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## **The Macdermots of Ballycloran** Anthony Trollope

When Trollope landed in Dublin in 1841, in order to become clerk to a postal surveyor, few, if any, would have detected in him the successful novelist. Yet it was in Ireland, and while occupying that seemingly most unliterary position, that he wrote his first novel, *The Macdermots of Ballycloran*.

## **The Macdermots of Ballycloran Details**

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Author : Anthony Trollope

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## From Reader Review **The Macdermots of Ballycloran** for online ebook

### classic reverie says

I read this story in a collection of Trollope's works. I have been wanting to read a story by him & decided on his first (1847) which is / was not very popular or well received but I agree with Trollope's comments on this, he did "not know that I ever made one so good." Never having read him before, I cannot say this is not his usual story but a pure melancholy story of an Irish family in dire straits but with genteel ancestry. Thady's brotherly love for his sister Feemy but lack of return from his family was something very sad for this poor young man. His desires to do what is right but also his self pride which made things difficult for him. Having Irish ancestry, this story was especially interesting to me. There are some dialect passages that were a little tough but not too hard to decipher. My edition had no typos & a table of contexts. Loved this story & it will not be easily forgotten. The character Father John was closet to a saint.

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### Jim says

This is not the edition of **The Macdermots of Ballycloran** that I read. Unfortunately, books published by the Folio Society rarely appear in Goodreads' databases, so I usually pick the edition whose number of pages is the closest (the Folio edition has 448 pages as opposed to Penguin's 384).

The main reason I bring up this issue is that it very much matters which edition of this book you read. Folio Society published the original 1847 edition, which has 36 chapters. In 1860, the novel was reissued, with two of the best chapters of the book being purged, probably by the publisher; also, various other changes were made, none of them seemingly with the approval or supervision of the author.

It's a pity, because Trollope's first novel was surprisingly good. Much of it is written in a thick Irish dialect, which becomes more readable the farther one gets into the story.

Imagine to yourself a kind of **Brothers Karamazov** in which you have a demented head of the family (Larry), a thoroughly stupid and imprudent daughter (Feemy), and a hardworking son (Thady), who winds up murdering an official because he mistakenly thought he was raping her. It is a had story, but one told with a great deal of heart. The local parish priest, Father John McGrath, is one of the most sympathetic characters in all of Trollope's extensive (47 novels!) work.

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### Laurel Hicks says

This is the first of forty-seven novels by Anthony Trollope. I would say he got off to a pretty good start, and I laud him for not giving up when the public proclaimed it a failure. It's an Irish novel, which was not popular at the time in England, and it is a sad tale with only a few bright lights, the brightest of which is Father John, the priest of the village church.

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## **B says**

When Trollope landed in Dublin in 1841, in order to become clerk to a postal surveyor, few, if any, would have detected in him the successful novelist. Yet it was in Ireland, and while occupying that seemingly most unliterary position, that he wrote his first novel, *The Macdermots of Ballycloran*.

Very hard to read. Like the Irish themselves, the conversation is convoluted, repetitive.

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## **Erika RS says**

I read this book because it was the first in a complete works of Anthony Trollope that I'd bought for my Kindle. It was only after that I learned that this was a mistake and that this was not the Trollope novel to start with. (That, at least according to many on the internet, being *The Warden*.)

I didn't dislike this book, but I couldn't quite like it either. It had a lot of elements that were interesting, but the overall story was just so unrelentingly sad and hopeless that I kept getting distracted by other books while reading it.

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## **Tom James says**

The sad tale of a once prosperous landowning Irish family on the decline during the years just prior to the potato famine. Ireland's woes did not begin with the famine of the 1840s, but reached back in time and this story gives us a small glimpse into the customs, the conditions, and the circumstances that lead to the death of a government official and the arrest and trial of a man who has some very real motives and enough circumstantial evidence to hang him. Not typical Trollope fare, at least if you're used to his style in "Barchester Towers". This is his first novel (1847), but its dark tone would lead one to think that it came from a later period, when novelists were taking more risks. Another realistic and believable portrait of life in the nineteenth century.

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## **Julie Bye says**

I enjoyed the novel and the ending surprised me. I would have given it a higher rating except for some glaring plot faults and would wishy washy female characters. I know it's written in a different time and ladies were more delicate, but the main female character of Feemy is shallow, stupid and feints every five minutes. The deterioration of the father would have been more believable if he was older. But the novel does make you wonder who in the novel are good people and who are not, what is justice and what isn't. Few of the characters are straightforward good or bad, and the prose is well written. I can understand why it was unpopular as it left me feeling a flat and unhappy, but it definitely makes you think, which is what a good novel should do.

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## Elizabeth (Alaska) says

This was Trollope's debut. It didn't sell well and I wasn't expecting much. I was pleasantly surprised. Trollope's prose and general writing style was immediately recognizable. It appears he knew how to go about it from the first. The two biggest differences from his later novels are that he has only one plot line rather than the several I have come to expect, and that this of his Irish novels, mostly involves those of the poorer classes rather than those more middle class people that are his usual fare.

He took time to mention the educational opportunities of his characters in this, and I could easily picture this problem:

His other expensive taste was that of books; he could not resist the temptation to buy books, books of every sort, from voluminous editions of St. Chrysostom to Nicholas Nicklebys and Charles O'Malleys; and consequently he had a great many. But alas! he had no book-shelves, not one; some few volumes, those of every day use, were piled on the top of one another in his little sitting-room; the others were closely packed in great boxes in different parts of the cottage—his bed-room, his little offertory, his parlour, and many in a little drawing-room, as he called it, but in which was neither chair nor table, nor ever appeared the sign of fire! No wonder the poor man complained the damp got to his books.

Trollope personalizes this at the beginning by stating that he visited the area on his post office business and ventured out for a walk after supper where he chanced upon the abandoned house and property of Ballycloran. He then proceeds to tell his story that begins about ten years earlier. Thus, we know his novel hasn't a happy ending. Trollope has a sense of humor, but with his sad tale, it was difficult for him to display it. There were very few sentences where I was allowed a small upturn to my lips. *We must now request our reader to accompany us to the little town of Mohill; not that there is anything attractive in the place to repay him for the trouble of going there.*

I said I was pleasantly surprised. However, I must say that if I had started with this, I might not be so enthusiastic about reading all 47 of his novels. I'd really like to give this 4 stars, but I'm afraid it only comes very close to crossing that line.

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## Becky says

First sentence: In the autumn, 184 — , business took me into the West of Ireland, and, amongst other places, to the quiet little village of Drumsna, which is in the province of Connaught, County Leitrim, about 72 miles w.n.w. of Dublin, on the mail-coach road to Sligo.

Premise/plot: A traveler (presumably the author/narrator) stumbles across an abandoned estate in Ireland named Ballycloran. He learns from residents of the tragic tale of the Macdermot family. From chapter two through the end, the book focuses exclusively on this sad tale. What you should know: The novel is set in Ireland in the 1830s and chronicles the downfall of an impoverished family. The main characters are Thady Macdermot, and his priest, Father John. This one is NOT a mystery but does feature a murder trial.

My thoughts: *The Macdermots of Ballycloran* was Trollope's very first novel. In many ways it's darker and bleaker than the Trollope's I've read before. First, the framework of the story lets readers know from the start that things do not go well for the family...at all. Second, the very nature of the story involves a murder. The 'victim' is Captain Myles Ussher. He has been hanging around Feemy Macdermot. And the talk of the surrounding communities is that he has no intention at all of marrying her, or doing right by her. Thady, at first, appears to be too little concerned about his sister's reputation, and, then too much concerned as the case may be.

On the night of the crime, Feemy and Myles have planned to run away together. Not to elope. He's been transferred and she wants to go along with him--can't bear to be separated from him--so even though there's no ring (as you might say) she's willing to live in sin with him...in hopes that one day in the future...there will be a marriage. The brother catches them in the act of running away. Actually, his sister is paralyzed into inaction when she sees him. Thady just sees Myles carrying--or dragging--his sister along. He assumes: Ussher's stealing her away, she's not screaming in protest--he later realizes--but if she was going willingly why wasn't she walking on her own two legs?! He doesn't think or reason. He jumps into action--with a stick in his hand. Two blows later, his sister's lover is dead. WHAT DID HE DO?!?!

He sees no point in denying it. He confesses his crime: to his sister, to his father, to his servant, Pat Brady. He and Pat deliver the body to the police themselves. He does later flee the vicinity trying to decide if he should flee Ireland or remain and face the court. But ultimately he decides to stay and face the consequences--come what may--of his actions. His closest friend and ally is Father John. Father John believes that it was not murder. That he was acting in defense of his sister, that the crime was not premeditated, that the crime is justifiable. Regrettable perhaps, but ultimately justifiable. But what will the jury say?

Two-thirds of the novel focuses on this crime and subsequent trial. There is nothing about the book that is witty or cozy or feel-good. It's a dark look at human nature. Thady's father has absolutely lost what little remains of his mind. His sister, Feemy, is distraught with grief and burdened with secrets that others would guess easily--given enough months. The only steady character is Father John. He, by far, is my favorite.

The novel reminds me--if memory serves--of Thomas Hardy. Actions have consequences, and human nature being what it is dooms us to unhappy ends...most of the time.

The first sentence is truly terrible in terms of hooking readers. The first sentence of the second chapter is much better! "McC — — 's story runs thus. About sixty years ago, a something Macdermot, true Milesian, pious Catholic, and descendant of king somebody, died somewhere, having managed to keep a comfortable little portion of his ancestors' royalties to console him for the loss of their sceptre."

Feemy is a character much addicted to novels--to romances. And she sees Myles Ussher to be a hero from one of her novels. "This, then, was Feemy's lover, and she certainly did love him dearly; he had all the chief ornaments of her novel heroes — he was handsome, he carried arms, was a man of danger, and talked of deeds of courage; he wore a uniform; he rode more gracefully, talked more fluently, and seemed a more mighty personage, than any other one whom Feemy usually met. Besides, he gloried in the title of Captain, and would not that be sufficient to engage the heart of any girl in Feemy's position? let alone any Irish girl, to whom the ornaments of arms are always dear."

One of my favorite new words--that I discovered thanks to Trollope--is stirabout. It's a porridge made by stirring oatmeal in boiling water or milk. "The father finished his stirabout, and turned round to the blazing turf, to find consolation there."

The text does feature dialect. Not all the time. But most of the dialogue, I would guess. “And what wor the gentlemen saying about Feemy, Pat?” “Oh, yer honor, how could I know what gentlemín is saying over their punch, together? only they do be sayin’ in Ballinamore, that the Captain doesn’t spake that dacently of Miss Feemy, as if they wor to be man and wife: sorrow blister his tongue the day he’d say a bad word of her!” “Faith he’d better take care of himself, if it’s my sister he’s playing his game with; he’ll find out, though there aint much to be got worth having at Ballycloran now, as long as there’s a Macdermot in it, he may still get the traitment a blackguard desarves, if he plays his tricks with Feemy!”

Favorite quotes:

A girl should never obey her lover till she is married to him; she may comply with his wishes, but she should not allow herself to be told with authority that this or that should be her line of conduct.

Poverty, to be picturesque, should be rural. Suburban misery is as hideous as it is pitiable.

“Nonsense, man; — how can you say you are not going to lie, when you know you’ve a lie in your mouth at the moment.”

The brave soldier goes to meet Death, and meets him without a shudder when he comes. The suffering woman patiently awaits him on her bed of sickness, and conscious of her malady dies slowly without a struggle. A not uncommon fortitude enables men and women to leave their mortal coil, and take the dread leap in the dark with apparent readiness and ease. But to wait in full health and strength for the arrival of the fixed hour of certain death — to feel the moments sink from under you which are fast bringing you to the executioner’s hand; — to know that in twelve — ten — eight — six hours by the clock, which hurries through the rapid minutes, you are to become — not by God’s accomplished visitation — not in any gallant struggle of your own — but through the stern will of certain powerful men — a hideous, foul, and dislocated corse; — to know that at one certain ordained moment you are to be made extinct — to be violently put an end to; — to be fully aware that this is your fixed fate, and that though strong as a lion, you must at that moment die like a dog; — to await the doom without fear — without feeling the blood grow cold round the heart, — without a quickened pulse and shaking muscles, exceeds the bounds of mortal courage, and requires either the ignorant unimaginative indifference of a brute, or the superhuman endurance of an enthusiastic martyr.

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## Leslie says

I love Trollope's novels, but I didn't expect his first novel to be this good. The Irishness is not just a matter of exotic stage setting or condescending comedy, as happens so often in English novels about Ireland. Trollope clearly observed Irish culture and landscape and ways of living closely; he has an eye for foibles while maintaining the compassion for people caught in personal and economic traps that characterises his mature fiction. His characters are trapped in their broadly human and specifically Irish circumstances, and Trollope is very good at creating our understanding of the complexity and extensiveness of their entrapment and their struggle against their limitations. He even manages to give his characters a distinctly Irish voice without descending into caricature or unreadability. There are some set-pieces, especially comic set-pieces, that I think drag out too long (like the horse race scene, but then I find horses of far, far less interest than Trollope does), but Robert Tracy makes a good case in the introduction to the Oxford World's Classics edition for their value: "The English novel assumes the possibility of social coherence, maintained by the mediating role of the middle class. It appeals continually to social coherence as a goal, even when depicting injustice or

agitation. Its form reflects this coherence, with characters and situations subordinated to and integrated into the total work. The Irish novel, depicting a divided society, rarely achieves such formal coherence. It tends to be episodic, a series of encounters or activities not wholly integrated into a plot.... In this, as in its insights, *The Macdermotts* is an Irish novel.... In these episodes, Trollope virtually abandons the forward progress of his story to present comic scenes allegedly typical of Irish life. They are rich in comic observation, but irrelevant to his plot. But it is precisely in these episodes that Trollope is able to suggest the vitality of Irish life, and to reinforce the sense that Ireland is two countries, not one" (xxv). I like this structural reading of these scenes very much, even as I admit that I found them at times excessive. Probably the biggest difference between this and Trollope's more mature fiction is its tendency to melodrama, something highly characteristic of much Victorian fiction but not usually so prominent in Trollope.

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### **Nat says**

An involving novel populated with interesting characters and creates a wonderful feeling of time and place. Yes, it takes a while to get used to the speech written in local dialect but, once mastered, this adds to the characters and the story as a whole.

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### **John Croall says**

Slow start, but soon started to enjoy it. Trollope's first book and it is excellent.

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### **Margaret says**

His first novel, and, um, not his greatest. Oh, Trollope, whyfor phonetically rendered Irish dialect?

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### **Paul Servini says**

Took me quite a while to warm to this book, but once I did get into it, I really started to enjoy it.

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### **Ali Miremadi says**

A good first novel. Lots of the later Trollope evident here, as well as a plot device borrowed by Tolstoy. An indictment of the neglect shown to Ireland by Britain. Much darker than most later Trollope though.

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