *Argosy* as a vehicle for her own fiction.²⁶ Phegley notes that the *Argosy*, as a “family literary magazine,” was supportive of women’s roles in periodical culture: “Family literary magazines were aimed at culturally educating a broadly middle-class audience that included women. These magazines conceived of women as important participants in and disseminators of the nation’s culture and were very amenable to women writers, editors, and readers alike” (Phegley, “Domesticating” 180).

Still, given that most editors of Victorian periodicals were male, it is safe to assume that Craig and Wood had to negotiate the rhetorical situation of the periodical press in a different way than their male counterparts. This comes atop the already complex interactions

²⁵ Craig also served as assistant secretary for the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science for 10 years (which, according to the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, earned her much public scorn). She also may have met Cobbe through her associations with the Langham Place circle, a feminist group that lobbied on behalf of women’s suffrage. Craig also was one of the first staffers of the *English Woman’s Journal*. Like Cobbe, Craig moved to London from a “Celtic” region, Scotland. Unlike Cobbe, Craig was middle-class, the daughter of a merchant.

²⁶ It may be tempting to read Craig’s pseudonym as an attempt to cloak her gendered identity. However, while “Isa” is a masculine name in twenty first-century America (though rare, it is sometimes used as a diminutive of Isaac), the name Isa was actually a popular nickname for Isabella in nineteenth-century English and Italian culture: her audience would likely have known that Craig was a woman.

between periodical editors (not to mention writers) and their audiences. The opening lines of “On Board the Argosy” may speak not only to the ethereal nature of artistic inspiration but to the rhetorical implications of the periodical press as well:

Our thoughts are ships that go,/Blown by a breath, and with their fit words
freighted,/All up and down the world; we never know,/When we have set them
forth, if they are fated/To find a haven, or to sink below/Oblivion’s waters that
about them flow. (37)

Craig’s poem may be more sophisticated than a superficial reading might suggest: in fact, it can be read as a deft analysis of the rhetorical situation of the periodical press. Craig seems to acknowledge the difficulty of assessing her audience. Like the wares traveling aboard a merchant ship through unpredictable waters, she cannot be sure that her words, and the words of her writers, will gain a receptive hearing from her intended audience, that they will hit home.

The figurative use of a merchant ship and its precarious cargo also signaled the very real possibility that the periodical would fail financially (this, in fact, occurred with *Tinsley’s*, a short-lived journal for which Cobbe also wrote on the Irish Question). The use of “argosy” as the title of the journal may have implications in regards to class, as well: an argosy evoked images of freight and merchandise, which suggest middle-class concerns and ideologies, as the middle-class was composed partly of merchants. Perhaps more importantly, Craig’s conflation of the supposedly ethereal act of writing with a merchant ship evokes images not of the romance of sea-faring, but of the realities of working for a living, something with which a middle-class audience would be familiar. Though Cobbe was a “big house daughter,” she had to write to make a living. That would mean that she would necessarily

need to shape her arguments to meet the expectations of not only her audience, but her editors as well.

When considering the rhetorical situation posed by a Victorian periodical, even small details can open up to reveal clues about the publication and its audience. The subtitle of the *Argosy* reads “A Magazine of Tales, Travels, Essays, and Poems.” A glance at the table of contents of its first volume suggests that Cobbe’s essay on the Irish would have fit well under the themes suggested by the subtitle: one essay is titled “The Natural History of Scotchmen” and asks, “Are all Scotchmen alike? Is it enough to say of a man that he is a Scotchmen to convey a full and accurate idea respecting him?” (49), while an illustration titled “Sheik Hamil” by Arthur Boyd Houghton, features a turbaned middle-eastern man in traditional Arabian costume gazing dreamily into the distance as wisps of smoke curl from an incense burner nearby. The use of a merchant ship as symbol of the periodical speaks not only to the issue of class, but to the issue of commodification: as an argosy carries the products of faraway lands into English ports for the consumption of the middle class, the *Argosy* packages images of the racial and cultural “other” for the consumption of its middle-class readers. Cobbe, as a member of the Anglo-Irish gentry, would be in the unique position to offer an image of the Irish that her audience would accept.

APPEALING TO ENGLISH READERS IN THE *ARGOSY*:

COBBE’S CLOAKED SUBJECTIVITY IN “THE FENIANS OF BALLYBOGMUCKY”

Maureen O’Connor, in her essay “Frances Power Cobbe and the Patriarchs,” offered a useful synopsis of Cobbe’s complex associations with Ireland:

Cobbe, though she took pride in being unidentifiable as “Irish,” lived in the colonial periphery for over a third of her life and was not English, nor was she

middle class, but the daughter of a landlord of a sizeable estate with close family ties to British aristocracy. She was brought up by a beloved Irish nurse, taught native Irish children in her role as big-house daughter, lived through the famine, and in 1848 inadvertently contributed funds to the local “Cutthroat Club,” which was threatening violent insurgence, targeting the Cobbe family. (188)

These unstable and contradictory associations are all in play in “Ballybogmucky.” Cobbe’s persuasive powers in “Ballybogmucky” hinge upon her ability to construct an authoritative, persuasive identity. In the context of the *Argosy*, she constructs herself as an expert on English-Irish relations without ever revealing *why* she is such an expert, writing the entire piece from the perspective of a distant observer, using the standard “we” in the place of the authorial “I” but nonetheless speaking from the third person. In the case of the *Argosy*, as in most of her periodical essays, Cobbe received a byline in the form of her full name at the end of the narrative. Her open claim of authorship emphasizes that her decision to use pseudonyms was a rhetorical choice that distanced Cobbe from her Irish past. By not informing her audience of her Anglo-Irish background, Cobbe does not acknowledge her narrow focus on her own classed community as the site of civility and rationality. Just as she makes appeals to her audience in “The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland” based on what she supposed were shared identifications between herself and her audience, Cobbe finds common ground by constructing her national identity as English.

Cobbe speaks from her hyphenated identity in her opening appeal to the audience of the *Argosy*. Though Cobbe has made the same point in each of her essays on Ireland—that

England should retain control of Ireland—her *Argosy* essay paints a much more vivid picture of English-Irish relations than her other pieces:

Between Arcadian pictures of O’Connell’s “finest peasantry in the world,” compounded between accounts of extatic [sic] tourists, with scenery and costumes furnished by reminiscences of the *Colleen Bawn* at the Adelphi and certain very different portraits drawn from the less agreeable sources of police reports of Agrarian and other murders—the English idea of the Irish peasant is, to say the least, somewhat obscure. We propose in the following pages to offer a little contribution of veritable sketches, to enable such of our readers as may desire it to form for themselves a rather more accurate notion of the subject. (80)

Because she was writing in a periodical that would become well-known for its sensation fiction, Cobbe made appeals to pathos rather than relying on her usual strategy of appealing to logos, drawing broad sketches of local villagers that are meant to represent the supposed simplicity, child-like nature, and innate violence of the Irish. Her pathetic appeals are designed to elicit sympathy for the impoverished villagers and to raise panic about the nationalist movement within Ireland.

Cobbe quickly establishes the event that precipitated her essay: a thwarted 1865 rebellion that failed in the months before the publication of “The Fenians of Ballybogmucky.” While this insurrection never materialized, the threat against the English and their interests in Ireland was real and persistent: “It appears that a certain small nucleus of truth lay concealed within the very large nebula of Fenian boasting” (80). It would be in the best interest of her English readers to pay attention to her essay given the uneasy

relationship that still existed between the English and the Irish. She almost immediately references William Smith O'Brien's rebellion in 1848, referring to the willingness of the Irish peasantry to succumb to the rhetoric of powerful leaders: "That the leaders of this insane attempt calculated upon the unbounded ignorance of the mass of the Irish peasantry—their readiness to be roused to insurrection and violence—their deeply-planted jealousy of the landed class, whose pillages was a main feature of the programme,—all this is evident enough" (80). Cobbe acknowledges her English audience straightaway by complimenting England's economic and military power: "There have been actually found men who either believed, or pretended to believe, that it was possible to wrench Ireland from the grasp of England's strong right arm" (80). While Cobbe raises fears about the power of rhetoric to incite people to violent action, she was attempting to sway her audience to her position.

She alludes to the dangers such uprisings pose to the Ascendancy class, a small but powerful minority to which her English readers might feel more connected, without mentioning that she herself is a member of this class. She continues to sidestep her Irish heritage in her justification for her study of the Irish peasantry:

It will surely not be amiss for *us in England* to pause a little and study the state of some millions of *our fellow-subjects* to whom such a character as this can be justly attributed; whom those who ought to know them best treat as a sort of social powder-magazine, ready to be exploded by the first weak hand that applies to them the torch of some wild-fire project. (80, emphasis mine)

Note that Cobbe does not necessarily claim "Englishness" for herself in this passage. She negates her specific national identity by locating herself within the same specific

geographical boundaries as her English readers. She also attempts to foster a connection with her audience to the so-called “Celts” by referring to them as “fellow-subjects.”

Cobbe’s opening passages also reflect Julian Moynahan’s assertion that Anglo-Irish writers could not take for granted that their audiences particularly cared about the subject of the Irish Question (40). Cobbe thought that the English *should* care due to the propensity of the Irish to act out violently, a “powder keg” ready to explode just miles from the English shore. While she negated her own Irishness by relying on geographical definitions of nationality, she relied on essentialist notions of national identity when it comes to the “native” Irish: “Those who know Ireland best will, we believe, without exception, be found to be also those who feel most tenderly for her people; while they admit that in Celtic veins there runs, along with the largest share of the milk of human kindness, a drop of intensest [sic] gall, having no appreciable parallel in the Saxon constitution—a drop which at evil hours seems to turn the whole nature into bitterness” (81).

In the portrait of the Irish peasant constructed by Cobbe, Irish rebellion arises from the very blood, not from the social conditions faced by the Irish that came as a result of economic and political policies instituted by the English. Though Cobbe groups herself as one of “those who know Ireland best,” she evaded any explanation of *how* she knows Ireland. Cobbe’s use of the rather clinical term “specimen” in place of “sketch” perhaps hints at her difficulty crossing over from her rationalist comfort zone into the more poetical tone needed for the three-pronged literary hybrid, an autobiographical periodical essay with elements of sensation fiction, she was attempting in the *Argosy*.

COBBE’S EXPERIMENT WITH SENSATION FICTION

As we have seen, autobiography is found across several sites. Cobbe's autobiographical genre-blending did not end at satire. Perhaps Cobbe's unwillingness to be straightforwardly autobiographical had more to do with the type of material published in the *Argosy* than any putative threat to her family's physical safety. "The Fenians of Ballyboggmucky" stylistically seems as close to fiction as anything Cobbe would ever write, employing a narrative style that featured dialogue and characterization. Mitchell describes a similar piece titled, "The Spectral Rout," which Cobbe published in another miscellany, the *Shilling Magazine*, which "may have been an attempt at fiction, though a legend or a tale (plot and moral without characterization) seems to be as close as she could get" (156). "Plot and moral without characterization" is an apt description of "The Fenians of Ballyboggmucky." Perhaps "The Fenians of Ballyboggmucky" was Cobbe's only piece in the *Argosy* due to Cobbe's favoring of the nonfiction essay as her genre of choice. Today, Cobbe's readers have the benefit of knowing that "Ballyboggmucky" was based (however loosely) on the facts of Cobbe's life. But at the time of its creation, Cobbe took a third person perspective, as if she were narrating a tale told to her by someone else. Perhaps her reticence has less to do with protecting her family than with trying to meet the genre conventions of a form of writing to which she was not accustomed: sensation fiction. Phegley provides an apt description of an example of sensation fiction: "It includes detection, spying, deceit, murder, secret identities, disguises, black mail, theft, numerous sentimental death-bed scenes, premonitions, and other supernatural occurrences, including the appearance of ghosts" (191). Sensation fiction also features "surprises, revelations, and coincidences" (Phegley 190).

As Mitchell points out, Cobbe's two attempts at something like fiction not only seem out of place when considering her entire body of work but also share common elements with

each other. Sensation fiction was also a genre associated with women writers, just as the miscellany periodical was. As Mitchell notes, Cobbe would continue to struggle over the creation of a “popular voice” that would be suitable for a magazine with less prestige than the *Cornhill* or *Fraser’s* (156). In the years after Cobbe wrote for the *Argosy*, the journal became well-known for its penchant for the publication of this genre, thanks to Ellen Price Wood, who used her editorship to market her own sensation fiction.

What does Wood have to do with the rhetorics of Cobbe, who, after all, published her *Argosy* essay two years before Woods took the helm? If the *Argosy* was to become known as a journal that specialized in sensation fiction, it is not a stretch to imagine that the factors that contributed to such an environment were already in play when Cobbe published “The Fenians of Ballybogmucky.” In “Domesticating Sensation Fiction: Ellen Price Wood as Author and Editor of the *Argosy Magazine*,” Phegley argues that Wood made sensation fiction acceptable to a mainstream audience by constructing her authorship as being particularly feminized. Wood downplays her ambition and creates an image of her authorship that relied on her roles as wife and mother, even using her married name, Mrs. Henry Wood, as her byline. Like Cobbe, Wood used the periodical press as a means of constructing an image of herself as a female author that would be acceptable to a mainstream audience. However, Cobbe’s experimentation with Wood’s genre of choice would not prove as successful. Cobbe’s “Fenian” essay bears many markers of sensation fiction—the threat of murder and insurrection, deceitful villagers, death scenes, ghosts, premonitions, and coincidences. For example, a “visitor” from the Norton family (Cobbe later identifies this visitor as herself) calls upon a poor family in Ballybogmucky, leaving them some of her pocket money. Shortly after she leaves, the local cutt-throat club meets at the house: the

Nortons' gift of money will go toward pikes meant for Mr. Norton himself. Perhaps Cobbe's essay was a precursor of what was to come.

However, before Woods made sensation fiction respectable (and as Phegley pointed out, Woods may have only succeeded in making it respectable for her own career), it was associated with the lower classes. Cobbe's use of pseudonyms may signal more than an adherence to the genre conventions of fiction; perhaps it signals a discomfort with sensation fiction's "low-brow" overtones. Though Cobbe's rhetorics in the periodical press often use a more conversational tone and are often times humorous, she mostly employs a rational argumentative style, noting points of agreement with her adversaries, then refuting their argument point by point, often using her own experiences as evidence (I will discuss more fully Cobbe's rationalist style in Chapter 5). Even "The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland" employs a more evenhanded tone than "The Fenians of Ballybogmucky," though her argument is much the same. Though it touches briefly on the threat of insurrection, it more closely resembles a travel piece than a romantic tale of Irish rebels and haunted graveyards. Perhaps the style of the *Argosy* was too much of a stretch even for a rhetor as versatile as Cobbe: throughout her life, no matter how far away she lived from Ireland, her upper-class, Anglo-Irish position continued to inform her rhetorical style.

COBBE'S COMIC SKETCHES OF THE IRISH: INDIVIDUAL PORTRAITS DESIGNED TO REPRESENT THE WHOLE

Sensation fiction was not the only genre that intersected with Cobbe's autobiographical rhetorics in "Ballybogmucky." Grubgeld recognized a link between Anglo-Irish autobiography and satire:

The sardonic humor that pervades many Anglo-Irish autobiographies center on shared preoccupations with childhood, the social indicators of language and manners, family history, inherited property, religious difference, and even the narrative of extinction itself. In satirizing the very tropes that are regularly summoned to fortify Anglo-Irish assertions of superiority, the comic autobiographer examines them as sites of critical inquiry as well as emblems of a lost way of life. (127)

Despite its heavy subject matter—the Fenian uprisings of 1860s and the Home Rule movement of the 1880s—Cobbe’s essay is meant to be humorous. For clues as to her intent, look no further than the title, which references an invented place name that evokes popular views by the English of Ireland as a muddy backwater. Pairing the very real Fenians with such a ridiculously inventive place name is meant to deflate the seriousness of the Irish nationalist movement, which is just what Cobbe would attempt to do with the rest of her essay.

Cobbe’s tone in “The Fenians of Ballybogmucky” is problematic and most likely faced a much different reception from an English nineteenth-century audience than it would receive from an audience today. Cobbe’s comical tone may also reflect a struggle to match the house style of a middle-brow periodical. According to Mitchell, Cobbe continually strived to achieve a tone that would appeal to general audiences: “The humorous Fenian piece may also have been a stab at finding a popular voice that would sell” (156). Mitchell suggests that Cobbe’s humour will likely not translate well to a twenty first-century audience, noting its shortcomings as evidence of the actual history of the Irish nationalist movement: “Its most vivid details have political or religious targets that make unpleasant reading if taken

as a picture actually remembered from the famine years” (64). Cobbe rather glibly summed up the Potato Famine thus: “Of course all the neighbouring gentry joined the usual schemes of soup-kitchens and the like, and by one means or other the hard years of famine were passed over” (87). She not only glosses over the fact that an estimated one million Irish people died as the result of the famine, but overemphasizes English aid to the starving underclass.

In Chapter 2, we saw an example of how Cobbe used the trope of family to position the Celt within the United Kingdom. In “Ballyboggmucky,” her perspective on the Irish is one of a parent who is alternately delighted and disappointed with her child. She is interested, she claims, not in rebuking them, but in shaping their characters: “What lesson, then, are we to learn from this fact of human nature? Surely not that Celt, or Hindoo, or Negro, are irreclaimable beings, never to be given the rights of civilized men, but simply that, like children of mingled virtues and faults, they must be treated with a view to *their* characters, and not to the characters of far off other races” (81). She categorizes the Celts with other groups victimized by colonization, including South Asians and Africans, yet claims the Irish should be treated as an individual race. Perhaps that is why she chose the genre of the sketch, as it facilitated the creation of individualized, though superficial, portraits of the everyday Irish. Cobbe uses the same sketches in both her periodical essay and her autobiography, though her introductory material is very different, reflective of both the time that has lapsed between the publication of the two pieces and Cobbe’s different audiences.

But before we meet the people of Ballyboggmucky, Cobbe introduces us to the village itself, offering a description of the material conditions of everyday life. Ballyboggmucky, which Cobbe noted does not lie on land owned by the Master Norton (her father’s alter-ego)

and is instead owned by an English absentee landlord, is “certainly *not* the ‘loveliest village on the plain.’” Cobbe’s rhetorical choices emphasize that Ireland was not the prelapsarian, rural paradise often written about in travelogues. In “The Fenians of Ballyboggmucky,” Cobbe spoke as though she were one step removed from the ongoing conflict between England and Ireland: she referred to the Anglo-Irish family at the center of her essay as “the Nortons of Knockillsassenach.” Reading the essay against her autobiography reveals that the Nortons were, of course, the Cobbes, and Knockillsassenach was their estate, Newbridge. The audience of the *Argosy* did not have the benefit of knowing Cobbe’s biography as she had only just moved to London and begun her career in journalism. Though Cobbe “pledges” that “every character and incident” is “drawn from life,” she also emphasizes that Ballyboggmucky could be found on “no map of Ireland,” and the Nortons could not be found in Burke’s “Landed Gentry,” a catalog of important British families. She also stresses that she has changed the names of the Irish peasants “Miss Norton” encounters on her charitable excursions into the village (80). This seems considerably less necessary than using pseudonyms for herself and her family, given Cobbe’s audience of middle-class English miscellany readers.

Though Mitchell believes that Cobbe’s tone was meant to be light and humorous, she acknowledges that Cobbe’s intent was to persuade her English audience that the Irish were not fit to rule themselves: “The article was designed to discredit the rising Irish nationalism of the 1860s by demonstrating—comically, as the substitution of ‘Ballyboggmucky’ for ‘Ballisk’ reveals—the disorganization, incompetence, and shortsightedness of the native Irish when left to their own devices” (Mitchell 63). For much of the piece, Cobbe refers to herself as “we” until she introduces the Nortons halfway through the piece. Mr. Norton is the

landlord of the village that neighbors Ballybogmucky, who has “a wholesome horror of pauperizing” and tries to help the poor villagers as much as he can (85). Yet his assistance comes with the understanding that his tenants will repay his kindness with loyalty. When the threat of rebellion rises in the local villages, Mr. Norton posted a “paternal manifesto about the different villages, entreating them to forbear from entering the ‘Cut-throat Clubs’” (88). This may be one reason Cobbe chose to use pseudonyms for her family.

In answer, Dublin nationalist newspaper the *Felon* identified Mr. Norton by name to local rebels as “one of the very first for whose benefit the pikes were procured” (88). Newspapers and periodicals, of course, functioned as a much more immediate genre than traditional literary autobiography, by necessity addressing more timely issues. Though Cobbe’s father had died by the time she published her essay, there were several Cobbes still alive—including all of her brothers, one who was the landlord of Newbridge, the other who tried his hand at authorship (though never as successfully as his famous sister), and another who was disinherited after joining Agapemone (a doomsday cult that featured practices such as free love). She might have felt it necessary to protect Newbridge’s newest landlord, given the wide readership of a Victorian miscellany.

However, the reason for Cobbe’s reticence in naming her family members may have more to do with a genre convention of Victorian autobiography. As Mitchell notes, it was a convention of Victorian autobiography not to mention living persons by name (138). Her use of pseudonyms for the Irish villagers could represent another convention. According to Mitchell, “those with no public presence” were generally not mentioned by name (140). Clearly, the nameless, “Celtic” Irish who lived in Balisk have no public presence in Victorian society. To paraphrase Edward Said, Cobbe would speak for them and represent them. She

refuses to see any justification for the actions of the Irish rebels, instead viewing their plans for revolution as an expression of rebellion from unruly children. From our vantage point in the twenty first century, we can clearly see that it was Cobbe who was shortsighted. While her essay accuses the Irish underclass of acting on emotion and from a limited perspective, she too was operating with ideological and emotional blinders. Grubgeld undermined the seriousness of constructing Irish characters as comical foils to the English: “Comic representations sometimes amount to no more than the predictable caricatures of an underclass drawn by persons whose norms have been vindicated by their political and economic sovereignty” (137). For Cobbe, however, her choice in using character sketches is in line with the larger purpose of all of her writings about Ireland. Cobbe describes the world of the villagers as being very small, sharing an anecdote about a village woman who feeds a starving man, who she calls “a bowzy villain from other nations,” meaning a village about 10 miles away. The village became a metonym of Ireland, the villagers representative of the larger class of people.

What is not readily apparent by Cobbe’s authorial persona is that the world she is constructing is equally limited in perspective, given her reliance on her own familial history as evidence of the positive role of the Ascendancy class within Ireland. Her survey of the village and its inhabitants is detailed down to the smallest point, but is intended to stand for Ireland and its people as a whole. She described a typical cabin, made of mud, mostly one-bedroom, with an earthen floor. The furniture was, in Cobbe’s words, “of the usual Irish description,” consisting of a bed that was often only a heap of straw,

a table, a griddle, a kettle, a stool or two ... a window whose normal condition is being stuffed with an old hat; a door, over and under and round which all

the winds and rains of heaven find their way; a population consisting of six small children, a bedridden grandmother, a husband an wife, a cock and three hens, a pig, a dog, and a cat; lastly, a decoration of coloured prints, including the Virgin with seven swords in her heart, St. Joseph, the story of Dives and Lazarus, and a caricature of a man tossed by a bull, or a fat woman getting over a stile. (82)

In just one passage, Cobbe constructs a seemingly objective image of everyday life in Ireland for her English audience, only it is a particularly classed assessment of Irish life: she recounts the disrepair of their cabins and their lack of even the most basic of material possessions as a means of describing their economic status; she notes their large family and their religious idols to signal their Catholicism; she mentions that the family lives with their livestock, another popular image of the Irish that circulated within English culture, suggesting that the Irish were slovenly, or at least, very earthy; and, in what is probably the least forgivable transgression in Cobbe's estimation, she reveals the lack of cultural sophistication displayed in the way they decorate their homes. In just one small description, Cobbe drives home what she feels is the superiority of what she terms "Anglo-Saxon" — read English and Anglo-Irish—culture. The Irish cannot achieve even the most basic needs of shelter and cleanliness, much less the higher achievements of art and design. Through the small details she describes, Cobbe constructs and maintains the hierarchies that positioned the Irish below the English, and their Anglo-Irish relatives, in the minds of her readers.

Though "The Fenians of Ballybogmucky" is not one of Cobbe's overtly feminist pieces, the question of gender informs the hierarchical constructions that support Cobbe's argument that the Irish needed the colonial supervision of the English. As Cobbe did in many

cases of her journalism on the Irish Question, she uses the treatment of women to gauge the development of the country. Like “The Celt of Wales and the Celt of Ireland,” Cobbe’s treatment of Irish women is more forgiving than her treatment of Irish men. Cobbe’s first description of a villager emphasizes both her Catholicism and her homeliness by focusing on the griddle that an elderly, childless woman bequeaths to her fellow villagers upon her death. Because the woman fears that no one would pray for her soul after her death, she instructs the villagers to pray for her each time they use the griddle, which is passed from house to house. Cobbe comically deflates the importance of the griddle, calling it “the Holy Griddle.” In yet another poke at the villagers’ Catholicism, Cobbe dabbles in sensationalism with the sympathetic story of a local woman whose only companion is her aged mother: when her mother dies, her daughter roams the graveyard, hoping to see her mother’s ghost. She tells Miss Norton, “I asked Father would I see her in heaven? and all he said was, ‘I should *see her in the glory of God.*’ I don’t understand what it means. Will I see her, herself—my poor old mother?” (84). Cobbe continually references the shortcomings of the local priests, describing them as bloated, red-nosed, and curmudgeonly, offering neither spiritual nor social support to their congregations.

In Cobbe’s estimation, the malleability of the Irish character makes them vulnerable to powerful leaders, including Catholic priests. These powerful but ill-intentioned leaders that Cobbe feared were carrying off the minds and hearts of the Irish underclass were invariably men. However, Miss Norton represents a different kind of leadership, female but still hierarchical. As Watson and Smith discussed above, there is no “universal” woman. O’Connor made connections between Cobbe’s problematic portrayal of the Irish underclass and her interstitial position as an upper-class woman in Irish society. Though Cobbe’s

rhetoric was emancipatory in many ways, particularly in regards to women and the poor, her alignment with the Ascendancy class often leads to what is most frustrating about Cobbe's writing about Ireland, which is her tendency to contradict her own emancipatory theories:

In the critique of domination that Cobbe pursued over several decades, the points of intersection among her uneasy alliances with both the exploiters and the exploited are uniquely unstable. . . . This often self-cancelling impulse to pigeon-hole leads to frequent lapses in reasoning, despite Cobbe's vaunted rationalist ethos. (188-9)

O'Connor correctly identifies Cobbe's position as a "big house daughter" as both limiting and empowering. It was empowering in the sense that it allows her access to the villagers and the authority to act as interpreter, thus enabling her role as a speaker on behalf of women and the poor. It was limiting in the sense that her elevated position inhibits Cobbe's ability to fully transfer the "critique of domination" that she uses to interpret questions about women, the poor, and oppressed populations in every part of the world to Ireland. While she expressed concern for the plight of the Irish, she did not see any problem in the hierarchies that maintained the colonial system that placed Cobbe above the villagers. The objective tone Cobbe often employed in the periodical press enabled her to construct imperialism as somehow natural and commonsense, beyond the interrogation of her English audience.

Within a colonial system, women are not universally oppressed by patriarchy; their actions and words are circumscribed in different ways and to different degrees. Cobbe's Miss Norton embodied the idea that women's experiences of colonialism were dependent on how closely they were positioned to power. Miss Norton inhabited a powerful role in the local villages, teaching the local children at a school sponsored by a wealthy Anglo-Irish widow. In one sketch, Miss Norton chastises a young villager named Bessie, who is about to

emigrate to New York but has mistakenly purchased a passage to New Orleans: “Oh, Bessie, Bessie, why would you never come to school and learn geography? You are going to a terrible place, far away from your sister. That wicked agent has cheated you horribly” (90). Bessie, of course, dies of fever in New Orleans. The moral behind Cobbe’s parable was obvious: the backward Irish need the protection of the advanced English. While Cobbe (or Miss Norton) expressed a humanitarian concern for Irish peasant women, she was aligned more closely with the power associated with the Anglo-Irish ruling class.

While her portrayal of Irish women is concerned but condescending, her portrayal of Irish men poses more of a problem. They are either quite literally portrayed as the doddering old Paddy—in one sketch, Cobbe uses a derogatory nickname for Irish men as her character’s given name—who believes that the priest has miraculously cured his lameness or the violent young insurgent Cobbe referred to as “a poor Celtic schoolmaster,” leader of the local “Cutt-throat Club,” who was convinced that the fictive “Knockillsassenach” rightly belonged to him (87). Throughout the essay, Cobbe does not question the colonial system and the presence of the Anglo-Irish within England. Her final sketch emphasizes what Cobbe felt was the claim of the Anglo-Irish to Ireland. Cobbe devotes much of her publication space to a quickly quelled rebellion within the village in 1848 that was inspired by nationalist William Smith O’Brien, who urged Irishmen to undergo military training and spoke against a law that allowed authorities to punish nationalist speakers (Mitchell 70). Cobbe focuses her ire on the schoolmaster, who leads a planned rebellion within the village and who also claims to be the rightful owner of the Nortons’s estate. Cobbe dismisses his claim:

Nearly every parish in Ireland has thus its lord *de facto*, who dwells in a handsome house in the midst of a park—and another lord who dwells in a

mud-cabin in the village; and is fully persuaded he is the lord *de jure*. In the endless changes of ownership and confiscation to which Irish land has been subjected, there is always some heir of one or other of the dispossessed families, who, if nothing had happened that did happen, and nobody had been born of a score or two of persons who somehow, unfortunately, were actually born—then he or she, might, could, would, or should have inherited the estate.

(87)

In Cobbe's view, the "native" Irish has no claim to the land: the estate belongs to the Nortons due to the fact that they purchased it from the, incidentally, English family who happened to own it. Cobbe attempts to diminish the importance of the nationalist movement by boiling down the Irish Question to a simple economic argument: those who have the money and resources are naturally going to own the most land and wield the most authority. Cobbe relies on essentialist notions of the inferiority of the Celtic people to explain the economic order: naturally, in Cobbe's view, the English will have more resources, given their social, political, and economical superiority.

Cobbe argues for the continued presence of England within Ireland, asserting that England should act as a benevolent though authoritarian parent, a parent that is always present. Her locating of the blame for Irish ills on absentee landlords suggested that the presence of the English—or in Cobbe's racial terminology, the Anglo-Saxon—within Ireland forestalled or diminished social and economic problems. To further drive home her representation of a parent-child relationship between England and Ireland, Cobbe pairs the burgeoning rebellion within the village with an anecdote about the Norton children "playing

at rebellion” on the grounds of the estate, and being teased by their nursemaids that rebels would come and get them if they were naughty.

Cobbe’s Miss Norton, though not truly the lady of the house, is representative of a certain kind of imperial power, enacting a kind of maternalistic care-taking role that complements the paternalistic role of male servants of imperialism, represented here by Mr. Norton, the Anglo-Irish landlord. While Cobbe cannot use the experiences of being a wife and mother as a means to speak in the public sphere, she could construct an image of herself as a surrogate “lady of the house,” spreading English cultural values to underdeveloped nations, an image of womanhood that her middle-class English audience would likely find acceptable. In this figuration, Cobbe is able to present Irish rebellion as nothing more than outbursts by an unruly child who needs a strong hand. Cobbe’s construction of her alter ego Miss Norton reveals the flexibility of the periodical genre as a rhetorical space for women rhetors, allowing them to construct their authorship in ways that their audiences would find acceptable. What is problematic is that Cobbe uses the flexibility of the periodical essay to maintain the privileges of her class. Thirty years later, Cobbe sticks to the same imperialist argument, though with careful revisions that can tell us much about the diverse possibilities for women’s rhetorical production in the Victorian era.

IDENTITY AND AUTHORSHIP: COBBE’S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL BYLINE AND HER ANGLO-IRISH HERITAGE

The rhetorical moment when Cobbe sheds the pseudonym of Miss Norton and claims her own name is instructive to our understanding of her self-fashioning as a rhetor. The title of her autobiography alone, *The Life of Frances Power Cobbe, by Herself* raises many questions about gender and nationality and their implications for authorship, the first of

which was the addition of “by Herself.” Why did Cobbe, or her editors, apparently feel the need to assert that Cobbe was the author of the work? She might have made other choices. For example, her contemporary Harriet Martineau’s memoir was simply titled *Harriet Martineau’s Autobiography*. Cobbe expressed in her personal letters that she felt the decade in which she published her memoirs would be the last years of her life (in fact she would die in 1904, a decade after the first edition of her autobiography). Perhaps she felt that, if her autobiography was posthumously published (as Martineau’s was), her readers would speculate about the authorship of her work. This explanation seems fitting, given that Cobbe demanded a byline for most of her periodical writing, only writing anonymously when the house style of the journal or newspaper required it, and sometimes not even then. Mitchell noted that Cobbe received a byline even in *Fraser’s Magazine*, a periodical that typically featured anonymously written pieces (116).

Another interpretation is that Cobbe felt it was necessary to insist upon her own authorship, aware as she was of the politics surrounding women’s life-writing. As Mitchell points out, many of the autobiographies written by women were designed to be published posthumously, while many more were “compiled and edited by a niece or a daughter” (*Frances Power Cobbe* 133). Cobbe herself was instrumental in the publication of the memoirs of Mary Somerville, a writer and scientist. Cobbe acted as the editor of the manuscript, advising Somerville’s daughters on what material to excise or revise. In at least one instance, Cobbe advised Somerville’s daughters to reword a passage where Somerville described her own devotion to domesticity to read as though they had written it: “Cobbe would not allow the only well-known English woman of science to say that her life had been wholly domestic” (136). Cobbe’s careful negotiation of the stereotypes surrounding

femininity showed that she was well-aware that autobiography was a tool women used to shape their images as cultural meaning-makers in the public eye. Overemphasizing domesticity could result in a woman's writing being completely dismissed or relegated to niche markets, while underemphasizing traditionally feminine traits could risk a woman's writing being rejected due its masculine style if not necessarily its content.

However, the "Herself" could signal something else to her Victorian readers. It is an Irish colloquialism to use "herself" and "himself" not as a reflexive pronoun, but as a nominative noun.²⁷ For example, when calling upon a friend, if her spouse answers the door, one might ask "Is herself at home?" The form was used especially to denote an important man. For example, Cobbe's landlord father may have been known as "Himself" to his tenants. It could also be used ironically, to denote a self-important man or boy. As Mitchell notes, Cobbe had "her share of typical British arrogance," but perhaps her use of "herself" in the context of her autobiography signifies something very different (85). Perhaps it is finally—after decades of insisting on the "Anglo" part of Anglo-Irish or passing as English—a signal of Cobbe's Irish identity. As Cobbe believed that her autobiography would be the last piece of writing she would ever publish, her use of such an Irish turn of phrase could be read as a deliberate rhetorical choice meant to signal a crucial aspect of her identity to her audience.

SAME ARGUMENT, DIFFERENT CONTEXT: THE RHETORICAL SITUATION OF COBBE'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

²⁷ The usage of "himself" and "herself" may have arisen out of Irish Gaelic, argued Brian Ó Broin, a correspondent of Raidió na Gaeltachta, the Irish language service of Ireland's public broadcaster, RTÉ (MPR News). When Irish speakers construct a sentence that "requires some sort of stress or intensifier on the subject, they will use the Irish word, *féin*, which means self" (MPR). So the Irish sentence "*Sé féin atá ann*, meaning 'It's him—that one,' becomes translated in Hiberno-English as 'It's himself'" (MPR News).

In this section, I examine how Cobbe recycles the same material in her autobiography and unpack how the material she added—including a new introduction, supporting evidence, and conclusion—signals Cobbe’s adeptness at appealing to a different audience at a different historical moment. Again, we can look to periodical culture for evidence of what kinds of readers composed the audience of Cobbe’s autobiography. W. T. Stead (a reformist journalist who supported Irish home rule) refers to Cobbe as “one of the most remarkable women of the Victorian era” and the “oldest New Woman now living on this planet” (qtd. in *Frances Power Cobbe* 346). Mitchell points out that Stead’s description “was a pointed reminder that some women had successfully lived independent public lives for thirty years or more” (346). Reviews and advertisements for *The Life of Frances Power Cobbe* appeared in such divergent publications as *The Saturday Review*, a conservative Tory newspaper famous for publishing Eliza Linton’s anonymously written anti-feminist “The Girl of the Period” essays and supported light sentences for wife murder in the 1870s (Wellesley), and the *Athenaeum*, a liberal journal noted for its “impartial criticism” (Wellesley). *The Saturday Review*, which once referred to Cobbe as a “half-woman speaking half-truths,” gives the autobiography a positive review, largely relying on plot summary but choosing Cobbe’s status as a “big house daughter” as one site of specific focus: perhaps Cobbe’s class status and imperialist ideology were rare points of convergence between the conservative newspaper and the feminist Cobbe. They also close their review by pointing out Cobbe’s friendship with Matthew Arnold, suggesting they were equally impressed with Cobbe’s connections.

Of course, not every publication was impressed with Cobbe’s life-writing. The satirical *Punch* calls it “a slovenly-written, ill-digested mass of miscellaneous matter, including whole chapters devoted to digests of her published works” (qtd. in Mitchell 346).

Cobbe herself expressed trepidation over the publication of her autobiography, wondering to her friends if she should limit publication to her private circle (Mitchell 344). According to Mitchell, Cobbe was concerned that “displaying her successful career” would seem arrogant (344). Perhaps Cobbe was nervous about the intersection of the public and private that autobiography presents, or perhaps feigning disinterest in seeking public recognition was a feminine rhetorical move that even the “oldest New Woman on the planet” felt compelled to perform.

While Cobbe discussed her journalism career in great detail in her autobiography, she devotes almost as much space to her life in Ireland as she does to her writing life. Perhaps this attention is undercut by the fact that she recycled much of her material from her earlier work, but it seems evident that Cobbe thought this part of her life was important. The recycling of her material perhaps signals something else: maybe Cobbe herself thought her periodical work on Ireland was minor, not as important as her work on the Woman Question (for which she received a lot of attention, not always positive) and therefore would be unrecognizable to the readers of her autobiography. Yet she felt her periodical writings on Ireland were an accurate enough representation of her life to be included in her autobiography, a genre that is meant to represent a life (no matter how much of a construction that life may be).

Though 30 years elapsed between the publication of “The Fenians of Ballybogmucky” and *The Life of Frances Power Cobbe, by Herself*, Cobbe presents almost the same imperialist argument in her autobiography, though the genre conventions of the autobiography, plus the time and distance elapsed between her and Ireland, allow her to claim the first-person: the Nortons of the “Fenians of Ballybogmucky” are now the Cobbes,

Knockillsassenach is Newbridge, and she is Miss Norton, or, as she puts it, “Lady Bountiful,” who tends to the needs of the village called Balisk, whose absentee landlord she names directly as a Lord Trimleston. Though Cobbe recycled most of the material from the “Fenians of Ballybogmucky,” her introduction to the material is markedly different. In her periodical article, Cobbe quickly needs to gain the reception of a transitory audience; in her autobiography, which consists of two lengthy volumes, Cobbe can be assured of an attentive audience, so it is not necessary for her to rely on broadly drawn essentialist theories about the racial characteristics of the Celt. Instead, Cobbe’s approach is more thoughtful and even-handed: “The prominence which Irish grievances have taken of late years in English politics has caused me often to review with fresh eyes the state of the country as it existed in my childhood and youth, when, of course, both the good and evil of it appeared to me to be part of the order of nature itself” (124). Thirty years earlier, writing for an English periodical, Cobbe would hardly have used the word “evil” in connection to the presence of the English in Ireland. It seems that Cobbe no longer felt the need to flatter her audience by heavily complimenting England’s cultural, economical, and political superiority. Her opening statement also reflects a glimmer of understanding that imperialism does not arise “out of the order of nature” but out of a complex interplay of race, class, and economics. The material Cobbe adds to her argument reflects at least some acknowledgement that the problems in Ireland stem from real social conditions and not from the more ethereal Celtic blood.

The rest of the chapter, however, relies on many of the same arguments made in “The Fenians of Ballybogmucky,” including the argument that any “evil” arising from colonization of Ireland arises from absenteeism. Cobbe, or Lady Bountiful, makes charitable excursions from her father’s village of Donabate into the neighboring village of Balisk, which does not

have the benefit of a benevolent landlord: like the fictional Ballybogmucky, it is peopled with a superstitious, uneducated populace. Thirty years after “The Fenians of Ballybogmucky,” Cobbe also had the experience of living in another Celtic country, Wales. Wales, in Cobbe’s estimation, was vastly superior to Ireland (and, in Cobbe’s view, perhaps even England) in culture and in people: Cobbe saw Wales as a space where Celtic tradition continued to flourish despite what she saw as a lack of a nationalist movement. This is evidenced in her comparison of the cottages of the Irish peasants with the cottages of their Welsh counterparts. Again, she details the “everyday” in order to make an argument about Irish nationalism: “I never saw in an Irish cottage any of the fine oak settles, dressers and armchairs and coffers to be found usually in Welsh ones. Flowers in the gardens or against the walls were never to be seen” (127).

However, in her autobiography, Cobbe widens her focus from sketches of Irish daily life, supplementing her argument that absenteeism is the cause of Irish problems with the argument that Ireland was overcrowded and that famine and emigration were thus inevitable (the implication is, of course, that Ireland was overcrowded with the underclass). Cobbe also adds numerical data about the cost of living in Donabate in the 1830s and 1840s, calculating what an average peasant family would spend per year on essentials such as oatmeal and wheat. Though Mitchell would question the accuracy of Cobbe’s figures, Cobbe’s use of this material not only reveals Cobbe’s considerable skills at managing a household (a role she performed at Newbridge for almost two decades) but a more nuanced understanding of the material realities faced by the people who labored on her father’s estate. Though her additional material still supports her earlier imperialist argument, Cobbe’s appeals to *logos* balance, somewhat, the more pathetic appeals presented by her broad sketches of the

peasantry. Her inclusion of “factual” material (however problematized) shows that Cobbe was aware that she could not rely on the same evidence to convince the audience of her autobiography that England’s continued presence within Ireland was justified that she did 30 years earlier in the periodical press, often a much more sensationalistic, immediate genre.

Despite adding a few new passages to her recycled piece about the Irish Question, Cobbe relies on the same argument: Ireland is an unruly child who needs a strong imperial parent. Throughout both pieces, Cobbe—who taught both the Irish children of her father’s village and the poverty-stricken children of Bristol— discusses the superiority of Irish children to their English counterparts, as they are smarter and better-humoured. She shares an anecdote about a mother giving birth while flood waters invaded her cabin: the “fine little child” did not die, but was seen by Cobbe a few years later “scampering along the roads with true Irish hilarity” (131). It seems that Cobbe wished the Irish would always remain in the innocence of childhood: perhaps, like many real-life parents, she never wanted to see her children grow up. In nationalist terms, of course, this would mean leaving behind their colonizer, England, and becoming an independent Ireland.

For Cobbe, Irish independence would shake the foundations of her Anglo-Irish identity. Cobbe did have material investments in the continuance of the Anglo-Irish supremacy within Ireland: she received a small patrimony from her father’s estate throughout her life, which she heavily supplemented with the income she earned for her journalism. However, it seems that Cobbe’s investments in the Irish Question were more ideological and psychological. In perhaps the most telling passage in “The Fenians of Ballybogmucky,” Cobbe writes, “The threat of rebellion rose higher, till even the calm people like the Nortons began to wonder whether it was a volcano on which they were treading, or the familiar mud

of Ballybogmucky.” She repeats the line in her autobiography, of course replacing “the Nortons” with we and the fictional place name with the real Balisk. By the time Cobbe published her autobiography, she had been living away from Ireland for over 30 years, visiting sporadically but spending most of her time in England and Wales. Yet her life there—including her complicated class identity—continued to form the way she constructed her authorial persona. As Cobbe begins to receive more attention for her writings on the Woman Question, we cannot ignore her writings on the Irish Question, as they give us more material to consider when asking questions about how Cobbe dealt with issues of hierarchy. While we continue to gain knowledge about what is positive about Cobbe’s writing, we cannot allow ourselves to ignore what is problematic.

Despite Cobbe’s contradictory rhetorics surrounding the Irish Question, reading her journalism against her autobiography proves that Cobbe is more than just a deft recycler of her own material. Her use of the same material to make arguments about Ireland’s ability to rule itself at two different points in history proves the flexibility of the periodical essay genre. This flexibility allows a woman writer to use experiential evidence to comment upon important cultural issues while maintaining an “objective” journalistic persona, which allows her entry into the often masculine world of public writing. It also offers evidence that we should expand our definition of what constitutes “autobiography,” which could lead to the consideration of a greater number of women’s writings as objects of study. But most importantly for my project, Cobbe’s recycling and reshaping of the same material shows her savvy as a rhetor, as she is displaying her ability to anticipate the needs of her audience: her use of the same material and her deletion and addition of certain passages displays her ability to subtly change her arguments to suit different audiences, genres, and historical moments.

While the “house style” of each periodical sometimes limited the agency of women writers, it could just as easily allow them to try different styles in order to reach different audiences, as Cobbe did with her experimentation with sensation fiction in the *Argosy*. Though Cobbe’s publication did not result with lasting employment with the *Argosy*, she was able to attempt a feminized rhetorical strategy meant to appeal to a largely female audience, thus broadening her influence to a larger swath of Victorian society.

“The Fenians of Ballybogmucky” is a prime example of Cobbe’s imperialist rhetorics because it shows Cobbe’s rhetorical strategy of spreading her influence through the use of multiple genres and audiences. Just as her ancestors played their own roles in spreading imperialism to colonial outposts including Ireland and India through their roles as landlords and military leaders, Cobbe played her own role by using the periodical press as a tool to spread an imperialist message. Though her conclusions to the Irish Question are troubling to a modern audience, it is important to remember that Cobbe’s own identity was as unstable and unfixed as the genres for which she wrote and that her rhetorical strategies have much to lend to our understanding of how women negotiated conflicting interests and ideologies during the tumultuous and fascinating nineteenth century. Grubgeld discusses the flexibility of Anglo-Irish autobiography:

The boundaries often blur between autobiography and travel writing ...
 Particularly in the depiction of the self as a predominantly static character whose resources are challenged by the demands of a changing environment, both genres of writing tend to exaggerate those characteristics that distinguish the writer from the population he or she encounters. ... Political satirists, travel writers, and autobiographers display local language, dress, politics, and social

customs for the amusement of the readers, who may or may not be of the same group as the author but who share more with him or her than they share with the exotic native. (136)

Grubgeld's connection of Anglo-Irish autobiography to travel anticipates the connection I make between persuasive identity construction and the multiple rhetorical contexts of the Victorian periodical press. In Chapter 4, I develop this connection by examining how Cobbe used the available means of travel-writing to make another argument for England's continued presence in Ireland, thus expanding her imperialist rhetorics across more sites in Victorian culture.

CHAPTER FOUR

COBBE AS A “STRANGER-GUEST”: TRAVEL-WRITING AS POLITICAL
 COMMENTARY IN “IRELAND AND HER EXHIBITION IN 1865” AND “LIFE IN
 DONEGAL”

Weary men, what reap ye?—Golden corn for the stranger.

What sow ye?—Human corse that wait for the avenger.

Fainting forms, hunger-stricken, what see you in the offing?

Stately ships to bear our food away, amid the stranger’s scoffing.

From “The Famine Year,” by “Esperanza,” Lady Jane Wilde, 1864

The sophists’ rejection of transcendent truths and eternal values, their ability to move a popular audience with a range of rhetorical techniques, their interest in social exigencies: all formed a dark “shadow” of timeless Platonic idealism and the frozen perfection of Aristotelian logic. There is much about the well-known lore of their historical existence which contributes to the impression of “otherness.” They were all aliens, stranger-guests to Athens, who impressed its citizens with their expertise as diplomats, teachers, and performers. But they could be victims of fickle public opinion.

From *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured*, by Susan Jarratt

In the Oct. 20, 1866 issue of *Once a Week*, Frances Power Cobbe published another essay that drew upon her life in Ireland as evidence that Ireland was not fit to govern itself.

“Life in Donegal” recounts a year Cobbe spent in an isolated region that is still known as being one of the wildest in all of Ireland. Late in the year 1848, 26-year-old Cobbe left the relative civilization of her father’s estate outside of Dublin (relative, of course, to Cobbe’s adopted city of London) for a year’s stay at her brother’s estate just outside of the town of Donegal. Cobbe’s year-long sojourn was productive in Cobbe’s self-fashioning as a rhetor, as it informed her later writing on Ireland, evidenced most directly in “Life in Donegal.” This rhetorical moment—encompassing Cobbe’s lived experience of Ireland and her written construction of that experience—provides important evidence of Cobbe’s perception of herself as a woman writer and thinker for her twenty first century audience. That perception played an important role in Cobbe’s rhetorical strategies. As we have seen in previous chapters, Cobbe’s conceptualization of herself as an Irish woman informed the multiple ways she made appeals to her audiences.

Exactly a year before “Donegal” was published, “Ireland and Her Exhibition in 1865” appeared in *Fraser’s Magazine for Town and Country* in October 1865, and featured many of the same themes. More importantly for this chapter, both pieces feature many of the conventions of travel-writing, a hybridic genre that often could just as easily be classified as autobiography while embracing all manner of scholarly inquiry, including the social sciences, history, and art (Kinsey 73). Travel-writing is “nonfictional,” though novels that fictionalized an author’s travel experiences are often included as examples of the genre (Kinsey 10). The travelogue appeared mostly in guidebook, narrative, or epistolary formats, but its hybridic nature allowed a movement between the three types (Kinsey 38-39). While it is certainly true that the essays covered in my project thus far could be counted as examples of travel writing, the two essays I examine in this chapter more clearly bear the markings of

the genre, as they describe specific places or events that people could actually visit (unlike the mythic Ballyboggmucky) and more openly address the concept of English tourism to Ireland. Like many British travelogues, Cobbe's two articles also took special interest in social science, art, and history. They also illustrate the hybridity of the genre, as they were published in periodical format.

This chapter also focuses more narrowly on the concept of rhetorical space and its intersection with place, the geographical *and* imagined Ireland, given that Ireland is a place that exists and a place created in discourse. Travel-writing allows us to look even more closely at the concept of how rhetorical space impacts the self-fashioning of a woman rhetor. The conflation of the physical space of Ireland and figurative space of the periodical becomes the rhetorical space from which Cobbe makes her arguments. Her action not only replicated larger imperialist actions that maintained English control over Ireland, but also maintained a metaphorical place for women for women to stand and speak on behalf of their own interests. Travel-writing, by its very nature, examines how a subject moves through a specific space and how that subject presents her experiences in written form, suggesting that it is the navigation, the movement, through rhetorical spaces that creates rhetorical identity, as identity in discourse is not created until the author responds to the pressures of the rhetorical space.

In this chapter, I continue my study of how Cobbe used her experiences of Ireland as a means of making imperialist arguments, arguments that would need to be delivered in a vessel her audience would find credible, informative, and entertaining. Again, Dana Anderson's book, *Identity's Strategy* is my rhetorical anchor text, as it describes how rhetors construct "selves" in language that are persuasive in different contexts. The question that

continues to guide my study is how did Cobbe fashion a “self” that could speak with authority about Ireland without rooting herself too firmly in the relatively powerless position of being an Irish woman? One answer to that question lies in her self-construction as a “stranger-guest,” a strategy that relied upon a certain unfixeness in positionality, enabling Cobbe to move freely between spheres, English and Irish, public and domestic, male and female. In this chapter I emphasize the concept of rhetorical space to advance my argument that women fashioned persuasive selves by responding to the constraints imposed on their discourse in various contexts.

Travel-writing intersects in productive ways with Susan Jarratt’s feminist reconceptualization of sophistic rhetoric, providing a new means of imagining women rhetors navigating the physical and conceptual spaces of the nineteenth century, enabling us to see how Cobbe fits, and expands, our definition of a Victorian woman rhetor. I pay special attention to “distancing strategies,” which Sara Mills defines as women speaking about “unfeminine” topics by de-emphasizing themselves as the source of the information; one example of a distancing strategy would be the quotation of letters to relay controversial information (82). Cobbe’s distancing strategy was the use of the genre conventions of travel-writing, which she used to build a rational, objective identity, one that would create an ethos of credibility on the subject of Ireland. In order to distance herself from the irrationality and sentimentality attributed to Irish and women’s rhetorical performances, Cobbe adapted a style of travel-writing that allows her to move through the discursive spaces of *Once a Week* and *Fraser’s Magazine* by constructing herself as a neutral, disinterested “stranger-guest.”

The periodical functioned as a third space between the material and the conceptual, and travel-writing’s place in the periodical culture illustrates how women navigated this

terrain. Imagining Cobbe as a “stranger-guest,” a term in classical rhetoric re-envisioned in modern rhetoric by Jarratt, will help us envision how Cobbe used the conventions of travel-writing as a means of navigating both geographical and metaphorical spaces. This “stranger-guest” persona, a term I unpack in greater detail in the next section, authorized Cobbe to speak with conviction on the issue of Ireland, while masking her identity as an Irish woman, enabling her to speak about the “other” though she often functioned as a societal “other” herself. After I define the term “stranger-guest,” I offer a brief discussion of the theories surrounding women’s travel-writing. I then describe Cobbe’s year-long stay in Donegal and its impact on her self-fashioning as a writer, before concluding with an exploration of how her construction of herself as a “stranger-guest” to Ireland enabled her to navigate the rhetorical spaces of *Once a Week* and *Fraser’s* magazines.

Cobbe’s “stranger-guest” persona illustrates the flexibility of the strategy of first-person constitution: Cobbe could enter into discursive spaces where women had only just begun to set foot and, thus, shape larger cultural conversations that impacted women across the globe. If Cobbe had elected to emphasize her Irishness and/or her femininity, she risked not being taken seriously by her audience. The strategy of first-person constitution enabled women to use what could be held against them—their very otherness—as a means of making effective arguments. Cobbe fashioned herself as a “stranger-guest” in order to more effectively navigate the rhetorical space of the periodical, taking advantage of the foreignness associated with the racial or gendered “other” by offering a perspective that depended on displacement and dislocation. As a stranger-guest, Cobbe leaves her identity as an Irish woman *out* of the equation, while constructing herself as an English, masculine subject: while she negated her femininity and her Irishness, the stranger-guest persona does allow her

to enact the role of interlocutor between English and Irish culture and to assert herself as an authoritative voice in a polyvocal rhetorical space.

JARRATT'S FEMINIST RECLAMATION OF SOPHISTIC RHETORIC AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN'S RHETORICAL PERFORMANCES IN JOURNALISM

Before I delve into a rhetorical analysis of the two essays that will be the subject of this chapter, a closer examination of the definition of two key terms—sophist and stranger-guest—is in order, starting with the ways in which Cobbe's traversing of the imperialist discursive space is suggestive of Jarratt's conceptualization of "sophistic rhetoric." Though the term "sophist" is often used rather loosely today, the original sophists are generally known as traveling teachers who taught rhetoric for a fee during the fifth century B.C.E. They were "educational innovators responsive to social and political changes that made the ability to speak effectively a valuable commodity" (Rountree 681). To use the word "sophist" is to evoke a mixture of reactions: "The ancient Greek term *sophist* was used in both a general and specific way, both of which carried positive and negative associations" (Rountree 681). Perhaps most famously, in *Gorgias*, Plato labels sophistic rhetoric as a "form of flattery" that merely "persuades without educating" (Rountree 682). Sophistic rhetoricians "believed that logical arguments could be constructed on either side" (Rountree 682); thus, they were often viewed as being opportunistic, uninterested in "Truth" in exchange for multiple "truths." However, the sophists have been reclaimed for modern rhetoric and are most often used today for their philosophy of context-based truth: "They evinced a special interest in human perceptions as the only source of knowledge in all fields, including nature, and emphasized the significance of language in constructing that knowledge" (Jarratt xviii). The idea that truths are contingent on context is more democratic and pluralistic, enabling a

system that supposes that if authority is unfixed in any location or time, it is also not fixed in any one person.

The unfixed nature of sophistic rhetoric is what makes it an apt means of theorizing women's speech and writing, allowing rhetorical authority to be dispersed over groups of people and across multiple spaces. Such flexibility would allow someone like Cobbe, privileged in many ways and marginal in others, the authority to speak persuasively across multiple spaces, including the third space of the periodical. However, there were two sides to the sophistic coin: strategies of sophistic rhetoric worked in positive and negative ways for cultural "others," whose writing and speech acts either predicted or emulated practices of sophistic rhetoric. In addition, Jarratt makes important connections between the sophists and women rhetors, describing how ideas about their "otherness" often cut both ways in terms of their reception by their audiences. In the epigraph for this chapter, Jarratt describes how the sophists represented the otherness of being born away from a cultural center. "Stranger-guest" has many implications in terms of the "otherness" Cobbe would have experienced as an Anglo-Irish woman writer. Here I tease out the meanings of "stranger-guest" as a means of better understanding how Cobbe was able to live and work so comfortably in a world so divided and guided by political and ideological borders.

The concept of "stranger" would have meant something very different to someone living in Ireland during the nineteenth century. "Stranger" was a term that the Irish used to describe English and Anglo-Irish people living in Ireland. Examples of this usage in the nationalist literature are plentiful. In the poem that is the epigraph for this chapter, Lady Jane Wilde, under the pseudonym Speranza in nationalist newspaper *The Nation*, castigates the "stranger" as the recipient of the "golden corn" harvested from Ireland that should have gone

to the starving people who cultivated it. In Lady Gregory and W.B. Yeats's nationalist play *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, the titular character, an old woman personifying Ireland, is asked what has "set her to wandering" (7). She answers, "Too many strangers in the house" (7). The term "guest" connotes someone who is welcome under certain conditions, but not permanently. Cobbe is a "stranger-guest" on different levels: she is a "stranger-guest" in Ireland due to her English heritage, a "stranger-guest" in England due to her Irish background, and a "stranger-guest" in the masculinist discursive space of imperialism, represented by the family literary journals for which she wrote. Cobbe was an interloper in the country of her birth *and* an interloper in the masculinist world of journalism.

But how can we compare wandering, male teachers of rhetoric active during the sixth century B.C.E. to women writing and speaking about two thousand years later? The implications "stranger-guest" has for women's discourse have to do with the term's connections to hierarchical gendered and racial systems. According to Jarratt, the sophists were feminized and, thus, denigrated: "The character projected onto the feminine as 'other' shares with Plato's sophists qualities of irrationality (or non-rationality), magical or hypnotic power, subjectivity, emotional sensitivity; all these are devalued in favor of their 'masculine' or philosophic opposites—rationality, objectivity, detachment and so on" (65). According to Jarratt, the feminization of sophistic rhetoric is bound up in the concept of nationalism: those born away from Athens were cast as the irrational, submissive "other." As discussed in earlier chapters, Irish communication styles were similarly devalued, depicted as overly emotional, illogical, and subjective. Cobbe's adoption of an objective, detached persona throughout her writings helps her distance herself from charges of irrationality and subjectivism, characteristics that would have marked her writing as female and Irish,

guaranteeing a more difficult reception. Cobbe's journalism was not "feminine" in its style or content, so her performance of sophism is complicated and not easily classifiable.

While the label of "sophist" does not fit Cobbe perfectly, it does overlap with her identity as a writer in many areas. For example, like the sophists, she was paid for her labors. In a letter to a friend, Cobbe wonders what her patrician father would have thought of his daughter's journalism career. During a visit to Newbridge after her removal to London, she writes: "Sometimes it comes over to me there in the stately old rooms & beautiful parlors that I was born a gentlewoman & have rather had a downfall in becoming a hack scribbler to a halfpenny newspaper! But the scribbler is happier than ever the idle lady was (as if indeed I was ever idle) and my regrets always end in a laugh" (qtd. in Mitchell 209). Cobbe's funny anecdote not only reveals the tension between class and genre but the connection between writing and agency that I explore in this chapter. If Cobbe had become "the lady of the house" as women of her rank were groomed to be, she would not have had the influence she had over such a wide audience. But enjoying that influence meant leaving the well-appointed parlors of Newbridge for the much less refined Burkean parlor of the periodical press. Cobbe's depiction of Ireland as the "other" mirrors her own "otherness," albeit an otherness mitigated by the distancing strategies she employs in her writing. While Jarratt posited that the denigration of sophistic rhetorics resulted in its feminization (and recursively the feminization resulted in its denigration), my use of the term "stranger-guest" will emphasize how it allowed women the power of movement through hostile or contested spaces.

STRANGER-GUEST IN A FAMILIAR LAND: TRAVEL-WRITING AS A MEANS OF
NAVIGATING REAL AND RHETORICAL SPACES

In Cobbe's construction of Ireland, the land becomes not just a "colonial farmyard" as Liz Curtis described it, but a colonial playground (4). The colonial playground of Ireland became the rhetorical space where Cobbe shaped her persuasive identity. Her descriptions of the wild landscape—by turns desolate and lush—opened up the space for English visitors, whether they traveled there physically or only in their imaginations. It was their minds that Cobbe most sought to change: her descriptions of the people—whether she created character sketches or reduced them to faceless numbers—offered her English readers a construction of Irishness that enabled a certain attitude toward colonial rule. This construction of Irishness was wholly dependent on her construction of herself as a "stranger-guest" to Ireland, which left her identity persuasively open to her readers' interpretations, investments, and expectations.

In order to navigate the treacherous terrain of the periodical press, Cobbe would need to use her class position in specific ways. Cobbe emulated the conventions of travel-writing in order to speak authoritatively on Ireland but from a strategic distance. Cobbe's goal was never to persuade her audience to visit the country of her birth. Rather, her purpose was to narratively construct Ireland and then claim Ireland not only as part of the Empire, but as rhetorical platform. Cobbe's use of the travel-writing genre to advance her own class interests at the expense of the Irish underclasses shows the problematic malleability of the periodical as a rhetorical space for women. While it offered women a metaphorical podium to address large audiences of willing listeners and often did serve as a mouthpiece for social change, it also gave rhetors the ideal apparatus for maintaining their privilege: a ready-made audience that had many of the same investments as the writer and would find the rhetor's arguments credible. Travel-writing was a readily acceptable and available means to deliver

arguments about England and her colonial holdings. In the case of Cobbe's imperialist rhetorics in *Fraser's* and *Once a Week*, her "stranger-guest" persona endowed Cobbe with the power of navigation over the metaphorical spaces of the periodical press.

In a sense, *all* women writing during the nineteenth century were navigating newly chartered spaces. Travel-writing makes the figurative literal and the literal figurative, tracking how women navigated these conceptual and physical spaces. Examining travel-writing as rhetoric shows what Cobbe—representing in this project a certain class of Victorian woman—did with the rhetorical spaces available to her and how she expressed her material body moving through material spaces in discourse. Cobbe's travel writing not only helped legitimate women's movement through physical spaces, but through the world of journalism. Her travel-writing on Ireland, no matter how problematic a portrayal, shows a woman on the move, in terms of geography and letters, displaying the potential of the "third-space" for women rhetors. Access to physical spaces would allow women access to rhetorical spaces, and vice versa. The act of travel allowed women the authority to speak about subjects unrelated to hearth and home, while women's presence in the rhetorical space of travel-writing made their exploration of the world outside the domestic sphere seem a lot more commonsensical.

In her lived existence, Cobbe represented a person who was in danger of falling through the cracks of Victorian society: a middle-aged, unmarried woman who in many ways clung to an aristocratic way of life that was on the wane. However, the Cobbe constructed in London's literary miscellanies expressed Cobbe at her best: authoritative, independent, sure of her place in the world, and thus, a credible source of information on diverse subjects. The

conception of first-person identity construction will help us theorize the ways in which Cobbe's complicated "place in the world" proved so productive for her writing.

MASCULINE, FEMININE, AND "OTHER": HOW NARRATION STYLES
CONSTITUTE A SOPHISTIC RHETORICAL IDENTITY IN TRAVEL-WRITING

While Cobbe's endorsement of imperialism remained unchanged regardless of context, her use of language to fashion a persuasive self in discourse is sophistic. Like the sophists, she emphasizes the construction of truth through language. Her strategy of making different choices in the fashioning of her Anglo-Irish persona in response to changing contexts also reflected the flexibility and variability of sophistic rhetorics. Jarratt's concept of the "stranger-guest" complicates an easy categorization of Cobbe's writing on travel, because it does not allow us to comfortably place her within any one tradition, suggesting as it does that cultural "others" are always set apart from the dominant rhetorical paradigm. Yet, as we have seen throughout this project, Cobbe was not alienated from the dominant culture, enjoying a place of privilege even when she stepped out of bounds. For example, Cobbe's travel did not mark her as absolutely exceptional among Victorian upper-and-middle class women. After all, evidence of British women's travel-writing began appearing in the eighteenth century, when Lady Mary Wortley Montagu circulated her *Letters* detailing her experiences in Constantinople where she traveled with her husband, ambassador to Turkey, well over a century before Cobbe began her writing career (Bassnett 229). However, as Susan Bassnett points out, "In an age when relatively few people travelled at all, the idea of a woman traveller was something of a novelty" (229). Some women writers chose to capitalize on this novelty when it came to fashioning their narrative selves, while others did not (Bassnett 229). Cobbe would locate herself between the two positions.

Cobbe's success as a rhetor entirely hinged on her narrative style, which allowed her to access her privilege while hiding her transgressions against the status quo. Understanding Cobbe as part of—and apart from—specific rhetorical traditions will help us understand her importance to rhetorical history. Joining women's rhetorics scholarship with the scholarship on Victorian women's writing provides us with both expansive and specific views of women writing and speaking on issues of empire during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Such an intersection not only brings together two separate fields that have much to lend each other; it will also aid in illuminating Cobbe's narrative self. In Victorian studies, Sara Mills offers a useful discussion of the narrative "self" in Victorian imperialist travel-writing in *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*. Discussion surrounding women's travel writing in the nineteenth century, like the discussions surrounding women's other rhetorical performances, center on ideas about masculine and feminine performances. Mills uses Mary Louise Pratt's categorizations of two dominant narrative styles found in nineteenth-century travel writing to draw distinctions between the reception men and women may have faced. The "sympathetic" narrator was most often associated with women and often viewed as more sympathetic to the plight of the native populations due to its personal style and focus on the individual. To be in "a position of intimacy with the inhabitants of the country" gives a writer "the authority to describe them" (80).

But as Bassnett points out, an emphasis on the relationships between the traveller and the "native" as being particularly feminine is troublesome: "There is a danger of essentialism in this argument, and much early feminist scholarship suffered from a tendency to see 'woman' as a unitary category, and to make assumptions based on that undifferentiated

categorisation” (227). By placing all women under a single category despite their varied experiences and class positions, we risk ignoring the sheer diversity of women’s travel-writing during the nineteenth-century (Bassnett 228). By using ideas about feminine and masculine narration styles, I do not mean to retread the same path earlier scholars have already covered; rather, I point out that Cobbe’s experience and class position impacted the construction of Irish that she presented to the Victorian reading public. The idea that men and women constructed their rhetorical selves in different ways was persuasive in the nineteenth century, as it continues to be today. Rather than disregard the important work done in this area by Mills and other scholars, I use it with the knowledge that easy categorizations between feminine and masculine have been troubled.

What remains a constant in Cobbe’s journalism is an impersonal style. In Chapter Three, we saw how Cobbe’s identity as a “big house daughter” was foregrounded in her autobiographical writing, in both her memoirs and her journalism about Ireland: that identity was dependent on her close—though always hierarchical—relationships with the people who lived on her father’s estate and the nearby villages. Though she could openly claim these experiences in her memoir, she used distancing strategies to use those experiences to construct an authoritative identity in her journalism. While feminine narration style relied on physical and emotional closeness with the people being described in the narrative, men’s travel-writing—associated with the “manners and customs” style of narration—claims authority through its use of scientific information, including statistics and anthropological fieldwork. According to Mills:

Women writers are supposed to write within a “confessional” framework, revealing personal information, and not writing on serious topics. When

women travellers do attempt to give “scientific” accounts, their work is seen as aberrant. . . . If the reader expects that the texts should only deal with pleasure or with trivial domestic information, then statistical information will not meet those expectations. (81-82)

As we have seen, Cobbe could hardly be considered a “confessional” writer, given the need for her to cloak various aspects of her identity dependent on the constantly shifting contexts in which she wrote. In much of the discussion on Victorian travel-writing, the focus is on the “narrator,” the “device through which the narrative becomes comprehensible,” the “construct which gives coherence to a variety of voices, or discourses” (Mills 74).

This discussion has much to lend to the discussion of a rhetor’s “identity” that has interested us as scholars of rhetoric. Mills’s analysis of the narrative styles leaves open a space for hybridity, a space where writers such as Cobbe—continually difficult to classify—can assert themselves as authoritative speakers. According to Mills, travel writing that features the “manners and customs” style is “largely impersonal,” the narrator “largely absent,” whereas the “sentimental” style “foregrounds the narrator” (Mills 75). Cobbe’s style of narration often fell between the continuum of two poles, not easily categorized as either masculine or feminine, Irish or English. In her writing on Ireland, Cobbe is at turns sympathetic and scientific. Mills problematizes any easy categorization of women’s rhetorical performances as either feminine or masculine, noting that women’s travel writing—even if they performed traditional femininity—“was of a contest between masculine and feminine discourses, and other textual determinants” (44). Those textual determinants included editorial style and audience expectations, all the elements that put pressure on how women rhetors fashioned their narrative selves.

For Cobbe, that pressure manifested itself in the distancing strategies she used to downplay her national identity and gender. While “The Fenians of Ballybogmucky” represents one distancing strategy—the strategy of sensational narration in place of autobiography—her work in *Fraser’s* and *Once a Week* represents another kind of distancing strategy: the adoption of the persona of traveller or voyager. Despite Cobbe’s deep connections to Ireland and her concern for its people, her travel-writing on Ireland served to uphold imperialist values, much like the masculinist travel-writing Smith identifies. Adopting the conventions of travel-writing allowed her a freedom of movement in the discursive space of the Victorian periodical, the freedom most enjoyed by men of her rank. By adopting the persona of traveller, Cobbe could mitigate her own “otherness” and place herself in a position of authority over the material space of Ireland and the figurative spaces of *Fraser’s* and *Once a Week*. Thus far I have examined how Cobbe’s experiences of Ireland were mediated through a rhetorical self that was designed to move through discursive and literal places, despite cultural codes that reified women’s rightful place in the private or domestic sphere. The “stranger-guest” persona would prove to be a successful strategy when Cobbe used the conventions of travel-writing as a means of persuasion about Ireland because it enabled her to use the power of her position while mitigating the factors that could make her powerless.

COBBE’S EXCURSION TO DONEGAL AND ITS TRANSLATION INTO “LIFE IN DONEGAL”

Before I delve into Cobbe’s rhetorical excursion into Donegal, a description of her literal excursion is in order. Though “Ireland and Her Exhibition in 1865” was published before “Life in Donegal,” I will follow a non-chronological organizational pattern, using

“Life in Donegal” as the primary focus, as it has so much to tell us about how Cobbe’s narrative life intersected with her lived experiences and how she used travel-writing as a means of fashioning a persuasive argument. All of this then demonstrates how “Ireland and Her Exhibition” followed the same patterns in a different rhetorical space. When considering Cobbe’s positionality, we need to understand how her ideological location intersected with her geographical location. If Ireland as a whole was often described as the wild opposite of stately England, western Ireland was seen as even wilder and more removed from civilization. Donegal is even now part of the *Gaeltacht*, “the appellation employed to describe certain geographical areas containing a diverse group of communities which are predominantly Irish-speaking. These communities are mainly in the west of Ireland” (Watson 256). In the 1990s, there were 80,000 people living in the *Gaeltacht*, and 60,000 were Irish speakers (Watson 256). In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Donegal was even more widely Irish-speaking. For Cobbe’s English audience, it would have signaled a particularly foreign experience, though logistically it was not far away. As Mitchell noted, “It seemed a long way from civilization. By 1848 news reached Dublin by telegraph and twice-daily London mails. Donegal still had no rail service” (71). Because the western end of Ireland was further away both geographically and culturally, Cobbe could more easily establish herself as an expert on the subject, as most of her audience had not likely seen Donegal for themselves.

According to Cobbe’s autobiography, Cobbe was banished to the wilds of Donegal from Newbridge by her strictly evangelical father after revealing that she no longer was a believing Christian.²⁸ However, this may be another important example of Cobbe’s ability to

²⁸ She later abandoned her disbelief in favor of a Deist approach to Christianity. Deism, according to the OED, means a “belief in the existence of a Supreme Being as the source of finite existence, with rejection of revelation and the supernatural doctrines of Christianity.” A

fashion a persuasive “self” in discourse, as Mitchell points out that there is no evidence of a rift between Cobbe and her father in his diary, where he agonized over one son’s decision not to enter the clergy and his other son’s brief interest in an alternative sect of Christianity (Mitchell 71). This implies that Cobbe’s dissension barely registered with her father (or did not register at all) and that Cobbe’s banishment stemmed from something else entirely. While Cobbe may have believed that her father sent her away due to her dissent from her family’s faith, Mitchell asserts that the reasons probably had nothing to do with religion but still everything to do with her gender:

Perhaps Fan’s father never really heard what she said about her religion, or perhaps he thought men’s doubts were important and women’s were not, but it also seems possible that her own fear and guilt led her to project onto an unspeaking father the response she thought he must have had. In recalling her own stricken conscience at the enormity of disbelief, defiance of an earthly father stands in for the vastly greater risk of defying God. (71)

All of Mitchell’s suppositions speak to Cobbe’s position as a woman in a patriarchal culture. Cobbe’s father may not have even “heard,” literally or figuratively, Cobbe’s assertions about her own spiritual beliefs, though those beliefs were important enough to shape his daughter’s identity as a reformist writer for the rest of her life. Cobbe’s experience within her own home mirrors the problems of reception women writers faced outside the domestic sphere. If Cobbe’s father heard her assertions and disregarded them, it suggests that Cobbe’s expressions as a woman did not carry as much intellectual or spiritual weight as a man’s.

“deist” is one who “acknowledges God on the testimony of reason, but rejects revealed religion.” Such a belief system enabled Cobbe’s feeling of superiority over the Catholic Irish who populated Donegal and her father’s village.

Cobbe's projection of her guilt onto her father also proves the emotional damage inflicted on women by paternalistic spiritual and familial systems: her silent, disapproving earthly father stood in for a silent, disapproving heavenly one. Cobbe's role as a "stranger-guest" in her own home would replicate itself in her roles in the public sphere, including the periodical press.

Perhaps, though, Cobbe's construction of this autobiographical event was more strategic than psychological. Perhaps Cobbe was not simply in denial about her father's estimation of her value in a patriarchal family system. It is possible that she continually asserted that she was sent away due to her father's anger because Cobbe saw herself—and saw the benefit in fashioning herself—as equal to a man, despite cultural cues to the contrary. Cobbe was remarkably self-possessed, and this attribute greatly informed how she constructed her authorial persona. While Mitchell makes the very reasonable assumption that Cobbe was actually sent to Donegal to tend to her seriously depressed brother, Cobbe's writing never suggested that her exile was an extension of her role as domestic caretaker of Newbridge instead of punishment for her religious apostasy. Many women writing during the nineteenth century made different rhetorical decisions, opting to emphasize their roles as domestic caretakers in order to build their ethos. While these women rhetors used their domestic experiences to harness rhetorical power, it is fair to say that this sort of power was undervalued in comparison to the political and social power of men (a trend that we can recognize in our own age). Cobbe surely recognized this and opted to construct herself as equal to her brothers in importance to her father and, more expansively, saw her rhetorical performances as being equal to a man's.

The fact that she could not assume that her audience would feel the same way informed how she portrayed her writing self in each of her pieces. In *Once a Week* and *Fraser's*, Cobbe found it most expedient to use the conventions of travel writing, a genre popular with writers of both sexes. Of course, the ways that men and women employed the conventions of travel writing were often different and put to different purposes. However, at times, those purposes would converge. This was the case in Cobbe's imperialist rhetorics, which sought to keep in place the colonial system that benefited her and other members of her class. The complex interplay of class, genre, and gender in Cobbe's travel writing enabled a masculinist voice that facilitated a certain construction of Ireland forever open to the excursions, literal and imaginative, of the English.

FASHIONING A SELF OUTSIDE OF THE CONFINES OF NEWBRIDGE: COBBE'S USE OF TRAVEL-WRITING AS A MEANS OF ENTERING A WIDER WORLD

Before Cobbe could open up Ireland to the imaginative excursions of her readers, she would need to take literal excursions of her own. Class was the very mechanism that allowed Cobbe to function as a travel writer. If Cobbe's class enabled her to speak persuasively on the Irish Question, it was partly due to the fact that it afforded her the privilege of dislocation and displacement from her native land *and* traditional expectations of gender—the ability to be on the move, free from financial concerns and domestic duties. While the boundaries between genres may be a bit nebulous, it is clear that Cobbe was no stranger to travel writing before her pieces in *Once a Week* and *Fraser's*. While Cobbe's excursion into Donegal may have been forced upon her during her young womanhood, later in her life, she was afforded the freedom to venture out on her own, to places of her own choosing. Upon the death of her father, she had left the safe confines of Newbridge for a year-long excursion to the Middle

East and Italy. According to Sidonie Smith, an increasing amount of women were embarking on voyages at the time Cobbe left her family estate for the wider world: “The expanding mobility of *certain women* in the middle to late nineteenth century came as an effect of modernity—democratization, literacy, education, increasing wealth, urbanization and industrialization, and the colonial and imperial expansion that produced wealth and the investment in ‘progress’” (xi, my emphasis). Due to her class status, Cobbe was one of those “certain women,” free from the “drudgery of daily survival and from ignorance” (Smith xi). While other upper- and middle-class women were traveling during this time, Cobbe took the unusual step of cutting her hair short so she would not have to take a maid: “Independent travel ... especially by a woman on her own, was not yet customary” (Mitchell 84). For Cobbe, the ability to physically move and freedom from limiting expectations were of a piece—leaving Newbridge and travelling the world enabled her to fully embrace her identity as a writer, an identity that was subsumed under her role as big house daughter.

Cobbe’s independent travels illustrate how enacting the role of “stranger-guest” could work in positive ways for the woman writer. While Cobbe’s travel marked her singularity as a woman independent of father and husband, it also marked her entry into a wider world, one where she could also be free of her privileged background if she chose: “She was especially happy to discover that people enjoyed her for herself, even without the social advantages of her position in Ireland” (Mitchell 87). One could imagine that Cobbe’s travel gave her the sense that she could shape her identity to make herself appealing to the strangers she met on her journey. Was her navigation of the physical spaces of Italy and the Middle East, where she was never sure what people and events she would encounter, the origin of her ability to

negotiate the conceptual spaces of the literary miscellanies that would help make her career? We can only imagine.

What *is* clear is that Cobbe's class helped propel her into the world outside the gates of Newbridge; within those new contexts—including the periodical press—she could also turn “off,” so to speak, her classed identity when it proved advantageous. We also know that Cobbe mined her experiences for her first publications in the periodical press. In 1862, “The Eternal City (in a temporary phase),” a piece about Rome, was published in *Fraser's*, while “Women in Italy in 1862” was published in *MacMillan's Magazine*. In 1863, *Fraser's* also published “A Day at the Dead Sea” and “A Day at Athens.” Travel-writing helped keep Cobbe employed as a professional writer from the beginning of her career to the end. Little wonder, then, that she relied on its conventions even when writing about her own homeland.

The first few decades of the nineteenth century brought waves of middle-class British tourists “eager to demonstrate its cultural and economic capital” in an expression of “a metropolitan desire to ‘tame’ the previously colonized, ever-expanding margins of the United Kingdom” (Kroeg 200). Travel-writing “provided a space and a language for ongoing cultural negotiations between Great Britain and England” (Kroeg 200). Cobbe may have been capitalizing on this cultural moment by lending her services as a “guide” to her native land. Susan Kroeg, in “Cockney Tourists, Irish Guides, and the Invention of the Emerald Isle,” discusses a tradition of Irish writers producing “guidebooks” that detailed the best places to stay, local landmarks, and the cost of meals (203). In this tradition, the writer's open acknowledgement of an “Irish” identity was a necessary means of ethos-building. Cobbe, however, was fulfilling a different role as a travel writer, providing “amusing

anecdotal material” rather than the logistical information, the two traditions becoming more clearly delineated by the nineteenth century (Kroeg 203).

In *Women Writing the Home Tour, 1682-1812*, Zoë Kinsey discussed the tradition of British writers touring their own country as a means of constructing their own identities as British subjects. In the context of the United Kingdom from the seventeenth century to the early part of the nineteenth century, this was complicated by recent legislative acts that had made Wales and Scotland part of the nation:

Representations of otherness are not solely the product of travelling encounters between the East and West, Europeans and non-Europeans; they are also an intrinsic feature of the narratives produced by the English, Scottish, and Welsh travellers journeying Britain, a fact which demands that we think carefully about what it meant to make a “home tour” in this period. (Kinsley 2)

Kinsley did not include Ireland in her study, focusing on the Celtic countries that shared geographical borders with England, though Ireland had recently become part of the nation, as well. Writing on the home tour shared many of the same genre conventions as travel-writing that detailed journeys to faraway lands: “British travellers touring their own island encounter difference just as travellers ‘abroad’ do, and that difference is commonly given expression through rhetorical gestures that imitate or echo the motifs of travel texts relating foreign journeys” (Kinsley 2).

In important ways, Cobbe continued the tradition of writing the home tour in her journalism on the Irish Question. Travel writing was yet another way for Cobbe to use her Irish heritage as a means of shaping a persuasive identity, as it relied on her class status as much as her personal experience of Ireland. As a member of the Ascendancy class, Cobbe

shaped herself as a writer above the task of giving mere tourists the practical information they would need to visit Ireland. Instead, she used her expertise to craft a wider argument about culture, an argument that always ended with an intact Great Britain, with England at its political and cultural center.

TELLING TALES OF TRAVEL IN “LIFE IN DONEGAL”: COBBE’S USE OF TRAVEL-
WRITING CONVENTIONS TO CONSTRUCT AN IDENTITY OF “STRANGER-
GUEST”

Cobbe’s rhetorical identity came into being at the intersections of the multiple spaces she inhabited. In this section, I bring together discussions of the physical space of Ireland, especially Donegal, and the more conceptual spaces of the periodical in question, in order to demonstrate the rhetorical space Cobbe navigated. *Once a Week* was similar to the other family literary magazines that employed Cobbe. Its contents reveal that *Once a Week* was “an emphatically middle-class magazine that takes reading, history, and art seriously” (Hughes 46). *Once a Week* was founded by William Bradbury and Frederick Evans, whose firm had published Dickens’s *Household Words*. When Dickens left to start *All Year Round* after a disagreement, the two decided to publish a rival literary weekly that would “mark its bold departure from Dickens’ magazine by being illustrated and employing some of the best artists and engravers available” (Hughes 41). The first of its kind, *Once a Week* “appeared at a crucial pivot in the publishing history of poetry and periodicals,” offering readers “original poems *and* original woodcut engravings” six months before its closest competitors *Cornhill Magazine* and *Good Words* appeared on the literary scene (Hughes 41).

“Donegal” was the second piece that Cobbe published in the magazine that year; an essay detailing her travels to Egypt, “A Lady’s Adventure in the Great Pyramid,” had

appeared in the April 14, 1866 issue. This reveals that the editors of *Once a Week* were interested in travel writing in general, and in particular, Cobbe's travel writing. "Donegal" was the only piece in the October 20 issue that featured Celticist themes. Overall, the issue displayed an interest in Teutonic subjects, featuring titles such as "A German Jubilee," an essay commemorating the German victory over Napoleon at Leipzig, and the travel piece "A Day at Salzburg and Berchtesgaden." Cobbe's travel piece was written about a space much closer to her English readers, and to herself.

For Cobbe, the location of Donegal was bound up not only in her construction of herself as a writer, but as a commentator on the Irish Question. Tours of the "Celtic fringe" had become increasingly popular during the eighteenth century as regions on the outer edge of Britannia gained the infrastructure to support a tourism industry. The home tour of the Celtic regions "assisted the articulation of national character, yet instead of promoting Britishness as a coherent and united identity, it placed emphasis on the foreignness of much home tour experience and accentuated regional difference" (Kinsley 129). We saw this idea in play in Chapter 2, as Cobbe presented one of her adopted home countries as an exotic travel destination for her English readers. In "Life in Donegal," Cobbe would do the same, but with a country of which she had experienced even more fully.

Cobbe's assertion of herself as an expert on empire is a subversion of a powerful cultural force that masculinized imperialist actions. Mills argues that women's roles in textual production within an imperialist system were often ignored during their own lives and in twentieth century scholarship:

In the colonial context, British women were only allowed to figure as symbols of home and purity; women as active participants can barely be conceived of.

This is because of social conventions for conceptualising imperialism, which seem to be as much about constructing *masculine* British identity as constructing a national identity *per se*. For this reason, women as individuals and as writers are always seen to be marginal to the process of colonialism. (3, emphasis in original)

As Mills points out, if women were given any role in shaping colonial culture, they were limited to the domestic sphere, serving as an inert emblem that moved men to action:

“Females play an important part in the colonial enterprise as signifiers, but not as producers of signification” (59). Journalists such as Cobbe subverted this paradigm through their production of editorial content, which served as “the colonial material which which links their accounts to larger discursive structures” (3). To be a “producer of signification” in the context of the middle-class, literary miscellany, Cobbe must emphasize her presence within Ireland but hide her reasons for being there, which would reveal her troublesome Irishness and gender.

That is why Cobbe’s introduction to “Life in Donegal” is an exercise in identity construction by the means of evasion. The constraints presented by *Once a Week* are the constraints posed by a larger imperialist system. In *Once a Week*, Cobbe portrays herself as an active participant in Empire by downplaying her position as a “big house daughter,” thus undercutting the expectations of feminine behavior that go along with it. While the piece bears her byline, it does not come until the end. It is not obvious at the beginning of the piece whether the author is male or female, and Cobbe makes no allusions to her gender throughout the entire piece. In the passage below, Cobbe places herself at the level of adventurous young men prepared to travel to the furthest reaches of the Empire:

If it should happen to any parent with a mind thus well-regulated, to possess a son troubled with a strong desire to emigrate to Upper Canada or New Zealand, we should recommend, as the best possible remedy, that the youth should be induced to make a short and easy trial of how he really likes solitude, by spending six months or so in the county of Donegal. If he pass through that ordeal, and return to London still talking of the delights of living out in the world, then let him go by all means to the Antipodes, or the society of those sweet creatures which brave S. Baker met about Gondokoro. He has certainly a “call” from St. Anthony. (436)²⁹

In fact, by constructing herself as an authority, Cobbe occupies a space *above* these young men: her identity here reads more like a middle-aged Victorian gentleman about to recount his past adventures to a younger audience than a middle-aged “spinster,” which is how many of her readers may have viewed her. Cobbe’s performance of masculinity here deemphasized her role as a woman in shaping colonial culture.

Cobbe establishes herself as an adventurer to the outer limits of the British Empire, a difficult identity for women travelers to claim, as they were afforded less freedom of movement and behavior than men. To claim this identity, Cobbe distances herself from any information that would reveal her inferior status as an Irish woman. In order to construct an Ireland her audience would accept, Cobbe would need to set the parameters for discussion, undertaking this task in the most literal sense by becoming an educator for her English audience, offering her readers a quick geographical primer:

²⁹ One has to wonder if the Protestant Cobbe had confused St. Anthony, the patron saint of lost things, with St. Christopher, the patron saint of travelers. However, if one notes the quotes around call, it seems more likely that Cobbe was making an ironic appeal.

[Donegal] is a vast shire some forty miles long at the N.W. angle of that island of whose history and geography you know less than of those of Kamtschatka.³⁰ Donegal is large, and Donegal is beautiful in a certain wild desolate style. There is a magnificent rock-bound coast to the north, and a bay like the Bristol Channel swarming of fish to the south, and plenty of mountains and salmon rivers, and a few woods here and there; altogether a county which in England people would walk over and talk over perpetually. *But it is in Ireland, and at the outermost and most inaccessible rim of Ireland. So who cares for its beauty or wildness?* (436, emphasis mine)

Though Cobbe's piece is not illustrated, her descriptive language reflects the ethos of *Once a Week*, providing her readers with a vivid portrait of Donegal. Cobbe's physical descriptions were never simple; instead, they were overlaid with multiple meanings. In this one, there is a hiccup in Cobbe's careful construction of herself as an objective, English traveler to Irish lands. She expressed a sense of indignation at English ignorance of a land just meters away. The line "so who cares for its beauty and wildness?" suggested that the ignorance was a sort of willed ignorance: the curiosity of the English middle-class about foreign cultures did not extend, in Cobbe's view, to Ireland (though the sheer number of essays and articles about Ireland in many literary miscellanies refutes this point). Cobbe's labeling of her English audience as ignorant of Ireland's attributes is calculated to create the opportunity for Cobbe to act as educator. Her strategy of first-person constitution would construct Cobbe as a credible resource for her English readers, actually placing her above them in terms of authority and expertise on the subject of Ireland.

³⁰ Kamtschatka is a peninsula located on the outermost northeast region of Russia, extending the length between Brussels to Reykjavik.

Cobbe enacts this expert authorial persona by organizing the English into different groups, suggesting that the class of Englishman implied what each was looking for in a holiday. This labeling, surely meant to be comical, has uncomfortable overtones. For example, Cobbe offers the correct pronunciation of Donegal for her “dear brother Cockneys” who “are sure to mispronounce it” (436). In Chapter Three, we saw how satirical autobiography overlapped with Cobbe’s journalism on the Irish Question. In “Donegal,” it overlaps with travel-writing, which emphasizes the flexibility of the periodical press and the topic of the Irish Question. Rather than use ornamented, lyrical prose, Cobbe strives for an objective, scientific tone, but that does not mean she was not also striving for humor, dryly observing the travelling patterns of her fellow Britons, carefully categorizing them according to their class: the Cockney, “an animal so naturally gregarious,” longs for the “alpine solitude” of a Swiss chalet, while the Londoner—clearly distinct from his “brother Cockney”—“aspires” for “a lodge in some vast wilderness” (436). Cobbe’s self-conscious adoption of a scientific persona creates moments of comedy: the Cockney does not leave “his wonted habitation” in a train, but a “shoal,” in a “process corresponding partially to the hibernation of the mole, and partially to the passage of the herring” (436). Her stranger-guest persona enables Cobbe to persuasively categorize her fellow British subjects without revealing where she fit into such a broad hierarchical system. The working-class Cockney is described in much the same way as Cobbe often described the Irish: uneducated, ignorant, and highly animated. Cobbe’s categorization of English tourists only anticipates much more serious categorizations that would come later in the piece, categorizations that would have greater implications for questions of empire.

It takes more than military and economic might to conquer a nation: language also plays an integral part. Cobbe expends more energy describing the land than she does the people, placing her within the masculinist tradition of the “manners and customs” style of travel-writing. Mills argues that in “the physical act of describing the landscape the narrator is also mastering it” (78). Travel writers often describe landscapes “as if they were empty of people,” symbolically emptying a colonial space of its native inhabitants to make room for colonial occupiers (Mills 75). Cobbe takes a similar tack in “Life in Donegal.” Gone is the “big house daughter,” who had a close, though hierarchical, relationship with her father’s villagers, who could name them and ascribe them characteristics and life stories that emphasized their humanity even within a system that subjugated them. Instead, Cobbe focuses her energies on narrating the landscape of Donegal in order to discursively package its wild landscape for a new audience. Her power in this context would hinge on her ability to construct a persona that was knowledgeable but not vested.

Though Cobbe devotes more time to describing the landscape of Ireland than its human population (particularly during the first half of her essay), when she does describe the people of Donegal, she focuses on the specific population it lacked:

Few tourists ever hear of it. Beyond the immediate corner of the little county town nearest to the rest of the world, there is hardly a resident gentleman. Half of it is a vast district, thinly inhabited by the poorest of poor Irish-speaking cottiers; and, if the Ordnance Surveyors were not beyond suspicion, we should entertain private doubts whether the villages marked sparsely in the map were

not fancifully introduced, as in *Hudibras*³¹ days, when “Geographers on Africk’s downs/Stuck elephants for want of towns.” (436)

The above paragraph is typically Cobbian, with many layers of meaning and intertextual references, including the 20-year endeavor by English government to map the terrain of Ireland. In 1824, the British government began mapping “every nook and cranny of the country” which would “address inequalities in local taxation” (McWilliams 51). In one short passage, Cobbe renders Donegal as the western “Other” to the civilized England and even the rest of Ireland, emphasizing their strange tongue and perhaps more importantly, the lack of an aristocratic presence in the region. In her biography, Mitchell sees Cobbe’s musings in *Once a Week* as straightforwardly autobiographical. No “gentleman” means simply that there is no society and Cobbe was socially isolated. But what Mitchell read as Cobbe’s boredom due to lack of society, I read as a signal to her English audience that the area had seen little English influence, with the attendant lack of civilization that entailed. Of course, her brother was a “gentleman,” but he is left out of Cobbe’s piece, as is any information that would openly signal Cobbe’s Anglo-Irish identity.

In sophistic rhetoric, there was a focus on the “local” over the “universal.” But for Cobbe, as stranger-guest in Donegal *and* in the English periodical, what is “local” is the audience represented by *Once a Week*; it is the shared values between the audience and Cobbe that become transposed upon the landscape of Ireland. But instead of remapping Ireland, she rewrites Ireland through the imperialist lens of a middle-class English miscellany. Her position as “stranger-guest” enables her to function as both a traveler to and

³¹ This is surely a reference to *Hubridas*, a mock epic poem written by seventeenth-century poet Samuel Butler. The poem is a satirical indictment of Cromwellian politics. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Butler was widely read and imitated in Great Britain and continued to be published until the early twentieth century.

a resident of Ireland, allowing her to claim authority through her experience with the land and people, without revealing or emphasizing parts of her identity that would mitigate that authority: her Irish heritage and her gender. By focusing on one part of the country, “Life in Donegal” offered a piece of Ireland for the consumption of her English audience.

The strategy demanded and enabled a certain selectivity in what the rhetor revealed to the audience, which not only allowed the woman rhetor to speak within the contested third space of the periodical, but fashion an identity that could persuasively answer the question for her Victorian audience: To whom does Ireland belong? For her readers in the twenty first century, what does Cobbe’s answer to this question say about the intersection of hierarchy and rhetorical agency? At a time when so much was in flux—gender roles, racial conceptualizations, geographical boundaries—Cobbe’s rhetorical mapping attempted to keep Ireland and its people frozen in time, perpetuating the classed system that allowed a woman such as Cobbe rhetorical agency in the first place.

The next piece I examine, packaged in similar ways for a similar audience, follows many of the same patterns as “Life in Donegal,” but focuses more on the people of Ireland than the landscape, creating a discursive portrait that would have a similar flattening effect on the country and its people in order to smooth over disturbances in the colonial system caused by Irish rebellion. In its analysis I expand my discussion of Cobbe’s masculinist narrative style and how it impacted Cobbe’s representation of the Irish *people*, asserting that her deft detailing of their character actually does the work of constructing Cobbe’s own character as a rhetor. By fashioning the character of the Irish, Cobbe need not say anything about her own identity at all, which is a powerful strategy for a stranger-guest who existed on the margins of race, gender, and class, who could never be sure of the reception she would

receive. However, she could always anticipate the needs and investments of her audience as the venue she chose for her imperialist rhetorics enabled a certain predictability due to its periodicity and editorial bent, on the part of both the audience and the rhetor: the audience knew what they were buying, and the rhetor knew what the audience wanted to buy. The genre made it all the easier to package her essays on Ireland for the consumption of her English readers.

CONSTRUCTING IRELAND, CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY IN “IRELAND AND HER
EXHIBITION IN 1865”

“Ireland and Her Exhibition in 1865” was published in *Fraser’s Magazine for Town and Country* in October 1865. *Fraser’s* was a monthly miscellany that followed predictable patterns. Similar to the *Cornhill* in content and audience, its political orientation was conservative, associated—as Cobbe was—with the Tory party. It offered material that was described as “scrupulously clean family entertainment” (qtd. in Waterloo). The table of contents of that particular issue featured none of the sensationalist, romantic titles of the *Argosy* or *Tinsley’s*. It does, however, display an interest in issues of empire. Cobbe’s piece was the first of the issue, placed ahead of titles such as “A Chapter on Pai Marire, the New Religion of the Maoris” and “The Organ in Scotland.” The table of contents also provides evidence that the audience of *Fraser’s* was interested in international issues that fell outside of the British empire, as well, with titles such as “Austrian Politics” and “From London to Rio de Janeiro.” For twenty first century readers, this interest in global affairs should signal that the audience for *Fraser’s* would be more educated and urbane, interested in the cultural event that Cobbe referenced in the title of her essay.

“Ireland and Her Exhibition in 1865” was written in response to an event that happened only a few months prior to its publication. In “Ireland and Her Exhibition,” Cobbe moved further away from her own personal experiences of Ireland (however indirectly she may have addressed them) and into an experience that would be more accessible to most of her British readers, a deft rhetorical decision, given that her class status would have separated her from most of her readers. The term “exhibition” functions as a literal event and as a rhetorical strategy. Both of these uses of “exhibition” rely on Cobbe’s artful construction of herself as a “stranger-guest” to Ireland, one who could closely observe the landscape and its people without acknowledging any investment. The Irish exhibition itself was modeled after the Great Exhibition held in Hyde Park in London for over five months in 1851, which showcased the manufactured goods from across the Empire. While still living on her father’s estate, Cobbe traveled to London to view the Exhibition, one of her first trips without her father (Mitchell 75). Though the exhibition was seen as a touchstone event for many Victorians, Cobbe left no personal account of her own experience of it (Mitchell 75). Rather, she focused her attention as a writer on its smaller Irish counterpart.

According to John Turpin, the two Irish exhibitions—the first was held in 1853—were part of a political movement, “the first large-scale propaganda on behalf of Irish industry,” sponsored not by the British government, but the Royal Dublin Society and “enlightened” Irish businesspeople (2). Cobbe discusses the exhibition at the very end of her piece, not even devoting two full pages to the titular event. Cobbe is complimentary of the manufactured goods and artwork displayed at the event, a tonal shift that she acknowledges, as she spends much of the piece listing the cultural deficiencies of the Irish:

We cannot conclude this brief sketch of Ireland in 1865 without a few words concerning the Exhibition, albeit tourists and the newspapers have well-nigh said enough on the subject. We are almost inclined to retract the hard words in the early part of this paper concerning the lack of taste of the Irish people when we consider the claims of this graceful building. (421)

However, the literal exhibition is only superficially the focus of Cobbe's essay. Cobbe is exploiting a seemingly innocuous genre to deliver an imperialist message, using Ireland's exhibition as a means of contrasting Irish culture to English culture. Cobbe's goal is not to persuade her audience to visit the next Irish exhibition. Instead, she uses her opportunity in *Fraser's* to claim the power of representation—albeit over a relatively small audience, over the fleeting amount of time that a periodical essay circulated in the culture. Her identity as “stranger-guest” allows her the power of representation without the liabilities of identification, facilitating Cobbe's use of a major and minor cultural events—potentially accessible to every British subject—to advance an imperialist agenda that benefited her own class.

A rhetorical “exhibition” is an act of representation; for Cobbe, the packaging of an image of Ireland was dependent on her self-construction of Cobbe as an experienced traveler to, rather than a resident of, the land. She again constructs the persona of educator to the less informed masses; her strategy was to “exhibit” the landscape for her English audience, who she felt were largely uneducated on the subject. The Irish landscape was for her to represent, to make available to her English readers. By making an unflattering comparison between the natural beauty of the landscape and Ireland's cultural production, she was making an imperialist argument that England should retain control over Irish land. As part of this act of

rhetorical exhibition, this narration of the land, Cobbe controlled the image of Ireland that her English audience would take away from their reading. While Cobbe complains of English ignorance of the Irish landscape in “Life in Donegal,” in “Ireland and Her Exhibition” she decries the flowery descriptions of Ireland made by English tourists. Cobbe’s liminal, dualistic positionality as “stranger-guest” imbued even her opening description of the Irish landscape, where she risked insulting her audience, surely composed of the very type of middle-class tourist about which she complained:

If there be any scenery in the world less fitted than another for the appreciation of hasty visitors, it is surely that of Ireland. There is beauty, very great beauty, in the country; but, except for some twenty miles of Wicklow, and twenty more round Killarney, it is so widely scattered, so subdued and unpretentious, that we have been often tempted to wonder whether the admiration professed for it by many possessors of monthly tourists’ tickets was, in truth, altogether due to the landscape—so bald and meager to a superficial glance,—or to the rivers and ruins—so absurdly overcried,—or to the traveller’s enjoyment of the genial spirit of the people, combined with that *pleasing sense of the superiority of his own nation, which so naturally stirs the breast of the Englishman in Ireland.* (403, my emphasis)

As we have seen in previous chapters, Cobbe often repeated a pattern found in Celticist literature of relegating Ireland to the past: if it was no longer a living culture, it posed no real threat to English sovereignty. The landscape, again, seems empty of people: the only people moving through the space are English tourists. While Cobbe complains about English visitors, she describes their sense of “superiority” as “natural.”

By defending her homeland against the romanticization of English tourists, she is also denigrating it by lessening its charms: Ireland is portrayed as an archaic object, a “ruin” presented for the consumption of English tourists, and not even a particularly interesting ruin at that. Perhaps the most important layer of meaning in the above passage is the distinction Cobbe draws between “tourist” and those with lived, authentic experience of Ireland. “Hasty visitors” were not invested with the authority to describe the landscape. Rather, one had to have long-term experience of the land in order to speak about it with authority. She also questions the ideological blinders of English commentators on Ireland, noting that they bring an unacknowledged bias to their view of the country. Of course, Cobbe does not acknowledge her own biases when it comes to Ireland and the Irish. To do so would have revealed her Irish heritage, undermining her authority.

Cobbe’s authoritative, descriptive style is used to persuade her readers that she has been close enough to Ireland and its people to render a decisive verdict on its place in the Empire. In “Exhibition,” the land and the people become conflated: “We rather believe that it is needful to live in Ireland long months, if not long years, to take in fully the *expression* in which, as in many a human face, lies its true and touching charm” (403, emphasis in original). When describing this “expression” Cobbe indulges in a bit of ornate language: “Beside the hues of the dark green trees and the emerald grass, Nature, as if jealous to supply the colour of the earth which she denies to the sky, has dressed the hill-sides with imperial robes of purple heather and golden gorse” (404). Here, Cobbe ventured very close to the territory of the poetical, the realm of the Irish and the feminine, two labels she sought to avoid throughout her career. But her description of the “imperial robes” of purple heather complicates her performance of Irishness in the sentence, indicating Cobbe’s imperialist

worldview and illustrating the lens she used to view Ireland. Ireland was—and in Cobbe’s view, would always remain— part of the empire, and she saw the very landscape as being part of that empire. Her strategy of creating a persuasive identity as a stranger-guest to Ireland depended upon it.

The stranger-guest persona also depended upon a separation from the landscape and people, cultivating a sense of alienation from the surroundings. While the sentimental style of narration is associated with caring and compassion, Cobbe’s discursive treatment of the Irish as people and not as statistics is no less troubling for a modern audience. If the Irish landscape is conflated with the Irish people, subduing the landscape means control over an unruly populace. In the Ireland created by Cobbe in “Ireland and Her Exhibition,” the Irish are portrayed in broad, cartoonish sketches. For example, she shares an anecdote about hearing a speech by Daniel O’Connell in Conciliation Hall. O’Connell, known as the “Great Liberator,” had helped form the nationalist organization the Catholic Association in the 1820s and was an MP from Country Clare, strongly opposing absentee landlordism (Curtis 26-27). Yet his accomplishments did not earn him even a grudging show of respect from Cobbe:

He was then an old man, and wore a shabby red wig, forming disagreeable contrast with his wrinkled face, a face with the same fixed smile noticeable in Pio IX. Over his broad shoulders hung the red robes of a Lord Mayor. Dirty, worn, old robes they seemed, like a house-keeper’s ill-made cloak. Altogether the Liberator and his toga did not produce an imposing effect. (412)

Cobbe was equally dismissive of his speech: “It turned on the famine, which in some wonderful way was so mixed up with English oppressions that his audience probably ended

by believing that the blight had come by Act of Parliament” (412). In one short passage, Cobbe undermines an Irish nationalist hero and minimizes English culpability in the famine.

Though Cobbe adapted the conventions of travel-writing typically associated with women’s writing, the “sentimental” narration style that brought the observer closer to the observed, the distance between the two would not allow any real merging. Cobbe explains this distance to her readers, using well-worn tropes explaining the differences between the “races” of Celt and Saxon:

Intimate knowledge of the Celtic Irish, by one of Saxon race, will always result in a strong sense of the essential distinction of the two great families, and will probably serve to cure any tendency to mawkish sentimentality on one side or stupid contempt on the other. It will, however, above all other things, teach a real sympathy with the people, and leave to the end of life a tender recollection that under an Irishman’s faults and follies lies a more simple, genuine, human heart, warm, generous, grateful, and brave, than is often to be found in combination with calmer and better-regulated brains.

(408)

Cobbe is constructing herself as an authority through her “intimate knowledge of the Celtic race, by one of Saxon race.” According to Cobbe, such a perspective allows an equilibrium between the two poles of abject hatred and complete romanticizing of the Celt.

However, Cobbe continues to cast the Irish as emotional and disorderly while presenting the Saxon as rational and well-ordered. She does not openly claim a Saxon identity, but instead performed the identity of the Saxon through her own characterization of the Saxon as “calm” and “better-regulated” than the Celt. Her position of stranger-guest

allowed her to move through the discursive space of Ireland without being tied to that location forever, in a position that is located further from power and agency. The strategy works particularly well, as Cobbe is able to sidestep any uncomfortable associations with the kinds of Irishness that she described in this piece, both the ones that she identified as circulating within the larger culture and the ones she reinforced through her repetition of old ideas that she used to render the Irish as non-experts on the issue of imperialism. Through her enacting of Saxon rationality, she is able to claim these attributes without openly identifying herself as Anglo-Irish or even English. The distance between the observer and the observed did not allow “Saxon” to collapse into “Celt.” The distinction between the two remained complete, illustrating Cobbe’s larger, imperialist argument: Ireland was part of the Empire, but would always be lower on the hierarchy, subordinate to England.

Yet within Cobbe’s seemingly shallow caricatures there is some depth from which we can draw larger inferences about persuasive identity construction. Cobbe offers a snapshot in words of the “Catholic Celt himself,” a dualistic character whom she created to make a deft and sophisticated synopsis of the competing versions of the Celt in circulation in Victorian media. I quote it almost in its entirety in order to emphasize the myriad ways the Irishman functioned as a symbol and Cobbe’s acknowledgment of the instability of the Celtic character as constituted in the periodical press:

It must be admitted that the typical Irishman is a Proteus. View him in one way, he is the Merry Andrew of Europe, a ragged roguish clown who never opens his mouth but to utter (in a brogue which is itself ridiculous) either a jest or a bull. View him from another side, he is the suffering victim of unmerited oppression, the patient martyr of his ancient faith, the sensitive,

poetic Celt. ... Now—he is the tipsy bully, brandishing his shillelagh in a faction fight and trailing his ragged coat in the mud to provoke his equally pugnacious neighbor to trample upon it. And now—he is the silent secret-plotting Ribbonman, nourishing his *Vendetta* for years, till he can shoot his unarmed and helpless victim from behind a hedge. Now he is the most warm-hearted, faithful creature in the world, toiling to reap English harvests and win bread for the wife and children he tenderly loves. And now—he is the idlest, laziest loon that ever lay smoking by side of a ditch. (408)

Cobbe describes the difficult task of presenting an accurate image of the Irish: “It is not easy to find expression for the different sentiments wherewith we must regard a people so constituted” (408). The Irishman, “the Martyr of Europe” and “the Buffoon,” was ever-changing, an identity that was constructed in different ways dependent on the rhetorical context (408). Within her Irish Question essays, this is Cobbe’s most direct acknowledgement of the power of the periodical press to shape identity, an understanding that identity is not innate or essential but constructed in discourse. This is also a recognition of Cobbe’s power as a writer to shape identity, of the Irish and of herself.

The above passage corresponds with Cobbe’s conclusion in productive ways. Cobbe closes the essay with a discussion of the Irish language. The placement of this discussion is odd, considering that it comes after her lengthy discussion of Irish history and culture and a comparatively brief description of the exhibition. Cobbe quotes census figures that estimated the Irish-speaking population at 1.5 million in 1841 and “scarcely” at a million in 1861 (422). For Cobbe, the dearth of Irish speakers is such an obvious marker of improvement that she need not elaborate further:

The direction in which these figures point as regards the progress of the country seems to need no comment. We shall add nothing to them beyond our past remarks, save the hope that no *Agrarian* Reviewer, shooting at us from behind the shelter of his journal, may “do us to death” with the famous remark “that nothing is so false as figures, except facts.” (422)

In this passage, Cobbe conflates the agrarian nationalist agitator, such as the Ribbonman,³² with the editors and writers of nationalist newspapers, who instead of actual weapons, use language to win Irish independence from England. By closing her piece with an acknowledgement of the power of the periodical press to move people to action, she asserts her own power of influence over her audience.

Cobbe’s rhetorical power in “Exhibition” hinges on the distancing strategies she creates within her piece which enable her audience to “read” her identity in different ways: they could read her as one of them, as English but with extensive personal experience; they could read her as Anglo-Irish, like them but with first-hand knowledge of the Celtic Irish through both experience and heredity. Either way, she could avoid the pitfalls of too much Irishness, while claiming the credibility that only lived experience can provide. Like the Janus-faced Irish character propagated by Cobbe, the strategy of persuasive identity construction cut both ways: it could be flexible or constricting.

CONCLUSION: NEGOTIATING GENDERED AND GEOGRAPHICAL SPACES

Cobbe’s strategy of constructing herself as a “stranger-guest” to Ireland, like other strategies performed by women rhetors, has both positive and negative implications for

³² The Ribbonmen were one of the nationalist peasant secret societies that were active during the 1830s, forming in response to high rents and demands for tithes to the Church of Ireland (Curtis 28).

women speaking and writing during the Victorian age. On the one hand, while Cobbe underplays her gender by equating herself with masculine adventurers, the fact remains that she was a woman asserting her right to travel freely through the empire, which lent her—and by extension, other women—the authority to speak credibly on issues of empire. Cobbe’s construction of herself as a travel writer is instructive to the myriad ways Victorian women used the strategy of first-person constitution in order to persuade, as it emphasized how in flux the concept of identity was for women writing and speaking about empire. Travel-writing is where the materiality of the rhetorical situation—the journals, the contested physical space of Ireland—interconnects with conceptualizations of rhetorical space that are vital when discussing Victorian women rhetors.

Cobbe’s persuasive identity as a travel writer is contingent upon her gendered identity. As Jarratt pointed out, the reception to the rhetorics of the “stranger-guests” is closely connected to the reception of women’s rhetorical performances:

This parallel can be traced even more closely into the realm of “style,” both as it refers specifically to language and in its more general reference to gesture, appearance, and dress. The devaluation of both the sophists and women operates as their reduction to a “style” devoid of substance. Both rhetoric and women are trivialized by identification with sensuality, costume, and color—all of which are supposed to be manipulated in attempts to persuade through deception. (65)

It might be argued that Cobbe practices sophism in the worst sense of the word, as she attempted to persuade the English public of the essential rightness of continued colonial rule over Ireland without acknowledging her investments in the issue. Her ability to be “English”

or “Saxon” dependent on context could be seen as an “attempt to persuade through deception.” She also often relies on racist stereotypes of the so-called “native” Irish in order to support her claims that England should remain in power. While Cobbe is often discussed as being an “exceptional” Victorian woman, she was very much of part of that age, and was subject to—and perpetuated—some of the worst prejudices of her class, race, and time. While we work to recover Cobbe’s rhetorics for what they can teach us about the Victorian age, we should not forget her shortcomings and remind ourselves that even during the nineteenth century, she might have made different choices. The epigraph by Wilde that begins this chapter proves that upper-class Victorian women did write on behalf of the poorer classes of Irish from a nationalist perspective.

We have also seen how Cobbe negotiated her gender and class through her use of the periodical press as a rhetorical space and witnessed how she adopted the conventions of different genres in order to meet the expectations of different periodicals. She also used masculine or feminine rhetorical styles when it suited the situation, as we have seen in her use of both the masculine “manners and customs” style of narration and the feminine “sentimental” style. It is the *performance* of gender and nationality that interests me when it comes to Cobbe’s imperialist rhetorics in middle-class English journals, though we cannot see or hear her. As a journalist, Cobbe had no access to what Jarratt labels as the trappings of feminine rhetorical performances: the “sensuality, costume, and color.” Her identity as an Irish woman—or as a specifically *not*-Irish *not*-woman, dependent on context—was created in discourse. Cobbe created herself—indeed, created myriad selves—within the Victorian periodical. Sophistic rhetoric gives us the means to think about how rhetors could successfully travel through various locations by effectively making appeals based on context

without becoming fixed in one position. Jarratt describes how the sophists' idea that truth is created in discourse helped create a space for women's methods of writing: "The sophistic style, anticipating in a fashion *écriture féminine*, runs deeper than surface 'technique.' ... [S]tyle *is* the woman" (Jarratt 72). Or for Cobbe, the not-woman, not-man, but something persuasively in-between. While we cannot know the "true" Cobbe—if such a person actually existed—we can know the Cobbe, or Cobbes, created in discourse. Because questions of gender and nation played such an important role in shaping Victorian identity, Cobbe's Irishness and gender are inextricably tied.

Over the course of this project, we have seen how Cobbe used the conventions of different genres to extend her imperialist argument across a range of publications, examining how ideas about gender impacted the specific ways Cobbe used those genres. The intersection of travel-writing and rhetoric represents women on the move, physically, socially, and ideologically. Travel-writing enabled women to, borrowing a phrase from Hélène Cixous, write themselves into being on an international scale. In the case of Cobbe's travel-writing, we can view her writing on place as an argument that women had rights to traverse the globe and make meaning about what they saw and the people they encountered. Cobbe's travel-writing on Ireland shows how complicated this global rhetorical stage could be for women, despite the greater freedoms afforded those "certain women" described by Sidonie Smith. On a larger scale, women were on the move through multiple contexts during the Victorian age. That Cobbe traversed through so many successfully enough to become a celebrity writer on both sides of the Atlantic signals to us that we should be very interested in just how she did it. *Where* Cobbe came from—geographically and ideologically—is an

important question to consider as we begin to examine Cobbe's rhetorical journeys through the Victorian English-speaking world.

In the next chapter, I look more closely at how Cobbe enacted performances of masculinity and femininity in her journalism on the Irish Question, discussing more fully Cobbe's position in a larger conversation about nineteenth-century women's rhetorics. I hope including Cobbe will broaden that conversation, if only a bit, by widening our focus to include a woman who, like her American counterparts, had to answer questions about race and class; those questions may have come with different historical and cultural baggage given different cultural and political contexts, but are still instructive to us as we strive to construct a more complete picture of women speaking and writing in the past, and as we work to expand our vision of women and speaking and writing transnationally today.

CHAPTER FIVE

“THE FENIAN IDEA” AND “IRELAND FOR THE IRISH”: HOW COBBE
NEGOTIATES COMPETING DEFINITIONS OF IRISHNESS

In the preceding chapters, we have encountered the many ways Cobbe constructed her authorial persona when answering the Irish Question in English periodicals, observing how Cobbe has relied on her experiences as a member of the Ascendancy class to speak on the subject of Irish nationalism without necessarily claiming Anglo-Irish identity. Thus far, our only example of Cobbe openly labeling herself as Anglo-Irish occurred in her autobiography, a genre expressly written for the purposes of revealing the events of the author’s life (no matter how unreliably those accounts may be constructed). In “Ireland for the Irish, by an Anglo-Irish Loyalist,” published in *Tinsley’s Magazine* on Feb. 2, 1868, Cobbe directly addressed her Anglo-Irish identity in the very title of her piece, establishing her *ethos* as a loyalist in the minds of her readers before they even begin to read her introductory paragraph. The paragraph encapsulated Cobbe’s treatment of the periodical press as a site of rhetorical performance, where multiple speakers with multiple investments use their national identities as a means of persuasion:

The “American Fenian” with whom the readers of this Magazine have become acquainted, opened his remarkable paper by saying that the English press habitually deals with Irish questions exclusively from an English point of view. His observation is just, and has a double bearing. Not only have the Celtic Irish, Fenians and non-Fenians, no organ devoted to their interests in England: the Anglo-Irish are in the same predicament. The vast influence of the daily journals has been by them so stupidly ignored that, while expending thousands to obtain the return of the silent

members of Parliament, they have never attempted to start a newspaper which should fairly set forth their interests before the English public. (39)

Cobbe's acknowledgement of the "vast influence" of the periodical press revealed her awareness of her journalism as a rhetorical performance, one that could persuade (or fail to persuade) her audiences based on her negotiation of certain cultural powder kegs: race, class, and gender. Cobbe's negotiation of these three important identity markers in the two essays I examine in this chapter serve as evidence of how a rhetor's position in relation to shifting structures of power shaped those performances.

In previous chapters, I addressed Cobbe's strategy of constructing an *ethos* of credibility in order to persuade mixed audiences. In this chapter, I focus more closely on how Cobbe fashioned a persuasive Anglo-Irish persona for English and American audiences, expanding my discussion from specific genres to a wider discussion of how Cobbe used ideas about masculine and feminine argumentation styles in order to address a heterogeneous audience on a larger cultural stage. Cobbe and her counterparts were not speaking and writing on issues of empire in a cultural or national vacuum. Cobbe's negotiation of traditional concepts of femininity and masculinity resulted in the creation of a hybridic rhetorical identity, empowering her to promote England's continued rule over Ireland even within a widening transatlantic context. In the introduction, I posited that the English periodical served as a "third space" for women writers, an interstice between the public and the private. In this chapter, I extend that argument by looking at transatlantic periodical as a third space, as well, in the material sense that it shares the genre conventions and mode of publication as its English counterpart, but also in a more theoretical sense that set it apart and made it a new rhetorical platform for Victorian women. The third space of transatlantic

periodical, not strictly American or British but a hybrid, allowed women rhetors the rare opportunity to occupy a place between ideological and national borders to address a culturally and ideologically mixed audience.

“Ireland for the Irish” and “The Fenian ‘Idea’,” published in 1866 in the *Atlantic Monthly*, were broader in scope than Cobbe’s other essays on the Irish Question, as they did not solely consider the question from the vantage point of the English, but from the perspective of the Irish and the American, as well. “Ireland for the Irish, by an Anglo-Irish Loyalist,” published in the English *Tinsley’s*, was written in response to recent uprisings instigated by Fenian Brotherhood, a secret society that used militant tactics to advance the Irish nationalist cause. “The Fenian ‘Idea’” was published in the American *Atlantic* and addressed the same topic. In this piece, Cobbe approached the question from a global perspective, trying to position Ireland not only within Great Britain, but also within the context of American-British relations. We have seen how Cobbe used the conventions of specific genres to switch on or off certain aspects of her identity—particularly her class and gender—in order to build a credible ethos. In this chapter, I will examine how Cobbe’s “big house daughter” persona translated in an expanded rhetorical context to an audience with different historical and political frames of reference.

First, I bring together ideas about persuasive identity construction and feminine and masculine styles of rhetoric in the nineteenth century, coalescing into a theory of Cobbe’s androgynous argumentative style. I then discuss the rhetorical spaces of *Tinsley’s Magazine* and the *Atlantic Monthly* before describing how Cobbe negotiated her Anglo-Irish identity and attitudes toward Irish nationalism by performing her form of third-space rhetoric. To conclude, I discuss how Cobbe used her androgynous rhetorics to expand her influence over

multiple sites of cultural meaning-making, then lay the groundwork for the conclusion of this project, which will call for an expansion of critical attention to how Cobbe's rhetorics circulated in America, a third space not yet fully considered when it comes to the rhetorics of British women. While the rhetorical strategy employed by Cobbe, persuasive first-person constitution, was used by many Victorian women rhetors, the ways in which Cobbe used it has something to tell us how class, gender, and nation intersected in the formation of rhetorical identity and how women found a platform from which to speak in the rapidly expanding global context of the nineteenth century.

THE BIG HOUSE DAUGHTER NAVIGATING THE TRANSATLANTIC SPHERE:
COBBE'S USE OF CLASS AND GENDER TO CONSTRUCT THE CHARACTER OF
THE ANGLO-IRISH WOMAN WRITER IN THE AMERICAN-ENGLISH PRESS

Read together, "Ireland for the Irish" and "The Fenian 'Idea'" offer compelling case studies of how "identity" and "character" are not "loosely interchangeable," but separate though often complementary, as Dana Anderson argues in *Identity's Strategy* (94). Anderson defines "ethos" as "the linguistic presentation of character" and "our sense of how a person acts, or one's nature as a moral agent," while identity signals the "strategic constitution of the self," "our sense of who a person is, or how one defines itself" (93). According to Anderson, "A person's expression of identity can and often does lead us to infer something of that person's character from it" (93). According to Anderson, the construction of a rhetor's identity is a self-constituting act, bringing the rhetor into being within the text.

Cobbe's assertion of her Anglo-Irish identity—a direct assertion in *Tinsley's*, a more muted assertion in *Atlantic Monthly*—is a strategic action designed to persuade her audience that she had both the experience and the ethos necessary to speak credibly on the issue of

Irish nationalism. By openly claiming Anglo-Irish identity, Cobbe simultaneously builds her character as a commentator on the Irish Question as she forms her identity by ascribing to the Anglo-Irish certain values and traits. Her Anglo-Irish identity signaled that she had experiential knowledge of the place, while her privileged class status and loyalist ideology denoted that Cobbe was invested with the cultural superiority, the *character*, that was necessary to speak on behalf of the Irish. Cobbe displayed a similar awareness of the rhetorical situation of the periodical press in “The Fenian ‘Idea,’” which responded to many of the same issues raised in Cobbe’s “Ireland for the Irish,” though it was directed at an audience that differed from her English audience in important ways. While Cobbe’s imperialist rhetorics were, for the most part, directed at middle-class English audiences, “The Fenian ‘Idea’” is a departure from Cobbe’s habit of addressing audiences whose opinions about imperialism she could (almost always) predict because this essay was one of the few she wrote directly for an American audience. Though “The Fenian ‘Idea’” was published two years before Cobbe’s *Tinsley*’s piece, it addressed the same issues: who was authorized to claim Irishness and, thus, who was authorized to speak on Ireland’s behalf.

The periodical allowed a “third space” for women writers who addressed a variety of social issues, who needed to reach a mixed audience that accepted women’s public speech in varying degrees. These women rhetors, though often freed from the labor of childcare and housekeeping, often did not have access to traditional feminine means of persuasion such as motherhood and marriage. Cobbe and her ilk would need to find a different means of persuasion, a strategy that would strike a balance between the expectations for women’s expression and the necessity of asserting one’s voice in a loud marketplace of ideas. In the first chapter, I asserted that class was the fulcrum around which every component of Cobbe’s

identity moved, enabling Cobbe to function as a persuasive rhetor. As we have observed, that mechanism did not always run smoothly. Cobbe's gender often created friction: if Cobbe's class allowed her to speak as an Irish woman, her gender put the most pressure on *how* she made those arguments. Cobbe was one of many women who helped create a space for women writers in the periodical press, but the masculinist expectations of that space necessarily shaped her discourse. Because Cobbe makes some risky choices in her execution of these two pieces—openly claiming (Anglo)-Irish identity in one piece, leaving the comparatively safer context of the English mainstream press in the other—she mitigates her risk-taking by practicing an ambiguously gendered form of rhetoric, one that is both conciliatory and assertive, a blend of traditionally feminine and masculine rhetorical styles.

As we have seen, the categorizations of race, class, and gender bleed into each other, creating hybrid categorizations that encapsulate all three simultaneously. Cobbe's Irish womanhood is one of these, which is instructive about organizational paradigms in the Victorian age. Declan Kiberd argues that England had to "invent" Ireland in order to define itself, making Ireland "not-England," the binary opposite of its colonizer: "if the English were adult and manly, the Irish were childish and feminine" (30). Strength and assertiveness were tied to masculinity, weakness and passivity were tied to femininity, both on the international stage and in the domestic sphere. In this paradigm, the Englishman always came out on top, while the non-English man or woman was always at the bottom.

The same paradigm is represented in the rhetoric of the age. Cobbe, by claiming Irish identity, risked being doubly feminized, first, by her byline at the end of the piece, which clearly marks her as female, and second, by her Irish heritage, which could render her as weak and ineffectual in the minds of her English readers. In order to avoid the trap of what

Kiberd would call the “Celtic feminine” and, thus, weaken her imperialist argument, Cobbe elected to argue in a traditionally masculine form: she lays out the argument of her opponent, then dismantles his argument point by point (42). Rather than rely on experiential knowledge, Cobbe made appeals based on logos, constructing a history of Ireland that justified England’s continued role as colonizer *and* her own role as a speaker on behalf of Irish people.

Yet when she described her opponent’s argument, Cobbe also conceded points of agreement, a maneuver that could be read as rationalist and high-minded (and, thus, to Victorian readers, masculine) *or* as a conciliatory gesture (feminine). In the strategy of first-person constitution, the rhetor writes what she is, creates a self that is bound up in her actual material existence *and* extrinsic to that existence, present in the realm of ideas. Because Cobbe was a writer who lived a hyphenated existence—Irish, but with English ancestry, born in Ireland but living in England, legally single but spiritually and virtually married—her argument style is reflective of her dualistic persona. Cobbe used this dualistic persona to construct a rhetorical style that would appeal to different audiences.

Cobbe’s dislocation of herself from her surroundings in all of her writing on Ireland signals an ability to inhabit multiple “selves” in discourse that exist concomitantly, not necessarily adding up to a comprehensive whole, but not necessarily signaling a fractured self with the negative psychological connotations that entails. As Susan Jarratt and Nedra Reynolds argue in “The Splitting Image: Contemporary Feminisms and the Ethics of *êthos*,” principles of classical rhetoric can be used for feminist purposes, particularly the model of *êthos* presented by the sophists, which does not posit an essentialist “self” that exists *a priori* discourse: “Rather than focusing on the split between a genuine, fully formed character and

its representation, sophistic rhetoric explains the process of character formation through learning to speak to the interests of the community” (44). For Jarratt and Reynolds, the concept of ethos can help us “locate” a rhetor:

It is precisely the concept of *ethos* in rhetoric that theorizes the positionality inherent in rhetoric—the speaker having been created at a particular site within the contingencies of history and geography. The location we speak of here is not the distance between a stable, moral Self and the various images contrived for an audience. . . . Rather, this positioning is a constant awareness that one always speaks from a particular place in a social structure. (47)

As we have seen throughout this project, Cobbe’s point of view was always informed by her privileged class position and always refracted by the varied publications for which she was writing. We have also seen how Cobbe falls somewhere in between the protected status of a gentlewoman and the unprotected status of a woman who has de-feminized herself through her masculine behavior or appearance.

COBBE’S NEGOTIATION OF FEMININE AND MASCULINE RHETORICAL STRATEGIES

Cobbe’s rhetorical strategy was inextricable from her reception by her audiences. Before I can offer a theory of Cobbe’s androgynous rhetorics, I need to look more closely at how Cobbe’s performances were viewed by her culture. What is clear is that Cobbe’s popularity as a writer and speaker did not completely shield her from gendered criticism of her activist rhetorics. As Mitchell notes, Cobbe’s speech on behalf of women taking degrees at universities prompted the conservative *Saturday Review* to describe her as a “half-woman” (unmarried) speaking “half-truths” (qtd. in 128). The satirical *Punch* was also often critical in

its depiction of Cobbe, though their derision was more dismissive than vicious. As evidence of Cobbe's mixed reception, we can look to a piece titled "Cobbe to the Rescue!", published in the Dec. 22, 1877 issue (without a byline, typical for the magazine), which discussed Cobbe's speech at an "at home," a gathering of women at a private residence for the purposes of discussing the topics of the day (Mitchell 254). Mitchell describes Cobbe's lecture as "another effort to reach beyond the core supporters of suffrage," an action that is typical of Cobbe, who always sought to broaden her audience whenever possible (254). The *Punch* essay featured an illustration of "a fashionable young lady" (clearly *not* Cobbe, as she was by then middle-aged and growing increasingly stout) driving an "invalid's carriage" while whipping, with a ladylike parasol, a fashionable gentleman (complete with a top hat) who is pulling the carriage in place of a horse (Mitchell 255). The illustration suggests that young women were using physical complaints to control the actions of men.

What makes this event important to our discussion of Cobbe's rhetorical style is the fact that it was Cobbe's act of speech—not her published words—that made her the object of derision. The essay portion was published in the January 1878 issue of *Contemporary Review*. While "The Little Health of Ladies" was published more than a decade after Cobbe entered into the transatlantic debate about the Irish Question and addresses a completely different topic, the *Punch* incident is evidence that Cobbe was not exempt from gendered expectations regarding rhetorical performance, despite her class. First, *Punch* derides Cobbe's subject matter by suggesting that women's health concerns are somehow frivolous and unworthy of attention. Then, the writer goes beyond Cobbe's subject matter to criticize Cobbe's oratorical style (which, unfortunately, we cannot judge for ourselves), using Cobbe's name as a verb: "Let us hope that the Cobbing which these fashionable unsanitary

practices have been subjected to, may lead to still more strenuous efforts to punish them with something worse than Cobbing” (285). In this context, to subject something to a “Cobbing” is clearly to subject it to a scolding. The *Punch* writer is relegating Cobbe to the category of “nag” or, in nineteenth-century terminology, “virago.”

The treatment of Cobbe within the pages of *Punch* magazine reveals the complexities of Cobbe’s position in Victorian society: her focus on issues that affect women and her assertive style sometimes made her a figure of fun, which may have lessened her credibility as a speaker and writer, yet the fact that Cobbe’s speech, given to women in a private home, was debated within the public sphere, that a writer could repurpose Cobbe’s name in a way that was probably instantly understandable to his audience, shows that Cobbe’s rhetoric had an impact on the wider culture. It also reveals the double-bind women rhetors often found themselves in during the nineteenth century (something they share with their twenty first century sisters). They could assert themselves as public speakers by using a forceful style and be labeled as too mannish *or* too womanish: to suggest that someone is “Cobbing” is to imply that they are engaged in an activity that only a woman could perform—that is to say, *nagging* her audience—but a woman who is behaving in a particularly assertive, i.e., unfeminine, manner.

Another important way that a woman signaled her rhetorical identity was through her physical appearance. In *Appropriate[ing] Dress*, Mattingly argued that a woman rhetor’s dress during the nineteenth century was “read” by her audience just as much as her speech. Women who performed traditional femininity through their dress, or who were conventionally attractive in other ways, often faced an easier reception from their audience, no matter the content of their oratory. Though Cobbe never wore men’s clothing (or even

bloomers), her short hair and riding skirts signaled masculinity to Victorian observers. While Cobbe's class position (and jovial personality) made this acceptable to those within her own circle, her masculine appearance and behavior could be a liability when it came to the public's perception of her rhetorical performances.

Perhaps she had been "unsexed" by her unmarried state, her decidedly non-lovely physical appearance, or her age. If Cobbe faced harsh criticism even when addressing a subject clearly under a woman's purview, such as women's health, one could imagine that she could face even greater criticism for covering subjects that normally were the province of men. In *Regendering Delivery*, Lindal Buchanan identifies gendered patterns of delivery style in nineteenth-century women's rhetorics, arguing that a dichotomous gendering has had lasting effects on how the rhetoric of women is evaluated. Buchanan believes that the women who chose to perform traditional femininity in their rhetorical performances have been ignored by modern scholars for the very reason their rhetorics were successful during their own time. One example is the women who spoke on behalf of the American temperance movement in the early twentieth century. While their campaign was ultimately successful, their rhetorical performances are viewed as conventional and weak and, thus, not deserving of critical attention today. Women who chose a more masculine rhetorical strategy faced a harsher reception from their audiences: "The masculine delivery style, on the other hand, was initially more shocking to spectators. Its practitioners unapologetically stood and spoke directly to listeners of both sexes, thereby embracing a delivery style typically used by men" (Buchanan 8). Practitioners of this style, such as Ida B. Wells and Susan B. Anthony, faced more obstacles to getting their messages heard during their own historical moments, but are critically lauded for their writing and oratory today.

But where does Cobbe fit into this paradigm? Buchanan's discussion lends much to my argument that Cobbe used the available means of the periodical essay to speak on a multitude of topics, even topics not related to feminism, thus expanding her influence over Victorian society and claiming a role for women as cultural interpreters. Cobbe's strategy of bringing feminist societal critique to an audience that, though female, was not engaged in feminist activism shows Cobbe's ability to speak from different locations, to move between the public and the private, however uneasily at times. "The Little Health of Ladies," in both its oral and written components, illustrates the tension between women's expression in print and their expression in speech, proving that women could communicate in both spheres, but faced different expectations.

Cobbe's speech and accompanying essay show us that we cannot so easily separate women's writing acts from their speech acts, as one often generated the other. Buchanan quite necessarily leaves out much of a discussion of women's writing, as her emphasis on women's oratorical performance is meant to rectify decades of critical neglect of women's speech in favor of women's published works. Buchanan argued that we have overused "metaphors of voice" to describe the challenges facing women writers, "speaking in terms of their struggles to 'express' their views publicly, to 'address' mixed-sex audiences, to obtain a 'hearing' from legislators or authorities," when the available evidence, such as conduct manuals and textbooks, suggests that "women's disembodied or domestically bound voices became acceptable long before their public bodies did" (37). In short, the published voices of women writers—bound up and constructed in the pages of a book or a journal—faced an easier reception than the spoken voices of women in a lecture hall or pulpit.

Though I am using different data, Buchanan's work lends much to my discussion of the voice Cobbe constructed in her periodical journalism. Buchanan's position that women speakers faced greater public approbation than women writers is apt and central to my argument that Cobbe used the periodical essay genre in order to construct a persuasive identity as an Anglo-Irish woman writer. As I discussed in Chapter 1, the respectability afforded to Cobbe's rhetorics is what most interests me, and her focus on the written word is part of that respectability. On the face of it, my project follows the old patterns that Buchanan identified. The central thrust of my argument is that the "voice" Cobbe used to make appeals was theoretical, while the "space" from which she spoke was metaphorical. However, our projects converge at one important point: we are both concerned with how women rhetors designed their own strategies based on cultural attitudes about women and their place in society.

While women orators could use their corporeality to make appeals to their audiences, women journalists had to make much different decisions. While women public speakers could not deny their femaleness (or had to prove it, as Sojourner Truth famously did in "Aren't I a Woman?"), women journalists could hide their gender by writing anonymously, assuming a masculine subject position, or by using a male pseudonym. They could also write about subjects deemed "domestic" and, thus, falling under the sphere of women's influence, such as educating children and caring for the poor. Though Cobbe's voice was not "domestically bound" by marriage and children, it was "disembodied" by the act of periodical production; her voice was at least two steps removed from her readers through the editing process and the act of publication, meaning that her corporeality would not hinder or enable her message. However, her byline—a feature of most of her published works—clearly

marked her gender, meaning that she would still need to negotiate those “conventional gender ideals” that Buchanan discussed. Cobbe’s construction an androgynous rhetorical persona using feminine and masculine styles of argument signals her inclusion in larger rhetorical traditions, even as she refashioned those traditions for her own uses.

COBBE’S ANDROGYNOUS RHETORICAL STRATEGY AND THE TRANSATLANTIC IRISH QUESTION

So, how did Cobbe integrate the divergent expectations of women rhetors into one coherent strategy? As Janice Fiamengo argues in *The Woman’s Page*, a woman writer’s “presentation of herself was inextricable from the content of her text” (20). The “self” that Cobbe constructed to discuss the Irish Question was articulated through her rhetorical choices, the ways in which she developed her prose in order to achieve the desired effect. Though we cannot be sure that the audiences of *Tinsley’s* and the *Atlantic Monthly* would have an image of Cobbe in their minds as they read, the *Punch* article reveals that Cobbe’s reputation outgrew the confines of a private home or public pages of a magazine or newspaper. While Cobbe traded on her reputation to build and sustain her career, that very reputation could be used against her and threaten the reception of her published works. Cobbe’s occupation of a “third space”—both in terms of her chosen genre and her androgynous rhetorical style— signals an intent to present herself as a rational, credible commentator on the Irish Question, while avoiding the dehumanizing insults of an unreceptive audience. Achieving this delicate balance enabled Cobbe’s continued influence over Victorian readers in England and even America. While Cobbe may not have relied on conventional fashions in order to win the approval of her audience, she used the rhetorical

strategy of self-fashioning in order to constitute a self that could address the issue of nationalism in transatlantic contexts.

In *Frances Power Cobbe and Victorian Feminism*, Susan Hamilton focuses on Cobbe's style of argument, asserting that it resisted simple labels of masculine or feminine. Though Hamilton does not offer any commentary on Cobbe's writing on Ireland—focusing, as most scholars do, on her writing on women's issues—her discussion of Cobbe's "Criminals, Idiots, Women and Minors" lends much to my discussion of Cobbe's rhetorical strategies in "Ireland for the Irish" and "The Fenian 'Idea.'" "Criminals" was published in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1868 (*Fraser's* was, of course, the same journal that published Cobbe's "Ireland and Her Exhibition" which I discussed in Chapter 4). "Criminals" directly addressed the Married Women's Property Act, legislation that sought to establish the right of married women (subsumed under her husband's identity under the law) to own property and keep their earnings (a version was eventually passed in 1882). Cobbe's strategy of conceding points of agreement and setting the terms for the argument reveals an overarching theory that informs her rhetorics on every subject, even subjects that fell outside the subjects that directly impacted just women. But in order to talk as a woman, Cobbe would need to talk like a man. In many ways, Hamilton's description of Cobbe's rhetorical style could be termed as "gentlemanly":

Cobbe's willingness to entertain the terms of her non-feminist opponents' arguments, the terms of the unconverted, and to treat such starting points as having logical consequences that can be traced through to conclusions, means that she does not ever simply overpower the opposition. She allows it to be cut

away by its own terms. A kind of no-nonsense sleight of hand is her preferred mode, not a rough and ready attack. (75)

However, Cobbe's rhetorical "no-nonsense sleight of hand" defies any easy categorization as masculine and feminine. Cobbe avoided sentimentality or ornate language—criticisms lobbied at the rhetoric of both women and the Irish. She also eschewed displays of high emotion, which would have rendered her rhetoric too feminine or too Irish (or both). She also avoided the performance of a violently masculine rhetoric, opting instead for a gentler approach.

Cobbe's "middle register" rhetoric, as Janice Schroeder describes it, is ideal for the "third space" of periodicals such as *Tinsley's* and the *Atlantic Monthly*. So when it came to arguing with her opponents, from non-feminists to Irish nationalists, Cobbe did not act as an invading army into the rhetorical space of the periodical, but as an educator, instructing her audience, bringing the same imperialistic message but with a much more diplomatic approach. As I pointed out in Chapter 2, Cobbe's strategy relied on the practice of identifying shared values with her readers in order to gain the good will of her audience, a strategy that enabled the continuation of bonds between groups of people that did not necessarily agree. After all, at this point in history, the outcome of the Irish nationalist movement was far from clear. England would still, of course, be geographically close to Ireland even if England lost it as a colonial holding. Imperialism itself was far from a closed question, with British citizens not uniformly holding positive views of continued U.K. expansion around the globe. Like Cobbe, many British subjects would have family ties in England and Ireland, and many would also have ties to America.

As a career writer, Cobbe would also not have wanted to completely alienate potential audiences on either side of the Atlantic: it was a fine line between offering stimulating discourse and repelling potential audiences with aggressive prose. Cobbe's strategy of conciliation also had a more immediate effect: "In order to get the vital question answered, she is prepared to create points of accord for the larger purpose of moving the debate forward" (Schroeder 72). Cobbe's strategy of acknowledging where she and her opponents agree not only moves the question along more quickly, it also works to set build her reputation as a fair and civil commentator on the issues of the day and allows her to stake her own claim by laying out the arguments that have preceded her own, then building upon them or dismantling them before asserting her own point of view.

COBBE'S PERSUASIVE IDENTITY IN "IRELAND FOR THE IRISH, BY AN ANGLO-IRISH LOYALIST"

I start my close reading of the two texts in Cobbe's adopted city of London, where "Ireland for the Irish" was published in *Tinsley's* magazine, two years *after* her piece in *The Atlantic Monthly*. I start here because the piece displays Cobbe at work in her comfort zone of the middle-class English periodical, preaching to an audience that was probably a bit more converted to the idea of imperialism than her American audience. By approaching the texts non-chronologically, I emphasize the differences between Cobbe's strategies for addressing two audiences that had different relationships to colonialism. She negotiated those different relationships by foregrounding or, in the language of journalism, backgrounding her Anglo-Irish identity. *Tinsley's Magazine* was yet another "shilling monthly," to borrow Jennifer Phegley's term, featuring serial fiction, poetry, and coverage of the latest fashions from Paris (signaling that women were an important part of its audience). What makes *Tinsley's* unique

is that it took a decidedly pro-Irish stance under Edmund Hodgson Yates, who edited the journal from its inception in 1867 until 1869, one year after Cobbe published “Ireland for the Irish, by an Anglo-Irish Loyalist.” According to the Waterloo Directory, Yates’s opening address to his readers “declared that the paper would take an interest in things Irish.” Indeed, a month after the publication of Cobbe’s essay, the journal’s founder William Tinsley and his brother Edward (“The Tinsley Brothers”) began publishing a series they wrote titled *A Saxon’s Remedy for Irish Discontent*. Cobbe’s essay was written in response to an anonymously published essay titled “Ireland for the Irish, by an American Fenian,” which appeared in the journal in December 1867. Again, the label “Fenian” stemmed from the formation of two secret societies: the Irish Republican Brotherhood, which was formed in Dublin on St. Patrick’s Day 1858, and the Fenian Brotherhood, which was formed in New York City by Irish exiles at the same time (Curtis 62-63). Both organizations sought Irish independence through militant means. The term “Fenian,” which evoked the Fianna, ancient Irish warriors, became a blanket term for all Irish revolutionaries in the nineteenth century (Curtis 63).

The inclusion of Cobbe’s rebuttal to the American Fenian, published just two months later, signaled both an opening and a closing, an alternative view from a cultural “other” that nevertheless supports the dominant ideology of the ruling class—the English middle-class, whose tastes and opinions drove the marketplace. Cobbe, as an Anglo-Irishwoman, could speak to the middle without inhabiting it, displaying the power of her position on the border where identities converge. The ways in which Cobbe’s construction of her Anglo-Irishness (or her gender, or her lesbianism, or her many other identifying labels) interacted with outside factors beyond her control resulted in the alchemy that is persuasive identity

construction. In “Ireland for the Irish, By an Anglo-Irish Loyalist,” Cobbe argues for the continuation of England’s long-held power in Ireland by capitalizing on a recent event in English-Irish relations. On December 13, 1867, in an attempt to free Fenian prisoners, Fenian rebels blew up part of the Middlesex House of Detention, located in a working-class, overpopulated section of London, killing six people and injuring 120 (Mitchell 181). In this context, Cobbe was able to invoke her audience’s fear of physical violence in order to gain a hearing for her imperialist argument. Hamilton noted Cobbe’s ability to gain control of her audience: “Her audience, untutored and uninitiated, is carefully and decisively tutored in the process of debate, the minimal requirements for the civil exchange of perspectives on and solutions to a knotty, divisive issue” (72).

On the face of it, Cobbe’s publication of her piece just two months after the Middlesex bombing is highly manipulative: evoking fear in her audience in order to bring about maintain the status quo in the face of social change has historically been viewed as the most devious instrument in the rhetor’s toolbox. However, if a rhetor does not capitalize upon timely events, he or she runs the risk of not capturing the interest of the audience, even more of a risk considering the fast-paced, transitory nature of journals and newspapers. Cobbe, and her editors, recognized that the Irish Question was a long-standing issue that would wax and wane in the minds of their readers. In the winter of 1867-1868, the issue of Irish nationalism would again be on the ascendant, giving Cobbe the opportunity to remind her readers of the debate over Ireland’s future (and past) and assert her own argument.

The original “American Fenian” essay, to which Cobbe was responding, is important evidence of how an editor shaped the content of the literary miscellany. It was Yates who set the tone for *Tinsley’s* as being open to multiple perspectives on the Irish Question. His

editor's note does the work of verifying the authenticity of the anonymously written piece: "There is no doubt about the *bona fides* of this Article. It is written, as it purports to be, by an American citizen, and a leading member of the Fenian Brotherhood" (607). Yates's note alludes to the public reception of *Tinsley's* as a vehicle for Irish nationalism: "It would be absurd for the Conductor of this Magazine to disavow participation in the sentiments of the writer; he hopes that the public have known him too long and too well to require any such assurance" (607).

Cobbe uses her opening paragraph of "Ireland for the Irish" to justify a discussion of the Irish Question, and Yates felt a similar the need to justify his decision to publish the Fenian's essay: "But, while Fenianism is the alarmist topic of the day, no one knows the exact meaning of the parrot-cry which everyone is repeating; and as Fenian literature is not to be found in English society, it may be well to learn, from authentic sources, the wishes, hopes, and machinations of the Brotherhood" (607). Yates strove to create a reputation based on openness to diverse ideas, as evidenced by the publication of both an Irish nationalist argument and an imperialist argument within two months of each other. However, it was Yates's openness to new ideas that may have been his undoing (at least in terms of this particular periodical), as he was editor of *Tinsley's* for only two years before its editorship was taken over by William Tinsley. According to the Waterloo directory, the parting was "acrimonious." It seems Yates's stance of editorial openness was not conducive to reaching a wide audience.

The author of "The American Fenian" did not, like Cobbe, use a strategy of addressing the middle, instead offering a lengthy justification of Fenian violence as legitimate acts of war and an explanation for the failures of the American branch of the

brotherhood (including a botched invasion of Canada), a risky approach considering his English audience. His essay also provided a compelling example of the different ways Irish identities were constructed in the English press. For the American Fenian, Fenianism is the natural result of Irish identity; thus, a true Irishman (gendered pronoun used advisedly) is a Fenian, either by membership in the organization or by sharing the organization's ideals. The anonymous "American Fenian" offers a view of Irish nationalism that had not often been aired in the pages of the English press, constructing himself as an expert on the subject, able to "present the Irish side of the Irish Question," without the ideological blinders worn by most commentators on the Irish Question (607):

A man who hangs his hat over the end of his telescope before looking at the stars may make some very curious observations as to the state of the heavens, but he can hardly be considered a reliable astronomer, and calculations based upon his reports can scarcely be regarded as accurate. But that is precisely what John Bull does when he condescends to examine Irish affairs. He takes out his telescope, points it at Ireland, claps a hat full of prejudices over the end of it, looks gravely through it, the proceeds to theorise and to legislate upon the condition of his own hat-lining, *having never seen the real Ireland at all.*

(608, emphasis mine)

The American Fenian would make the same complaint that Cobbe often made in her writings on Ireland: too many commentators on the Irish Question had not seen Ireland for themselves. Like the American Fenian, she would offer her own construction of it, from her expert position as an Anglo-Irish woman. The American Fenian, however, constructed his persona as an expert from a completely different position.

For the American Fenian, geography does not matter as much as heritage and ideology. He asserts that someone born far from Ireland could claim an Irish identity: “Thousands of them have crossed the ocean, exiles to a New World; but although they have become Americans, they have not ceased to be Irishmen” (610). For the anonymous Fenian, it is a mixture of heritage and ideology that makes one a true Irishman: “The Fenian uprising is simply a struggle for Irish nationality. . . . Every Irishman is at heart a Fenian, whether he is a sworn member of the Brotherhood or not. Fenianism is the expression of the Irish national feeling” (611). While the American Fenian complains that most commentators on the Irish Question have no real experience of Ireland, it is unclear whether he has actually set foot in his ancestral homeland. This is where Cobbe finds a snag in the Fenian’s premise that she could use to unravel the persuasive self that he constructed. To borrow one of the American Fenian’s colorful phrases, Cobbe attempted to “knock down” his argument “like a child playing with nine pins” (607).

Cobbe’s response, published in February 1868, two months after the American Fenian’s essay, is more in keeping with the conservative approach of the journal’s later editor. As the Waterloo directory points out, when the publisher William Tinsley took over editorship from Yates in 1869, the periodical’s tone became decidedly “apolitical,” which of course denotes something very different than the openness to divergent, controversial ideas that occurred under Yates’s stewardship. Because Tinsley’s editorship stretched over 20 years, presumably the long-lived periodical was more commercially successful under his direction. This could tell us something important about the family literary miscellany as a rhetorical space—it was easier to sustain an audience by steering away from divisive issues. This editorial strategy put pressure on the writers when it came to producing content that

would speak to the issues of the day without alienating readers. Cobbe's *Tinsley's* essay, though written with Yates still at the helm, was a perfect example of this strategy, as Cobbe appealed to the middle by avoiding extremes, either in her style of argumentation or in her assertions of her identity.

The pressure to aim for the middle revealed itself in what Cobbe does not disclose in her essay, which recapped the Fenian's argument, before giving a slanted history of and justification for the continued Anglo-Irish presence in Ireland. Again, she does not give any personal history of her family's presence in Ireland. While she detailed, using pseudonyms, her family's experiences in "The Fenians of Ballybogmucky," she uses a much different rhetorical strategy in "Ireland for the Irish, by an Anglo-Irish Loyalist." Gone are the dramatic narrative and the character sketches of the former, replaced with a more traditional argumentative style. Cobbe's colorful tales of Irish village life are replaced with terms such as "testimony" and "exposition" (39). The ethos that Cobbe begins constructing from the very subtitle of her piece is one of rationality and coolness. It seems that if Cobbe was going to choose to claim Irishness—even Anglo-Irishness—she would need to downplay any stereotypically Irish traits, such as sentimentality.

It is important to remember that it was not just Cobbe who actively constructed a rhetorical persona. As her readers consumed her discourse, they were also constructing her authorial identity. Hints of sentimentality in her discourse would impact how her audience might view her in terms of class, race, and gender. Softening her rhetorical identity could make her rhetorics more accessible *or* weaken her arguments, depending upon her audience's expectations.

COBBE'S BUILDING OF ANGLO-IRISH IDENTITY

In her “Ireland for the Irish,” Cobbe is concerned as ever about how to communicate effectively in order to persuade. To create an image of the Anglo-Irish as a conscientious, loyal member of the Empire, Cobbe must construct a rationalist persona, the polar opposite of the irrationality attributed to the “Celtic” Irish. Cobbe used “Ireland for the Irish” in order to create an image of the Anglo-Irish in the minds of her readers, where, Cobbe complains, “The Anglo-Irishman is hardly known to exist” (39). To that end Cobbe uses a logical argumentative style, projecting a rational ethos, using terms such as “testimony” and “exposition” to clearly mark her essay as a thoughtful, balanced entry into the debate, and *not* as a violent outburst, albeit in print (39).

Though Cobbe would mitigate her Irish identity in other rhetorical spaces, in “Ireland for the Irish,” she emphasizes her Irishness in order to speak effectively in support of England’s continued presence in her country of birth. However, rather than portray herself as a cultural “other,” Cobbe constructs images of Irishness that fit into a pre-existing paradigm, drawing upon the trope of Ireland as the colonial child of England (one she would revisit a decade later in “The Celt of Ireland and the Celt of Wales”) in order to present complimentary but competing definitions of Irishness. In this version, the Celtic Irish is the spoiled, rebellious child and the Anglo-Irish is the long-suffering sibling of the New Testament parable: “The Prodigal (the reverse of the penitent) well-nigh expects the timbrels and dancers of the Reform League to escort him home from the far country in triumph. The elder brother, guiltless of offence, not only receives no fatted calf, but is threatened with speedy disinheritance” (39). Cobbe’s figuration of the Irish and Anglo-Irish as one of the biblical squabbling siblings is one that her middle-class English audience would have easily recognized: the image evokes shared Christian values and positions England in the powerful

role as father to its colonial children, a flattering portrait, despite the neglect Cobbe suggests the Anglo-Irish experienced as a result of Irish rebellion.

Persuasive identity construction in this context relies on competing definitions of Irishness. Whoever constructed the most authoritative version of Irishness would win the argument. Cobbe's version of Irishness attempts to correct the image created by the American Fenian by replacing the image of a republican revolutionary with her own, a stalwart supporter of empire. Cobbe must undo the American Fenian's authority in the minds of her English readers, asserting her authority in the face of the forceful image constructed by the American Fenian. Cobbe's answer to the American Fenian is also titled "Ireland for the Irish," but with an important distinction: Cobbe identified herself as an "Anglo-Irish loyalist." Identifying herself as Irish was a risky but necessary move, necessary because a persuasive argument in this context required that the rhetor claim Irishness, but risky considering the image held by many English of the Irish as violent and treasonous. After all, Cobbe was directly answering an Irish writer who openly expresses hatred toward the English. By describing herself as loyal to the British crown, Cobbe is both labeling her ideological position and attempting to endear herself to her audience. She is also separating herself from the Irish rebels who terrorized London just two months earlier and complicating the idea of "Irishness" in the minds of her readers by categorizing the Irish dependent on their class, race, and ideology as a corrective to what Cobbe sees as the dominant view of the Irish in England: "So far, Celt and Anglo-Irishman stand on equal grounds. England knows little of either of them through the legitimate channels whereby the wants and wishes of other parties in the United Kingdom are revealed" ("Ireland for the Irish" 39). One of those "legitimate channels" is the newspaper and periodical press.

Cobbe recognizes the opportunity for the periodical press to function as a rhetorical space for members of her class. While this rhetorical space was not a courtroom or legislative hall, Cobbe used rhetorical strategies that were usually the province of men. However, her gesture in the airing of her opponent's argument and the capitulation of certain points could easily be read as the feminine strategy of conciliation, used to gain the hearing of an unreceptive audience or maintain the bonds between different groups during times of conflict. While there was not a specific newspaper aimed at Anglo-Irish interests, Cobbe recognizes that she could fulfill the role as a mouthpiece for her class within the scope of one essay, suggesting that the Anglo-Irish could gain the attention of the English government through a different means of persuasion: the reasoned argument in the "legitimate vessel" of the English press. Cobbe is able to make "legitimate" arguments in support of English colonization, as opposed to what she constructs as the illegitimate arguments against colonization made by people who were, in Cobbe's estimation, not Irish at all.

As the self-identified mouthpiece for her culture, Cobbe takes on the responsibility of representing the interests of the Anglo-Irish class; by taking on this burden, she also takes on the privileges enjoyed by members of her class. It is she who has the power of definition, of self and other. Cobbe's power is derived from defining herself as a loyalist, nonviolent, non-Celt, while casting the Irish underclass as a violent, uncivilized "other." During these rhetorical moments, Cobbe fully enacts her third-space, androgynous persona. She is not the biased English writer, the "*man* who hangs his hat over the end of his telescope before looking at the stars" identified by the American Fenian in his essay (608, emphasis mine). Nor is she the Irish militant, almost always male, who argued for a violent overthrow of the English government in the pages of *Tinsley's* and elsewhere. She is an Anglo-Irish woman,

and, thus, speaks from a seemingly more neutral and even more importantly—given the turbulent time in history—nonviolent place.

Because in the rhetorical context of the periodical, one can only build a “self” through discourse, Cobbe has to dismantle the American Fenian’s persona, breaking the spell of his self-assured first-person constitution. In order to construct this image of the Fenian, Cobbe undermines his rhetorical power: “Before one part of a great State has a moral right to separate itself from the rest, there is so much to be shown beside wild aspirations after independence and shrieks for ‘freedom’” (40). Though the Fenian uses the “legitimate channel” of the periodical to make his arguments, and does not resort to acts of violence, Cobbe attempts to link his rhetorics to acts of verbal aggression: the Fenian does not make rational arguments, only shrieks. Cobbe’s legitimacy as a speaker on behalf of imperialism hinges on her ability to fashion herself as balanced between English and Irish, with the cultural superiority of English heritage and the working knowledge of Ireland and its inhabitants that could only come from her experiential knowledge of the place she gained as the daughter of an Anglo-Irish landlord.

After contextualizing her piece by describing recent turbulence between England and Ireland, and airing her grievances about England’s neglect of her class, Cobbe launches into dismantling the argument of her opponent. In one instance, Cobbe boldly asserts: “Irish rebels can point to no ground of *reasonable* hope that an Irish independent State can ever exist, or have in itself the necessary elements of national life. There is, on the contrary, every reason to believe such a thing impossible” (41, emphasis mine). Cobbe’s tactic is to render the Fenian unreasonable, to break down his character and thus undercut his credibility as a speaker on the question of Ireland:

In the first place, let us attempt to dispose of the arguments, or rather denunciations and assertions, of the American Fenian. Not with the ridicule which first occurred to the Englishmen when the rumour of Fenian projects came across the Atlantic; nor yet with the good-humour of a teased giant wherewith England treated the childish and hopeless outbreak of last winter. Not even (if we can help it) with the indignation and disgust wherewith the recent barbarous outrages have filled our minds; but such calmness as we can command, let us examine what of sense or justice there may be in the Fenian's ideas. (39-40).

Cobbe undertakes many tasks in this short passage. She undercuts the ability of her opponent to express his ideas cogently by pointing out that he does not make “arguments,” only “denunciations and assertions,” which suggests that rhetoric is beyond the abilities of the underclass and is thus the province of the privileged (uncomfortably continuing the often exclusionary traditions of the rhetors who came before her, who categorized rhetoric as an activity for the powerful, meaning that only men of wealth, social standing, and education could properly argue within the public sphere, which would have effectively left out even the privileged Cobbe). She also flatters her audience by her portrayal of England as a “good-humoured giant” forced to deal with the annoyance presented by the Irish rebels. This image cast what Cobbe's saw as England's inaction in dealing with the Irish threat in a positive light, creating the image of the Fenians as flies buzzing around the monolith that was the English empire.

Her acknowledgement here of her class status, when she does not openly claim Ascendancy class elsewhere, is a signal to her readers of her investment in the issue. In a conciliatory gesture, she entertains the ideas presented by the American Fenian, admitting

that the Irish had some cause for grievance. For example, in Cobbe's estimation, "no viler legislation ever disgraced a statute-book" (40) than the penal laws, which severely limited the rights of Catholics to own land, receive an education, or marry Protestants. Of course, by the time Cobbe was writing, the Penal Laws had been severely curtailed by various reform acts. Cobbe's conciliation is undoubtedly strategic: she is creating a tone of equanimity by acknowledging English unfairness, but presents the unfairness as being firmly in the past, which suggests that England was capable of responding to past wrongs and righting them.

This presentation of historical unfairness is in keeping with Cobbe's oft-repeated view that working within existing structures was always preferable to tearing them down and starting completely anew: that is to say, improving conditions in Ireland within the framework of colonialism would be better than a complete severance from England in the form of an Irish republic. While her gesture of openness to the Fenian's argument could be read as a means of creating common ground, Cobbe's construction of her classed identity shut down any real understanding. To maintain her authority, Cobbe had to maintain the upperhand, which meant that her conciliation could only go so far if she wanted to maintain the Anglo-Irish identity that allowed her entry into the contested space of the periodical press in the first place.

To that end, Cobbe dismantled the American Fenian's Irish identity. Because the framework Cobbe created within "Ireland for the Irish" equates identity with character, Cobbe's deconstruction rendered him unable to answer the Irish Question. Cobbe correctly summarizes the American Fenian's core premises: "He says that England makes two mistakes: first, it will never understand that the Irish people wishes for independence, and will be satisfied with nothing short of it; secondly, it cannot believe that the project of

achieving such independence is other than wholly absurd and visionary” (40). The American Fenian cannot speak for the Irish and their wish for independence because he is not, in Cobbe’s estimation, Irish. Americans with “hereditary hatreds” are not Irish (40). Cobbe offers a definition of Irishness that hinges what being Irish *is not*: “We refuse to consider these aliens as the ‘people of Ireland’” (40). Cobbe then succinctly defines who is Irish: “The two races, Saxon and Celt, who actually inhabit the land” (40).

As we have seen in Cobbe’s other pieces on the Irish Question, the equanimity she displayed toward the “Celt” in this instance is rare. Elsewhere, we have seen Cobbe attribute irrationality and savagery to the native Celt (ideas she trades on in “Ireland for the Irish” as well). In the context of “Ireland for the Irish,” the Celt and the Saxon are placed on the same level because it becomes effective for Cobbe to do so. Cobbe imagines the two races joining to cast a vote on whether to separate from England: “The two races, Saxon and Celt, who actually inhabit the land, we place side by side, and fearlessly demand such a vote for union or secession as intelligence, property, education, or even, we are persuaded, the more numerical majority of a universal *plebiscite*, would give in favour of loyalty to England” (40). This is a bold assertion on Cobbe’s behalf, as there was no way either she or her audience could verify the “truth” of this statement, but it is an assertion that her construction of herself as an authority on the Irish Question enabled. Cobbe collapses differences not only between races but between classes: *most* Irish, no matter their “intelligence, property, [or] education” would vote to remain part of the empire.

But Cobbe’s class consciousness was only momentary. It is precisely Cobbe’s intelligence, property, and education that enabled her to construct herself as an expert on the Irish Question and speaker on behalf of the “better sort” of Irish, which in this case included

loyalist members of the middle and working classes. But Cobbe's Anglo-Irish identity is the "strategic addressed," apparent from the beginning of the piece to the conclusion. Cobbe's strategy of first-person constitution allows her to construct herself as an authority, but the classed identity that she constructed disallowed any real understanding between herself and the American Fenian. Twenty-first-century readers of Cobbe may be continually frustrated that her emancipatory rhetorics never worked to emancipate everyone: certain hierarchies, especially those based on class, remained symbolically in place at the end of her rhetorical performances. Cobbe's feminism and anti-racism (apparent in her abolitionist writings) invariably butted against her imperialist ideology and her classed self-consciousness.

But the act of self-constitution never fixes a subject in one place. An identity is always unstable and unfixable. Dana Anderson, paraphrasing Kenneth Burke in a *Grammar of Motives*, writes that identities "are complex and ambiguous 'generalizations': they are substances capable of enacting many different motives, even contradictory motives, at different times" (86). Every act of self-constitution is "ultimately an act of hierarchizing or prioritizing; every act is also an act of determining which principle reigns at any given time, for no single act can honor all that is willed in a constitution's concept of substance" (85). In "Ireland for the Irish," Cobbe prioritizes the concerns of the Anglo-Irish class over the concerns of other groups: even at her most generous, the concerns of the lower classes—even if they are loyal to the crown—can only be of secondary importance.

But how would Cobbe construct her identity in a periodical that did not primarily address an English audience? How would she negotiate an audience that had a different experience with colonialism, though it was similar in race, class, and education? And how would Cobbe negotiate an audience with similar attitudes toward gender roles as their

English counterparts, when she could not count on the protection her privileged class status afforded her quite as much as she did in England?

COBBE'S IDENTITY AS AN IRISH WOMAN WRITER IN AMERICA

The economic and social climate of the mid-Victorian literary culture proved ideal for a transatlantic crosscurrent of periodicals and celebrity journalists. Laurel Brake identified two trends that helped create this Anglocentric attitude in America: “first, until 1891 the dearth of international copyright law, meaning that British material might be cheap or free, without the encumbrances of royalties, and second, that peculiar legacy of revolution—a vestigial, high cultural value attached to the ejected imperial power, at the expense of the native” (104, 106). Cobbe’s authorial presence in America could be explained by both of these reasons: her essays and longer works were often reprinted from British publications, while her literary celebrity meant she was sought out to produce original works, as well. Cobbe’s identity as an author circulated widely through American print culture, though Cobbe the actual person never visited the United States.

“The Fenian ‘Idea’” was the second of Cobbe’s writings on the Irish Question to be published in a Boston magazine. “The Fenians of Ballybogmucky” had been republished in *Every Saturday* immediately after its initial publication in *The Argosy* in 1865. According to Sally Mitchell, publication in American periodicals was politically and economically advantageous for Cobbe: she points out that Cobbe was paid 10 pounds for her essay and had to write the editor a “tough but polite letter” demanding payment (163). Mitchell describes “The Fenian ‘Idea’” as a “more temperate piece designed to discourage the *Atlantic’s* educated audience from making parallels between the American Revolution and the Fenian cause” (163). By May 1866, when the essay was published, Cobbe had already been featured

in the journal: her pamphlet *Rejoinder to Mrs. Stowe's Reply to the Address of the Women in England*, originally published by Emily Faithfull in London in 1863, was republished in the April 1863 edition of the magazine. Indeed, several of Cobbe's works, particularly her theological writings, were reprinted in American journals throughout the 1860s. Her theological work was also widely reviewed by American journalists.

Cobbe the woman was also an object of interest for American readers. Cobbe's authorial presence worked powerfully on the imaginations of American writers who encountered her during their travels abroad. In "English Authoresses," published in *The Saturday Evening Post* on July 21, 1866, Cobbe's physicality is the focus of the Rev. M.D. Conway, whose correspondence to the *Review* details meeting such notable writers such as George Eliot, Mary Braddon, and Isa Craig. I quote it at length in order to render accurately the vivid image American readers might have held in their minds as they read her works:

Miss Frances Power Cobbe is huge. The first impression she makes is that of a great mass of merry flesh and blood, weighing nearly three hundred and fifty pounds. ... [W]hen one converses with Miss Cobbe he finds the chief characteristic of her face and expression is delicacy. There is a lambent humor about her mouth, a subtle perceptiveness blended with the sweetness about her eye, a sensitiveness and sensibility in her manner, under which—as conversation or acquaintance go on—the corpulency seems to shrink, and the most charming physiognomy to be unsheathed. Miss Cobbe has an extraordinary power of conversation, is one of the wittiest of mortals, and wherever she appears has a group of fascinated young people—particularly of

her own sex—by whose bursts of merriment one may know upon entering a company where the authoress of “Intuitive Morals” is seated. (2)

Though Conway’s letter was published two months after “The Fenian ‘Idea,’” his description gives us a real sense of how Cobbe was imagined by American readers. Like almost every woman who had a role in public life during the nineteenth century, Cobbe’s character is ascertained through her physical appearance. Her girth was often read generously as a signal of her large spirit and intellect. It could also be a tacit description of Cobbe’s class status: she could afford, and always enjoyed, good food and drink. However, it is important that Cobbe’s “hugeness” is never described as being overpowering: it is Cobbe’s powers of conversation that made her the center of attention. It is also important to note that Cobbe is “English” in Conway’s description, despite the description of her as “merry” and talkative (two traits often ascribed to the Irish, when they weren’t being described as violent and mercurial). In Chapter 1, we saw how Louisa May Alcott emphasized Cobbe’s Irishness through a discussion of her dress and manner (her green bonnet and her garrulousness). It seems that Cobbe could function as either English or Irish in the minds of her American readers, a trait that would be useful when she addressed the Irish Question in periodicals published in one of Britannia’s former colonies.

COBBE’S TRANSATLANTIC APPEAL IN THE *ATLANTIC MONTHLY*

While *Tinsley’s* did attract American readers, *Atlantic Monthly* was created for the exact purpose of reaching both sides of the Atlantic and was published in Boston and London. The founders, including original editor poet James Russell Lowell, envisioned the journal “a literary bond between the Old and New England” that would “bring together under one roof British as well as American thought” (Heymann 107, 109). Lowell imagined the

periodical as featuring “all available talent of all shades of opinion,” while its editorial voice would be open, yet “scholarly and gentlemanlike” (qtd. in Heymann 108). According to biographer C. David Heymann, the journal featured work by British and American luminaries such as John Ruskin, Christina Rossetti, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Harriet Beecher Stowe as well as “a score of less formidable names,” a category that clearly includes Cobbe, as she is not mentioned in his lengthy list (108)³³.

Its transatlantic influence is denoted in its title, while its subtitle, “a magazine of literature, art, and politics,” suggests that it is the type of miscellany for which Cobbe generally wrote. However, the *Waterloo* categorizes the magazine’s political orientation as “neutral,” which signals that Cobbe could not take for granted that its readers held her enthusiasm for imperialism, even among its English readers. The fact that the magazine was published in Boston also signals something important: the city was second only to New York City in the number of Irish-born inhabitants living there in the nineteenth century (Lee 14). In general, New England had a reputation as a hospitable place for Irish immigrants, where they could climb the social and economic ladder more quickly than they could in other regions.³⁴ By 1920, the United States was home to over 5 million Irish immigrants who began arriving in waves during the colonial era (Kenny 13).

³³ Heymann does not mention whether these names were equally “less formidable” in their own time period, or whether his assessment stems from whether their work continued to be popular far into the twenty first century; my guess is the latter.

³⁴ This idea has been disputed by scholars such as Patricia Kelleher, who noted that evidence suggests there were “exceedingly modest levels of upward mobility” amongst the Irish living in New England in 1880 (188-9). J.J. Lee also provides an overview of the various arguments among scholars of where the Irish stood the best chance of assimilation (and, thus, upward mobility): candidates include New York City, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, St. Louis, and San Francisco (12-13).

Cobbe's American audience could very well have contained readers who had ancestral connections to Ireland, signaling that they may have also had ideological interests in the Irish Question. Of course, it is important to remember that many Irish would not have numbered among the middle-class, which comprised the intended audience of a miscellany such as the *Atlantic Monthly*. However, the Irish Question would matter to readers on America's northeastern coast, given the high number of Irish immigrants to that geographical area. According to Heymann, editor Lowell held certain ideas about the Irish in his midst. In his younger, more liberal days, Lowell wrote an essay titled, "In Support of the Irish," which expressed an understanding of why the Irish were rebelling against English rule, while also questioning their often violent methods. Later, however, the patrician Lowell would complain that Irish immigration to Boston would forever change the city. Lowell would also serve as Ambassador to Great Britain during the latter part of the nineteenth century, where his waffling on the Irish Home Rule movement would prove unpopular with both the English and the Irish. Perhaps Lowell's wavering position on the Irish Question is somewhat reflective of America's stance toward colonization in general. While America was a place where subjugated groups such as the lower classes of Irish could settle, (eventually) assimilate, and in some cases, even prosper, the fact remains that Cobbe was addressing a country that violently overthrew its own ruler, yet had usurped the land of their country's indigenous people, killing many of them in the process. This indicates a complex relationship to imperialism, to put it lightly.

Issues of gender, class, and race circulate throughout the May 1866 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*. The plight of the Irish-American was raised in a poem by Lowell, no longer editing but maintaining close ties to the journal, titled "Mr. Hosea Biglow's Speech in

March Meeting.” Lowell—using New England farmer-philosopher Hosea as a mouthpiece—directly links Southern blacks with Irish immigrants: “You take the Darkies, ez we’ve took the Paddies;/ Ign’ant an’ poor we took ‘em by the hand,/ An’ the’re the bones an’ sinners o’ the land” (639). The linking of the Irish with African slaves hints at the social and economic position of the Irish in the United States during the nineteenth century. Hosea is suggesting that people of the north should work to help southern blacks, to “take them by the hand,” so that they could begin to assimilate into American culture, as the Irish had begun to do.

However, “The Fenian ‘Idea’” is the only essay in the issue that specifically addresses the issue of Irish nationalism. It is also one of only two pieces that are written in a traditionally argumentative style, while the other pieces reflect a literary style. One of those literary pieces was written by another woman writer of note. Coming right after Cobbe’s piece is a column titled “The Chimney-Corner for 1866,” written by Harriet Beecher Stowe (whose popularity in life, unlike Cobbe’s, extended long past her death, thanks to her abolitionist novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*), a monthly column that ran through the year of 1866. May’s column, subtitled, “What Are the Sources of Beauty in Dress,” was written from the perspective of a bemused father, Mr. Crowfield, who lamented the outrageous hairstyles of his teenage daughter. Stowe uses the voice of Mr. Crowfield to make a commentary on the changing fashions of young American women, who were abandoning more natural looks for what Stowe viewed as the more outlandish fashions of Europe.

Unlike Cobbe, Stowe employs an openly masculine voice to make her argument. Despite Stowe’s respected position as a reformist writer, she still felt it necessary to impersonate a father in order to comment upon the issue of how women should conduct themselves publicly. While she does receive a byline, using a paternal voice gives Stowe a

certain authority that she did not necessarily have even as a celebrity author. While Stowe wrote on a drastically different topic than Cobbe, her shaping of her authorial persona has implications for how a woman writer could perform her rhetorics in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Even though neither Cobbe nor Stowe explicitly raises the issue of *how* a woman should conduct herself in public, it is clear that these ideas put pressure on their rhetorical strategies. The inclusion of Stowe's and Lowell's pieces reveal that ideas about *who* was permitted to speak, and *how*, would have informed Cobbe's imperialist rhetorics in the American press just as much as it did in the English press. Her gender and Irishness—no matter how mitigated by her class—would impact the ways in which Cobbe would shape her appeals in the *Atlantic Monthly*, just as it did in *Tinsley's*.

COBBE'S EVASIVE IDENTITY IN "THE FENIAN 'IDEA'"

If Cobbe's tone in *Tinsley's* was calm and even-handed, it was even more so in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Cobbe's reticence may stem from her relatively unfamiliar audience: Cobbe could anticipate the expectations of the middle-class readers of English miscellanies, but the expectations of American readers would have proved more questionable. Cobbe's inclusion in the *Atlantic Monthly* signals that American readers were interested in the Irish Question. After all, the Irish Republican Brotherhood had been formed in New York City, and the Fenian Brotherhood was a "support organization" based in the United States: "Its central motivation revolved round the view of England as a satanic power upon earth, a mystic commitment to Ireland, and the belief that an independent Irish republic, 'virtually' established in the hearts of men, possessed a superior moral authority" (Foster 391). This was the "Fenian idea" that Cobbe attempted to dislodge from the minds of her readers by posing her own skewed version of Irish history.

Cobbe, like many Irish writers, evokes the United Irishman Uprising of 1798, but unlike her nationalist counterparts, she did not use it to advance revolutionary ideas:

Fenians talk of an Irish Republic, and the brave and honest men who led the rising of '98 undoubtedly heartily desired to establish one on the American model. But to any one really acquainted with the Irish character, to dream of such institutions for ages to come seems utterly vain. All the qualities which go to make a republican, in the true sense of the term, are wanting in the Irish nature; and, on the other hand there is a superabundance of other qualities which go to make a loyal subject of a king. (574)

Cobbe presents the uprising as a noble failure, rather than a savage act, as she habitually described Irish acts of rebellion. Cobbe is attempting to flatter her American readers through her complimentary treatment of the United Irishmen. In this figuration, the Irish rebels were well-intentioned but ill-equipped, a people suited to taking direction from a monarch, someone “not *too* despotic, but still a strong-handed, visible, audible, tangible ruler of men” (574). The Irishman does not contain the innate characteristics needed to form and take part in a democracy: “Devotion to an idea, to a constitution, to a flag; respect for law *as* law; sturdy independence and self-reliance ... all these true republican characteristics are most rarely to be found in Irishmen” (574). Instead of setting up the Irish as being the opposite of the English, Cobbe describes the character of Americans as the exact inverse of the Irish. Hamilton identifies Cobbe’s ability to “control the question” in any argument. In this case, Cobbe was attempting to define Irish nationalism as the opposite of the impulse that drove Americans to seek independence of England in order to undercut American sympathy for the Irish cause.

Ironically, in order to undercut American sympathy for the Irish, Cobbe would need to employ a more sympathetic tone toward the Irish than she had in previous essays. Cobbe recognizes that current events would more greatly impact the reception of her piece than an event, the Uprising, that happened nearly a century before. While the Waterloo has identified the *Atlantic's* political orientation as “neutral,” the presence of Harriet Beecher Stowe suggests that the readers most likely had an abolitionist point of view. Cobbe, of course, held the same perspective, writing for the cause in English and American publications and publishing a pamphlet titled *The Flag in John Bull's Eyes*, which castigated English supporters of the Confederate states. Cobbe recognized that any equation of the Irish with American slaves would create a powerful image in the minds of her readers from New England, an image that could persuade them to ideologically align themselves with the cause of Irish nationalism. Indeed, this image was already circulating in the very issue in which Cobbe was writing, as evidenced by Lowell's Hosea comparing the plight of newly freed slaves with Irish immigrants.

Cobbe attempts to dismantle this image by emphasizing the differences between the colonization of Ireland and the enslavement of Africans. The Irish were not transported in chains across an ocean and did not live in an “actual serfdom.” Rather, according to Cobbe, they were unfairly treated as the result of unjust laws. Surely, she was referring to the penal laws, which, again, she presented as an event firmly in Ireland's past, instigated by those who are safely dead. Cobbe's introductory paragraph suggests that Cobbe was more concerned that her audience would equate the Irish cause with abolition than with the American Revolution:

It was a great truth Shelley uttered when he said slavery would not be the enormous wrong and evil which it is, if men who had long suffered under it could rise at once to freedom and self-government. *We see this fact everywhere proved by races, nations, sexes, long held in bondage, and, when at last set free, displaying for years, perhaps for generations, the vices of cowardice, deceit, and cruelty engendered by slavery.* Chains leave ugly scars on the flesh, but deeper scars on the soul. Even where the exercise of oppression has stopped short of actual serfdom,—where a race has been merely excluded from some natural rights, and burdened with some unrighteous restrictions,—the same result, in a mitigated degree, may be traced in moral degradation, surviving the injustice itself and almost its very memory. Ages pass away, and “Revenge and Wrong” still “bring forth their kind.” The evil is not dead, though they who wrought it have long mouldered in their forgotten graves. (572, emphasis mine)

Cobbe would use tropes of bondage and slavery throughout the piece, but her inclusion of these ideas in the introductory paragraph gives her readers an important lens through which to view the rest of the piece, setting up an opposition between metaphorical bondage and actual bondage. Cobbe’s assertion that the Irish were in metaphorical bonds is meant to undercut American sympathy, as they were still dealing with the aftermath of literal slavery. Her inclusion of women (“sexes”) as one of the groups in bondage is instructive on how Cobbe wanted her American audience to view the plight of the Irish: the conservative world view she displayed in her “conduct manual for Victorian feminists,” *The Duties of Women*, is echoed here in her discussion of the Irish. Like the British woman, due to systemic prejudice,

the Irish people are undeveloped in comparison to the English man, but with the proper education and guidance (from the Anglo-Irish, of course), they can improve themselves.

Cobbe's conservative approach to Irish liberation is in keeping with her feminist activism. Life could be improved through the strengthening of present educational, legal, and social institutions, making it unnecessary and even counterproductive to radically alter or dismantle existing societal structures. Cobbe's conservative viewpoint depends upon a sense of order and propriety, even when it came to revolutionary ideas such as feminism and nationalism. While Cobbe acknowledges English mistreatment of the Irish to a greater degree in "The Fenian 'Idea'" than she had in other writings on the Irish Question, she continues to construct the history of ancient Ireland as being unorganized and incoherent, which suggests that imperialism was a necessary ordering force. This ordering force was also, by default, masculine, represented by the cool, rational English. Though she was not English, Cobbe was able to speak persuasively from a third place: she is between the English and the Irish, between male and female.

Cobbe's approach to issues of identity is much more understated than her approach in "Ireland for the Irish." There is no bald acknowledgement of her privileged status in the title, only a quiet admission buried in the middle of the rather lengthy second paragraph:

"Fenianism is not, *to Anglo-Irish observers*, a startling apparition, an outburst of insane folly, an epidemic of national hate, but, on the contrary, a most familiar phenomenon, the mere appearance on the surface of what *we* always knew lay beneath" (572, emphasis mine).

Cobbe claims Anglo-Irish identity so indirectly that it could pass without notice. Her audience could have read this phrase in one of two ways: Cobbe could be including herself among the "Anglo-Irish observers" she named, the "we" signifying an imagined collective of

members of the gentry class, or Cobbe was reporting the findings of the “Anglo-Irish observers” who were part of the tradition of Ascendancy writers weighing in on the Irish Question, while the “we” functioned as a means of identification between Cobbe and her readers.

Cobbe again references the Anglo-Irish class at the end of her piece, assuring her readers that the unfairness of the landlord system portrayed in Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* “exists no more” (576). Cobbe again indirectly referenced her own Anglo-Irish identity: “On the other hand (*we speak it advisedly,*) no class of men in Europe strive more earnestly and self-denyingly to improve the condition of those dependent on them, to build good houses for their tenants, open schools for the children, and drain and fertilize the land” (576-77, emphasis mine). Cobbe felt it necessary to close her piece by assuring her audience that she was a credible source of information, but again does not openly claim the status of “Anglo-Irish observer.” Like her parenthetical assertion of her credibility, Cobbe attempts to minimize her Anglo-Irish identity, to suggest that it was incidental to her argument and not the source from which it developed. Her closing reference to worthy Irish landlords is surely a reference to her own father, but she does not give any clues to her audience that she is drawing on personal experience. Her indirect acknowledgment her class status—the major component of her identity construction in her writings on Ireland—is as strategic as her evasion of strictly feminine or masculine patterns of expression. The third space of the periodical allows her to emphasize or underplay aspects of her identity dependent on her varied audiences and editors. It allows her to shrink her female corporeality but expand her influence.

CONCLUSION: LOCATING COBBE AS AN ANGLO-IRISH WOMAN RHETOR IN
EXPANDING CONTEXTS

Cobbe's rhetorics on the Irish Question provide a unique means of looking at rhetorical situatedness. Cobbe's ability to adapt her argument to different audiences was dependent on her ability to constitute a self that would be persuasive no matter the national identity or ideology of her audience. Jarratt and Reynolds drew on images of the classical world as a way of imagining "the ethical subject of feminist rhetoric," offering the example of the secondary goddesses, the nymphs, who were named for the locations they inhabited: the nereids, for example, spoke from the sea, while the naiads spoke from the springs. Jarratt and Reynolds argue: "The selves created by women's discourse are similarly multiple and intimately connected with the places they inhabit. These selves are not bound by a *logos* divorced from the desires and emotions . . . of the physical bodies they inhabit. Rather they announce their locations in their names and, from those places, speak artfully to those around them" (57). By naming herself Anglo-Irish, Cobbe located herself in Ireland, yet maintained the class advantage of associating herself with England.

In many ways, Jarratt and Reynold's image captures Cobbe: the place she was born, her experience as a "big-house daughter," provided the source of the identity she constructed to "speak artfully to those around [her]." However, she rarely "announced her location in [her] name," doing so only in "Ireland for the Irish, by an Anglo-Irish Loyalist." Just as often, her strategy was to "pass" as English, to negate or underemphasize her origins. Also, though she is considered a secondary figure in our own time, she certainly was not secondary in her own (and with her brimming self-confidence, never would have considered herself as secondary). It was the very hybridity of her identity that marked her power as a rhetor. The

hybridity of her identity—Irish and English, female and male—can work to persuade many audiences, which makes Cobbe’s strategy of using her identity to persuade particularly suited to the periodical genre, which was unstable and composed of many parts. Cobbe’s strategy of first-person constitution made her able to adapt to the constantly changing contexts of nineteenth-century journalism.

Cobbe’s persuasively hybrid identity—her adaptability to constantly shifting locations and situations—has the potential to be instructive in our own age, as the locations for rhetoric consistently change and proliferate. Cobbe’s problematic disconnections could also be instructive in reminding us of the gaps between our own beliefs and actions and that our own identities are composed of many parts—that we speak and write from many different, and sometimes conflicting, motivations. Cobbe attempted in her rhetoric to represent the interests of the disenfranchised, including women, the poor, slaves, and the Irish. She was successful at presenting major social issues to multiple audiences, while she often failed at setting aside her own self-interest and prejudices. Her successes and failures as a speaker on behalf of the disenfranchised is a reminder that we have a responsibility to constantly be mindful of our own positionalities in relation to power, that while we may not be privileged in some areas, we might be privileged in other ways and may be invested in maintaining those privileges.

Cobbe’s strategy of persuasive identity construction empowered her to move between contrasting poles. The masculine-feminine rhetorics that evolved from this strategy enabled Cobbe to occupy multiple sites and speak on multiple subjects. The periodical press, functioning as a third space for women’s rhetorical performances, allowed Cobbe to assert herself as a woman commenting on a subject in which Victorian audiences—on both sides of

the Atlantic—would have been interested. The periodical press allowed Cobbe to perform an assertive rhetorical style that likely would have faced a harsher reception if she were performing a speech, a genre that never proved as successful for the pugnacious, spirited Cobbe as the periodical essay. But, just as Cobbe spoke from both sides of her mouth as an Anglo-Irish woman, she could perform femininity when it suited her purposes, often constructing herself as a dutiful daughter of empire in her periodical and autobiographical writings, meaning that her even-handed tone could be read as an attempt at flattery (no matter how transparent or sycophantic that attempt may seem to modern eyes), which signals that Cobbe—no matter how confident she may have been in her class position—was aware that her gender impacted how her message was received by her audiences.

This awareness meant she would need to anticipate her audience's expectations of how a woman would write on the issue of empire, and shape her argument accordingly. The changing and enlarging contexts of the Victorian age are mirrored in our own age, when women often must meet the expectations of multiple audiences across wide geographical spaces, using numerous technological means. As we ask the question of how women answer questions of race and nation in our increasingly global society, exploring how women began to answer those questions during over 100 years ago gives us a wider frame of reference and new questions to ask. Cobbe's androgynous rhetorics can help us move from the third space of the periodical into the new space of transnational women's rhetorics.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION: RE-POSITIONING FRANCES POWER COBBE: A MOVE TOWARD A
TRANSNATIONAL VIEW OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY WOMEN'S RHETORICS

In the March 4, 1880 issue of the *Independent Statesman*, a newspaper published in Concord, New Hampshire, was printed this terse phrase: “Miss Frances Power Cobbe’s death is reported from London.” This report was, of course, made in error—the Miss Frances Power Cobbe reported dead only bore the same name, and the writer Cobbe would live on for another two decades. The *Boston Daily Advertiser* published Cobbe’s witty rebuttal of her premature obituary soon after in their April 5, 1880 edition:

My Dear, Kind Friends: I am not dead! I have been reading your all-too-kind and partial remarks on me, here in my office, in the midst of business life, and awaiting a committee extending its influence all over the kingdom at the previous election. There is something half droll, half infinitely solemn in thus seeing what will be said and felt of me some day—no doubt not far distant, since I am fifty-eight years of age. God grant that such days as may yet be allotted to me on earth may be so spent as to merit in some measure all the good words which have been said over me now! ... I am, thank God, not only alive, but as well and strong as any woman of my years may expect to be, and I hope to strike more than one blow for the noble cause of the emancipation of woman before I die.

Cobbe’s “death” is meaningful for us in different ways. The treatment of Cobbe in the Concord newspaper is an important signal of how Cobbe’s rhetorical persona circulated outside the context of Victorian England. Though the editors did not give news of her “death” much space, it is clear that the newspaper’s readers would have recognized Cobbe’s

name and would have attached some importance to it. The reception of the announcement also proves an important point: the identity of the author could not be severed from her work. The strategy of persuasive identity construction enabled the circulation of Cobbe's writing in America. The author was not dead, literally or theoretically.

PERSUASIVE IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND TRANSNATIONAL WOMEN'S RHETORICS

Cobbe's presence as an author was varied and wide-ranging. My project has tracked these multiple Cobbes over multiple locations in the vast rhetorical space of the Victorian periodical press, examining how Cobbe answered the Irish Question by constructing a discursive identity that would be persuasive to a constantly changing audience in multiple contexts. In Chapter One, I argued that intersecting theories of women's rhetorics, periodical studies, and Irish studies would help us explore how Cobbe's complicated identity could be used as a persuasive strategy in the rhetorical space of newspapers and periodicals and how the genre conventions of the periodical essay created opportunities for women's self-fashioning as persuasive rhetors. In Chapter Two we saw how Cobbe built a persuasive identity that conformed to the conventions of the masculine, English rhetorical space of the middle-class literary miscellany, enabling her to use her personal experience to speak credibly on the Irish Question while minimizing or hiding elements of her identity—her Irishness and proto-lesbianism—that would jeopardize her reception by a middle-class English audience. In Chapter Three, I extended my analysis of how Cobbe used personal experience as a form of ethos-building, this time emphasizing the intersection between journalism and autobiography, arguing that periodical rhetorical space allowed women to use their experiences as evidence without writing autobiographically, thus protecting their

identities from too much exposure in a culture that preferred women to remain within the private sphere. In Chapter Four, I demonstrated how Cobbe used the genre of travel-writing in order to fashion a sophistic rhetorical identity that could discursively map Ireland for her English audience, in order to (re)claim it as part of the Empire in the midst of a nationalist movement that would separate Ireland from its colonizer. In Chapter Five, I focused on how Cobbe's negotiations of masculine and feminine rhetorical practices enabled her use of a hybrid style that was more androgynous, that matched the third space of the periodical, a flexible strategy that enabled Cobbe to successfully address mixed audiences, including American readers.

Cobbe's powerful presence as an author complicates how she would fit into women's rhetorics as we are talking about them today. In the introduction to *Rhetorica in Motion: Feminist Rhetorical Methods and Methodologies*, Kate Ronald reconstructs the medieval figure of Rhetorica for the modern age:

If I could design the cover of this collection, I suggest a redrawn Rhetorica, or many Rhetoricas, perhaps on a plane, in a city and a village, and at a computer, and in a classroom, and in the archives, and as a transgender, queer, not wearing a crown but perhaps a headscarf or a Derby hat, not a helmet but perhaps safety goggles or sunshade. Instead of swords and lilies, she might have a tape recorder, a notebook, a passport, a document camera, a protest sign, a petition, a wiki, and a wallet. Instead of heralds, she might have students, teachers, collaborators, and a friend, and a family. Above all, she would not be seated in the center, but seeking the margins, always on the move. (xi-xii)

In many ways, Cobbe resembled the new Rhetorica imagined by Ronald. She had a passport, a notebook, and a petition; she was “queer” before there was a name for it. She was never at the center of English power, but as an Anglo-Irish woman, she spoke powerfully from the margins, on the move in terms of her travels and her rhetorics. But Cobbe died over 100 years ago, so where would she reside in the new landscape of women’s rhetorics?

The 2010 publication of Eileen E. Schell and K.J. Rawson’s edited collection called for an expansion of the locations where we search for women’s rhetorics, not requiring us to abandon our fruitful inquiries into well-trodden areas of inquiry but to explore other means of asking questions as well. In the keynote address of the 2011 Feminisms and Rhetorics conference in Minnesota State University Mankato, Schell called for scholars not only to reclaim and refigure but also to reposition the field(s) of women’s rhetorics in relation to the rest of the world, to practice methodologies that considered women’s rhetorics geopolitically and not just nationally. Schell argued that our focus on American women—and in some cases, Western European women—has caused us to ignore the transnational networks of women’s texts and oral communication. Schell’s comments came after the 2010 publication of *Rhetorica in Motion: Feminist Rhetorical Methods and Methodologies*, where she and co-editor K.J. Rawson discuss the impetus behind the publication of their collection:

We wanted the volume to pull in two directions—to continue to map the terrain of well-defined areas of feminist inquiry such as archival research, literacy research, and online research and also to bring to the fore work in interdisciplinary areas of inquiry such as disability studies, gerontology/aging studies, Latina/o studies, queer and transgender studies, and transnational feminisms. (3)

My work with Cobbe's imperialist rhetorics "pulls in two directions" as well, as it follows the "well-defined" terrain of historical research *and* seeks the newer terrains of transnational feminisms and queer studies, an area that I have only begun to explore in this project. A rhetor such as Cobbe is illustrative of a larger tension within women's rhetorics: the gap between the study of important figures and the study of collective rhetorical practices.

In the May 2008 issue of *College English*, devoted entirely to feminist transnational rhetorics, Schell and Wendy S. Hesford interrogate the tension between figure studies and collective practice studies, exploring the presence of Tejana writer Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* in women's rhetorics anthologies and theoretical texts:

Anzaldúa has expressed surprise, even shock, at the field's interest in her work and its configuration of her as a postcolonial and transnational feminist writer. Anzaldúa's canonical location is emblematic of the field's modernist tendencies, namely how we continue to privilege the individual author/critic, in this case the postcolonial writer, over the study of transnational and postcolonial rhetorical practices. (461-2)

Hesford and Schell posit the field's canonization of Anzaldúa as representative of one of the ironies facing scholars of women's rhetorics today, including "the risk of institutionalizing certain forms of resistance, romanticizing mobility and hybrid identities, and tokenizing individual writers over and above a geopolitical analysis of alternative rhetorical practices" (462). In my introduction to this project, I argued that Cobbe was an ideal means of bridging the theoretical gap between figure studies and studies of collective action, more accurately known as the Campbell/Biesecker debate that has provided fertile ground for women's rhetorics scholars for two decades.

But the title of my project alone will alert my audience that my project is, in many important ways, a figure study. My intersection of a rhetorical study of a single woman writer within the disciplines of periodical studies and Irish studies illustrates how figure studies and collective practice studies can be integrated in fruitful ways. Leaving figure studies completely behind would be a disservice to women speaking and writing all over the globe. There is a reason that biography and autobiography continue to be popular genres well into the twenty first century: exploring how individuals compose themselves and are composed by their culture teaches us to recognize our interconnections to a multitude of experiences, people, and discourses. Individual voices function as part of a collective, just as a collective is composed of individual voices. Any issue of a Victorian periodical is a collective, containing a multitude of topics and viewpoints, all contributed by individual people speaking from varied positions in Victorian society (though we can guess that most of these people were writing from positions in the middle and upper classes, many of them were male, and many of them were English). The Frances Power Cobbe we know through her writings about Ireland is a single author, to be sure, but one composed by multiple textual strands: the periodical culture that afforded women the space to speak, the Anglo-Irish literary tradition of asserting the rights of her class, and the transatlantic network that transported her writing on social issues to America's shores.

COBBE'S AMERICAN RHETORICAL IDENTITY: A MEANS OF EXAMINING THE INDIVIDUAL AUTHOR AND THE RHETORICAL CONTEXTS THAT SHAPED HER

Now that we have deeply explored Cobbe's identity as an Anglo-Irish woman writer in the context of Great Britain, I conclude by discussing Cobbe's transatlantic identity and how she used it as a persuasive strategy in multiple contexts, including the United States, a

subject I raised in Chapter 5. Furthering this discussion not only brings Cobbe closer to home, so to speak, for scholars of nineteenth-century women's rhetoric while emphasizing the breadth and depth of women's involvement in rhetoric during this crucial historical moment; it also illustrates how context shapes persona. I have taken care in my analysis of Cobbe's rhetorical persona to answer postmodern concerns about overprivileging the individual as the site of all meaning and agency: further exploration of how Cobbe's rhetorics circulated within a transatlantic sphere only emphasizes how rhetorical identity is composed by multiple forces and is contingent on context, not on the author's solitary thoughts and inclinations.

In this chapter, I expand upon Schell, Rawson, and Hesford's argument that we should broaden our scope in women's rhetorics by broadening where we look for evidence, in terms of historical range and genre. While recent work in transnational women's rhetorics has focused on women speaking and writing today—for example, in “Cosmopolitan and the Geopolitics of Feminist Rhetoric,” Hesford examines “cosmopolitan” feminists such as Hillary Clinton, Eve Ensler, and Ursula Biemann and their work with non-Western and minority women—I argue that expanding our view of women speaking and writing in multiple national contexts should include looking to women rhetors of the past, who were using genres that too often escape our attention in rhetorical studies. If we gain a fuller understanding of how women used rhetoric to shape global history, we gain a fuller appreciation for women's capacity to participate in public life.

Adopting a transatlantic view of women speaking and writing in the United States and Great Britain is a productive place to start, as there is ample evidence of a cross-pollination of texts. Throughout this project, I have illustrated how Cobbe shaped her identity

in order to best fit the rhetorical spaces of diverse Victorian periodicals. Applying a transatlantic lens to the rhetorical study of periodicals will show the vastness of the rhetorical space open to women during an age where their writing and speaking activities were severely circumscribed by most of the spaces they inhabited, the domestic sphere and—to a lesser extent—the public sphere.

Cobbe was far from the only British woman whose rhetorical identity was in wide circulation in the United States. In *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World*, Amanda Claybaugh used Harriet Martineau as an important example of a “British subject who was also an Anglo-American,” part of a group that had close familial, commercial, political, religious, and social connections to the United States (1). In the first chapter, I discussed how Cobbe is often termed English at the expense of her identity as an Irish woman. However, I will conclude my project by examining how a transatlantic lens on Cobbe—and her British and American cohorts—creates further possibilities in the research of persuasive identity construction. Cobbe may not strictly be “Anglo-American,” but her rhetorics on social issues transcended the overly simplifying labels of “English,” “British,” or even “Irish.” All of these labels identify something important about Cobbe, but do not fully explain or describe how her rhetorics circulated in the world. Cobbe’s kinship with Americans was based on ideas, not blood, proving that cultural connections were not inborn, but created.

Claybaugh’s work can also help us bridge the gap between literary studies and rhetorical studies, as the transatlantic focus can lend a material and theoretical grounding for a transnational view of women writing and speaking in an American-British context. Martineau’s work is representative of a new way of seeing women writing and speaking in

nineteenth-century America: “Martineau embodied these residual ties, but she also highlighted, through her tour of the United States, two new modes of transatlantic interaction: the circulation of texts and the collaborations of social reform” (1). Like Martineau, Cobbe worked on behalf of American abolition, publishing *The Red Flag in John Bull’s Eye*, a pamphlet condemning British support for southern slaveowners. To call Cobbe “Anglo-American” would be an overstatement. Unlike Martineau, Cobbe never toured the United States and available biographical information does not suggest that she had any familial ties. Cobbe’s ties were ones of friendship and ones of the literary marketplace, from her correspondence with American activists, the publication of her new and recycled essays, to news about her life and death (real and imagined). Because Cobbe could not rely on the excitement generated by public appearances, her strategy relied entirely on building a persuasive identity by textual means.

Transatlantic issues may have been incidental to our research in nineteenth-century women’s rhetorics up to this point. For example, American anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells’s tour of Great Britain has received some attention from women’s rhetorics scholars, though it is mostly noted as merely a biographical fact, while Anglo-Irish Maria Edgeworth’s essays on women’s education have also been the subject of feminist rhetorical study, though her class and national identity were again seen as biographical details and not as instrumental to how she made appeals to her audience. I propose that we examine questions of how textual identities not only circulated within activist networks but helped foster those networks as well. Claybaugh’s three central claims about transatlantic activist literature can be useful for research into transatlantic activist rhetoric: 1) “Social reform depended on print” (2). This is especially important considering that Cobbe’s activist messages were only delivered to her

American audiences through print; 2) “Social reform was crucially Anglo-American in scope. Nearly all the nineteenth-century reform movements involved both the United States and Great Britain” (2-3). It is impossible, then, to obtain a complete picture of activism in either Great Britain or the United States without talking about the other; and 3) “Reformers in each nation allied with those in the other in order to alter both” (3).

The third point is the most important: what happened in Great Britain impacted what happened in the United States, and vice versa, which makes a transatlantic study of women’s rhetorics crucial to our understanding of the rhetorical situation of the nineteenth century. Claybaugh’s attention to the materials of print culture will also aid us, as the stuff, so to speak, of periodical culture also constitutes a rhetorical stage where there was no physical stage. This textual stage constituted a space where people and texts circulated in a context that was neither British nor American, but something else, a space between the two: “Martineau’s career as a reformer highlights the existence of an Anglo-American public sphere, so her career as a woman of letters throws into relief the structure of the Anglo-American literary field” (6). The structure Claybaugh identifies is composed of short stories, newspaper columns, travel books, novels, and theoretical texts (6). While Claybaugh emphasizes the novel, my work calls for a fuller examination of how newspapers and journals facilitated and created this connection between England and America, this “Anglo-American public sphere.” Though she did give speeches in England, Cobbe’s rhetorical stage was print, particularly newspapers and journals. A transatlantic view of the nineteenth century will show that the rhetorical stage was more encompassing than we have yet fully imagined in women’s rhetorical studies. Moving to the transatlantic in women’s rhetorics will give us a fuller picture of women writing and speaking during the nineteenth century

because those invisible borders that Cobbe had to navigate around extended beyond England and Ireland. While Schell and others have done important work in repositioning the rhetoric of modern women in a transnational context, the historical crosscurrents between America and Great Britain remain a rich area to explore.

As we have seen, Cobbe navigated both the private and public spheres during her long life. Her presence in the periodicals is an example of her deft navigation of the public sphere, despite her upbringing as a “big house daughter,” a role that would have effectively curtailed her presence in the grittier world of journalism. Despite Cobbe’s very public life as a journalist and author in Great Britain, her literary presence in the United States may be a bit curious to modern readers, as the author herself never set foot in the country. Yet references to Cobbe the person and Cobbe the writer appeared regularly in American newspapers during the time period that she was writing prolifically in British periodicals: indeed, it seems that Cobbe the writer and Cobbe the person were never distinguishable to her readers on either side of the Atlantic. Such a strong impression did Cobbe’s work make that a report of the author’s death caused a small flurry in American newspapers.

Perhaps the few words afforded Cobbe signals her fame in America: the editors felt no need to provide any contextualizing information on Cobbe’s identity because they could trust their readers to be familiar with her work, which was widely circulated in the United States. What is more important is that Cobbe, when reclaiming her “life” within the periodical press, used the moment to pledge her continued commitment to the cause of women’s suffrage. While Cobbe’s identity as a person was bound up in her identity as a writer, for Cobbe and her American readers, her identity as a writer was inextricable from her feminist activism.

In *Golden Cables of Sympathy*, Margaret McFadden recognizes the intersection of a burgeoning transatlantic print culture and Anglo-American cultural bonds as ripe with potential for the formation of feminist activist networks that she terms a “matrix”:

The gradual building up of international relationships and contacts between women in Europe and North America, across borders of nations, languages, ethnic groups, and sometimes class, intensified throughout the nineteenth century. Although this process had been going on even earlier, the transformations of travel, magazine and book dissemination, and the international post combined with nineteenth-century advances in literacy and education to create a virtual explosion in the number of physical and verbal connections between women. It is my contention that the building up of these connections—an accretion, like the slow dripping of minerals that forms stalactites in caves or the deposits leading to the emergence of coral reefs—enabled the establishment of more formal international women’s organizations by the turn of the century. (3)

McFadden singles out Cobbe as a “mother of the matrix” who deserved “special attention,” along with Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Fredrika Bremer, and Anna Doyle Wheeler (6). She befriended several American luminaries, including Theodore Parker and Louisa May Alcott. She also had working relationships with American reformers. For example, Cobbe’s “conduct book for feminists” proved so influential that Frances Willard requested permission to publish an edition of Cobbe’s *Duties of Women* for the Women’s Christian Temperance Union.

While Cobbe's theological and feminist books circulated widely in the United States, her shorter news articles and essays also enjoyed a wide readership, reprinted (often, perhaps, without her permission) in newspapers across the country. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Cobbe received the most attention from publications in the East Coast and New England, where news and texts from Great Britain arrived from across the Atlantic. Cobbe was mentioned frequently in *The Boston Advertiser*, a one-page broadsheet that appealed to a general audience. In a notice about a petition for women's suffrage in the House of Commons published on June 1, 1868, Cobbe's name is numbered among the "names well known in this country," including Harriet Martineau and Florence Nightingale. A search of the Proquest American Periodicals database turns up over 600 entries for Cobbe, either in her own work reprinted from British periodicals, in reviews, in advertisements, or in news articles. Most of these publications were located in New York and Boston, where periodicals and other materials from across the Atlantic would enter the United States.

However, further searching reveals that Cobbe's influence extended further than major urban centers on the eastern seaboard. A search of the Infotrac Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers databases reveals that Cobbe was cited eighteen times, including in the June 19, 1896 edition of *The Idaho Avalanche* published in Silver City, far away from the Atlantic states where Cobbe had friends and associates and news about her could more easily circulate. The news is far from dramatic, only a marker of a small milestone in the span of Cobbe's 81 years of life:

Miss Frances Power Cobbe, who recently celebrated her seventy-third birthday, was the first woman to do regular office work on the editorial staff of a London daily. When *The Echo* was first started, Miss Cobbe attended every other day to write

leaders and notes, generally on social subjects. She was known as an author long before she was a journalist.

The passage is sandwiched between a short essay titled “The Bread of the World” and a poem titled “I’m as Tall as Ma.” No other contextualizing information is offered. Most likely, the editors gleaned this information from a larger, East Coast publication, but the fact remains that they assumed their readers would find Cobbe reaching another advanced year (by Victorian standards) to be an event worth celebrating and that they would be especially interested in her pioneering role as a woman journalist. Interest in Cobbe among readers in Idaho should really come as no surprise, given the state’s own pioneering role in women’s suffrage: in 1900, it became one of the first states to grant women the right to vote (Susan B. Anthony Center). Without a doubt, Cobbe’s rhetorical performances in England found a willing audience in America, and those readers were especially interested in Cobbe’s perspective on women’s rights.

Why, then, have I focused my attention on Cobbe’s writing on Ireland, if her American audience seemed more invested in Cobbe’s identity as a feminist than her identity as an Irish writer? My answer hinges on Cobbe’s strategy of constructing a persuasive “self” that would function in multiple contexts: without understanding Cobbe as an Irish woman writer, as an abolitionist, as a theologian, as an animal rights activist, we cannot fully understand Cobbe’s feminism, which thus far, has been the most accessible and instructive part of Cobbe’s identity for the twenty first century reader. Viewing Cobbe as Irish (though her strategy often demanded she distance herself from that label) will impact how we examine Cobbe’s most important role: as activist rhetor on behalf of women’s emancipation. I have attempted to answer the Irish part of the question, understanding that for a writer such

as Cobbe—whose active interest in diverse subjects is reflected in the hundreds of published pieces in multiple publications—there can be no definitive way of containing her identity, of packaging it up so that we can easily fit her into our conceptualization of the nineteenth century. If anything, I hope my examination of Cobbe’s imperialist rhetorics has helped illustrate the impossible task of pinning any writer for Victorian periodicals down to any one position, given the constraints and pressures posed by each periodical.

I am not asserting that Cobbe’s Irishness is the most important factor in an examination of her rhetorical performances. I do think, however, the question of her Irishness is a germane way to start an exploration of Cobbe’s persuasive identities, as so much of what constituted ideas about Irishness in the nineteenth century also constituted ideas about womanhood. Understanding Cobbe as an Irish woman rhetor enables us to place her in multiple contexts, as it allows us to see how the critical questions of race, class, and gender inform rhetorical performances without the baggage of our own history, our own classifications of race and class that differ from nineteenth-century views. As we move toward a transnational women’s rhetorics, the national identity of a rhetor could become just as important as gender in determining how a rhetorical text circulates within an expanded context. Examining Cobbe as Anglo-Irish gives us a clear means of gauging how class and race legitimize the rhetorical performances of certain women, authorizing them to speak on behalf of groups with less power to affect change *while also* speaking on behalf of the status quo, emphasizing how women can be complicit in and victimized by imperialist and gendered systems.

Throughout this project, I discussed how the periodical press functioned as a “third space” between private and public spheres, where women could address mixed audiences

about controversial subjects without facing the backlash woman orators speaking about the same issues to the same audiences often experienced. Of course, this was not always the case, or perhaps more accurately, the periodical or newspaper served as a safer space for women in degrees, depending on differences between groups of women in terms of class and race. Ida B. Wells, for example, had to leave Memphis due to her editorials questioning the premise that black men were lynched due to their raping of white women, asserting instead that black men and white women often entered into consensual sexual relationships: the fact that she used the newspaper as the vehicle for her argument did not make her safer beyond the lag time between publication and reception.

Wells's speaking tour of Great Britain was the safer choice, as she was guaranteed a receptive audience of like-minded thinkers. This illuminates the parameters of the periodical as a rhetorical space for women: the textual production of the genre allowed women to speak about controversial issues while allowing protection from the perils of immediate reception. Yet the commercial interests inherent in periodical publication also required that writers shape their rhetoric to target the specific audience of each periodical. As we have seen, the expectations of those varied audiences often represented the worst parts of nineteenth-century culture: hatred and fear of the racial, religious, or gendered "other" (sadly, it seems not much has changed even more than 100 years later). Like the Janus-faced Irish rebels that populated Cobbe's prose, the newspaper and periodical press could function in a dualistic way for women rhetors: as a means to affect social change or as a means to maintain the status quo. Examining how women rhetors constructed persuasive identities in a transnational context reveals the scope of the periodical press as a rhetorical space. Due to the very

flexibility of the genre, the space was always shifting, its parameters always up for negotiation.

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ABSTRACT

IMPERIAL RHETORICS: FRANCES POWER COBBE'S ANSWERING OF THE IRISH QUESTION IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY PERIODICAL PRESS

by Kelly Cameron, Ph.D., 2012
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My dissertation explores the imperialist rhetorics of nineteenth-century journalist Frances Power Cobbe. The project intersects feminist rhetorical theories with periodical studies and Irish studies in order to more fully examine how Cobbe, a member of the Anglo-Irish gentry, negotiates her classed and gendered positions within the English periodical press. Using seven essays about Ireland that Cobbe wrote for various periodicals as case studies, I show that Cobbe was able to negotiate each periodical as a rhetorical space: her ability to shape what was essentially the same argument—that England should remain in control of Ireland—for the different audiences of each publication proves her ability to function successfully as a rhetor within Victorian culture, a culture that circumscribed the voices of women and colonial “others.” Cobbe used the genre conventions of the periodical essay to address a mostly English audience from the considerably disadvantaged position of an Irish woman, adopting the “default masculinity” of the editorial voice of the middle-class periodical in order to construct an objective, and thus, persuasive, persona.

Cobbe was a writer who performed a number of identities, a writer through which we can follow several lines of inquiry: we can look to her writing as evidence of women’s agency within a culture that sought to repress women’s expression; or we can look to her evidence of the perspective of a loyalist Anglo-Irish woman writing about the ongoing

conflicts between Ireland and England. My project does both. Cobbe's most persuasive strategy hinges on her ability to fashion an identity that uses her experiential knowledge as an Anglo-Irish woman in order to persuade. My central thesis is that Cobbe used the periodical press to rearticulate the position of cultural "other" as a location of rhetorical power by constructing an identity that would speak from an authoritative position in between or even outside of paradigmatic and often opposite positions. By shifting the power to a space outside the location usually invested with power in Victorian culture—read: white, male, middle-class or above, straight Englishman—Cobbe could speak persuasively in multiple and shifting contexts.