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EMERGING IMAGERY:
THE GREAT FAMINE IN NINETEENTH CENTURY IRISH LIT.

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ABSTRACT

The critical debate surrounding the Great Famine in Irish Literature centers on the notion of a perceived silence. While some scholars claim that there is a literary void in Irish Literature following this cataclysmic event, others wonder whether language is even capable of describing the extreme physical, emotional, and psychological suffering that is inflicted upon the victims when such tragedies occur. Centuries of imperialism and colonialism had created a class divide so wide and an Irish economy so fragile that when a calamity such as famine occurred, it was the poverty-stricken, predominately Irish-Catholic peasantry that suffered most. Poor and illiterate, powerless and voiceless, they also lacked the ability – and oftentimes, the willingness – to articulate the horrors that they experienced, witnessed, and sometimes even committed in order to survive. Trauma, too, would add to their muteness as feelings of guilt, shame, blame, and immeasurable grief followed in its wake. Anguished by the question of why the Famine had occurred and feeling somehow responsible for it, the Irish peasantry were at a loss as to how to cope with it, how to address it, and how to articulate it to those who had not experienced it first-hand.

What must also be kept in mind when discussing the Great Famine is that there were two stories to be told in regards to location: those who remained behind in Ireland and those who departed to other shores. Each had their own experiences to share and their own trauma with which to cope. While the horrific images and memories brought on by

the Famine still plagued this sector of the Irish population, they also experienced a haunting sense of melancholy and nostalgia for the homeland that they had left behind oftentimes as a last resort in order to survive.

While there was a silence of sorts immediately following the Famine that echoed the silence that reverberated across the decimated land, a torrent of imagery would emerge to express the inexpressible and describe the indescribable while a nation struggled to find its voice and heal its many wounds: Gothic imagery in response to the immense horrors and hardships that had been suffered and pastoral/sentimental imagery in response to the loss endured by those who fled to foreign lands. Famine imagery would continue to evolve in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as the number of remaining survivors began to diminish and the outrage of future generations began to grow, demonstrating that the Great Famine *is* found in Irish Literature and that it is indeed describable.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

And now language utterly fails me in attempting to depict the state of the wretched inmates...My hand trembles while I write. The scenes of human misery and degradation we witnessed still haunt my imagination with the vividness and power of some horrid and tyrannous delusion, rather than the features of a sober reality. (William Bennett, 1847, member of the Society of Friends, quoted in Kelleher, p. 18)

The Great Irish Famine, circa 1845-1851, is considered by many leading literary scholars and critics to be the defining natural catastrophic event in Irish history. The magnitude of the widespread suffering was on a scale that crippled the nation for decades to come. Death from starvation, disease, and a pervasive diaspora decimated the population, decreasing it by a third of what it had been before the blight consumed the potato crops. As the primary food source for much of the nation, the devastation that the blight wrought when the crops failed for several consecutive years resulted not only in extreme physical suffering, but emotional and psychological suffering as well. As a result the Irish were at a loss as to how to cope with it, how to address it, and how to articulate it to those who had not experienced it first-hand. While most critics would agree to the magnitude of the Great Famine and its effects on the Irish people, many also wonder at the lack of literature that immediately followed. Rather than providing a rich source of inspiration with a variety of perspectives from which to approach it, there are those who

find a curious void instead. As Terry Eagleton famously asks in his book, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture*: “There is indeed a literature of the Famine...But it is in neither sense of the word a major literature. There is a handful of novels and a body of poems, but few truly distinguished works. Where is the Famine in the literature of the Revival? Where is it in Joyce?” (13). Christopher Morash also faced this widely held belief of a literary abyss when approaching this topic for critical study: “Back in the mid-1980s, when I told colleagues about my work, the response was almost always the same. I would get a quizzical look, followed by: ‘There’s not much to study, is there?’” (300). It must also be noted that the literary debate revolving around the Great Famine has another aspect as well: the uncertainty as to whether or not the event *can* be described. Margaret Kelleher proposes this very question when she asks “can the experience of famine be expressed; is language adequate to a description of famine horrors?” (232). Is the Famine indeed indescribable? Do words fail? Or is trauma alone to blame? Through a close examination of selected Irish texts and the application of specific critical theory (post-colonial and trauma theory), the primary purpose of this study will be to establish that the Great Famine *was* depicted in Irish Literature, evolving initially in the form of gothic imagery to express the horrors endured to a stark form of outraged realism as the number of remaining survivors began to diminish and the anger of future generations began to grow. In essence, this paper will argue that the Famine took on different dimensions and developed different meaning as the agenda of Irish writers began to shift and transform to meet the needs of their current-day audience. And while Famine imagery would continue to evolve into the twentieth century and beyond, the primary focus here will be on Irish literary works written during the nineteenth century.

What must also be kept in mind when discussing the Great Irish Famine is that there were two stories to be told in regards to location: those who remained behind in Ireland and those who departed to other shores. Each had their own experiences to share and their own trauma with which to cope. While the horrific images, memories, and trauma brought on by the Famine still plagued this sector of the Irish population, they also experienced a haunting sense of melancholy and nostalgia for their homeland which often materialized in Irish-immigration literature in the form of sentimental and pastoral images of Ireland and its people. And out of this imagery, a particular type of prose would emerge to help this audience navigate a strange new world far different from the one they left behind.

Regardless of whether they stayed in Ireland or left to try their luck on distant shores, what most Famine victims belonging to the particularly hard-hit Irish peasantry had in common was the inability to understand why the horrors and hardships of the Famine had been inflicted upon them. Was it their own fault for being a lazy, inferior, uncivilized populace as the British people, government, and press would have them believe? Or the act of an angry God for sins committed and for worshipping the wrong denomination of faith (Catholicism) based on idolatry, popery, and pagan superstition as many members of the Protestant faith would insist? Or a corrective act of Nature: a means of purging a poor and over-populated nation of its weak, vulnerable, and underprivileged masses as some economic theorists would maintain? Or perhaps something more sinister as some critics both then and now would contend: a deliberate act of genocide by a ruling nation intent on further subduing and cleansing Ireland of a group of rebellious and unruly inhabitants? Unable to answer the rudimentary questions

as to what caused the Famine and why, it would prove to be an extremely difficult subject to discuss, especially for survivors immediately following this cataclysmic event.

Perhaps at the heart of the matter, however, lies this question: Why had the Irish become so dependent on the potato that its repeated failure would result in such devastating outcomes, including mass starvation, evictions, emigration, death from disease and illness, the ultimate demise of the Irish language, and the overall impact it had on Irish culture, identity, and selfhood? Though other European countries had experienced the effects of the potato blight, none felt them as severely as the Irish population. Great Britain was considered to be one of the strongest and richest empires in the world (and since the Act of Union in 1801, declared itself united with Ireland) but here was one of its sister-nations just miles off its shores where the population was quite literally starving to death. In an attempt to answer the above questions and determine the effects that the Great Famine had on the Irish people – physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually – and its subsequent effects on Irish Literature, this paper will also examine through historical study and the study of current and prior discourse the factors (socio-economic, religious, and political) that played a significant role in allowing the outcomes of the Famine to occur and proliferate in a land that in reality produced enough food to sustain its starving people.

The theoretical components of this paper will be two-fold: 1) addressing how imperialism and colonialism created the conditions, such as poverty, oppression, and illiteracy that had made Ireland so vulnerable to the effects of famine and actually exacerbated and prolonged the situation; and 2) how the trauma that was initially introduced by imperialism was further intensified by the Famine, instilling within the

Irish psyche feelings such as guilt, shame, and low self-esteem in a population that was primarily peasant, underprivileged, and Catholic. This in turn will lead to an examination of how trauma may have played a role in the manner in which the Famine was depicted in Irish Literature afterwards. My primary sources will be Edward W. Said and Paulo Freire in regards to the effects that imperialism and colonialism can impose upon a nation, John R. Butterly and Jack Shepherd's study on the causes of hunger and mass-starvation, and the theories of Sigmund Freud and Cathy Caruth regarding trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, and survivor's shock/guilt.

The key literary sources discussed will include (in chronological order): William Carleton's groundbreaking famine novel, *The Black Prophet: A Tale of Irish Famine* (1847); Fitz-James O'Brien's haunting short story, "The Lost Room" (1858); Anthony Trollope's prominent Famine novel, *Castle Richmond* (1860); Mary Ann Sadlier's American-based novel, *Bessy Conway, or the Irish American Girl in America* (1861); Elizabeth Hely Walshe's Anglo-Irish centered novel, *Golden Hills: A Tale of the Irish Famine* (1865); John McElgun's novel, also based in America, *Annie Reilly or the Fortunes of an Irish Girl in New York, a Tale Founded on Fact* (1878); and finally, Bram Stoker's horror classic, *Dracula* (1897). Works by James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, John Millington Synge, William Butler Yeats, Liam O'Flaherty, Tom Murphy, and Nuala O'Faolain will also be mentioned briefly in the conclusion of this study in regards to Famine imagery in the twentieth century and beyond.

CHAPTER II

PLANTING THE SEEDS OF POVERTY:

IMPERIALISM AND COLONIALISM

I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country. I don't believe they are our fault. I believe there are not only many more of them than of old, but that they are happier, better and more comfortably fed and lodged under our rule than they ever were. But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours. (novelist and historian Charles Kingsley in a letter to his wife from Ireland in 1860, quoted in Watson, p. 17)

When discussing the Great Famine in Ireland, the factors and events that caused such a cataclysmic event must be examined first. On the surface, the Famine could be attributed to *Phytophthora infestans*, the blight that struck the potato crop beginning in 1845 and continued to devastate it for several consecutive harvests that followed. But why did the Famine have such a devastating effect on Ireland when other countries across Europe had also experienced the blight at this time but not as severely as the Irish? The obvious answer is, of course, that a vast majority of the Irish poor had become dependent upon the potato as their primary source of sustenance. What is perhaps less obvious is why the Irish had become so dependent upon it. In order to answer this question, we must look to Ireland's long and turbulent history as a colonized nation under British rule, a

history that created the underlying causes of poverty that made Ireland dependent upon the potato and vulnerable to the effects of famine when it occurred.

A Brief History

Although the Vikings had made an attempt to conquer Ireland as far back as the ninth and tenth centuries and had intermarried with the Celtic natives and settled there, it was not until 1171 that English King Henry II began to parcel out its land to outsiders, mainly to Norman invaders led by Richard (Strongbow) FitzGilbert de Clare, who the British king feared might achieve too much power. Strategically located off the shores of England, it was imperative that Britain maintain control over its neighbor to the west. Should one of England's rivals such as Spain or France, or even an English usurper, gain a foothold, it could have dire consequences for the English monarchy, leaving it vulnerable and open to attack. Imperialism, after all, was not only about the expansion of a nation's power but also the reinforcing of a country's defenses against invasion from other hostile and equally ambitious nations. And what better way to ensure loyalty than to seize land from discontented natives and implant loyal subjects to keep the indigenous population subdued. But a subdued population can also be a dangerous one, for Britain's enemy was in many regards Ireland's ally: "In the political division which followed the Reformation, England and Ireland were on opposing sides. Henceforth, Irish aspirations could only be fulfilled, Irish faith could only flourish, through the defeat of England and the triumph of her enemies" (Woodham-Smith 18-19). Conquering Ireland was therefore not only a show of might to England's adversaries but also a way to keep them at bay.

The system of colonialism that began centuries before by Henry II was continued by Henry VIII in the 1500s and his Catholic daughter, Mary I (the notorious, "Bloody

Mary”), who officially introduced the practice of plantation into Ireland “whereby recalcitrant Anglo-Irish and Gaelic groups were dispossessed of their land, and English settler established in their places” (Coohill 20), a system that would eventually lead to the total subjugation of the primarily Catholic Irish peasantry. This practice of displacing unruly natives with loyal subjects would be further utilized in the seventeenth-century when King James I began in earnest to strategically plant English and Scottish settlers into Ulster, an area that at the time was heavily involved in rebellion and dissension:

‘Plantation’, granting land to English and Scottish settlers in Ireland, provided a potential solution to many problems in Ulster. The new landowning class would be Protestant, thereby weakening Catholicism in the closest province to Britain. Plantation under the Tudors had been unsystematic, but under the Stuarts it was more organized. From 1609 onwards, Catholics (both Irish and Old English) were moved to areas within strictly defined boundaries. Land was confiscated throughout Ulster and given to New English and Scots in plots ranging from one to two thousand acres. In return, the settlers had to agree to bring in Protestant tenants to work the land. The settlers were mainly from the lowlands of Scotland, but some came from England. (Coohill 21)

The colonization of Ireland would continue in 1649 when Oliver Cromwell and his army landed in Ireland, widening the divide between Catholics and Protestants even further. During what would come to be known as “the Curse of Cromwell” thousands of Irish natives were massacred and/or transported as slaves to the West Indies (another of Britain’s emerging colonies) and several million acres of fertile Irish land confiscated and handed over to Cromwell’s soldiers. The triumph of William of Orange in 1690 and the Penal Laws enacted between 1695 and 1727 that basically stripped Catholics of the right to bear arms, banned them from Parliament, limited their educational options, restricted their religious practices, prevented them from voting, and prohibited them from purchasing land, further established Protestant presence and dominance throughout

Ireland. Catholics were in essence stripped of their own land, representation in government, and limited in their participation in trade, giving all such rights instead to the Protestant community, making many of them wealthy large land-owners in the process. As a result, by 1778, only 5% of the land was owned by Catholics (Coohill 26-27). Prior to this, as recent as the dawning of the seventeenth century, Catholics had owned the majority of land in Ireland: “A major effect of Stuart rule was that land ownership changed dramatically. At the time of Elizabeth’s death in 1603, most of the land in the country was owned by Catholics (whether they were Irish or Old English). Sixty years later, however, Catholics could only hold land west of the river Shannon” (Coohill 20). Many of those who had previously owned the land (or whose families had previously owned it) had become either farm laborers working for the newly appointed (predominately Protestant) landowners or tenant farmers subject to high rent and devoid of any rights of ownership. Because of this long history of British conquest and displacement of its native people, Ireland was one of the first colonies in what was to become the powerful and far-reaching British Empire.

***Edward W. Said and Golden Hills:
Imperialism, Colonialism, and the Class Divide***

For small but powerful and ambitious nations such as England, imperialism was also a way to expand its holdings, open up trade routes, and most importantly, gain access to the wealth, land, and resources (both natural and human, in the form of cheap labor) of distant, weaker, less developed territories. The main goal: to increase their coffers, expand their own domain and military might, and have access to the exotic goods and materials that these regions produced. As Edward W. Said states it in his in-depth study on the subject, *Culture and Imperialism*: “In the expansion of the great Western empires,

profit and hope of further profit were obviously tremendously important, as the attractions of spices, sugar, slaves, rubber, cotton, opium, tin, gold, and silver over centuries can testify” (10). The only way to ensure compliance from the oftentimes inhospitable inhabitants of these foreign lands and divest them of these valuable and highly prized goods was to force compliance through domination, military force, and oppression. In order to maintain this stringent stronghold over the native population, psychological tactics were often utilized alongside military and economic ones, and were oftentimes just as necessary. The conquering nation had to establish authority and superiority over the conquered. The conquering nation had to justify their right to rule and right to procure resources from these foreign regions, including vast amounts of land for grazing, cultivating, mining, and colonizing. Consequently, the indigenous natives were often portrayed as inferior, uncivilized, unintelligent, and incompetent, a people in *need* of domination who would actually benefit from its affiliation with the motherland. In this manner, such hostile takeovers could be glorified, and justified, by the ruling class:

Neither imperialism nor colonialism is a simple act of accumulation and acquisition. Both are supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people *require* and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination: the vocabulary of classic nineteenth-century imperial culture is plentiful with words and concepts like ‘inferior’ or ‘subject races,’ subordinate peoples,’ ‘dependency,’ ‘expansion,’ and ‘authority.’ Out of the imperial experiences, notions about culture were clarified, reinforced, criticized, or rejected. (*Culture and Imperialism* 9)

Such negative stereotypes, therefore, were not only created in an attempt to further subdue the native population, but also as a means to garner support from the people back home who also needed validation for the aggressive, oftentimes brutal behavior that

accompanied the profitable practice of imperialism. It was their mission and Christian duty to go forth into the world and spread their way of life for the good of all mankind and save the savage heathens from their barbarous ways. The natives were exploited for their own good. If this happened to benefit the colonizers, all the better, for it was the right of the victor to reap the rewards.

Having experienced such bias first-hand, this practice of suppressing and exploiting an entire society by branding them with negative labels was of major concern to Said, who referred to this tradition as “Orientalism” and “cultural stereotyping”: “My own experience of these matters are in part what made me write this book. The life of an Arab Palestinian in the West, particularly in America, is disheartening” (*Orientalism* 27). Parallels between the prejudices that were inflicted upon nations of the East (or “Orient”) by those from the West (or “Occident”, as Said refers to them), and strategies used to keep them subdued, could also be made between those inflicted on Ireland by England. The practice of utilizing derogatory stereotypes to demoralize and degrade a vanquished people had a longstanding tradition in Ireland, dating as far back as the early twelfth-century when Gerald of Wales described the Irish as ““a wild and inhospitable people...a barbarous people...a filthy, people wallowing in vice”” (Butterly and Shepperd 182). In 1596 renowned poet Edmund Spenser wrote of “bloodthirsty plans for Ireland, where he imagined a British army virtually exterminating the native inhabitants” (*Culture and Imperialism* 7). And nineteenth-century descriptions portrayed the Irish as primitive beings, more animal than human: “As the Great Famine began, ‘the standard image of the good-natured Irish peasant was revised, becoming that of a repulsive ape-like creature’ placed somewhere between a monkey and the racial caricature of the African.

English observers characterized Irish peasants as ‘white negroes’ and ‘apes’... ‘the missing link’” (Butterly and Shepperd 182).

Class divide and the pervading sense of the superiority of a privileged ruling class over an inferior subordinate class are major themes in the novel *Golden Hills: A Tale of the Irish Famine* (1865) by Irish emigrant Elizabeth Hely Walshe. In this particular narrative, we are presented with the Anglo-Irish perspective in which colonialism (and as we shall see later, the Famine) is depicted in a positive manner. The story focuses on the Kingston’s, a Protestant family living in the Big House at Golden Hills located in a remote part of Ireland who are portrayed as victims when they are targeted by a band of lawless Riband men terrorizing the countryside. That they are led by a man who has recently been evicted from his home by Mr. Kingston’s land-agent does not seem to carry much, if any, significance to the story. While the author may have a valid point that the father is being targeted by this so-called band of outlaws, it is overshadowed by the family’s sense of entitlement and disdain towards the local peasantry who are portrayed throughout the novel by means of typical Irish stereotypes, such as course, dirty, ragged, incompetent, unintelligent, frivolous, superstitious, physically unattractive, uncivilized, and animal-like in their habits. Irish idleness, in particular, is a recurring theme in *Golden Hills*. When the daughter of the house, Lina Kingston, takes it upon herself to teach the local peasant girls a marketable trade, her innate condescension outweighs any benevolent motives she may have had towards the hapless girls:

Lina’s work-project was going forward. She had exaggerated no difficulty in planning it, and many started up of which she had not thought. Stupidity and awkwardness from the learners; carelessness, to the loss and destruction of materials; invincible idleness; self-conceit at the slightest progress; disinclination to take trouble about the work;—all these would have quite disheartened her, if she had not been strong in the one thought,

too high to be altered – that she was pleasing her gracious Saviour by her patience. And she was encouraged also by the knowledge that this was an appointed duty for her. (93)

Here the narrator assumes a voice of privilege that cultivates a belief in the superiority of the ruling class as well as the notion that they know what is best for the subordinate class while simultaneously reinforcing typical Irish stereotypes. This passage also gives the narrator the opportunity to further develop Lina's virtues by contrasting them with her peasant counterparts.

Even the potato is depicted as an inferior food blamed for the peasantry's current hardships due to the ease with which it could be tilled and harvested. As Mr. Kingston explains to a colleague

‘the facility with which the Irish peasant obtained a sufficiency of food is a cause of his slow civilization. There was no need for industry—no occasion for forethought. The simplest husbandry elicited an abundant crop; the roughest preparation made it eatable. He had not even the wants of life to educate his nature; he existed and enjoyed without labour. It was just a remove from the life of the animal, which digs up roots with its snout and devours them.’ (184)

Once again the Irish peasantry is portrayed as inherently lazy, lacking initiative, and no better than animals rooting around in the dirt, this time through the authoritative voice of Mr. Kingston. Their plight is their own plight; they have no desire to improve their conditions if planning and labor is involved. No thought is given to the causes of the Irish peasantry's predicament other than their own idleness and lack of prudence. Neither is the culpability of those who benefit while the underprivileged peasantry do without and starve outside the golden gates of Golden Hills of which admittance is severely limited to the affluent class, and, out of necessity, their domestic servants.

Criticism also abounds when the narrator describes the peasants' custom of waking the dead: "The cabin bore the aspect of deep poverty... Yet, poor as was the household, its most valuable possession, the pig, had been sold that day, in order to purchase tobacco and whiskey for the night's regale, and thus do honour to the dead—as they esteem honour—at the cost of six months' privation" (31). There is much more going on here than the narrator realizes, however, for it is more than just a wake and a means to pay homage to the dead: it is also an opportunity for this intrinsically social and tradition-minded people to observe an age-old custom and gather as a community to enjoy a small sampling of the goods that the ruling class takes for granted. Whatever sympathy the reader might feel towards the Kingston's precarious situation is soon transferred to the starving victims of the Famine who are generally used as a means to demonstrate the Kingston's generosity, a technique of contrasting, often obvious and overdone, which is common in Famine narratives that address the issue of class divide.

Such negative descriptions often had, and were meant to have, long-term psychological effects on the underprivileged lower class to keep them passive and complacent. Though perhaps less tangible to the human eye than the physiological effects of imperialism, such as poverty, hunger, disease, malnutrition, illiteracy, overcrowding, unemployment, and unsanitary living conditions, these psychological effects were just as valid and the list just as long, including shame, depression, repression, anger, resentment, frustration, despair, and a sense of worthlessness, futility, and powerlessness. That imperialism could inflict such feelings of trauma and insecurity collectively upon a people signifies a destructive nature so profound that it would haunt the Irish people for

decades to come, escalate throughout the Famine, and linger well into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As George J. Watson observes:

...so much emphasis is usually placed (not least by Irish writers) on the Irish love for nation and the Irish consciousness of its historical identity as a positive phenomenon. In fact, for all the Irishman's notoriously long memory, for all his sense of separate identity ('the ultimate criterion of nationality', says Joseph Lee), for all his comforting sense that his views are shared by the majority of his fellow-islanders, for all his sometimes aggressive proclamation of his nationality, which can – and does – grate on those (usually English) who feel no comparable assertive urges – for all these...always lurking somewhere near the surface is a painful sense of insecurity deriving ultimately from the sense of lost identity, a broken tradition, and the knowledge that an alien identity has been, however reluctantly, more than half embraced. (20)

***Paulo Freire and Dracula:
Oppression and Hunger Personified***

This practice of dehumanizing the native population and viewing them as objects and possessions to incur even greater profit was also of major concern for Paulo Freire, a visionary and educator who spent a lifetime championing the underprivileged and undereducated, especially those who were casualties of imperialism and colonialism. While his primary mission was educating the oppressed, his message regarding the negative consequences of imperialism is relevant to the British oppression of the Irish before and during the Great Famine, an oppression that, as indicated earlier, would play a significant role in creating the impoverished state of the Irish peasantry that made them so susceptible when famine conditions prevailed. Freire experienced the effects of hunger first-hand when his own family became destitute during his early childhood. Because of this experience he knew the effects that hunger could have on a person: "the precarious stability of Freire's middle-class family gave way and he found himself sharing the plight of the 'wretched of the earth.'" This had a profound influence on his life as he came to

know the gnawing pangs of hunger and fell behind in school because of the listlessness it produced” (10). This passage is important because it demonstrates the other, less considered aspects of hunger. While many sources discuss the physical, emotional, and psychological effects of starvation – all important, to be sure – Freire, due to his own personal experience is one of the few literary scholars who mention the effects that hunger has on our ability to think and to learn. John R. Butterly and Jack Shepherd findings support this important intellectual aspect of hunger: “Prolonged semi-starvation has permanent, irreversible effects, especially in children, which include intellectual, psychological, and social handicaps that are just as devastating as the more obvious physical deficits, such as stunting of growth or physical deformity” (58). If the Irish appeared backward and ignorant to the British, there was a biological basis for their listlessness, lethargy, and apathy. Food is, first and foremost, fuel for the body as well as the mind. Without it, people become indifferent and desensitized to what is happening around them and consumed with the need to find food to assuage their hunger. They are also more susceptible to the many illnesses and diseases associated with malnutrition, and perhaps of utmost significance to this particular study, they can become, like the Irish, dependent on one primary food source; and should that food source fail them, dire and deadly consequences result, consequences that the poor are ill-equipped to cope with due to their lack of resources and agency.

This dependency on one food source, as well as the dominating, oftentimes brutal aspects of imperialism and colonialism are themes present in Bram Stoker’s classic horror story, *Dracula*, published in 1897. Born in Dublin at the height of the Great Famine in 1847 (also known as Black ’47), Stoker would have been well acquainted with

Famine imagery and indeed borrowed from it copiously when writing his novel. While the majority of this imagery is gothic and meant to shock and terrify, parallels can be drawn between Dracula's arrival on England's shores and England's colonization of Ireland in an ironic twist involving the reverse colonization of England. Dracula, intent on creating a new colony of vampires in England, arrives via ship amidst one of the "greatest and suddenest storms on record" (75) and a "rush of sea-fog greater than any hitherto—a mass of dank mist, which seemed to close on all things like a gray pall" (77). As will be discussed later, violent storms at sea while crossing the Atlantic are a common motif in emigrant narratives and highly symbolic. In *Dracula* the storm scene is just as symbolic representing the upheaval produced in Ireland by imperialism. Similar to imperialist nations, Dracula invades distant shores searching for resources needed to thrive and survive and one resource in particular that is fast becoming depleted in his homeland, specifically, human blood. This quest for human blood is representative of the Famine in two ways: first, as Dracula's only form of sustenance, it is similar to the potato, which was basically the only food source available to the Irish peasantry; and second, human blood was becoming as scarce in the surrounding region of Dracula's home as the potato was in Ireland.

Dracula also represents the destructive, self-serving nature of imperialism. As Dr. Van Helsing explains to Mina Harker:

He come again, and again, and again. Look at his persistence and endurance...What does he do? He find out the place of all the world most of promise for him. Then he deliberately set himself down to prepare for the task. He find in patience just how is his strength, and what are his powers. He study new tongues. He learn new social life; new environment of old way, the politic, the law, the finance, the science, the habit of a new land and a new people who have come to be since he was. His glimpse that he have had, whet his appetite only and enkeen his desire. (279)

In order to take what he needs, he must use cunning and treachery and subdue his victims who would not normally succumb to him willingly. Dracula is England and imperialism personified, his bite inflicting the same symptoms as imperialism, such as disease, starvation, malnutrition, subjugation, dependency, and despair. The only way to defeat the monster is for the people themselves to rise up and unite against him and attack when he is most vulnerable. In this regard, those who defeat Dracula in the novel, Dr. Van Helsing, Jonathan Harker, (American) Quincey Morris, and Dr. John Steward, could very well be construed as future Irish leaders and nationalists who would lead the fight for Irish independence and use the Famine as a rally cry against a union with England that failed Ireland when its assistance was needed most.

Imperialism, Industrialization, and the Potato

The fight, however, would be a long and difficult one, for there was little opportunity to escape the cycle of poverty that had been thrust upon the Irish peasantry which rendered them helpless against English dominance. Primarily an agricultural economy, there was little industrialization to provide alternate employment or advanced weaponry to defend themselves. While other countries in Europe modernized and industrialized, Ireland was virtually left out of the Industrial Revolution which was taking the rest of Europe, including England, by storm. The fear that Ireland would provide competition to English commerce was a contributing factor, and since Ireland as a British colony was controlled by British policy-making, it remained an underdeveloped country: “Societies which are invaded...and dependent on the metropolitan society cannot develop because they are alienated; their political, economic, and cultural decision-making power is located outside themselves, in the invader society” (Freire 160).

This does not mean, however, that they were not affected by the Industrial Revolution. Any cottage industry that the Irish had enjoyed prior, such as linen, weaving, and lace, was crushed by competition from British factories. And though much is written about the impact of Ireland's growing population as a major factor contributing to the severity of the Famine, England's increasing population during the Industrial Revolution also had ramifications for Ireland. Grain was needed to feed English laborers and quickly became a lucrative cash crop for Irish landowners. As such Ireland became "a kind of granary for the rest of the United Kingdom" (Butterly and Shepperd 112). Livestock was also in demand further limiting the amount of arable land available for Irish tenants. Because the Irish peasantry had limited access to money, growing their own food became the only means available to feed themselves. The cash crops they grew, such as oats, wheat, and even potatoes, as well as the small number of livestock they raised were sold to pay exorbitant rents to the landowners, the majority of which belonged to members of the ruling Anglo-Irish Ascendancy or absentee English landlords.

While other countries advanced and grew stronger, Ireland continued to decline and become more vulnerable; its only seeming salvation: the potato, a nutritious, plentiful crop that grew in small plots of land not conducive to grazing or the cultivation of other crops, land virtually useless for generating high profits. As the Irish population exploded from five million people in 1800 to over eight million in 1841, the potato seemed the perfect solution: "The rising Irish population became dependent on the potato because it could be tilled easily, it yielded more crop per acre than any grain, it was a good subsistence food and could provide the nutritional value of grain at one-third the cost" (Coohill 61). Supplemented with buttermilk, eggs, and the occasional bit of meat, the

people could sustain themselves. Because the potato was easy to grow, people began migrating to western unpopulated areas where it could be sown in the rocky, barren, mountainous, and boggy terrain, land that ploughs could not reach and only a spade was needed to till. Potatoes, however, were perishable and could not be stored for extended periods causing “hunger months” in-between harvests; and Ireland’s wet weather can and did cause other famines in the past.

Though poverty was rampant amongst the Irish peasantry, for the most part they managed to survive, though sometimes just barely. Homes were often made from the mud of the earth with dirt floors and poor ventilation. Possessions were few, including furniture and clothing, and luxuries non-existent except for the occasional bit of tobacco and poteen (homemade Irish whiskey). As people married earlier and started families at a younger age and the peasant population continued to grow, the land was sub-divided amongst family members in order to provide a means to support themselves. The property was also sub-divided by landlords to generate more rents further overextending the land as plots became smaller and smaller. Consequently, the Great Famine of 1845 was a catastrophe just waiting to happen. The population was susceptible to any crack in their already delicate existence. When the blight arrived and politics failed them, their fate was sealed:

Most historians agree that the fragile Irish economy, more than anything else, made the country vulnerable to a catalytic event. Food collapse, a withering labor market, and evictions (“clearances”) all crushed the already impoverished Irish peasant laborer, and when potato production dropped...starvation was inevitable...Other countries in Europe grew potatoes and experienced crop diseases. But these countries had developed faster during the Industrial Revolution and benefited more. They could withstand the shock of the potato blight. (Butterly and Shepperd, 113)

As a result, there were few options left them, the primary one being emigration. But unless they had the means to relocate, or landowners who were willing to assist, this often wasn't a viable option. Hopelessness, helplessness, and despair would descend upon the land. A nation would starve while resources continued to leave the ports, a tradition of hunger, pillage, and poverty that had begun centuries before. The Famine would come close to achieving what British imperialism could not fully achieve on its own: the total subjugation, and near annihilation, of the Irish people. But the people would prevail. As Ireland crawled into the twentieth century, it would be the Anglo-Irish population like the Kingston's of *Golden Hills* that would eventually become expendable and obsolete along with disparaging images of the Irish peasantry that they had encouraged. In this regard, the Famine generation could quite easily be considered as Ireland's greatest generation for they had overcome a firmly entrenched tradition of imperialism, colonialism, and deprivation without giving up despite great adversity, surviving by sheer will to give birth to future generations that would triumph and achieve what their forefathers before them never could: nationhood and independence. Like Dracula and the memories of the Famine and years of imperialism that he represents, the Famine dead could not be laid to rest until Dracula, in the role of England, was destroyed and Ireland restored as a sovereign nation free from the infection of foreign rule/blood.

CHAPTER III

THE POLITICS OF HUNGER:

A COUNTRY FORSAKEN BY GOD AND MAN

The only way to prevent people from becoming habitually dependent on government is to bring operations to a close. The uncertainty about the new crop only makes it more necessary...Whatever may be done hereafter, these things should be stopped now, or you run the risk of paralysing all private enterprise and having this country on you for an indefinite number of years. (Charles Trevelyan, Head of the British Treasury, on ceasing operation of public relief works in 1846, quoted in Kee, p. 86)

The period prior to the Great Famine was a time of great political upheaval in Ireland. The relationship between Ireland and Britain was tenuous at best. To say that relief efforts would become highly politicized as a result would be a marked understatement. The question of who was to blame and why it had occurred would play a pivotal role in how to respond: What were the obligations of the British government? And if the Irish were to blame (whether aristocrat or peasant) did that absolve Great Britain from assisting a nation considered to be under its domain? If there is a perceived silence following the Great Famine in regards to Irish Literature, there was certainly no silence in regards to the political debate that raged on at the time.

Pre-Famine Politics

When the Act of Union was passed in 1801 uniting Ireland with England, the Irish were led to believe that Catholic Emancipation (in essence, a repeal of any lingering restrictions that had been imposed by the earlier Penal Laws) and an increase in Irish industry and trade were sure to follow. While the British Prime Minister at the time, William Pitt, sincerely believed that this would result, he, as is generally the case when discussing Irish affairs, had ulterior motives that would prove to be too shortsighted and designed to benefit the English over the Irish. He had hoped that by uniting Ireland with England and enfolding Irish Catholics into a predominately Protestant British realm the Irish problem of constant rebellion and religious divide would simply go away. Pitt's reasoning was twofold: first, if the Irish standard of living increased, discontent would decrease; second, Irish Catholics would now be part of the minority (Catholics) versus the majority (Protestants) as they had been when Ireland stood alone (Coohill 33). Needless to say, the Irish problem did not go away and would only grow worse with the advent of the Famine. What the Act of Union essentially accomplished was to dissolve the Irish Parliament in Dublin, transfer all political power to Westminster, unite the Church of England with the Church of Ireland, and further diminish Irish culture and identity. As a consequence, the Act of Union was construed as yet another example of British imperialism over Ireland:

For most of British MPs, the Union was thought to be a worthy and noble arrangement because it would bring benefits and better government to the Irish people. At best it was a sort of proto-internationalism based on what they saw as the real benefits of British government and British ideals. At worst, it was simply an attempt to subjugate another people and protect Britain's western flank from invaders. (Coohill 39)

The Irish remained a poor, primarily agrarian nation with outdated farming methods and little industrialization while the population and rents continued to rise. And the Catholic Emancipation bill would not be passed until 1829, almost three decades later.

One of the major political players before the beginning of the Famine was Daniel O'Connell, a Dublin lawyer who was instrumental in achieving Catholic Emancipation and who famously won a seat in Parliament in 1828 before the Emancipation bill had been passed. Although as an Irish-Catholic he was not permitted to claim that seat, this feat demonstrated his ability to unite the common people. When the bill was passed and he was able to claim his seat in Parliament (after having to run for a second time to make it legitimate), his attention turned towards repealing the Act of Union. Deeply affected by the unsuccessful uprising of 1798 and another that followed in 1803 led by Robert Emmet that also resulted in a large loss of Irish lives, O'Connell was an advocate of peaceful change through politics rather than violence (Kee 71). In 1843, just before the Famine struck, O'Connell and his camp of supporters began once again to hold what had come to be known as "monster meetings", a rallying of the masses in peaceful demonstrations that proved to be immensely successful in helping gain Catholic Emancipation in 1829. While the meetings were effective in assembling the people, they also led to the eventual arrest and imprisonment of O'Connell. After his release a year later, he was afflicted with poor health and died in 1847. By this time the Famine was raging throughout Ireland and political issues and thoughts of Irish nationalism and independence were replaced with the stark reality of having to stay alive (Kee 74). O'Connell's importance cannot be overstated, however, for "He had made Irish popular

opinion a force in British politics for the first time” (Kee 71), a force that would gain momentum once the Famine was over and a postmortem of the event could be completed.

***In Practice and in Literature:
Religion, Economics, and the Famine***

As early signs of the Famine began to spread across Ireland, British opinion of the Irish was extremely low. Complaints that the Irish peasantry had brought the calamity down upon themselves was not only a common belief but actively propagated by various groups with similar intent: to place culpability and therefore the responsibility of relief onto others. While a good number of British people were moved to sympathy and did work tirelessly to help raise money for starving Famine victims, this notion that the Irish were responsible for their own suffering would have significant political ramifications as well as religious. And as the brief look at Irish history recounted in this paper reveals, Irish politics cannot be studied without including religion, the two having such a long and interwoven history together; and this tradition would only intensify as the Famine continued to worsen. The Famine was soon labeled as Divine Providence, a sign of God’s wrath for sins committed and for embracing the pagan, superstitious practices associated with the Catholic Church. For many, then, to interfere would be akin to sacrilege, an obstruction of God’s divine will and divine plan for mankind. Hunger equates with punishment, providing aid with blasphemy. Their God was a vengeful God who punished the weak and helpless and rewarded the rich and powerful. When the potato crop continued to fail and donor fatigue began to settle in, this concept of Providentialism allowed many to adopt the view of allowing the Famine to run its course – unpleasant though it may be for the starving masses.

Nowhere in the literary examples employed in this study is this notion of Divine Providence more evident than in *Golden Hills*, a Famine narrative rife with examples of the religious and political dissent taking place between the Irish and the English during this period. What is so significant about this novel is that it presents a point-of-view seldom depicted in Famine literature, that of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy who had their own unique experience and perspective to relate. As such, Famine imagery is aimed towards a specific audience and with a specific purpose in mind. Rather than presenting a sympathetic rendition of the starving poor, we are given just the opposite: a sympathetic rendition of the aristocracy and how they were affected by the Famine. Consequently, the Famine is depicted in a positive manner, the theory of Divine Providence/Punishment fully embraced, and government policy is either praised or criticized, depending on how it affected the aristocracy. Likewise, the Poor Law is addressed from an Anglo-Irish perspective as are evictions, Irish rebellion, and emigration. The class divide between the primarily Protestant Anglo-Irish gentry and primarily Irish-Catholic peasantry begun centuries before by British imperialism was firmly established by this time and evidenced throughout the novel. The belief in the preeminence of the ruling class is firmly upheld by the Kingston family and not only for the peasantry's idle, pagan, uncivilized ways, though that was a big part of it. Peasants are also chastised for generations of rebellion against the Britain government. As Mr. Kingston observes to his children while quoting scripture from the bible:

“There is a verse in one of the Psalms that struck me lately: ‘He turneth a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein.’ It is just so with this unfortunate country; I believe the famine to be a judicial punishment for bloodshed lying upon it...Strange it is,” he further said, “how from the faults of men their punishment is evolved, as from a plant its fruit. The slothful character and improvident habits of our

Irish peasantry have originated a vast proportion of their present misery. This suffering has been laid in store for them by generations of indolence and animalism.” (249)

Little consideration is given to the oppression that has been inflicted upon the peasantry by generations of the elite or how their actions may have contributed to the “present misery” of the poor. When his son William asks, “But...are not many now suffering for the ancestral faults and sins? The little children, what have they done?” Mr. Kingston replies, “What did the children of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, when they were swallowed down alive into the pit? Or the children in Sodom and Gomorrah, when fire rained from heaven. This is one of the questions which may safely be left to the solution of Infinite Justice” (249). Here the author creates an opportunity to address a matter that is difficult to explain and rationalize while remaining sympathetic to the audience: that of the suffering of innocents. If the children have to suffer due to the sins of their father, it is all a part of the Divine Wisdom that man cannot begin to fathom. In this regard, Irish children are presented as martyrs atoning for the misdeeds of those who came before them. Through their deaths, the cycle of sin and savagery can be broken and a new and improved Ireland can emerge. Though they are innocent, their deaths will be for the greater good of the nation – unwittingly ironic because such deaths will also become fodder for future Irish nationalists.

Just as ironic are Mr. Kingston claims that the Famine was a consequence of the actions and attitudes that had been passed down from generation to generation in the Irish peasantry as the same could be said of the privileged elite who passed down a perception of superiority and entitlement to their own offspring. Indeed, the text is dominated by a prevailing sense of self-righteousness and anti-Irish sentiment. This is evident when his

daughter, Lina, who is oftentimes portrayed as kind, generous, virtuous, and downright saintly, attributes the deaths of peasant children to “Infinite Mercy” (249); and her brother William concurs: “Perhaps an early and certain heaven is better for them, even though the way be through pain, than a prolonged life on earth” (250). The lack of compassion displayed by the Kingston family is decidedly disturbing to the present day reader as is the narrator’s belief that the Famine was a blessing in disguise, for later in the novel we are told that “in 1850, the horizon was clearing... The lessened agricultural population had more elbow-room; and new systems of cropping the land were introduced among the peasantry, which in a measure displaced the treacherous potato” (266). In the author’s attempt to tell the Anglo-Irish’s side of the story, such logic would absolve the aristocracy from responsibility and defend their course of action/inaction as adherence to the will of God.

Popular economic theories at the time also supported principles similar to Providentialism’s hands-off approach, the most prevalent among them *laissez-faire* and Malthusianism. At the core of both these models is the concept that government should not intervene. The *laissez-faire* theory (French for “let do” or leave alone) had been in place in England for several decades prior to the Famine and espoused a free market trade system with little to no government intercession:

This theory, usually termed *laissez-faire*, let people do as they think best, insisted that in the economic sphere individuals should be allowed to pursue their own interests and asserted that the Government should interfere as little as possible. Not only were the rights of property sacred; private enterprise was revered and respected and given almost complete liberty, and on this theory which incidentally gave the employer and the landlord freedom to exploit his fellow men, the prosperity of nineteenth-century England had unquestionably been based. (Woodham-Smith 54)

This policy was rigorously applied, even during periods of economic decline based on the firm belief that the market/economy would correct itself in due course. To interfere was considered “unnatural” and would only make matters worse (Coohill 64).

The Malthusian model was based on the principles of overpopulation that appeared in Reverend Thomas Malthus’s 1798 treatise, *An Essay on the Principles of Population*, which basically believed that famine and disease were corrective acts of nature to deplete a nation’s population that had grown larger than its food supply:

Malthus’s argument of 1798, when applied to the Irish Famine forty-seven years later, played well in London, where anti-Irish sentiment was high. The Irish were often referred to as ignorant, primitive, and sketched in London newspaper cartoons with simian features. To the Malthusians in England, the Great Famine was part of God’s plan for humankind, or at least that part of humanity who were Irish. The prevailing view was that there was little or nothing that could (or should) be done to prevent or avert starvation. It was viewed as a “positive check” to bring a sinful population, often depicted as subhuman, back into balance with its food supply. Their suffering, while regrettable, was considered as inevitable and natural. (Butterly and Shepperd 46-7)

In order to avoid such suffering, Malthus, a clergyman for the Church of England, recommended diligence, hard work, and pious living. While there is validity to Malthus’s theory that over-population could eventually overcome a nation’s food supply, as was cited earlier in the *Gold Hills* example of the Kingston’s pervading sense of superiority overshadowing any sympathy that might be garnered for their being targeted by militiamen, Malthus’s theory, too, is underscored by a lack of humanity, morality, ethics, and perhaps most disturbingly of all, Christianity. For a population that considered themselves superior, pious, and highly civilized, many exhibited a staggering lack of charity and civility towards their fellow, less fortunate brethren.

Due to Ireland's lack of industry and free trade with nations other than Britain, neither theory could pragmatically be applied towards the Irish peasantry who were so far removed from economic policy and any financial benefit that might result from it, any further hands-off approach during times of famine would only place greater distress upon the people and, in turn, result in a greater number of fatalities. Strict adherence to both of these policies would unfortunately play a pivotal role in exacerbating and prolonging the effects of the Famine.

***In Practice and in Literature:
Politics and Policies***

This is not to say, however, that actions and systems were not put into place when word of impending famine in Ireland reached the British Isle in 1845, actions and systems that would, similar to *Golden Hills*, be critically or favorably incorporated into Irish Famine literature depending on the author's perspective of the event. Famine had occurred in Ireland on numerous occasions in the past, so Britain did have some methods in place to try to counteract its effects. Sir Robert Peel, Prime Minister of England at the time, had followed the usual course of action which included the setting up of local workhouses (a.k.a. poorhouses) and food depots to distribute food to the hungry. He also created a Scientific Commission to try to determine what had caused the potato blight and if anything could be done to save what was left of the crop but to no avail. But perhaps the most significant (and daring) action that Peel took was his decision to import £100,000 worth of Indian corn from America to serve as a substitute for the failed potato and to pursue the repeal of Britain's infamous Corn Laws which heavily taxed foreign grain imported into the United Kingdom as a means to protect the price of home-grown grain (Woodham-Smith 42). This was especially courageous due to the enormous

backlash he received, and knew he would receive, from members of Parliament who rigorously supported the law. Despite the controversy that it caused, “His purchase of Indian corn proved the decisive factor in relieving the distress of 1845-6” (Woodham-Smith 54). Peel’s plan, however, did not include just giving the corn away, but to use it as a means to keep food prices down when high demand and short supply would normally cause them to rise. The government also put other schemes into place which included employing the peasantry in public works which primarily involved road works commonly referred to as “famine roads” that led to nowhere.

The main drawback to these systems was the unanticipated scope of the calamity that was on a scale that had never been seen before. The British government and British people simply did not know how to respond to an event of this magnitude (Butterly and Shepherd 50). While the importation of Indian corn helped alleviate the immediate situation in 1845, it fell far short of what would be needed and the food depots were often devoid of food: “Government supplies were only a drop in the ocean compared with the needs of Ireland. Potatoes worth £3,500,000 had been lost and to make good that deficiency...the Commission had at its disposal £100,000 of Indian corn and an uncertain quantity of biscuit” (Woodham-Smith 74). There were also difficulties in milling the corn, which was much harder than grain, and making it ready for human consumption. And when it was ready, many did not know what to do with it:

Most people did not know how to cook Indian meal; some tried to eat the meal raw, because they lacked fuel for cooking...The consequences of consuming inadequately ground and incorrectly cooked Indian meal were painful. The flint-hard grain was sharp and irritating, and capable of piercing the intestinal wall. Little wonder it was so unpopular with the Irish who called it ‘brimstone’ on account of its bright yellow colour. (Crawford 64)

This abhorrence that the peasantry had towards Indian corn as well as the difficulty involved in preparing it is a common topic in Famine literature and addressed in Anthony Trollope's renowned Famine novel, *Castle Richmond* (1860). Like Hely Walshe's *Golden Hills*, Trollope's work is relevant when discussing the politics of the Famine era because it reflects the politics of that era. Also told from an Anglo-Irish perspective, it is done so with a bit more sympathy than its successor. British by birth, Trollope had spent eighteen years in Ireland serving as clerk to the Post-Office Surveyor and had developed a great affection for the land and its people. During his tenure in Ireland, he also achieved some success as a writer, success that had eluded him in England (Fegan 104). Arriving in 1841, he lived in Ireland throughout the Famine. As an Englishman living in Ireland during this politically-explosive time, his loyalties were conflicted. On the one hand he witnessed first-hand the hardships that the starving suffered, while on the other, he denied that such conditions existed, oftentimes downplaying what he observed in a series of letters that he wrote for the London-based weekly, the *Examiner*: "The Irish press is not proverbial for a strict adherence to unadorned truth; and, under the circumstances, it was perhaps not surprising that writers habituated to disdain facts should exaggerate and compose novels; but those horrid novels were copied into the English papers, and were then believed by English readers" (Kelleher 42).

Still haunted by his fragmented sense of allegiance, Trollope would write his own fictional account of the Famine ten years later in a half-hearted attempt to make amends for his earlier reports that diminished the severity of the suffering endured. While there are instances when the narrative is sympathetic to the plight of the peasantry and acts as

their champion, there are others that demonstrate that same sense of superiority and detachment that had been ingrained into the aristocracy by centuries of supremacy, further underlining the class divide between them. As Margaret Scanlan notes, “The narrative never enters the minds of the mostly nameless Catholic Irish; the starving have no psychological conflicts; no history; no culture; although they live in Cork, they do not even speak Irish. Appearing in 1860, a decade too late to satisfy our desire to see a great writer summoning his nation to action, *Castle Richmond* seems never to satisfy anyone” (67). Trollope fluctuates between defending the Irish peasantry and denying claims of Divine Providence and blaming them for their own misfortune while defending the aristocracy and government policy and inaction that failed the starving poor. An early review of his work published in the *Saturday Review* on May 19, 1860 captures this discord stating, “It is of course impossible to persuade him to give up a practice which he appears to have adopted in principle, but the milk and the water really should be in separate pails” (Kelleher, 39-40). The keen wit of the reviewer brings up another peculiar practice that we shall see is common in early Famine literature, that of using this cataclysmic event as a backdrop or secondary plot to enhance a primary storyline filled with romance, mystery, and intrigue: “Perhaps the most curious part of the book is that which relates to the Irish famine. It is impossible not to feel that that was the part of it which Mr. Trollope really cared, but that, as he had to get a novel out of it, he was duty bound to mix up a hash of Desmonds and Fitzgeralds with the Indian meal on which his mind was fixed as he wrote” (Kelleher 40).

Carleton’s continued dual loyalty is demonstrated in one particular scene in which a woman surrounded by her hungry children approaches the local food depot to complain

about the Indian meal that she had purchased there earlier in the day. In the process she admonishes the heroine of the novel, Clara Desmond, who suggests that the peasant woman did not cook it properly: “All the cooking on ‘arth wouldn’t make food of that fit for a Christian—feel of the roughness of it’—and she turned to another woman who stood near her; ‘would you like to be putting sharp points like that into your children’s bellies?’” (132). When one of the charity workers insinuates that the woman should be grateful for having been given the meal, the peasant woman’s outrage is palpable: “Who says it war guv’ me?’ said the angry mother. ‘Didn’t I buy it, here at this counter, with Mike’s own hard-‘arned money? and it’s chaiting us they are. Give me back my money.’ And she looked at Clara as though she meant to attack her across the counter” (133). Initially the narrator acknowledges the validity of her complaint and the poor quality of the meal: “The food, as food, was not nice to look at; and could not have been nice to eat, or probably easy of digestion when eaten” (131). Soon, however, the focus shifts to the ungratefulness of the poor towards members of the upper-class who only wish to help them: “The hardest burden which had to be borne by those who exerted themselves at this period was the ingratitude of the poor for whom they worked;—or rather I should say thanklessness” (133). However, there is more involved in this scene than the mere meting out of food to the poor; there is also the matter of what type of relief would be provided, who had the authority to dispense it, and who would be eligible to receive it, all determined by British officials and policy-makers who were oftentimes far-removed from the harsh reality of the situation and on a completely different economic and social standing than those that suffered: “The Irish were poor, rural, far from London, and Catholic” (Butterfly and Shepherd 50). The starving peasantry had no voice in the matter.

They were dependent on policy made by those who could little understand or relate to the severity of their predicament.

This disconnect between the politically elite and the powerless peasantry is depicted throughout Trollope's novel. Later Herbert Fitzgerald is approached at the gates of the Big House by another mother asking for money, which he is reluctant to give because government policy stipulates that no relief should be given to persons outside the workhouses: "But Herbert had learned deep lessons of political economy, and was by no means disposed to give promiscuous charity on the roadside" (292). Instead of addressing the inadequacies of the workhouse and other relief policies put in place that made it necessary for people to take to the road to beg, the narrator goes into a lengthy and unrelated discourse on the physical attributes of the peasantry as abbreviated below:

...neither the mother nor the children were comely. She was short and broad in the shoulders, though wretchedly thin; her bare legs seemed to be of nearly the same thickness up to the knee, and the naked limbs of the children were like yellow sticks. It is strange how various are the kinds of physical developments among the Celtic peasantry in Ireland. In many places they are singularly beautiful, especially as children...But then again in a neighbouring district they will be found to be squat, uncouth, and in no way attractive to the eye. (290-1)

The emphasis is placed on the physical unattractiveness of the peasants rather than the physical characteristics of starvation of which they clearly exhibit, indicative of the insurmountable class divide firmly in place between those who have power and agency and those who do not: "Throughout the scene, the male narrator as observer carries the power to inspect and judge, to define what is attractive and repulsive" (Kelleher 50). The narrator assumes the patriarchal voice of authority associated with imperialism in which the dominating culture has the power to name, to define, and to make policy within a

given society. Those who are not part of the process are excluded, often with dire consequences as was seen throughout the Famine.

As the Famine worsened and relief costs continued to soar, newly appointed Prime Minister and strong advocate of the *laissez-faire* philosophy, Lord John Russell (who replaced Peel after his disastrous repeal of the Corn Laws) and his supporters were intent on placing the financial burden for the Irish problem solely upon Irish landowners who they blamed for the conditions that led to the severity of the Famine in Ireland, such as absenteeism and the sub-division of property. This strategy was also fully endorsed by Charles Trevelyan, head of the British treasury, who had little sympathy for the plight of the Irish people and who had famously declared in 1847 that the Famine was officially over when the potato crops didn't fail as severely and as widespread as they had before, primarily because so few had been planted (Gray 99). The Famine, therefore, came to be viewed as an opportunity to initiate economic reform in Ireland, so that in 1847, at the height of the Great Famine when relief was needed most, many Irish landowners were themselves facing financial ruin due to decreased revenues and excessive living (Woodham-Smith 63). There were also few tenants from which to collect the funds as they were either "destitute or dead or in the workhouse itself" (Hickey 189).

Mass evictions that placed further hardship upon the poor was the outcome. One provision of the extended Poor Law, known as the £4-rating clause, mandated that landlords pay poor rates for all their holdings valued at £4 or less, causing landowners in the most destitute areas in the south and west of Ireland to evict tenants who could not afford to pay their rents (Woodham-Smith 364). But perhaps the most devastating policy to emerge which resulted in mass evictions was the Gregory Clause initiated by Irish

landowner and member of Parliament, William Gregory, who helped pass an amendment to the Poor Law Extension which stated that “no tenant holding more than a quarter-acre of land was eligible for public assistance either in the workhouse or outside it. To become eligible, he had to surrender the holding to his landlord...its enormous potential as an estate-clearing device was widely recognized in parliament” (Donnelly 159). If the clause held “enormous potential” for the landlords, it also had an enormous impact on the peasantry: “Throughout the rest of the Famine years the Gregory clause or ‘Gregoryism’ became the byword for the worst miseries of the disaster – eviction, exile, disease, and death” (Donnelly 160).

In order to avoid starvation, many gave up their land to qualify for relief, never to have it returned to them even if they did survive, which, as illustrated in *Golden Hills*, was a rare occurrence for such individuals. When Mr. Kingston learns that one of his former tenants, Pat Mangan, is on the verge of death suffering from both hunger and famine fever, his shock is clearly misplaced, for it would be a greater shock if the man had flourished after giving up his plot of land which was his only source of income:

“Can it be possible?” said Mr. Kingston and William in a breath. “Pat Mangan, of Slievemore!” They recollected the comely broad-built farmer, who had regularly brought his rent to the office each May and November; had given up his holdings, with a touching submission, when in justice to the landlord he could no longer retain them; and had retried somewhere out of ken, among the labouring masses of the people, to hide his indigence, and earn a livelihood, if possible. Thus had the struggle for existence ended. (247)

Though meant to invoke a kinship between Mr. Kingston and his former tenant and commend the man’s submissiveness and willingness to give up his holding when he could no longer afford it, this passage instead highlights Mr. Kingston’s lack of sympathy towards this man who had always paid his rents on time and been an exemplary tenant.

The consequences produced by this transfer of relief efforts from the British government to Irish landowners are also addressed in *Golden Hills*, again from an Anglo-Irish perspective. Because it shifted the financial burden of feeding the peasantry onto the aristocracy, Mr. Kingston begins to feel the effects of the Famine firsthand as he ironically bemoans the injustice of this new system:

“That is, in fact, throwing the whole weight of the destitute on the landed proprietors and tenant farmers, who are already crushed to the earth with burdens of all sorts...How are we to stand it? The poor-rate is already tremendous, often more than twenty shillings in the pound. Even with government loans, we must sink.” (261)

While he may once again have a valid point, the plight of the starving masses outside the boundaries of Golden Hills seems a bit more pressing. Many of those who had enjoyed the fruits of Ireland’s resources for generations were now disinclined to give back to the country that had provided them and their ancestors with much wealth, power, and authority, all elements needed to alleviate the Famine’s damaging effects.

The road-making scheme, another common topic in Famine literature, was an unorganized disaster from the start, the malnourished men who were hired often had to walk miles to the work site; were expected to work in cold, wet weather without proper attire, such as coats and shoes; had little supervision on what to do once they arrived; were often too weak to do the hard labor demanded of them; and were frequently not paid (oftentimes due to the corruption of those in charge). And if they were paid, the wages were so low they could barely purchase the Indian meal which was the only food source available within their price range. Also, the workhouses (many bordering on destitution themselves), which was often their only other recourse, were prohibited from offering aid to people who did not reside within, and since the number needing assistance far

outnumbered the amount that could be accommodated, this forbade relief to the majority of people in need. The narrator of *Golden Hills* presents a somewhat mixed view on public works. On the one hand, the government's introduction of such work is hailed as laudable, attracting "the attentions of all Europe" (234); on the other, the road-works are described as "a species of laborious idleness" for the peasant "loved his ease better than the pence to be gained by harder exertion" and "preferred a lazy fiddling with the pickaxe to the higher wage for which his sinews should strive" (235). That the Irish laborer's sinews are now malnourished and he hasn't the strength left to lift a pickaxe due to starvation is of little consequence for long-held biases prevail.

Castle Richmond also addresses the futility of the road works in Trollope's usual half-hearted approach. When describing the Irish peasantry crew, the narrator tells us:

They were wretched-looking creatures, half-clad, discontented, with hungry eyes, each having at his heart's core a deep sense of injustice done personally upon him. They hated this work of cutting hills from the commencement to the end,—hated it, though it was to bring them wages and save them and theirs from actual famine and death. They had not been accustomed to the discomfort of being taken far from their homes to their daily work. Very many of them had never worked regularly for wages, day after day, and week after week. (309)

The author once again demonstrates his disconcerting capacity to sympathize and criticize simultaneously. Though his approach is softened a bit, it still has a rather condescending tone to it as found in *Golden Hills*, leaving the reader wondering whether he is championing the Irish or insulting them.

Other Contributing Factors

Fishing, too, was limited. This is an important factor to mention as there are many who wonder how a people living on a small island in the middle of the sea could starve. As Cecil Woodham-Smith describes it, "Fishing was a backwards and neglected industry

in Ireland. A large part of the Irish coast, in the south-west, west and north-west is perilous; there are cliffs, rocks, treacherous currents, sudden squalls, and, above all, the Atlantic swell, surging from America across thousands of miles of ocean” (289). Because the weather was also unpredictable, dependable gear and sailing vessels were needed, all of which were either pawned or well out of the peasantry’s price range, as was the seafood caught by the big fisheries. Food that was available close to shore, such as herring, cockles, limpets, and seaweed were consumed to the point that “In times of famine beaches were stripped bare of the tidal crop” (Crawford 65). Fish in rivers and streams were depleted as was any other edible wildlife such as rabbits and fowl.

In regards to exports, there are many who contend, both then and now, that had the government banned food from leaving Irish ports, as they had done during the famine of 1741, many lives would have been spared and the full impact of the Famine avoided. Others doubt that it would have made much of a difference, even if the government had allowed it. The main reason: the Irish peasantry simply did not have the means to purchase the goods. As a consequence, should additional food have remained in Ireland, it is highly doubtful that they would have had access to it: “Other historians propose that even had exports been halted, and food retained inside Ireland, perhaps as many as 3 million Irish poor would still not have been able to locate and purchase food. They were the poorest of the poor, at the bottom of Ireland’s economy” (Butterly and Shepherd 50). Primarily illiterate and unemployed, the peasantry did not have access to revenue-producing assets or work other than farming or laboring. This imbalance is what made them so dependent upon the potato to begin with: an unequal distribution of land and resources which kept them in a cycle of poverty that was hard to break. Regardless,

witnessing carts of goods passing them on the roads or watching them being loaded onto ships for transport to other ports had a profound effect on the starving masses, further instilling feelings of bitterness and resentment towards the British government:

The spectacle of cart loads of wheat, barley, and oats continuing to be exported under armed guard, from Ireland while the peasantry starved is an indelible picture in the minds of Irishmen. Associated with this powerful image is the belief that prohibition of grain exports would have averted famine. This is largely a myth, although as with all myths it contains a kernel of truth. (Crawford 64)

The psychological impact would have been tremendous. Combined with Britain's reluctance to tamper with the economic principles of *laissez-faire*, a continued alliance with Britain would be hard to sell to the Irish people going forward: "It is seen, and taught, as 'the historical wrong that sealed the fate of the unhappy Union between Britain and Ireland: a partner so uncaring in time of need deserved no loyalty from Irishmen'" (Butterly and Shepherd 42).

If the Famine was seen as an opportunity to instigate reform in Ireland economically, it was also seen as an opportunity to initiate religious reform as well. At about the same time that the Poor Act was being amended, the public relief works, by order of Charles Trevelyan, were being suspended and in their place soup kitchens erected to help feed the millions of starving people:

Although there were disagreements in the cabinet and the treasury, the government set up soup kitchens throughout the spring and summer of 1847. Compared with the public works projects, the soup kitchens were more successful. During the summer of 1847, three million people per day were being fed at a cost of two pence per person. The total cost of the soup kitchens in 1847 was around £1,700,000, a fraction of what the public works had cost... The soup kitchens, however, were always intended to be temporary, and were shut down (amid much protest) in September 1847, just as they appeared to be having a beneficial effect. (Coohill 66)

Unfortunately for those dependent upon the public works, they were shut down before the soup kitchens were in full operation causing additional deaths that might have been prevented had the two been better coincided (Kee 95).

The majority of soup kitchens were run by local government-organized unions or districts while others were privately run by religious orders, most of which were there for no other motive than to provide relief to the hungry. Others, however, were reported as having less altruistic motives. Accusations of proselytizing or attempts to convert Catholics to Protestantism in exchange for food were widespread and would result in feelings of resentment and betrayal by the Irish towards the British long after the Famine had ended. Those that did accept the soup under such conditions bore the stigma of being labeled as “jumpers” and were considered as traitors to their neighbors who refused to renounce their faith for food. *Castle Richmond* adds fuel to this simmering fire when discussing the pragmatic, yet disturbing philosophy of the local Protestant clergyman, Mr. Townsend, lending credence to reports that this practice did indeed take place:

But neither Mr. nor Mrs. Townsend were content to bestow their charities without some other object than that of relieving material wants by their alms. Many infidels, Mr. Townsend argued, had been made believers by the miracle of the loaves and fishes; and therefore it was permissible for him to make use of the same means for drawing over proselytes to the true church. If he could find hungry Papists and convert them into well-fed Protestants by one and the same process, he must be doing a double good, he argued;—could by no possibility be doing an evil. (159)

Here the narrator demonstrates a distinct sense of irony when Mr. Townsend compares his rather begrudging distribution of food with the magnitude of the miracle of the loaves and fishes implying that they would instill the same sense of wonder and faith within the recipients (and comparing himself with Christ in the process). That the same sense of generosity and compassion are blatantly missing from the Townsends’ endeavor, key

elements in establishing the early Christian faith, is not lost on the reader. The Townsends' charity comes with a high price that requires the starving poor to forsake their soul in order to save it, making the reader wonder how deeply the Townsends actually value the peasantry's faith if it could be purchased with just a few crusts of bread or handfuls of Indian meal.

If "souperism", as it was called, did take place, though, it was on a limited basis and more good than harm resulted from the soup kitchens that were operating, the real tragedy being that they were closed down before the full impact of the Famine was felt during the winter of 1848-49 (Coohill 70). However, these claims of proselytization, along with the transfer of financial responsibility from Britain to Ireland, the government's reluctance to help, and the continuation of exports led to accusations of genocide, especially by Irish nationalists: "As Irish landlords and the British government were increasingly viewed as the human agents of misery, exile, and death, providentialism could only have seemed the cruelest of jokes to victims and their advocates. From many different mouths all over Ireland in 1848 the fierce, piercing, unforgiving language of genocide was spilling out" (Donnelly 173). While genocide might be a strong term for the insufficient relief efforts initiated during the Great Famine, it is easy to understand how emotions could overcome those who suffered as well as those who helplessly watched that suffering. Descriptions of the peasantry as being violent, rebellious, and useless were deeply imbedded within the British mentality, descriptions that were perpetuated by the British press: "Throughout the Famine, the role of the British press in shaping attitudes towards relief policies was crucial. *The Times* and *Punch*, in particular, constantly reinforced negative stereotypes of Irish people and

suggested that providing further relief would be a waste of British taxpayers' money" (Kinealy 20). The overall effects that such bias and disregard for human life had wrought throughout the Famine are stunning: an estimated four million people were left without food that first year alone when the potato crop had failed (Woodham-Smith 74); over one million people were reported to have died of illness and/or starvation (Póirtéir 9); 1.5 million people to have emigrated during its approximate six year duration (Kinealy 7); and another 750,000 to one million evicted from their lands (Butterly and Shepherd 183). Unfortunately, it did not end there. Following the Famine, people continued to emigrate and people continued to die, further incapacitating the country and prolonging its recovery. As Butterly and Shepherd note, "as many as 3 million Irish emigrated out of the country between 1845 and 1860, many to North America, and...perhaps as many as 2 million of those who remained died from the effects of starvation. Ireland did not recover from these economic and social losses until well into the twentieth century" (44).

Alongside Irish accusations of genocide were British accusations that the Irish were ungrateful for all that had been done for them. Though Britain's failure to provide adequate aid to the Irish may not have been an intentional act of genocide, it did demonstrate an appalling lack of urgency as well as compassion for the suffering of the poor and underprivileged. In order to offset the potential effects of famine, action must be taken swiftly and consistently, both of which were lacking during Ireland's Great Famine: "Generally, starvation and famine...are most frequently characterized by extensive deaths that require fast intervention – or a cold, political calculation of nonintervention" (Butterly and Shepperd 30), as prescribed by Malthusianism and *laissez-faire*. So while it could be said that the government wasn't intentionally trying to

kill the starving Irish, it could also appear to many that they weren't actively trying to save them either.

Such was the political mood and actuality in Ireland during the years of the Great Famine. Feelings of resentment, frustration, betrayal, and distrust, resulting from centuries of oppression, poverty and degradation simmered as economic, political, and religious restraints were systematically and continuously imposed upon the people by a higher, mightier force. And while historians and scholars continue to debate the different aspects of the Famine, such as culpability, causes, and representation in literature, most would likely agree, however, that while politicians debated and people tried to divert financial responsibility, people suffered and starved needlessly while others did not. Policies were based on bias and a deep-rooted perception of superiority and inferiority, policies that made the upper privileged class judge and jury of the lower disadvantaged class, the sentence, in most cases, death or exile. As quoted so succinctly in Butterly and Shepherd, during times of famine, "peasants always starve" (35) while "Rich people don't" (39). The class, religious, and political divide gained a new and disturbing momentum during the Famine years, and Irish Literature would come to reflect this as well as the trauma that such injustice induced, a trauma that would haunt the survivors and their dependents for decades to come as they tried to come to terms with and articulate the horrors that had been cast down upon them by God and man.

CHAPTER IV

THE STIGMA OF STARVATION:

GUILT, SHAME, BLAME, AND GRIEF

Its only inmate was a little infant, whose mother was most likely seeking milk for it. On slightly moving the tattered coverlet of the cradle, a shiver ran over the whole body of the infant, and the next moment the dark, emaciated little face relapsed again into stillness. Probably the mother returned to find her child dead. Mr. Monsell burst into a flood of tears. Nothing was said; but a few days later, on Lord Arundel's return to England, the inspector at Kilkee received a letter from him enclosing a cheque for two hundred pounds to be added to the local relief fund. (Aubrey de Vere, son of a County Limerick landowner in 1846, quoted in Fegan, p. 449)

As discussed earlier, centuries of imperialism and colonialism had produced a long history of domination, poverty, and illiteracy among Ireland's proliferate peasant population which had long-lasting psychological effects including the trauma of having one's culture, customs, language, land, basic human rights, and identity slowly stripped away to the point that they were marginalized and virtually powerless in their own country. Combined with the demeaning characteristics that were forced upon them, such as drunk, violent, poor, superstitious, abusive, and pig-in-the-pantry peasantry (Watson 17), a distorted sense of identity would linger long after the Revivalists would attempt to restore it, leading to a disassociation with the Irish language (which had been considered as uncivilized and barbaric) and the peasant identity and image (much to the chagrin of

Revivalist, William Butler Yeats). Anger, resentment, and hatred towards their oppressors would also take its toll, along with feelings of self-loathing for allowing themselves to become conquered by a foreign power: “So far as hate survived, it had now to include self-hate and self-contempt: quite important components in the psychology of some Irishmen as of other ‘colonized peoples’” (Watson 20). Paulo Freire also considered this effect that years of suppression and derogatory descriptions could have upon a people: “Self-deprecation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressors hold over them. So often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything – that they are sick, lazy, and unproductive – that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness” (49). This sense of being unfit or unworthy would lead to feelings of guilt, shame, and self-blame within the Irish peasantry throughout the Famine and beyond. Coupled with feelings of overwhelming grief and unmitigated sorrow, trauma was an inevitable outcome.

Trauma and Famine: An Application of Freud and Carruth

In many respects the psychological trauma associated with the Famine mirrored the psychological trauma inflicted upon the Irish peasantry by imperialism; therefore, when the hardships and horrors of the Famine arrived, the Irish peasantry’s psyche was already in a tenuous state. The list of trauma-inducing horrors that Famine victims witnessed and experienced collectively is a long and dismal one beginning with the shock and incomprehensibility of watching the potato crops fail not once but repeatedly while there was nothing they could do to prevent it. Other trauma soon followed and would include watching helplessly as friends, neighbors, and family members slowly starved to

death or became ill with famine related illnesses, such as dysentery, smallpox, and famine fever/typhus; being evicted from their dwellings and the subsequent homelessness that led to mass migration and emigration; witnessing the roads and fields littered with corpses with no means to bury or protect them from the hungry scavenger animals that fed upon them, such as stray dogs, rats, and crows; the knowledge that food was available in the towns and markets but having no means to buy it; and, the despair when realization struck that no one was going to help them. Whether they were evicted from their homes or not, many were forced to sell what little possessions they had and leave their dwellings behind to wander the roads and towns to beg or seek admittance into workhouses while others resorted to prostitution, crime, and the consumption of nettles, grass, and domestic animals in order to survive, infusing them with an overwhelming sense of shame and degradation along with their other hardships.

As a result of witnessing, experiencing, and perhaps even committing some of the aforementioned atrocities, if there *is* a survivor's silence following the Great Famine, it may very well be a part of the healing process as Margaret Kelleher suggests: "Such a silence may denote depths of pain, shame and of guilt on the part of those who survived, and a necessary repression of the past in order to move forward" (4). And Irish Literature would come to reveal this buried turmoil by depicting characters afflicted with symptoms of trauma, such as repression, self-destructive behavior, repetition, aimlessness, and a lost sense of purpose; and Ireland portrayed as a nation suffering from social disintegration, a virtual wasteland devoid of inhabitants and humanity.

Amidst all this turmoil was also the demise of civilized behavior as social strictures and family structures collapsed: "kinship and neighbourhood ties eventually

loosen or dissolve, theft becomes endemic, collective resistance yields to apathy, and group integrity is shattered” (Greene 250). Food riots, the looting of supply carts and shops, as well as stealing from one’s neighbor became the new norm. Incidents of infanticide, cannibalism, and parents stealing food from young children and children stealing food from elderly parents were alleged and reported: “I have seen mothers snatch food from the hands of their starving children; known a son to engage in a fatal struggle with his father for a potato; and have seen parents look on the putrid bodies of their offspring without evincing a symptom of sorrow” (Kelleher 24). As these accounts indicate, people became consumed by their gnawing hunger and as a result, indifferent to the suffering around them, their primary concern: finding food.

Victims were not the only ones who were traumatized; many who witnessed the horrors were also affected. Among them: travelers, tourists, and journalists, sympathetic landowners and property managers, the clergy (both Catholic and Protestant), and doctors and other relief workers who had come from England and other nations to help, bringing images back to their homeland that would haunt them long after. As Captain Wynne reported to his superior at the Board of Works in December 24, 1846:

I ventured through that parish [Clare Abbey] this day, to ascertain the condition of the inhabitants, and, although a man not easily moved, I confess myself unmanned by the extent and intensity of suffering I witnessed, more especially amongst the women and little children, crowds of whom were to be seen scattered over the turnip fields, like a flock of famishing crows, devouring the raw turnips, mothers half naked, shivering in the snow and sleet, uttering exclamations of despair, whilst their children were screaming with hunger; I am a match for anything else I may meet with here, but this I cannot stand. (Kelleher 27)

When cataclysmic events such as the Great Famine occur, it is only natural to ask the question why, and not only in the causal sense as has been examined earlier, but also

in a moral sense: What had the Irish done to deserve such suffering? Such a question insinuates that the Irish were in some way responsible for their own misery and places the blame squarely upon their own shoulders. Looking at this question now, from a twenty-first century perspective, the Famine would be attributed to an act of nature, the severity of which perhaps lay in human folly, but the actual event itself – the blight that consumed the potato crops – as unexpected and unavoidable, similar to a drought, epidemic, or hurricane. But back in the mid-nineteenth-century when the Great Famine was underway, it was not uncommon for people to justify plague as the result of a superstitious curse upon the land or as a form of Divine Retribution; and there were those, unfortunately, both in England and in Ireland, amongst the elite as well as the peasantry, who would support such a manner of thinking.

This question of why is one that Sigmund Freud would grapple with in the early twentieth century while trying to account for the continued persecution of the Jews. Like the Jewish people, the Irish, too, have experienced a long history of persecution and displacement so a comparison is a valid one. Freud found in his studies that individuals who experienced severe trauma commonly suffered afterwards from a type of trauma neurosis in which the incident is repressed by the subconscious in an attempt to protect the individual from the horrors of the ordeal. Freud's theory of repression, however, did not require that memories be forgotten or suppressed by the unconscious, but allowed that victims sometimes consciously suppressed them on their own: "I am not aware, however, that patients suffering from traumatic neurosis are much occupied in their waking lives with memories of their accident. Perhaps they are most concerned with not thinking of it" (12). Freud surmised that the trauma experienced by the Jewish people involved an

unconscious act of suppressing a specific event, the killing of the first Moses; for the Irish people, then, using similar reasoning, it could justifiably be deduced that Famine trauma resulted in a deliberate attempt of *not* thinking about a specific event, namely, the Famine.

As an historical event, such as war, the trauma induced from the Famine was shared by many, resulting in what has come to be known as “cultural trauma”, which occurs when “members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (Alexander 1). This concept of collective cultural trauma versus individual trauma is especially relevant to the experience of the Irish peasantry during the Great Famine who suffered jointly as a nation and faced similar feelings of confusion, shock, and incomprehensibility as well as guilt, shame, blame, and an overwhelming grief. This is comparable to the shell shock or war neurosis that a large number of veterans returning from World War I had suffered, an experience that they, too, would find difficult to describe to those who had not experienced it or witnessed it first-hand. Due to this shared experience, life as the Irish people knew it would never be the same again: “Within Ireland, the trauma of the Famine had a lasting impact on the lives and pastimes of the survivors. For those who had survived and remained in Ireland, life had changed in ways that were difficult to quantify or articulate” (Kinealy 22). Like war veterans, Famine survivors would, to an extent, be marginalized psychologically from the rest of society, an invisible chasm between those who experienced the trauma and those who did not.

This topic was of primary interest for Sigmund Freud, who studied this difficulty of dealing with horrific memories from horrific events. Most commonly referred to as post-traumatic stress disorder, this condition “reflects the direct imposition on the mind of the unavoidable reality of horrific events, the taking over of the mind, psychically and neurobiologically, by an event that it cannot control” (Caruth 58). Freud was intrigued by the repression of such events which often manifest in nightmares, flashbacks, repetition, paralysis, an overwhelming sense of purposelessness, and self-destructive behavior, including suicide, alcohol/drug abuse, or by continually placing oneself in abusive and/or dangerous situations. Cathy Caruth would take this study further to focus on the actual act of survival. For those who survived, the question becomes, “Is the trauma the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it?” (7). Later she will revise this to simply, “What does it mean to survive?” (60). As was the case with victims of war who survived, the question of survival for the Irish is twofold: does the trauma involve shock/anxiety from having come so close to death and survived it or guilt for having survived the event when so many others perished (as well as the acts that may have been committed in order to have done so)? Either way, underlying both is a sense of incomprehensibility of having lived through it: “It is only by recognizing traumatic experience as a paradoxical relation between destructiveness and survival that we can also recognize the legacy of incomprehensibility at the heart of catastrophic experience” (Caruth 58).

***Trauma in Famine Literature:
The Torment of Survival in The Black Prophet***

One of the earliest examples in Irish Literature that depicts the psychological repercussions of famine can be found in *The Black Prophet: A Tale of Irish Famine*, by

William Carleton. Though published in 1847 during the Great Famine, the author was actually describing conditions and events from Irish famines that had occurred earlier in 1817 and 1822. His haunting tale was meant as a warning of the precarious conditions that existed in Ireland as well as a call to action to prevent such conditions from recurring in the future: “Carleton’s novel has an explicit interventionist role, seeking, as he explained in the preface to the single-volume edition of February 1847, ‘to awaken those who legislate for us into something like a humane perception of a calamity that has been almost perennial in this country’ and to stir readers’ ‘sympathy’ into ‘benevolence’” (Kelleher 233). As the title suggests, his novel was indeed prophetic for his fears were realized. Not only did famine reoccur in Ireland, it did so on a scale that had never been witnessed before in that country. What makes Carleton’s work so significant is that it represents both the physical suffering that the starving masses endured as well as the psychological.

Though psychological trauma haunts the narrative throughout, one particular example of an individual suffering from severe mental anguish serves as a precursor to James Joyce’s *Dubliners* (1914) and *Ulysses* (1922) in which the characters wander the streets of Dublin with no intent or purpose, like the walking dead of *Dracula* but burdened with shame, guilt, and anger, looking for a target to vent their fury and frustration and lack of ability to take action. In *The Black Prophet*, this character is Tom Dalton, former lover of Margaret (Peggy) Murtagh and the son of a suspected murderer. Margaret, who bore Tom a child out of wedlock, has brought shame down upon herself and her family for having done so and Tom down upon himself for not marrying her, though his reasons, at least to himself, are altruistic for he fears he has nothing to offer

her or their child due to his extreme poverty and lack of resources. After Peggy and their baby die from starvation, Tom takes to wandering the countryside consumed by a need to seek vengeance for perceived past wrongs and to place the blame on others. When he resurfaces leading a violent mob against Darby Skinadre, the meal-monger he holds responsible for Peggy and the baby's death by denying them food, we are told:

The change that had come over young Dalton was frightful; he was not half his former size; his clothes were now in rags, his beard grown, his whole aspect and appearance that of some miscreant, in whom it was difficult to say whether the ruffian or the idiot predominated the most. He appeared now in his glory—frantic and destructive; but amidst all this driveling impetuosity, it was not difficult to detect some desperate and unshaken purpose in his heavy but violent and bloodshot eyes. (162)

As he attempts to rally the gathering mob against Skinadre, Tom is castigated by Sarah, the Black Prophet's daughter, who tells him:

...it wasn't he but yourself that starved her and her child. Who deserted her--who brought her to shame, an' to sorrow, in her own heart an' in the eyes of the world? Who left her to the bitter and vile tongues of the whole country? Who refused to marry her, and kept her so that she couldn't raise her face before her fellow cratures? Who sent her, without hope, or any expectation of happiness in this life--this miserable life--to the glens and lonely ditches about the neighborhood, where she did nothing but shed blither tears of despair and shame at the heartless lot you brought her to? An' when she was deserted by the wide world, an' hadn't a friendly face to look to but God's, an' when one kind word from your lips would give her hope, an' comfort, an' happiness, where were you? and where was that kind word that would have saved her? Let the old man go, you unmanly coward; it wasn't him that starved her--it was yourself that starved her, and broke her heart! (164)

Though Tom's frustration and anger may be misplaced, the true source of his wrath – his own helplessness and lack of agency – is genuine and trauma-inducing. Like his father who recently lost his holdings at the whim of a middleman land-agent after having made extensive repairs to the land, he is powerless against those with authority and voiceless in matters that affect him. He did not have the means to feed Peggy or their child; his only

perceived recourse now that they are gone: violence. Through the use of Sarah's voice, the author is also able to convey Ireland's own culpability in its own suffering: The British government and people were not the only source of inaction and indifference towards the Irish peasantry's plight; they were guilty of inflicting both upon themselves and each other.

Tom is not the only one affected by Peggy's death, for her parents, too, had spurned her in life due to the shame she had brought down upon them. It is not until after her death that their remorse and guilt is evinced. Once their all-consuming hunger has been appeased, the full weight of their guilt and sorrow descends upon them:

It is not our intention to describe, or rather to attempt to describe, the sorrow of Brian Murtagh and his wife, as soon as a moderate meal of food had awakened them, as it were, from the heavy and stupid frenzy into which the shock of their unhappy daughter's death, joined to the pangs of famine, had thrown them. It may be sufficient to say, that their grief was wild, disconsolate, and hopeless. She was the only daughter they had ever had: and when they looked back upon the gentle and unfortunate girl's many virtues, and reflected that they had, up to her death, despite her earnest entreaties, withheld from her their pardon for her transgression, they felt, mingled with their affliction at her loss, such an oppressive agony of remorse as no language could describe. (97)

The Murtagh's trauma is manifold for it includes the trauma of starvation, the death of their daughter and grandchild, their withholding forgiveness and inability to offer it now, and the trauma of survival when their children perished for they have also lost their only son to the famine. This scene also illustrates the distraction of hunger, for it is only after their hunger has been satisfied that the Murtagh's sorrow can be expressed, hunger being their first and utmost concern.

***Trauma in Famine Literature:
Apathy and Indifference in Castle Richmond***

When the hunger and sorrow becomes too much for victims to bear, apathy and madness oftentimes follow as demonstrated in Trollope's novel, *Castle Richmond*. In a chapter aptly titled "The Last Stage", the male lead and hero, Herbert Fitzgerald, a member of the privileged Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, encounters a dying mother and her children in a desolate cabin that he and his horse enter to take refuge from a storm. Thinking the place deserted, he instead finds a small family in the last throes of starvation beyond all hope and at this point beyond all help as well. Holding a toddler just barely alive in her arms, the narrator informs us that "the mark of death was upon her; but the agony of want was past. She sat there listless, indifferent, hardly capable of suffering, even for her child, waiting her doom unconsciously" (570). Seeing a bundle of straw in the corner, Herbert moves it aside with the handle of his whip and discovers the naked body of a small child dead but not quite cold. When Herbert inquires if the child in her arms is cold, the woman, who until this point has remained motionless, crouched in the middle of the dirt floor and oblivious to Herbert's presence, responds

"Cowl'd," she muttered, with a vacant face and wondering tone of voice, as though she did not quite understand him. "I suppose she is cowl'd. Why wouldn't she be cowl'd? We're cowl'd enough, if that's all." But she did not stir from the spot on which she sat; and the child, though it gave from time to time a low moan that was almost inaudible, lay still in her arms, with its big eyes staring into vacancy... The woman had made no plaint of her suffering, and had asked for nothing... (575)

This scene is indicative of the state of the woman's mind due to all that she has been forced to endure. Her apathy has taken over; her mind is shutting down, protecting itself against the horror of her dead daughter covered in straw in the corner and the imminent demise of herself and her remaining child. Her acute hunger no longer registers. She

suffers in silence making no complaint and asking for nothing. She does not even weep for her children's suffering knowing that it will all be over soon. She becomes what Butterly and Shepherd refer to as "the silent starving" (51), a voiceless, powerless, abandoned people.

Herbert's indifference also becomes painfully apparent in this scene as is the class divide that is made even wider by famine, for, as Butterly and Shepherd note, "There are very few famines in which the rich have starved" (38). Before he leaves Herbert presses a few silver coins into the woman's hands, coins that she will die holding as there was no means for her to spend them even if she was not already beyond the assistance that they might offer. Although he stops to make arrangements to have the woman and her still living child transported to the workhouse, there is no sense of urgency and they die alone in the desolate cabin. Herbert, however, and the aristocratic ascendancy that he represents, are absolved from all wrong doing for the narrator tells us that "Her doom had been spoken before Herbert had entered the cabin" (577). Blame and responsibility are shifted off those who have the means to help, and help, when it does finally come, arrives too late, illustrative of Famine relief efforts overall. Herbert's silver coins are also reminiscent of Judas who betrayed Christ just as the starving peasantry were betrayed by those who could assist them but failed to do so. And just as Judas died before his silver coins could be spent, so too would the woman above, the coins becoming useless to her, Herbert's gesture, empty and futile.

***Trauma in Famine Literature:
Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and Dracula***

A literary example of a person suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder in Famine fiction can be found in *Dracula* in the character of Jonathan Harker who travels

to Transylvania to conduct business for his firm, specifically, the purchase of residences in England for their client, Count Dracula. Famine references can be found throughout the novel, including recurrent references to the silence of the land and of the people; Dr. Steward's mentally disturbed patient, Renfield, who eats live insects and birds; Dracula's ability to summon wolves and rats to do his nefarious bidding; the soil that Dracula rests in as smelling musty and needing to be sterilized as if polluted like the blight that had struck Ireland; and the embodiment of the Famine in the characterization of Dracula, who can "flourish in the midst of diseases that kill off whole peoples" (279).

During his extended stay at Dracula's castle in which he is virtually held prisoner, Jonathan witnesses horrific events that bring images of the Great Famine to mind, the most terrifying and disturbing scene involving a mother who approaches the castle looking for her child whom Dracula has abducted to feed his vampire brides:

When a couple of hours had passed I heard something stirring in the Count's room, something like a sharp wail quickly suppressed; and then there was silence, deep, awful silence, which chilled me...As I sat I heard a sound in the courtyard without—the agonized cry of a woman. I rushed to the window, and throwing it up, peered out between the bars. There, indeed, was a woman with disheveled hair, holding her hands over her heart as one distressed with running... When she saw my face at the window she threw herself forward, and shouted in a voice laden with menace: —'Monster, give me my child!' She threw herself on her knees, and raising her hands, cried the same words in tones which wrung the heart. Then she tore her hair and beat her breast, and abandoned herself to all the violences of extravagant emotion...Somewhere high overhead, probably on the tower, I heard the voice of the Count calling in his harsh, metallic whisper. His call seemed to be answered from far and wide by the howling of wolves. Before many minutes had passed a pack of them poured, like a pent-up dam when liberated, through the wide entrance into the courtyard. There was no cry from the woman, and the howling of the wolves was but short. Before long they streamed away singly, licking their lips. I could not pity her, for I knew now what had become of her child, and she was better dead. (48-9)

In this passage the narrator, in the form of Jonathan, returns to the dilemma of explaining the suffering of innocence as was examined earlier in this paper. Instead of such suffering being attributed to Divine Wisdom as was the case in *Golden Hills*, it is instead attributed to the suffering inflicted by the rich and powerful aristocracy over the weak and helpless peasantry. Dracula as England takes what he needs in order to sustain himself no matter the consequences that are imposed upon others. The mother as Ireland is defenseless against such a mightier and ruthless force. In the end Jonathan concludes that she was better off dead perhaps suggesting that Ireland is better off retreating until Dracula/England is more open and vulnerable to attack. The innocent may suffer, but they will triumph in the end, for on their misery and sorrow – and blood – a new nation would emerge, a new nation different from the one envisioned by the narrator of *Golden Hills*.

Such scenes involving a mother and child are also common in Famine literature, including the child being torn from the mother and the mother's inability to protect/feed her child. Also recurrent are instances of dogs eating the dead and dying; the "deep, awful silence" that is mentioned again and again in Famine literature; and, the woman's quiet acceptance of her fate after losing her child, oftentimes manifesting, as mentioned earlier, in acute apathy and madness. The incomprehensibility that witnessing the above horrific scene would inflict upon the observer (Jonathan) is very reminiscent of the effect that the Great Famine had upon its victims. The physical symptoms that Jonathan exhibits when he returns to England suggest shock, while the psychological suggest that he is suffering from PTSD. As his wife, Mina writes in a letter to her friend Lucy Westenra:

I found my dear one, oh, so thin and pale and weak-looking. All the resolution has gone out of his dear eyes, and that quiet dignity which I told

you was in his face has vanished. He is only a wreck of himself, and he does not remember anything that has happened to him for a long time past. At least, he wants me to believe so, and I shall never ask. He has had some terrible shock, and I fear it might tax his poor brain if he were to try to recall it. (99)

We learn later that Jonathan does indeed suffer from nightmares, indicative of Freud's theory of repression, and disbelief that he has survived the experience after having accepted that he would never see his wife or home again, indicative of Caruth's theory regarding the incomprehensibility of survival and survivor's shock. But as Lucy Mina indicates above, the question that remains is whether or not Jonathan has repressed these events unconsciously or perhaps, like the Irish, deliberately. Nonetheless, Jonathan's memories would resurface in the journals that he had so painstakingly kept while in Transylvania just as Famine memories would resurface in Irish Literature.

Trauma, Incomprehensibility, and Silence

This sense of incomprehensibility is of extreme importance when discussing the Great Famine. When the potato crop failed initially, it was difficult enough for the Irish peasantry, who depended so heavily upon it for survival, to comprehend. When the potato crop continued to fail in subsequent harvests – after much hope and prayer and belief that it would surely thrive – it was devastating physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Hope was gone. There was little they could do in response. As Julieann Ulin explains

Famine accounts detail paralysis as an effect of the failure of the crops and the slow starvation of the people dependent upon them. As they realized their predicament, 'Blank stolid dismay, a sort of stupor, fell upon the people...It was no uncommon sight to see the cottier and his little family seated on the garden-fence gazing all day long in moody silence at the blighted plot that had been their last hope. Nothing could arouse them. (207)

Words become pointless; there is nothing left to be said. And Irish Literature would reflect this silence across the land. When it is broken, it is often by the desperate cries of the hungry, the howling of dogs, or mourners keening for the dead, imagery evoking the devastation and suffering that the Famine wrought.

When some people endured after so many had perished, as was the case on the battlefield, this state of incomprehensibility could and did create long-lasting effects on the survivors. Along with the added guilt, shame, and blame previously mentioned, there was also the inability – and reluctance – to share their experiences. For some it would be years before they could discuss what had happened, leaving behind an oral rendition for future writers (and nationalists) to employ; for others, that time would never come and the painful memories would die along with them leaving behind a legacy of unresolved issues. Where there were feelings of profound relief and joy, there was simultaneously feelings of grief and guilt. The dilemma: how does one rejoice and give thanks for having survived such a horrific event when so many of their family, friends, and loved ones did not? How does a nation collectively cope with such devastating loss? As Margaret Kelleher suggests (as cited earlier), one approach would be through repression and silence so survivors could build a future devoid of the misery and heartache that haunts their past, present, and future.

While the trauma induced by imperialism was a precursor to the Famine trauma that followed, they differed in one notable manner: the trauma generated by years of imperialism and colonialism was a slow, methodical, deliberate process compared to that of the Famine which was as quick as it was sudden. The potato blight destroyed the crops swiftly and silently, sometimes overnight, and was widespread, making it all the more

difficult to comprehend, process, and in the aftermath, articulate. In Irish Famine literature, *Golden Hills* illustrates the acute shock and anguish that the sudden appearance of the blight produced across the land:

Slowly under that bright moonlight spread the mysterious plague. On the low-lying lands might be perceived a dark mist creeping along, clinging to the earth in shadowed places... While the people quietly slept through all the cabins dotting the country, the scourge was abroad. Morning light dawned, and the vapour of the pestilence fled before it; but the green fields were as if a burning blast had passed over them. Black patches lay where previously had been verdure, and the keen odour of decay escaped from all sides... From the whole land arouse a despairing cry. The last hope of the people was stricken. At one stride gaunt Famine stood among them, and grasped them in its lean arms. In a month there would be no food throughout the country for four millions of human beings. (191)

As Cathy Caruth explains, again furthering Freud's findings, it is this "shocking and unexpected occurrence" of an event, in this instance, the unexpected appearance, severity, and longevity of the Famine that leaves the victim(s) struggling in its aftermath:

For what returns to haunt the trauma victim in Freud's primary example of trauma... is not just any event but, significantly, the shocking and unexpected occurrence of an accident... What returns to haunt the victim, these stories tell us, is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known... The story of trauma, then, as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality – the escape from a death, or from its referential force – rather attests to its endless impact on a life. (6-7)

While this is especially relevant to Irish Literature following the Famine and claims that it is missing from its annals, it is pertinent to literature produced in all regions following tragic national events, for literature not only captures the actualities of these events, but the mood of the nation as well. Freud recognized the importance of literature and would often employ it to examine the psychological impact on a people, making trauma and psychology an important consideration in various spheres of literary theory and discourse: "If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because

literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is, indeed at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet” (Caruth 3).

While a million victims are said to have perished throughout the Great Famine, millions survived; their legacy: to bear the psychological burden that followed as illustrated in Carleton’s *The Black Prophet* and Trollope’s, *Castle Richmond*. In *Dracula*, however, Stoker would provide the Irish with a means to triumph, defeating a metaphorical Britain and surviving an allegorical Famine by allowing his heroes (though technically American and British) to defeat Dracula and impede his imperialistic reign of terror. Stoker would pave the way for a new manner in which Irish writers of the emerging modern era could view the Famine and express “the sense of outrage to which the people has so much right” (Goss 89). A new era in Irish Famine Literature would dawn with Stoker at the forefront just as Carleton had been at the forefront of the previous one. If *Dracula* represents “the potential that the horrors of the Famine will not remain buried in the past, safely incorporated as an episode of Providence...intervening to clear the way for progress” as Sarah Goss contends (105), it also represents the rising of an independent Irish nation that was hovering on Ireland’s horizon, a rising that was founded on the Famine dead who, by inspiring a course towards emancipation for those that followed, would not die in vain. And though Famine literature was in its early stages of development in the nineteenth century, as the above examples indicate, Irish Literature would and did represent the turmoil induced by acute hunger and other traumas related to starvation, a trauma that would initially manifest in the form of gothic imagery.

CHAPTER V

WAITING TO DIE: A GOTHIC WASTELAND

Only the pen of Dante could describe it; only the brush of Rembrandt, in its darkest and most lurid colours, could portray it! (as quoted in Fegan, p. 445)

Just as the trauma inflicted upon the Irish by the Great Famine mirrored that which had been inflicted upon the Irish by imperialism and colonialism, early Famine imagery and motifs would very much come to reflect those considered as gothic. Such shared imagery includes desolate, isolated, barren landscapes; specters, ghouls, and monsters; nature as destructive, unpredictable, and shrouding (i.e., thunderstorms, lightening, fog, and mist); and strange noises, such as moaning, groaning, and the sound of howling dogs and wolves in the distance. Shared themes include tragedy, terror, and doom; shocking and oftentimes incomprehensible situations; foreboding and dread; death and disease; psychological turmoil, including disorientation and madness; grotesque physical deformity (often symbolic in nature); belief in superstition, the supernatural, and occult; and women who are left helpless and powerless in horrifying situations. What pervades these motifs and images is a sense of the macabre: the feeling of being in an alien world in which nothing makes sense and nothing is as it should be. What distinguishes them is that gothic fiction is primarily based on the author's imagination

which produces a “curious hybrid” of pleasure and terror” (Ellis 11) while shielding the reader from the trauma and horror of actually experiencing such events. Famine literature, on the other hand, is based on actual events, taking gothic elements to a whole new level of shock, horror, and terror and pushing past those invisible boundaries that keep the reader safe and secure in a world in which such horrific events could never occur. Consequently, the unease induced by Famine literature breaks one of gothic literature’s most fundamental rules, that of making the situation too realistic to thrill and entertain: “The supernatural...offers an expansive field of the imagination in which anything may happen...an opening out of imagination that leads to amazement and bewilderment... such scenes must avoid an overly close approximation of ordinary experience (realism) in order to achieve this effect of pleasure in terror” (Ellis 9). While the imagery used to describe Famine events may borrow from the gothic, pleasure was not the intended outcome. The intent instead was to describe the indescribable to those who had not experienced or witnessed the event firsthand, and gothic imagery provided a powerful means to do just that, for it gave authors the ability to express what many still consider to be the inexpressible. Ireland is presented as a bleak, barren, disease and corpse-ridden wasteland with deserted cabins and entire villages decimated and devoid of life. Famine victims are portrayed as the walking dead, homeless, wandering, emaciated skeleton-like creatures dressed in rags that haunt the countryside and forage in fields searching for food; or as corpses lying in roadside ditches or near cemeteries in their fervent attempt to die on holy ground. Commonplace are descriptions of entire families found dead and/or dying in ramshackle cabins with barricades at the door to protect them from the packs of abandoned dogs that roamed the countryside and swarms of disease-

ridden rats that fed on decaying corpses. These images, along with horrific tales of cannibalism, infanticide, mass grave pits known as “famine pits”, people eating grass, nettles, and weeds and drinking blood from cattle in order to survive, would emerge again and again in Irish Literature. As a result, the use of gothic imagery is especially fitting because it recognizes on a subliminal level that the Famine is a horror story of unimaginable and unspeakable events that filled the hearts of its victims (and witnesses) with terror and dread. This genre also provides an effective means for the author to convey veiled social commentary and criticism meant to sway and influence the reader, a feature that oftentimes allows the reader access to a character’s innermost thoughts, motives, and imaginings, disturbing though they may be: “the gothic is particularly interested in exploiting the emotions, both by detailing the protagonist’s thoughts and feelings, and by asking the reader to identify with them” (Ellis 8-9). This aspect is especially relevant to Famine fiction whether the perspective/experience presented is that of the Irish peasantry or that of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, two very distinct, oftentimes opposing points-of-view.

True Fiction: Gothic Imagery Describes the Indescribable

This penchant of using gothic imagery to describe graphic Famine conditions had its basis in non-fictional accounts from survivors (often in the oral tradition), newspaper writers, and tourists/travelers. Many travelers who visited Ireland at this time did so for no other purpose than to determine for themselves if the Famine reports they read were accurate. Oftentimes they sent correspondence back to their native land or published their accounts upon their return, struggling in the process to find words that would adequately describe the misery that they witnessed, bringing to mind Margaret Kelleher’s earlier

speculation as to whether or not the Famine *can* be described: “Again and again, famine observers emphasize the difficulty, even impossibility, of recording the horrors which they have witnessed” (Kelleher 17). These first-hand accounts would serve multiple purposes. During the Famine, they provided eyewitness accounts to outsiders who were often getting conflicting reports back home. Afterwards, they served as historic documentation of the event; renewed bids for independence; rejuvenated Irish nationalism; and, as is pertinent to this paper, supplied abundant material for Irish Literature.

The recurring cabin scenes so often found in Famine literature originate in actual eye-witness accounts such as the following documented in the journal of William Bennett who was sent to Ireland by his Quaker colleagues to determine the true state of the country so appropriate relief efforts could be organized:

We entered a cabin. Stretched in one dark corner, scarcely visible from the smoke and rags that covered them, were three children huddled together, lying there *because they were too weak to rise*, pale and ghastly, their little limbs – on removing a portion of the covering – perfectly emaciated, eyes sunk, voice gone, and evidently in the last stage of starvation. Crouched over the turf embers was another form, wild and all but naked, scarcely human in appearance. It stirred not, nor noticed us. On some straw, soddened upon the ground, moaning piteously, was a shriveled old woman, imploring us to give her something... Above her, on something like a ledge, was a young woman, with sunken cheeks, – a mother I have no doubt, – who scarcely raised her eyes in answer to our enquiries, but pressed her hand upon her forehead, with a look of unutterable anguish and despair... In many the husbands or sons were prostrate, under that horrid disease, – the results of long-continued famine and low living, – in which first the limbs, and then the body, swell most frightfully, and finally burst. We entered fifty of these tenements. The scene was one and invariable, differing in little but the number of the sufferers, or of the groups, occupying the several corners within... (Kelleher 18-9)

This eyewitness report chillingly illustrates how the peasantry began to transform into the animalistic, sub-human creatures that British stereotypes had always described them, the

figure crouching over the turf embers dehumanized and referred to as an “it”, which was also a common practice in Famine literary scenes.

The below inquest report published in the *Kilkenny Moderator* supports accounts of people dying on roadsides and being eaten by scavenger animals, horrific scenes that have also found their way into the pages of Famine literature:

They had received charity at a cabin a couple of days before their melancholy death, the mother appearing in a state of unconsciousness, evidently the effect of extreme mental anxiety. On the same evening (Fri. Nov. 27th), they were seen on the road, near the spot where their dead bodies were found on the morning of the following Monday. It is supposed they sat down to shelter themselves from the weather, which on that evening was very severe, and that from exhaustion they were unable to proceed until overtaken by the darkness and loneliness of the night. When found, the hand of one of the children, and the foot of another, were eaten away, it is supposed by dogs and swine. (Lysaght 35)

This particular account represents imagery that is both horrific and gothic in nature, but also poignant and disturbing as it describes the sorrowful plight of those who died alone, exposed and vulnerable on the side of the road, a fate that, like the cabin scene above, befell many Famine victims: “Many of the Irish died alone ‘by the countless thousands’ along the roads, in woods, fields, and bogs...Death was everywhere” (Butterly and Shepherd 118). Their human dignity, along with the potato crop, completely obliterated.

Recurring oral reports involve those of a mother and child joined together in death or dead mothers with infants still trying to nurse at their breast while clutched within the dead mother’s arms: “I heard my grandmother saying—she was from the Kenmare side—that the worst sight she ever saw—she saw the woman laid out on the street [in Kenmare] and the baby at her breast. She died of the Famine fever; nobody would take the child, and in the evening the child was eating the mother’s breast” (Lysaght 37). Though such gory accounts are often attributed to folklore, their regularity at the very least give

credence to the probability that many an infant or young child would indeed have perished in similar circumstances for another common Famine motif is that of the mother's milk having gone dry from lack of nourishment, eliminating the last form of sustenance available to the child (Kelleher 112).

Other oral accounts address the importance of burial to the Irish, especially on hallowed ground. As retold by Peter Clarke of Co. Cavin, Ireland:

Doctor Adams, of Lower Knockhide, was a young man out of college at the time of the Famine, he was after finishing his medical course, and he got an appointment in the west of Ireland. He told me it was most terrifying to drive along the road and see a corpse lying here and a corpse lying there, and some of them seemed as if they had been trying to get as near as possible to the cemetery. Both sides of the road were strewn with them. He said that they died of starvation. (Póirtéir 222)

This goes beyond the long-established Irish tradition of being properly waked and paying homage to the dead. The starving peasantry were not only terrified of the animals that preyed on the dead and dying, but after claims that the Famine was Divine Punishment for sins committed, many also believed that their last hope of salvation lay in dying on holy ground.

Images of the starving as the walking dead, mere skeletons with barely a layer of flesh to cover their bones, more zombie-like than human with dazed expressions and vacant eyes are also found in nonfiction accounts. As Charles Gavan Duffy, editor of the Irish newspaper *The Nation* described after being released from prison for charges of treason after the failed uprising of 1848:

We saw on the streets of Galway crowds of creatures more debased than the Yahoos of Swift – creatures having only a distant and hideous resemblance to human beings. Grey-haired old men, whose idiotic faces had hardened into a settled leer of mendicancy, and women filthier and more frightful than the harpies, who at the jingle of a coin on the pavements swarmed in myriads from unseen places; struggling,

screaming, *shrieking* for their prey, like some monstrous and unclean animals. (Fegan 455)

His army of once-proud rebels has been replaced with a starving horde of ghoulish, decomposing, squalid creatures begging in the streets and willing to do anything for a few coins or a handful of crumbs. While this would be difficult for any population, it was especially so for the Irish who had little left them besides their pride and refusal to concede to the British, which contributed to their reluctance to discuss or dwell on the Famine years. Once again they are dehumanized and denied one of the most fundamental of all human rights, namely, access to food.

Gothic Imagery and The Black Prophet

This practice of using gothic imagery to describe famine events in fiction was established early on in William Carleton's landmark novel, *The Black Prophet: A Tale of Irish Famine* which is also an early example of famine being presented as the backdrop for a primary plot which allowed authors a means to address the event without offending their readers or appearing political. As Melissa Fegan explains,

The task of representing the Famine was an onerous one, a duty performed with no expectation of reward. Publishers and readers could be hostile. Carleton was careful to assure his readers that 'the principal interest' of *The Black Prophet* was not 'so gloomy a topic as famine', and built his plot around a murder mystery and love triangle to prove it. Anthony Trollope begins *Castle Richmond* with an acknowledgement that he will need to convince his reader: 'I wonder whether the novel-reading world...will be offended if I lay the plot of this story in Ireland! That there is a strong feeling against things Irish it is impossible to deny'. (446)

The Black Prophet's happy ending is another curious element that can be found in early Famine fiction in which the main characters experience a happily-ever-after while the destiny of the starving masses, who were championed so ferociously earlier in the novel, are seemingly forgotten, demonstrating another difficulty early authors experienced in

presenting the Famine in narrative form: “the differing, even competing, requirements, of story and famine analysis become clear. As the novel ends: one family, the chief characters in the story, has its land and fortune restored as the story draws neatly to a close; the fortunes of the other ‘starving people’ are ignored” (Kelleher 234). While the need for a happy ending may be requisite for readers’ during that era, it would not, as we shall see, be an issue for Famine authors of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries whose outrage would be the driving force.

Gothic imagery is rife throughout *The Black Prophet*, a technique used not only to describe the misery of the famine conditions but to establish the general tone of the famine setting. As Markman Ellis tells us, “the gothic is not simply a narrative of terror or a set of properties, but it is also a tone or mood that is, in its own way, quite experimental” (8). And experimental is exactly how Carleton approached it, combining reality with the fantastic and adopting the gothic to create his overall mood. The region is described as a bleak, desolate, barren land laid waste by torrential rains that decimate food crops and saturate the bogs. There are numerous references to the country being cursed as well as the concept of Divine Providence and Punishment. There is the prerequisite gothic villain in the form of the Black Prophet himself, who is the master manipulator of the story as well as the keeper of the deep, dark gothic secret. References to vampires occur early on, long before Stoker’s *Dracula* made its debut in 1897. In an opening scene in which the Black Prophet’s daughter, Sarah, is fighting with her step-mother, we are told that she resembles “some beautiful vampire that was ravaging for the blood of its awakened victim” (5-6). Later, when a character named Hanlon is walking along a “lonely and dreary road” at midnight (of course), the scene is very gothic in tone

with references to “the howling of the storm,” the “wild wailing and dying sobs” of the trees and other sounds “that belonged not to this life” which filled him with a “supernatural terror”:

In this anomalous state he advanced, until he came to a grove of old beeches that grew at the foot of one of the hill-ranges...and here the noises he heard were not calculated to diminish his terrors. As the huge trees were tossed and swung about in the gloomy moonlight, his ears were assailed by a variety of wild sounds which had never reached them before. The deep and repeated crashes of the tempest, as it raged among them, was accompanied by a frightful repetition of hoarse moanings, muffled groans, and wild unearthly shrieks, which encountered him from a thousand quarters in the grove, and he began to feel that horrible excitement which is known to be occasioned by the mere transition from extreme cowardice to reckless indifference. (57)

The imagery evoked by the wild weather and moans, groans, and shrieks seem to represent Ireland herself as she mourns and rages against the misery of her people, while mention of a “horrible excitement” brings to mind the works of Edgar Allan Poe who was a master of the macabre and at titillating the senses. In his short story, “The Fall of the House of Usher”, originally published in 1839, the same gloom, doom, terror, and superstition as found in Carleton’s novel permeates Poe’s setting. The narrator speaks of “an atmosphere which had no affinity with the air of heaven, but which had reeked up from the decaying trees...a pestilent and mystic vapor, dull, sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued” (201) that hovers over and emanates from the mansion, much like Carleton’s description of famine Ireland. Indeed we are told that “Minute fungi overspread the whole exterior” which is very reminiscent of the fungus that destroyed the potato crop. Usher himself is described as a “wan being” with a “cadaverousness of complexion” and “ghastly pallor of the skin” (202-203). His sister, Madeline, who is suffering from an indeterminate illness and close to death, is depicted in a ghost-like fashion, silent and oblivious to what is happening around her bringing to mind Famine

victims who, after extreme suffering and want, became lethargic, apathetic, and resigned to their fate. When she is entombed while still alive, it is evocative of Stoker's vampires and the living dead of the Famine, some of whom were reported to have been placed in the Famine pits while still alive, though just barely. Similar to the stormy night described above in *The Black Prophet*, on the night that Lady Madeline rises from her tomb, a wild tempest pounds against the house amid "certain low and indefinite sounds which came, through the pauses of the storm, at long intervals, I knew not whence" (212) causing the unnamed narrator the same terror experienced by Hanlon. When the newly revived Lady Madeline makes her appearance,

There was blood upon her white robes, and the evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame. For a moment she remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold – then, with a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated. (216)

While famine victims were not normally described dying in so dramatic a fashion, they too, like Roderick Usher, would succumb to the terrors that they had anticipated as the potato crops continued to fail and their family and neighbors continued to perish around them. But while Poe's story was based upon a dark and inventive (and perhaps opium-induced) imagination, Carleton's was based upon his own experience with earlier famines in Ireland.

After examining Poe's work, it is easy to understand why Carleton would choose gothic as the setting for his famine fiction, using it to describe the nightmarish qualities of such events. Blending fact with fiction, his scenes and events eerily echo the first-hand true-life accounts referenced earlier in this section that describe the famine conditions that existed in the mid-1840s. As a consequence, Carleton himself becomes the Black

Prophet, prophesizing what was to come and what he had hoped to avoid by writing his novel, specifically future occurrences of famine as well as the chaos, loss of humanity, and extreme suffering that it spawns as so horrifically detailed in his novel:

Go where you might, every object reminded you of the fearful desolation that was progressing around you. The features of the people were gaunt, their eyes wild and hollow, and their gait feeble and tottering...it was no unusual sight to meet the father and mother, accompanied by their children, going they knew not whither, and to witness one or other of them lying down on the road side...never more to rise from it, until borne, in a parish shell, to a shallow and hasty grave...Temporary sheds were also erected on the road sides, or near them, containing fever-stricken patients, who had no other-home...the scenes which took place at the public Soup Shops, and other appointed places of relief, afforded melancholy proof. Here were wild crowds, ragged, sickly, and wasted away to skin and bone, struggling for the dole of charity, like so many hungry vultures about the remnant of some carcass which they were tearing, amid noise, and screams, and strife, into very shreds; for, as we have said, all sense of becoming restraint and shame was now abandoned...it is not surprising that the starving multitudes should, in the ravening madness of famine, follow up its outrageous impulses, and forget those legal restraints, or moral principles, that protect property under ordinary or different circumstances. (130-1)

Social conventions are torn asunder and Christian principles become a distant memory as people begin to realize that they must fend for themselves in order to survive. And while famine victims are once again reduced to animalistic behavior, the author uses this opportunity to explain why as he describes the acute desperation and loss of social constraints that are the byproduct of extreme hunger, behavior that is often beyond their control as the primal instinct to survive becomes paramount.

Though social commentary in gothic literature is often subliminal and open to interpretation, Carleton is candid about whom he blames, specifically, legislators that allow conditions that cause famines to prevail as well as those who take advantage of

such situations by hoarding food supplies to make a profit, causing what Carleton refers to as an “artificial famine”:

As it is at present, provision dealers of all kinds, meal-mongers, forestallers, butchers, bakers, and hucksters, combine together, and sustain such a general monopoly in food, as is at variance with the spirit of all law and humanity, and constitutes a kind of artificial famine in the country; and surely; these circumstances ought not to be permitted, so long as we have a deliberative legislature, whose duty it is to watch and guard the health and morals of the people. (154)

Middlemen or land agents who collect rents for the often absentee landowners fare no better as the temptation to oppress and defraud the helpless oftentimes proved too tempting to resist for many who held such power. Carleton holds these corrupt suppliers and land-agents to account for contributing to conditions that foster famine and keep the peasantry in a continuous state of poverty which in turn makes them vulnerable and at their mercy when crops fail. So while Carleton does hold legislators responsible for allowing such practices to ensue, his disdain is most often directed towards those who would profit from the misfortune of their fellow countrymen.

Though Carleton states throughout the novel that the miseries and atrocities of famine are “unspeakable”, “inexpressible”, and “indescribable”, he conveys them remarkably well by employing gothic elements and imagery to do just that.

Famine Imagery in Gothic Literature: Fitz-James O’Brien

Also similar to Poe’s style of writing was that of Fitz-James O’Brien who was born in Ireland in 1828 and immigrated to America in 1852. When he began his writing career in the states after some earlier success in Ireland, many critics panned him as merely an imitator of Poe (Fanning 87). But O’Brien, like Stoker after him, would, in a reverse from Famine fiction borrowing from gothic imagery to convey its misery and

horror, borrow heavily from Famine imagery to write his tales of terror. On the surface his short story, “The Lost Room” (1858), is a disturbing tale of a man who exits his boardinghouse room one hot summer evening, only to find that it has disappeared upon his return. There is a dream-like quality to the tale that is reminiscent of Poe, as is the overall atmosphere of oppression and apprehension that pervades the narrative. The boardinghouse is large and gloomy; the staircases, corridors, and vestibules described as desolate; and the servants as ghoulish creatures (182). While walking in the gardens smoking a cigar and getting some air, he is accosted by a strange dark figure who warns him of odd happenings in the house that involve inhuman creatures that reside within. Unsettled, the narrator returns to his room only to find it transformed into a pagan-like setting with people lounging and dancing about and tables laden with exotic food, flowers, and drink. As they try to entice him to join in their revelry, the words of the stranger in the garden come back to haunt him, filling him with dread. Instead of entering into their merrymaking, he demands that they vacate the premises which they refuse to do. As a compromise they decide to play a game of dice for the room. When the narrator loses, he is thrust bodily from his chambers, which immediately disappears never to be seen again. Like victims of the Famine, he is displaced, evicted from his hearth and home, and instantly loses all his earthly possessions. The comfortable, reliable world where everything makes sense is forever gone.

References to cannibalism and ghoulish creatures also evoke famine images as does the music that he previously tells us his friend and composer, Blokeeta, had played upon his piano, symbolizing the agony of those who suffered throughout the Famine: “Wild, unearthly, and sometimes insufferably painful, were the improvisations of

Blokeeta. The chords of the instrument seemed breaking with anguish. Lost souls shrieked in his dismal preludes; the half-heard utterances of spirits in pain” (179). The story of his Irish ancestor whose prized dagger once hung over his mantelpiece and who lost all his lands to an Englishman who usurped them while he was away brings to mind centuries of imperialism and colonialism that divested the Irish of their resources and contributed to their downward spiral into poverty. The abundance of food and drink provides a sharp contrast to the scarcity of food throughout the Famine as do descriptions of the voluptuous female interlopers and their lavish costumes which contrast with Famine victims who were often described as pale, skeletal, and dressed in rags, all imagery that O’Brien would have been familiar with: “The women were strangely beautiful, and all were attired in dresses of the most fantastic devices and brilliant hues. Their figures were round, supple, and elastic; their eyes dark and languishing; their lips full, ripe, and of the richest bloom” (186). The wild exuberance of the dancers also brings to mind Irish paganism, druidism, and superstition which were so intricately woven with the peasantry’s Catholic faith that even during times of famine the people were incited to perform both pagan and Catholic rituals to ward off the scourge: “I beheld a circle of wild figures, men and women, dancing with linked hands around the bole of the great tree, chanting some wild fragment of a song, to which the winds roared an unearthly chorus” (187). Even the lithograph on the wall that the narrator describes in such minute detail as he takes an inventory of the objects in his room prior to his ill-fated walk in the garden depicts a bleak, barren wasteland as if obliterated by famine:

It was a mere black spot on the white wall, but my inner vision scrutinized every detail of the picture. A wild, desolate, midnight heath, with a spectral oak-tree in the centre of the foreground. The wind blows fiercely...A formless wrack of clouds stream across the awful sky, and the

rain sweeps almost parallel with the horizon. Beyond, the heath stretches off into endless blackness...The picture is seemingly objectless. It tells no tale, but there is a weird power about it that haunts one. (178-9)

The story throughout is haunted by Famine imagery and extreme longing for things that have been lost. As Wayne Kime explains in his introduction to “The Lost Room”, “Loss, whether of one’s home, one’s family and dear friends, one’s talents, or one’s mental stability, was a topic often explored by O’Brien. In this tale he portrays his protagonist’s sudden loss of a private world he had assumed inviolable” (177). Loss is also a concept that dominates the Great Famine in which a great deal was lost by those who suffered through it, including homes and possessions, loved ones who were lost to either death or diaspora, human dignity and self-worth, the Irish language, and a stable, predictable world in which all was as it should be.

The Living Dead: The Great Famine in Dracula:

The aforementioned *Dracula*, written by Bram Stoker is also haunted by Famine imagery (Goss 80). Descriptions of Dracula’s victims are very similar to those commonly attributed to Famine victims: “The symptoms of his attack include deterioration of the body – pallor, weakness, skeletal appearance, lethargy, apathy and the inability to eat. These are all symptoms repeatedly described in accounts of famine, even the last, when after months of starvation, the sudden introduction of food to the stomach often made people sick” (Goss 85). As Lucy is being transformed, she is described as “ghastly, chalkily pale; the red seemed to have gone even from her lips and gums, and the bones of her face stood out prominently; her breathing was painful to see and hear...Lucy lay motionless and did not seem to have the strength to speak” (112-3). This scene is very reminiscent of many of the Famine victims/scenes described earlier in which the starving

are so weak and disoriented from hunger, they are unable to move or speak or even focus their attention on what is happening around them. Other common Famine motifs adopted by Stoker include the drinking of blood and blood stained mouths and teeth; protruding fangs and distended teeth; Dracula's ability to summon wolves and rats to do his evil bidding; ravenous hunger; madness; the dehumanization of victims who are portrayed as animalistic and the walking dead; and, even Dracula's arrival on English shores surrounded by a mist which was how the blight was thought to have arrived in Ireland (on the wind and in the air).

The drinking of blood is a Famine motif that Stoker capitalized on heavily, a motif adopted from reports of the Irish actually drinking the blood of cattle in order to survive:

In crossing the hills they often saw groups of men cornering cattle which they would bleed by cutting a vein in the neck of the beast extracting a few pints of blood, or whatever amount they could safely take, without endangering too much the life of the animal... The men would carry the blood home in jars and other vessels slung across their shoulders, some of them having to travel many miles before reaching home. When they would arrive their women folk would carefully salt the blood and some of it would be cooked by frying it in a pan. (Póirtéir 223)

Descriptions of blood stains on Lucy and Dracula's fangs and mouth recall the green stains that covered the teeth and mouths of Famine victims who ate weeds, nettles, seaweed, and grass in order to survive: "The dark stains on Lucy's mouth and robe recall other recurring Famine images... which include 'the walking dead' and descriptions of people, usually, children, 'with mouths stained green from eating grass'" (Goss 68). Even Dracula's fangs are borrowed from Famine imagery, representing the hungry mouths of the starving as well as the physical appearance of teeth that are said to become more prominent in victims suffering from starvation as their gum line begins to recede: "The

focus on the mouth and particularly on the pronounced appearance of teeth was common in representations of the suffering of Famine victims” (Goss 87).

Other common Famine motifs appropriated by Stoker include Renfield’s madness and subsequent attack on supply carts evocative of Famine food riots and looting as well as Dracula’s ability to command wolves and rats. In one especially horrifying scene, Van Helsing and his cohorts have tracked Dracula to one of his many homes in England. While they are searching one particular passageway, a mass of rats suddenly swarms the area: “The whole place was becoming alive with rats...in the minute that had elapsed the number of rats had vastly increased. They seemed to swarm over the place all at once, till the lamplight shining on their moving dark bodies and glittering, baleful eyes, made the place look like a ban of earth set with fireflies” (222). This is indicative of the rats that preyed upon the dead and dying during the Famine, a fate that was as terrifyingly real as death from disease or starvation: “Bodies actually lay unburied by hedges for rats soon devoured the flesh and only the skeleton remained. There is an instance of a family being found dead with their skeletons only remaining and the neighbours’ efforts failed to frighten away the rats which were feeding on the flesh” (Póirtéir 229). This is a gory image that Famine victims, unfortunately, would have been well-acquainted with, adding to their fear as well as to their psychological trauma.

The importance of burial and shortage of coffins in Ireland during the Famine is also alluded to in *Dracula*. When the Count arrives in England, he does so with no less than fifty coffins filled with soil from his homeland, which he then divvies up amongst the lairs he has purchased throughout the country. As previously and frequently discussed, the importance of burial cannot be overstated for it represents much more than

tradition and religion, though both were extremely important to the Irish peasantry. Burial also provided a sense of human dignity and self-worth, protecting the remains of the dead from further degradation and brutality.

The smell of death and decay that permeates Dracula's homes is also a common Famine motif in which the stench of the rotting potatoes foretells the coming of the blight and the starving are described as walking, rotting corpses carrying death and disease wherever they go: "A distinctive feature of famine fever, one on which several doctors commented, was the peculiar smell which clung to the clothes and bodies of the poor... This emanation was described by a doctor in West Cork as 'a cadaverous suffocating odour', a peculiar mousy smell', which was 'always the forerunner of death'" (Geary 83). Their fate was sealed. The smell of death was upon them. They were indeed like Dracula, the living dead.

Social commentary/criticism in *Dracula* is much more subtle than that found in *The Black Prophet* and is wide open to interpretation and speculation. As discussed earlier, there is much that suggests Ireland's long and turbulent history of oppression under British rule with analogies between Britain draining the resources, lifeblood, and culture out of Ireland just as Dracula drained the blood from his victims. Irish uprisings against the British could also be inferred. Vampires could be interpreted as both the souls of Famine victims who will not be laid to rest as Sarah Goss argues (105) and/or the Famine dead who never received a proper burial. They are the Famine personified, for, like the Famine, they prey on the weak and helpless: Dracula feeds primarily on women, while Lucy (and Dracula's wives) feeds on children. Vampires also represent Famine victims, wan-like in appearance and constantly in search of blood/food. *Dracula* could

also be construed as a story about immigration, for just as Dracula left his native land behind and immigrated to England via ship, so too did millions leave Ireland onboard what would come to be known as coffin ships due to the number of people who perished en route. And last but not least, *Dracula*, like the Famine, could be a story about survival and resilience and innocence lost.

Irrespective of the various motives and subliminal messages that can be derived from critical analyses of the above texts, the gothic imagery employed in *Dracula*, *The Black Prophet*, and “The Lost Room” more than adequately represents the supernatural force that was the Great Famine. As Sarah Goss tells us, “The Irish gothic novel is one place we can look for this not-fully-processed material, for the ‘inevitable recurrence’ of trauma so great as to be beyond the full power of articulation and where material not representable within the bounds of realism can take shape” (80). The use of gothic imagery to describe Famine conditions would continue well into the twentieth-century, and, as we have seen with Fitz-James O’Brien’s work, travel far across the sea to other lands. So while there was a silence of sorts immediately following the Famine, a silence that reverberated across the decimated land, a torrent of imagery rose to fill the void and express the sorrow, horror, and despair that a nation suffered until it could find its voice and heal its many wounds.

CHAPTER VI

PARADISE LOST: THE IRISH IN EXILE

The disaster...which saw destruction of one Ireland helped to create another Ireland which was not confined within the shores of one small island, for the North American Irish in particular were destined to make a remarkable contribution to the shaping of modern Irish history. (as quoted in Butterly and Shepherd, p. 41-2)

Though an estimated 1.5 million people left Ireland throughout the Famine years (Kinealy 7), the depopulation of Ireland via emigration had actually begun years before and continued long afterwards as a means to escape the firmly established cycle of poverty and lack of opportunity that centuries of imperialism and colonialism had wrought for the Irish-Catholic population. Prior to the Famine it is estimated that 1.5 million people left Ireland between 1815 and 1845 (Butterly and Shepperd 44-45) and that as many as 4 million emigrated between 1850 and 1914 (Coohill 114). This long tradition of emigration depleted Ireland of one of its most crucial resources: the Irish people.

The Exodus: Flight from Famine

It is often believed that those who left were primarily the weak and the starving and the most desperate of the poor. Unless they had landlords who were willing to pay for their passage (oftentimes in an attempt to clear their land), relatives in other lands

who would send passage money back to them, or were a part of a poor law scheme that allowed districts to “siphon off some of their increasing numbers of ‘deadweight’ paupers – single mothers, deserted wives and orphan children – to Australia and Canada” (Crawford 2), most of the desperate poor did not initially have the means to leave the country: “Emigration...increased after 1847, not for the poorest people, but as an outlet for those who had the energy and the resources to leave the country” (Kinealy 15). And most landowners were not so generous or concerned with the fate of their tenants once they were evicted off their lands. As a consequence, those who could afford to leave were often in better health and had the necessary skills to earn money to pay for their own passage, attributes that would desperately be needed during post-Famine reconstruction. As Butterly and Shepperd report,

Who was left behind? Many of those who could not afford food during the Famine also lacked funds to emigrate. The fare to North America – plus food for three or four months at sea – equaled about a year’s wages for a laborer. Those who could emigrate from Ireland, therefore, were the healthier and better off; those who remained were predominately the poor and unemployed, malnourished and weakened by illness and disease. This further deprived Ireland and its agriculture of reliable and healthy human capital and left behind a peasantry caught in a poverty trap inside the country. (45)

This does not imply, however, that all those who left Ireland did so willingly or eagerly, for there were many who did so with extreme reluctance and apprehension for it often involved a one-way trip to foreign lands fraught with great peril and anxiety in addition to the hardships they had already endured at home. For many who emigrated there was the sorrow of leaving their homeland and loved ones behind (and guilt, much like survivor’s guilt, for having abandoned them); the oftentimes horrific voyage in the aforementioned coffin ships; the stress of facing the unknown in a strange new land; the

adjustment to an urban setting from the rural setting that most were accustomed to; a continued lost sense of identity; feelings of displacement; being subjected to many of the same prejudices that oppressed them in Ireland; and for some, anger and resentment towards what they perceived to be a forced exile. And if they didn't have friends or relatives waiting for them on the other side, the adjustment, acclimation, and acceptance into the new society offered additional challenges and distress. The expectations of family members who had been left behind were also an added burden, for it was often expected that those who left would send funds (or passage money) back to those who remained. The pleas from back home could be as haunting and as heartbreaking as the horrific Famine images that Irish immigrants carried with them: ““they are Dying like the cholera Pigs as fast they can Bury them and Some of their Remains does not be Buri[e]d for ten or fifteen Days and the dogs eating them some Buried in mats others in their clothes”” (Fitzpatrick 174). While crudely written and somewhat difficult to decipher, the sense of urgency and desperation are clearly evident.

Because many felt they had no choice but to leave Ireland in order to survive and pursue opportunity elsewhere, and most of those who left never returned home again, this notion of forced exile came into being: “Many saw themselves as reluctant emigrants, but few returned to Ireland. As a consequence, the popular view of emigration as exile was reinforced, strengthened by songs and poetry that lamented the leaving of Ireland” (Kinealy 22). American wakes were held for those departing (Fanning 118) for emigration was viewed very much like death in that they would likely never see one other again: “A second by-product of the Famine was emigration, sometimes forced. Those who escaped, either voluntarily or involuntarily, left behind loved ones to mourn” (Parr

38). Parents were separated from their sons and daughters and even fathers from their wives and children as they left to try to establish a better life for themselves and for their families, further traumatizing the famine-ridden land.

As the Irish continued to emigrate, they established Irish communities worldwide – predominantly in the United States, Canada, Australia, and even England, for the fare was cheaper and the distance closer – making it easier for those who followed. As money was sent back home in what David Fitzpatrick refers to as a “reverse flow of money” (178), others could afford to join them, even those in some of the poorest locations in Ireland. Funds from overseas would likewise help rebuild post-Famine Ireland and put the country on its course towards independence both economically and politically:

Ireland’s social structure became increasingly dependent on its perpetuation. The money sent home by emigrants had many functions apart from funding further movement. Small farmers often relied on remittances to pay the rent, buy livestock, supply dowries, or clear shop debts; the churches drew heavily upon emigrant purses to provide relief in periods of rural crisis; politicians and conspirators used American money to promote their campaigns. (Fitzpatrick 180)

Sending money back home was also a way of dealing with guilt-induced trauma for it justified their reasons for leaving while helping to alleviate some of the suffering and hardships that lingered long after the Great Famine was over.

Because emigration appealed to the young, it not only depleted Ireland’s population overall, but its future generations of nation-builders as well (Fitzpatrick 176). While the narrator of *Golden Hills* and supporters of Malthusianism found this to be favorable, Ireland would never recover from its mass exodus. The 1841 census indicated that Ireland’s population pre-Famine had reached a staggering 8,175,124 people

(Woodham-Smith 31). According to the Irish government's website, www.gov.ie, Ireland's population in 2012, 171 years later, was just over 4.5 million.

Feelings of loneliness and isolation were also common, resulting in what Lois Tyson refers to as "the trauma of the cultural displacement":

This feeling of being caught between cultures, of belonging to neither rather than both, of finding oneself arrested in a psychological limbo that results not merely from some individual psychological disorder but from the trauma of the cultural displacement within which one lives...Being 'unhomed' is not the same as being homeless. To be unhomed is to feel not at home even in our own home because you are not home in yourself: your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee, so to speak. (421)

This was an important concern for Irish immigrants who, while proud of their heritage, also wanted to establish a sense of belonging, identity, and influence in their new world, something they could never fully realize in an Ireland dominated by another nation that had so thoroughly imposed its own culture, language, and political doctrines upon the people. By proving their worth through hard-work and determination, emigration provided a fresh start as well as the opportunity to distance themselves from the stereotypes that had previously plagued and hindered them, a feat that would surprise those who had made a habit of berating them: "Hard-headed English economists were bewildered by the seemingly unforced generosity and good sense of a people whom they had so often chastised for their imprudence, indiscipline and irresponsibility" (Fitzpatrick 179).

Sentimental and Pastoral Imagery: A Way to Cope with Loss

As previously discussed, the Famine is fundamentally a story about loss, and this concept of loss is especially relevant to Irish immigrants who lost their homeland as well

as their sense of identity, which would manifest in profound feelings of homesickness and nostalgia for that which could never again be regained. As Frawley explains

When nostalgia extends beyond the individual, it can become a sociological phenomenon that revolves around a longing for lost culture or theoretically unrecovered past. In this sense, nostalgia serves, quite effectively, as a safety mechanism designed to bridge past and present for cultures as they experience change. In post-colonial cultures, and in cultures that have experienced large scale emigration or social disruption, one would thus expect to find high levels of nostalgia, whether for the pre-colonial past, or for a time before emigration was economically and socially necessary. In Ireland, with its strange status as a western European former colony and its history of emigration, nostalgia has functioned at all of these levels. (3)

Aside from being a post-colonialism nation undergoing large-scale emigration, Ireland had also experienced great social upheaval in the form of the Great Famine. As a consequence, nostalgia for an idealized version of Ireland would become even more critical to its survivors, resulting in “selective realism” (Fanning 140), a practice in which certain aspects of Irish life would be emphasized and certain aspects ignored – or conveniently forgotten. Frawley further contends that “during times of unrest or insecurity, nostalgia functions to remind individuals, generations and entire cultures of times that, because of their distance from the unsettled present, seem safer and more stable” (4). In this manner, Ireland would become a paradise lost: an idyllic, romanticized, and even mythicized Eden, its soil soaked with the blood of its martyrs and freedom-fighters; the people portrayed as brave, heroic, witty, generous, hospitable, industrious, and pious; the past as a “Golden Age” based on “illusion” and “Freud’s notion of wish-fulfillment” versus stark reality (Gifford 41-2).

Developing their own literary style with a specific message and audience in mind was a way for Irish immigrants to deal with the trauma of relocating and regaining the

lost sense of self that they experienced, for it would provide them with a venue to deal with their sense of displacement as well as a way to reinvent themselves as both Irish and as a member of their new community. Irish immigrants could hold onto their “Irishness”, recreate it without the negative components that it encompassed in Ireland, and assimilate into their new environment. As a result, post-Famine Irish-immigration writers would generate a distinct set of motifs to fill the emotional abyss and sense of nostalgia that leaving their loved ones and homeland behind had created. Just as gothic imagery and language provided Irish writers with a way to describe the horrors of the Famine and work through their trauma, pastoral and sentimental imagery and language would help Irish immigrants express their homesickness, melancholy, and regret for all that they had lost while providing a means for the displaced Irish to support each other and help each other navigate a strange and alien new world. As described by *The Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, the pastoral

displays a nostalgia for the past, for some hypothetical state of love and peace which has somehow been lost. The dominating idea and theme of most pastoral is the search for the simple life away from the court and town, away from corruptions, war, strife, the love of gain, away from ‘getting and spending’. In a way it reveals a yearning for a lost innocence, for a pre-Fall paradisaical life in which man existed in harmony with nature. (647)

Or in the case of Ireland, the search for a simple life away from famine and oppression.

There is also a deeper quality to this seemingly frivolous mode that in the past was primarily concerned with the lives of shepherds and their ostensibly idyllic life. As the above description suggests, the pastoral often references a romanticized past to contrast, define, and/or critique the present, as well as an idealized landscape to provide a soothing rural setting that contrasts sharply with the frenzy of contemporary urban life,

while (overtly or subliminally) supporting the author's moral and/or political views, a feature also common to gothic literature which also provides a means of rendering social observation. As Terry Gifford explains, "the pastoral can be a mode of political critique of present society, or it can be a dramatic form of unresolved dialogue about the tensions in that society, or it can be a retreat from politics into an apparently aesthetic landscape that is devoid of conflict and tension" (11). Similar to other literary genres, it can be molded and manipulated to serve the author's intent, whether it be to simply glorify nature and reminisce about a simpler time or make social commentary and influence a specific audience and convey a specific message. And just as nature is an important feature of the pastoral, it, too, was an important component of the Famine, for it was the collapse of nature which led to this cataclysmic national disaster. Or, as Oona Frawley phases it, "the Famine was the literal failure of the pastoral" (45).

Sentimental fiction is often a feature of the pastoral and vice versa. Similar to the pastoral, the sentimental, too, often had a specific message to share with a specific audience and with a specific response that it wished to evoke. Rather than using nature or an idealized past to convey that message, the sentimental exploited emotions, most often to garner sympathy and create a sense of allegiance between reader and writer. As Janet Todd observes, the "arousal of pathos through conventional situations, stock familial characters and rhetorical devices is the mark of sentimental literature. Such literature buttonholes the reader and demands an emotional, even physical response. The sentimental work reveals a belief in the appealing and aesthetic quality of virtue" (2). Todd further maintains that "This fiction initially showed people how to behave, how to express themselves in friendship and how to respond decently to life's experiences...A

sentimental work moralizes more than it analyses and emphasis is not on the subtleties of a particular emotional state but on the communication of common feeling from sufferer or watcher to reader or audience” (4). Consequently, the sentimental, as well as the pastoral, in some Irish-immigration literature comes across as rather sermon-like and preachy, more like moral advice manuals on how to comport oneself in morally compromising situations and strange new surroundings similar to the urban American setting that awaited many an Irish immigrant at journey’s end. It must be remembered, however, that flowery language and phrases are not indicators of sentimentalism as direct, rigid, and assertive language could also provoke strong emotional responses from the reader such as indignation, outrage, and dread. As Todd further clarifies, “A ‘sentiment’ is a moral reflection, a rational opinion usually about the rights and wrongs of human conduct...But a ‘sentiment’ is also a thought, often an elevated one, influenced by emotion, a combining of heart with head or an emotional impulse leading to an opinion or a principle” (7). *The Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* upholds this description stating that the sentimental novel “concentrated on the distresses of the virtuous and attempted to show that a sense of honour and moral behaviour were justly rewarded. It also attempted to show that effusive emotion was evidence of kindness and goodness” (809).

As a result immigration motifs would emerge, including the prerequisite (much like cabin scenes in Famine literature) leave-taking or parting scene in which the heartache associated with emigration is depicted as family and friends leave their homeland and loved ones behind; storms at sea symbolizing the turbulent, emotional crossing over from one life to another; the final view of Ireland’s beloved shores as the

ship makes its way out to open sea; depictions of the immorality, temptations, and dangers associated with urban living to serve as a warning to the inexperienced and naïve Irish immigrants arriving daily; characters who fall prey to these temptations contrasted against those who remain true and proper; and descriptions of the rewards that could be reaped for those who remain steadfast to their principles – as well as the dire consequences awaiting those who do not.

***Paradise Restored in Irish-Immigration Literature:
Bessy Conway, or the Irish Girl in America***

Published in 1861, *Bessy Conway, or the Irish Girl in America*, written by leading Irish-American female author Mary Anne Sadlier is a primary example of Irish-immigration literature employing sentimentalism. Sadlier left Ireland in 1844, just prior to the Great Famine, and settled first in Canada before moving on to New York City with her publisher husband, James Sadlier of the D. & J. Sadlier Company, a branch of which still exists today in the form of William H. Sadlier, Inc. The majority of her books, *Bessy Conway* among them, are aimed primarily at an audience comprised of Irish-Catholic immigrants who are coming to a world far different from the one they left behind, a modern world filled with great temptation and lacking in moral values. In *Bessy Conway* Sadlier's attention is focused primarily on young Irish-Catholic girls immigrating to America, often on their own, and the many moral hazards that await them. Consequently, the novel is both a warning regarding those perils and an advice book on how to avoid them, becoming, in essence, "an instruction manual for working girls" (Fanning 132). Indeed, in her original preface, Sadlier informs the reader:

I have written this book from a sincere and heartfelt desire to benefit these young country-women of mine by showing them how to win respect and inspire confidence on the part of their employers, and at the same time, to

avoid the snares and pitfalls which have been the ruin of so many of their own class. Let them be assured that it rests with themselves whether they do well or ill in America—whether they do honor to their country and their faith, or bring shame and reproach to both. (iv)

Her main message: to stay true to the Catholic faith and observe its rules and doctrines at all times; her secondary message: to keep the memory of Ireland alive and do their homeland proud. In order to accomplish this, Sadlier employs what Fanning refers to as “the obvious but effective Sadlier technique of presenting contrasting characters to point to her moral” (119). The main heroine, Bessy Conway, is used as the premier prototype for which all young Irish girls should strive. Presented as a young woman with strong moral convictions and devoted to sustaining the spiritual upbringing that she received back home, Bessy is contrasted sharply with other Irish female immigrants who fall prey to the moral dangers that urban American life has to offer these susceptible young girls. These perils include abandonment of one’s faith and religious practices; engaging in lurid conduct such as going to dances and taking up with disreputable young men who might lead them astray; the threat of being corrupted by persons of other religions who would try to convert them; behaving in an unruly and discourteous manner; and wasting money on frivolous items such as fancy attire and gaudy jewelry instead of saving and/or sending money back home to either their family or their local parish.

While the Famine doesn’t actually appear until the end of the book (most of the action takes place in America pre-Famine), it is briefly mentioned at the beginning of the story in reference to how Bessy’s father, Denis Conway, avoids the hardships of the Famine while so many others either perish or are left destitute. Interestingly enough, his sparing is attributed to Divine Providence as reward for his continued faith in God despite the misery afflicted upon them (6). The Conway’s actual salvation, however, lies in the

emigration of Bessy who left Ireland for New York City several years prior to the Famine. Because the novel's main focus is the deportment of Irish-immigrant girls in America, the Famine is not reintroduced until the end of the story when Bessy, through much sacrifice, determination, and hard work, returns to Ireland triumphant, saving her family from eviction and certain pauperism. The narrative begins instead by depicting the emotional turmoil induced by emigration, bringing to mind the concept of the aforementioned American wake, as her family, convinced that they will never see her again, view her departure as they would her death:

Denis Conway and his family retraced their homeward steps not in silence, but in sorrow,—scarcely, if, at all, lessened by the number of their neighbors similarly afflicted. They felt at the moment as if they had left Bessy in the churchyard clay, and the lightest heart among them was weighed down with sorrow. None of them could realize to themselves that they should ever see her face again, her promise to the contrary notwithstanding. (9)

Such a scene would have been familiar to many of Sadlier's Irish immigrant audience, evoking the same sorrow and emotional trauma that they experienced before their own departure. The leave-taking scene is soon followed by the storm-at-sea scene in a chapter appropriately titled "The Storm":

"Say your prayers, ma'am, dear!" said Bessy, whose pale cheek and quivering lip testified her emotion though she tried to appear composed; "say your prayers—God will hear them." Mrs. Walters involuntarily sank on her knees and buried her face in her hands. The ladies' cabin was by this time a scene of wild confusion. Some were crying and wringing their hands, some fainting away with terror, other endeavoring to console and encourage others, like Bessy Conway, kneeling in fervent supplication to the throne of Mercy. Husbands and fathers and brothers were there, some of them trying to keep up the failing spirits of their female relatives, others moodily pondering on the probable termination of the scene. The sea was raging mountains high, and the hatches were nailed down by the captain's orders to protect all below from the ravages of the angry waters which ever and anon came sweeping over the deck with resistless fury. Amid the wild roar and sound of rushing billows came dolefully from below the

cries of the steerage and second cabin passengers terrified by the convulsive motions of the laboring vessel...It was a dismal chorus, raging winds, storm-tossed waves and the voice of human anguish. And the scene which met the eye was no less dreary, whether one looked up to the pitchy sky or down to the boiling ocean, or forward to the flickering light which marked the rocky coast of Ireland. (41)

The terror and chaos caused by the storm is a powerful analogy of the turmoil that many would be feeling on this life-changing voyage. The voyage by ship also corresponds with the trauma of the unknown for it would have been a new and terrifying experience for many who had probably never even seen a ship (or the ocean) before, much less travelled on one.

The sentimental and pastoral is utilized once again as the passengers catch their last glimpse of Ireland before heading off across the Atlantic:

It was drawing towards evening on the day following that first awful night at sea when the *Garrick* passed within the sight of the Irish coast, and oh! how beautiful it looked in the light of the setting sun! How dear it was each one felt at that last sad moment—they knew not before how much they loved that “Isle of beauty” till the well-spring in their hearts gushed forth at the sight of the land which had hitherto been their home—the land of childhood’s happy days where dead friends lay in their quiet graves awaiting the Resurrection, and living hearts still beat warmly for them, and sadly mourned their departure. (49)

This, too, would be a shared memory uniting the author’s audience, evoking the homesickness, melancholy, and nostalgia that haunts them. Knowing that others experienced the same trauma would help them feel that they were not alone in their sorrow and helped articulate for them what they were feeling.

Several neighbors from home are also embarking upon the same journey with Bessy including Mary Murphy, a girl of about the same age as Bessy but who is traveling with her family; Ned Finigan, who marries Mary’s sister, Ally, soon after their arrival in America; and Paul Brannigan, a pious God-fearing man who is the male counterpart of

Bessy in his religious devotion. Also accompanying Bessy is Henry Herbert, the son of the Conway's Anglo-Irish landlord, who is Protestant and something of a scoundrel, representing the villain of the story (until he repents and converts to Catholicism) and potential love interest for Bessy. Although he pursues Bessy relentlessly in America, she perseveres and resists him, maintaining her (and Ireland's) honor while avoiding bringing shame and disgrace down upon herself, her family, and her homeland.

The same, however, cannot be said for several other female Irish-immigrants that Bessy encounters during her stay in America who are either spiritually corrupted (i.e., stop attending mass) or fall prey to temptation once they arrive in America, providing the contrasting foil for the industrious, dutiful, and dedicated Bessy Conway. Bessy's acquaintance from home, Mary Murphy, squanders her money and lives recklessly. Instead of being careful with her earnings and behaving respectably like Bessy, we are told that Mary spends all her money on "foolish dress that only makes a show of her" and spends her free time at disreputable dances which her mother scathingly refers to as "*devil-digs*" versus "*shin-digs*" (192). We learn later that Mary gets her just-deserts when, much to her family's horror and everlasting disgrace, she marries Luke Mulligan, a ragman from back home that she met at one of the "devil" dances that helped contribute to her downfall.

Sally, a domestic coworker of Bessy, fares no better. After sneaking around with a rather unsavory man "with a black mustache and pair of sharp eyes" when she's supposed to be working, Sally is eventually fired. After leaving the respectable house where they are employed, she ends up working at a local saloon. When she returns for a visit, she

reveals to another of the domestic workers named Bridget (after lying to Bessy about how well she is doing),

I guess I an't going to stay where I am, for I an't used, you know, to be up at five o'clock and it's pretty hard work, cleaning after all sorts of rowdies in a salon, for less wages, too, than I had here. Still I tell you I was glad enough to get it...but I must be off—the boss is the devil of a rough customer, and the old woman takes a drop more than she should! (122)

Several years later Bessy encounters Sally begging with several children in tow. As she watches Sally depart, she recognizes the man with the black mustache as he approaches Sally and later hears one of the children lamenting, “Oh! daddy! don't beat mammy! She ha'nt got noting—noting at all!” (225). That Sally and her children are out begging for the man (who may or may not be her husband) is apparent, as is the dire warning for other Irish girls who might be tempted to follow in her footsteps.

A young girl's reputation is not the only thing at stake, however, for so too is her immortal soul as evidenced once again through comparison with Bessy who has long sermon-like discussions with other servant girls who give up attending mass. Bessy is let go from one job when her current employer, Mrs. Hibbard – who, in an interesting twist, is being converted from Episcopalian to Methodist – attempts to make her servants pray with the family. Bessy refuses telling Mrs. Hibbard that “Catholics are forbidden to join in prayer, ma'am, with any expect people of their own persuasion” (206). Though Bessy is fired as a result, in an act of Divine Providence, she is rewarded for being steadfast to her faith and finds a better job in the household of a Catholic physician. And in the end, once Bessy is back home in Ireland, it is Henry Herbert, the son of the Anglo-Irish landowner who converts from Protestantism to Catholicism in an act of redemption (and reverse proselytism).

The fate of young Irish girls does not garner the author's sole focus, however, for the perils of alcohol are also discussed at length. In one particular scene, the aforementioned Paul Brannigan berates fellow immigrant Ned Finigan who now runs a public house in America making plain his (and the author's) views on the subject:

When you see a naked, starved-lookin' creature of a man comin' in to take his glass, don't you know very well that the money he throws down on your counter has the curse of a heart-broken wife on it, an' that a whole family may be shiverin' with cold an' perishin' with hunger while that beast of a man is gettin' drunk on your *stock*, as you call it? Ah! That's the stock that brings down the wrath of God on them that sell it an' them that buy it... (67)

We learn later that Ned's life of debauchery has taken its toll. He is now a "cumbrous load of blubber—the hale, fresh, good-humored face was no longer what it had been, broad and coarse and covered with a sort of purple hue, its unsightliness was further increased by sundry blotches and carbuncles, and the eyes, once bright and twinkling with good humor, were now dull and unmeaning, protruding far beyond their sockets" (215). Like Sally, the poor choices he makes have dire consequences, and in Ned's case, actually leave their mark upon him.

As indicated earlier, Bessy returns home to rescue her family from the Famine in what Charles Fanning describes as one of Sadlier's "least plausible plot resolutions" (134). As the Conway family is in the throes of being evicted from their homestead and their furniture is being hauled outside and piled up at the door, Bessy herself comes walking up the road to save the day. She pays off the bailiff as well as her family's other debts and prosperity is once again restored to the Conway household suggesting that Bessy's diligence and hard work are to be accredited along with her father's unwavering faith that God will see them through despite the hardships being inflicted upon them.

Indeed, just moments before Bessy arrives and while their furniture is being carried from the house, his faith remains unshaken as he tells his family “don’t despair, for your lives, don’t! the darkest hour, you know, is the hour before day and I tell you God won’t desert us though the world may!” (271). There is no attempt to explain why so many others who also retained their faith and prayed to God for deliverance were not so fortunate and continued to suffer horribly while the Conway’s prevailed.

Even Herbert Henry is redeemed due to Bessy’s influence. When they are reunited in Ireland shortly after her return, he informs her of his conversion to the Catholic faith:

Suddenly he raised his eyes and ventured to meet her gaze for the first time. “Bessy!” said he, his pale cheek flushing like a young maiden’s, “Bessy! I have been guilty before God and the world, but not before you—I have never injured you in thought, in word, or in deed—I have loved you, God only knows how well,—you have been my star of hope—my rock of safety amidst the raging billows of this sinful world—it may be that you have prayed for me—in *charity*”—he said with emphasis—“if so—if at any time you invoked the God of mercy on my behalf, and Mary the refuge of sinners, you will now rejoice even as the angels of heaven do—in a sinner’s conversion!”...The tears gushed from Bessy’s eyes, and drawing a step nearer she laid her hand on his arm. (306)

They can now be together before God and man, for “Now that Herbert was converted from his evil ways, she cared not who saw them together, for in her heart she was proud of his affection” (314). Bessy and her family are assured a happy ending while the continued suffering of her neighbors is overlooked similar to *The Black Prophet*, *Golden Hills*, and *Castle Richmond*.

After Bessy returns to Ireland, pastoral images are utilized to restore Ireland’s Famine wasteland to a paradise no longer lost but newly restored – at least for the Conway’s – satisfying the nostalgic longing of Sadlier’s American-based readership. As

the Conway family's circumstances continue to improve, Ireland is once again presented as the idyllic Eden of yesteryear:

The green fields of Erin were covered with their spring carpet dotted over with white daises and yellow buttercups; the pale primrose—flower of sweetest memories!—was peeping forth on every sunny bank; the modest violet gave its faint perfume to the air, and the graceful blue-bell waved its fairy petals in the gentle breeze; the earth was balmy with the breath of opening flowers, and the trees were donning their summer foliage through the sunny showers... Denis Conway and his sons were hard at work all day—and every day of the six allotted for labor—putting in their crops of wheat, oats, and early potatoes. The whole household was astir from morn till dewy eve, each one employed in their own sphere of usefulness. Nancy and Ellen were assisting out-of-doors whilst Bessy and her mother attended to the business of the house and the dairy. (298)

The language turns poetic in its vivid descriptions and the imagery that it evokes. We can see the colors of the flowers swaying in the summer breeze and smell their heady fragrance. We can picture the Conway's working serenely in the fields and bustling about the house while completing their daily chores. We can hear the gentle mooing of the cows as they are driven towards the dairy for their evening milking. We can feel the family's quiet joy and contentment as they go about their daily routine. Irish immigrants toiling in America are whisked back to a kinder, gentler time when all is as it should be and famine is just a distant memory, their current drudgery forgotten for a few sweet moments. What we cannot see or hear are the Famine victims who continue to suffer in the background despite the Conway's good fortune.

While the above examples primarily employ sentimental and pastoral language to influence and sway the reader and/or evoke certain emotional reactions from them, be it sorrow, outrage, fear, happiness, disgust, pity, joy, or merely to fulfill a longing to return to days of old when all was right with the world, even when it wasn't, they also utilize the elements of selective realism, wish fulfillment, and illusion alluded to earlier. As Bessy

recounts to her neighbors the downside of American life upon her return, describing the pitfalls that many of their fellow countrymen and women have fallen prey to, she warns her neighbors that “America is a bad place for young girls to go to, unless they have their father, or brothers, or somebody to look after them” (294). In the end she advises them to “keep your girls at home—if *you* can live here, so can they, and you’ll find it better in the long run” (296). Little regard is given to the fact that had Bessy not gone to America her family’s circumstances would have been far different. As Fanning observes, already somewhat vexed by the unlikely plot resolution:

This unrealistic resolution involves a double distortion. Bessy Conway did so well in America, and the Famine years were so terrible in Ireland, that her return to the old country is implausible on both counts. Bessy’s return is motivated more by Sadlier’s pessimism about American city life for Irish Catholics than by the demands of realistic fiction. Moreover, the picture of a successful immigrant girl returning to Ireland to rescue her family in “the terrible year of the Famine” is formidable wishful thinking. (134)

While wishful thinking may seem pointless and perhaps even damaging if taken to the extreme, it can also help bridge the distance between American and Irish shores, erase horrific memories of famine, help make current hardships and homesickness a bit more tolerable, and provide a much needed respite from a reality far removed from what Irish-immigrants were accustomed to facing each day. If at the same time it provides the tired, poor, huddled masses yearning to be free with hope, encouragement, and a sense of belonging in an alien environment, a measure of unrealistic resolutions may have to be forgiven. After all, in real life there was no happy ending to the Great Famine. Perhaps that’s why so many Irish authors of the nineteenth century felt so compelled to write one, no matter how incongruous it might seem, especially to the modern-day reader.

***Paradise Preserved in Irish-Immigration Literature:
Annie Reilly or the Fortunes of an Irish Girl in New York***

While Sadlier's novel is the primary example of Irish-immigration literature featured here, there are others examples that are very similar. Among them, *Annie Reilly or the Fortunes of an Irish Girl in New York, a Tale Founded on Fact* (1878) written by Irish-immigrant author, John McElgun. Though *Annie Reilly* takes place not long after the Famine, it is referenced briefly and the circumstances that usurp the Reilly family and their close friends and neighbors, the O'Rourke's, from their home are very similar to what occurred during the Famine. Both families are evicted by their villainous landlord, John G. Ryan, also known as "the Pig" amongst the peasantry (46), and as a consequence are left destitute and dependent upon relatives for their survival. As a result each family has a child emigrant to America. For the Reilly's it is initially their daughter Annie who is followed a few years later by her brother, Francis; for the O'Rourke's it is their son, James, who is also Annie's love interest. There is the heart-wrenching scene when the evicted family must leave their beloved home; the American wake that takes place before Annie's departure; the heartbreaking parting as Annie leaves her loved ones behind; the storm-at-sea scene as the ship passes the shores of Newfoundland; and allusions to the deplorable conditions steerage passengers had to endure. Upon Annie's arrival in America there is even a reference to the imperialism and colonialism that has plagued Ireland, which is curiously absent from *Bessy Conway*:

What a moment it is for those kept down with poverty and oppression at home, toiling in hunger and exposure to enrich the very ones to whom they owe their degradation, when their weary eyes first rest on America's shore! Once there, they know tyranny can claim them no more, and that every advantage, every justice allowed an honest people on earth will be their share. (129)

There are also the unsuccessful attempts by employers who try to lure Annie away from her Catholic faith and Annie defending it staunchly as she responds to all their slurs against it in a skillful manner that confounds and stymies them. And, like Sadlier before him, McElgun does not leave out the negative aspects of urban life in America, discussing the slums and back-breaking work that await them as well as the nefarious individuals lurking on docks and prowling the streets waiting to pounce on newly arriving greenhorns to swindle what little money they have brought with them.

Annie Reilly deviates from *Bessie Conway* in that there is as much attention, if not more, following and describing James O'Rourke's experiences in America. Having left Ireland apart from Annie, the childhood sweethearts are separated for the greater part of the novel. Leaving New York City for the oil fields of Pennsylvania, James struggles with the drinking and debauchery surrounding him which makes him yearn nostalgically for his homeland:

The wild and reckless class amongst whom he lived was a source of great pain to him. During his first few weeks there, when the day's work was over, he would wander away alone, and sit in some quiet spot where he might not hear the curses, foul language, and drunken shouts of the others, and think of Ireland, with its quiet plains, gentle mountains and rivers, and green hills with tall chapel-spires peeping over their tops – an emblem of its people's devotion to God and the Catholic Church. (197-8)

In the midst of all this revelry, James remains true to his faith traveling many miles each Sunday to attend mass, lectures his fellow workers on the perils of drinking, and through much hard work and perseverance is rewarded first by being appointed clerk in the company's office and later by being given a full partnership. When James and Annie are reunited years later, their happily-ever-after is not long in coming. After years of being apart and remaining true to each other, they have a chance encounter while attending

mass when James happens to be in New York on business. The reunion is joyous and described ardently with sentimental language:

What a change had come over Annie's life since she left that little room in the morning! Then she was not very unhappy, but the painful sense of something wanting, which distressed her so often during those years, was now banished. Now her heart was full and overflowing with joy, and the tears which the "little lion" could keep back in the presence of misfortune and grief fell freely now that she was supremely happy. James had been a good, religious man she could tell during his long absence from her sight. No crime or vice had set their mark on his countenance. It was as bright, genial, and intellectual as she gazed at it unawares as he played or sang for her on the green hill-top. His upright life was receiving its reward even here... And what shall we say of his happiness now? All the fears that embittered his life so long at an end; the dream of years fulfilled; Annie, whose shadow he traced in the twilight, whose smile the moonbeams reflected, was now by his side, more beautiful than his imagination had ever painted her, never to leave him again. Yes, Annie and James were very, very happy that Sunday evening in Kitty's little parlor. (141-2)

They are married the very next day, their happy ending, like the Conway's achieved through hard work, immense faith, and determination while surrounded by corruption and enticement. Interestingly enough, unlike Bessy and Henry, Annie and James do not relocate back to Ireland at the end to reclaim their paradise lost, which they find instead in America. Instead, Ireland is purified and preserved within their memory for all time. As Margu rite Corporaal observes, "the text does not entirely exorcise the idea of Ireland as a lost paradise, for Annie and James do not settle back in Ireland. The green fields of Erin that James pines for appear to be an Eden that can survive only in memory but not be re-experienced physically" (341). In this respect, perhaps *Annie Reilly* is the more realistic of the two, for it was uncommon for Irish-immigrants to return to their homeland once firmly established elsewhere. This does not mean, however, that they did not maintain a great affection for their homeland; just the opposite. And it was narratives such as *Bessy Conway* and *Annie Reilly* that would cultivate that passion for

their native-land and keep it alive, providing Irish emigrants with that identity that eluded them even in Ireland; an identity that would now be firmly established in their faith, their love of their motherland, their dedication, determination, and diligence, as well as all the other characteristics that the Irish would come to be known for around the world in perhaps a new set of stereotypes, such as their wit, love of music, dance, laughter (and drink), as well as hospitality and generosity.

Besides prosperity and opportunity, there were other positive outcomes from the Famine's mass migration, and not just to other lands for many Irish moved from rural areas to cities within Ireland, making the peasantry as obsolete as the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy would become in the twentieth-century. While emigration stripped Ireland of its population, it did leave more resources and "elbow-room" for those who remained as the narrator of *Golden Hills* rather callously proclaims. And the money sent (or brought back home, as illustrated in *Bessy Conway*), helped reconstruct post-Famine Ireland and help families pay off debt and rebuild their own lives. As the opening quote to this section suggests, Irish immigration had a far-reaching effect on Ireland's future as well as Great Britain's and even America's. Christine Kinealy's findings indicate that "emigration reinforced existing support for Irish nationalism in the United States, and many of the exiles from the 1848 uprising were sowing the seeds for the emergence of Fenianism twenty years later" (22). Butterly and Shepperd further contend that

Those who took in the Irish – Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and the United States – gained immediately from Irish adult immigrant labor. In one exquisite twist of history, the influx of large numbers of Irish men in the 1840s and 1850s in Boston and New York provided, starting in 1861, five regiments of Irish infantry (the Irish Brigade) that fought in the Civil War against the Confederates, who were supported by the British. The bravery and service of the Irish troops helped preserve the Union of the United States, assure its sovereignty as a nation and its progress toward

becoming the world's leading democracy. By 1870, just 20 years after the starvation and upheaval of the Great Famine, more than 1 million Irish lived in the United States and another 300,000 in Canada. They and other new immigrants gave voice and substance to the American democracy, which in turn inspired and stirred other peoples in the colonial world, as well as in Ireland, and foreshadowed the end of almost 300 years of the British Empire. (119-120).

Therefore, it could be argued that emigration helped the Irish peasantry achieve what they could never have achieved prior to the Great Famine and the mass exodus that it triggered: respect, power, prosperity, and the opportunity to prove that they were not the savage, lazy population lacking intelligence and ambition as previously perceived and portrayed by the British. Instead, they regained their sense of self-worth and created a new identity.

If there is a happy ending to the Famine and the Irish in exile that it produced, it is that a new world was built on those who suffered, died, and left their homeland for foreign lands. Ireland might never have been the same again, for good or for bad, but neither would the rest of the world. And while open to further debate, Irish-immigrant authors such as Sadlier and McElgun were a motivating factor in keeping their fellow Irish-immigrants on the path to recovery and redemption as well as playing a noteworthy role in an intriguing stage in the evolution of Irish Famine literature and imagery, an evolution that continues to the present day.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION: THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AND BEYOND

The first generation of Famine writers may have been horrified, infuriated, shamed, or disillusioned by the Famine, but they were not silent about it, and nor were the writers who followed. Twenty-first-century writers who set their novels during the 1840s are not discovering the Famine as literary material: it never went away. (Melissa Fegan, p. 458)

In closing it is necessary to revisit the literary debates that inspired the writing of this paper. As more and more scholars continue to examine the presence of the Great Famine in Irish Literature (especially since its 150th anniversary in the 1990s), the literary questions that were posed earlier in this study and were so instrumental in initiating the flood of discourse that followed must be reevaluated.

When Terry Eagleton proclaims that “There is indeed a literature of the Famine...But it is in neither sense of the word a major literature. There is a handful of novels and a body of poems, but very few truly distinguished works”, the literary examples cited above would prove otherwise. The Famine is present in a rich body of literature that began soon afterwards in the works of Trollope, O’Brien, Sadlier, and Stoker, a tradition that continues to the present day.

When Margaret Kelleher ponders whether an event such as the Famine is even expressible, the answer is yes, language does not fail, it heals and liberates. Immediately

following works filled with gothic imagery emerged to help fill the void and express the horrors that were difficult to accept and difficult to express. When the Irish peasantry left Ireland's shore searching for a life that could never be achieved had they remained behind, pastoral and sentimental imagery emerged to fill the void that homesickness and fear of the unknown had created.

When Eagleton asks "Where is the Famine in the literature of the Revival? Where is it in Joyce?", it can be found in Yeats's romanticized Revivalist play *The Countess Cathleen* first published in 1892 in which the Irish peasantry suffer from hunger during a famine set in an unspecified time in the distant past; a famine in which the soul of the virtuous and compassionate (and Anglo-Irish) Countess Cathleen far outweighs those of the common peasantry for it is only her soul and her soul alone that can save her tenants from the eternal damnation that they have brought down upon themselves. As Famine imagery continued to evolve throughout the early 1900s becoming more abstract and obscure, it can be found in the Famine motifs strewn throughout Synge's play, *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) such as the desolate post-Famine landscape of County Mayo where eligible men of a marrying age are scarce and in which the main character, Christy Mahon, claims to have killed his father and is initially heard by one of the locals groaning and moaning from a roadside ditch. It can be found in the theme of repetition common throughout the short stories in Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914) in which the author describes his characters as angry, disillusioned, and repressed, the survivors of a cataclysmic event and a persecuted past who can't cope with the aftermath and have no guidance to see them through leaving them disillusioned and doomed to repeat the same mistakes over and over again. And in the haunting image of Michael Fury, the sick,

emaciated boy whom Gretta Conroy once loved and who makes his ghost-like appearance at the end of “The Dead” representing the Famine dead who lie forgotten beneath the softly and silently falling snow in unmarked graves in the west of Ireland. It can be found in Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922) in the symbolic imagery of the black withered potato that Leopold Bloom received from his mother, Ellen, a survivor of the Famine, and carries with him in his pocket as he and Stephen Dedalus wander aimlessly through a defeated, depressed, and disheartened Dublin trying to ignore the implications of the past while searching for the identity, self-worth, and self-respect that eludes them in the present. It is there in Beckett’s play *Endgame* (1957) in the apocalyptic wasteland lying in wait outside the door, Hamm’s fear of not receiving a proper burial, the rat running loose in the kitchen, Hamm’s control of and distribution of food, and the overall theme of paralysis: Hamm, who is confined to a wheelchair, Clov, who lacks the courage to leave the house and set out on his own, and Hamm’s legless parents, Nagg and Nell, who live in ashbins and are entirely dependent upon the generosity of their son much as Ireland was upon Great Britain.

Famine literature would continue to evolve in the mid to later twentieth century when a distance of time and the demise of its survivors would result in feelings of outrage – as well as a sense of hollowness – in their descendants. One of the most powerful to emerge during this period is Liam O’Flaherty’s novel, simply titled *Famine* (1937). The language is stark and raw; the descriptions both brutal and poignant; the ending, heartrending and unforgettable. Famine victims become individuals versus caricatures or stock characters, their pain profound, their loss overwhelming. Margaret Kelleher describes the author’s work “In stark contrast to other characterisations of famine

victims, O’Flaherty presents a victim who has a name, a voice, a family, a past, an identity” (242). Gone are the distracting storylines, happy endings, and tidy resolutions that were so common to earlier Famine fiction. Instead the novel closes with the death of Brian Kilmartin – an elderly man who is the only survivor left in the valley – as he attempts to bury his wife who has died during the night:

Brian climbed with great effort over the stile into the paddock. He went to the middle of the little field and halted...“I’ll make a hole for her in this place,” he muttered...he thrust the point of the spade at the frosty earth, put his naked foot on the haft, and pressed with all his force. The point did not penetrate. The dog lay down on his belly and whined loudly. The old man...again thrust the point of his spade at the frosty ground, pressing with his naked foot on the haft. The point again refused to penetrate. He overbalanced with the effort and fell forward over the fallen spade. The dog rose and barked. The old man lay still for a little while. Then he groaned loudly and struggled to his knees. Leaning on the spade he got to his feet. Now the dog barked angrily and scraped at the frost with his right forefoot...[the old man] clutched the handle of the spade, leaned forward, threatened the frosty earth with the point and raised his foot. There was a deep, gurgling sound in his throat and he fell forward headlong. The spade skidded away over the frost and rolled into a hollow. The old man lay still with his arms stretched out. The dog became silent and lay down on his belly. Then he raised his snout and sniffed the air. He shuddered. Then he dragged himself along the ground until he came to the old man’s naked foot. He smelt it. He rose slowly to his feet, raised his mane slightly, and advanced, an inch at a time, smelling along the old man’s naked shins and thighs. He started and growled when he came to the shirt. Then he made a little circuit, lay down on his belly once more, and dragged himself, whining, to the head. He smelt the face. He whined. He smelt again. His mane dropped. Suddenly he raised his snout, sat back on his haunches, and uttered a long howl. Then he lay down on his side and nestled against the old man’s shoulder. (358-359)

The narrator calculatingly describes the scene in painstaking detail to convey the horrors suffered, making them more real, personal, and profound. We have followed the plight of the Kilmartin family since the dawn of the Famine and in the process have come to know them and hope, no matter how unlikely, that they too will find the happy ending so customary to earlier Famine fiction, a happy ending that never arrives. His family and

neighbors are either dead or have left Ireland. There is no one left behind to bury him and no one left behind to mourn him but his dog. The sentimental and pastoral are also abandoned for there is nothing pleasant about O'Flaherty's depiction of the Famine. Villages were obliterated, the population decimated, and people suffered immensely. One scene involves a mother having killed her starving children after feeding them the carcass of a dead dog. No longer able to bear their cries of hunger and discomfort from the rotted food, she goes mad and murders them to end their suffering.

Tom Murphy's play of the same name, *Famine* (1968) is just as graphic and just as disturbing. The helplessness of Famine victims is presented as well as the extremes they had to go to in order to survive. One of the more disturbing passages is just before the closing scene and involves the mercy killing of a wife (Mother) at the hands of her husband (John Connor) at the wife's request so she can choose the time and place of her death:

*She goes into the shelter and lies down. **Mother, Maeve and Donail** are now in the shelter, which is almost completely in darkness. **John** moves to the shelter. We hear the stick rising and falling. After a moment **Maeve** rushes out of the shelter and off. The sound of the stick, rising and falling, continues for a few moments...**John** comes out of darkness and walks off. He has killed his wife and his son. (277-278)*

While the author also gives "a name, a voice, a family, a past, an identity" to Famine victims (Kelleher 242), his writing and research would incite him to bring up a new aspect of the Famine debate that would emerge during the twentieth century: What does it mean to be a descendent of the Famine? What is its legacy? Murphy describes this sense of disruption that he experienced while writing his play: "consciously or unconsciously, rightly or wrongly, another thought/feeling was emerging: Was I, in what I shall call my times, the mid-twentieth century, a student or victim of the Famine?"

(Kelleher 146). In an interview in 2001, while explaining the effect that this legacy had upon his childhood, he would also describe the lasting effect that the Famine had on Ireland:

How the natural extravagance of youth, young manhood, young womanhood was repressed, while the people preaching messages of meekness, obedience, self-control I observed had mouths that were bitter and twisted. And I began to feel that perhaps the idea of food, the absence of food, is only one element of famine: that all of those other poverties attend famine, that people become silent and secretive, intelligence becomes cunning. I felt that the hangover of the 19th century famine was still there in my time; I felt that the Irish mentality had become twisted. (Greene 255-256)

Though the new generation of Famine writers is only just emerging, and it remains to be seen what form Famine literature will take in the twenty-first-century, the topic of the Famine and its aftermath are still evolving as authors draw on this momentous event to grapple with the social impediments that Murphy alludes to above. One such novel worth noting is Nuala O’Faolain’s entitled *My Dream of You* (2001). Though the title may suggest a romance or sentimental work (we learn later that it is actually a line from a poem), it is just the opposite: painfully raw, brutally honest, and ruthless in its scrutiny of the Irish. The main heroine, Kathleen de Burca (Irish for Burke), a middle-aged Irish travel-writer living in London, returns to the place of her troubled youth after an absence of nearly thirty years to face issues that have plagued her since childhood. The Famine surfaces in a documented story Kathleen had stumbled across in college about a doomed love affair between an Irish peasantry groomsman and the married Anglo-Irish mistress of the Big House that occurred during that period. Going through somewhat of a mid-life crisis, Kathleen decides to return to Ireland and investigate the story for a possible novel. As she researches the tale, aspects of the

Famine emerge to reveal the inescapability of the past and how a history of oppression and deprivation continue to haunt the Irish in the present. The author uses the Famine to explore the lingering issues that plague modern-day Irish, such as gender issues, family issues, and religious issues; the inability to love, display emotion, and find happiness; and a fear of commitment that accompanies deep-seated feelings of insecurity and lack of self-worth. The older generation is still bitter about the past, paralyzed by their resentment and unable to move on. The younger generation is portrayed as rebellious, embarrassed, and confused, especially about love and sexuality. The Irish overall are depicted as a people still running from a painful past that they can't escape, a past that has left them damaged and broken, a past that they must come to terms with before they can move forward into a brighter future.

As they try to escape that painful past, Kathleen immigrates to London, her sister, Nora, to America. Though their parents are now deceased, their relationship and the effect that it had upon the children is explored at length. Kathleen's father is portrayed as angry and resentful and a tyrant towards their mother: "She never had a penny. I think he kept her short on purpose to dominate her" (154). The oppressed has become the oppressor as Paulo Freire warned could happen: "at a certain point in their existential experience the oppressed feel an irresistible attraction towards their oppressor and his way of life. Sharing this way of life becomes an overpowering aspiration" (Freire 49). Their mother, who Kathleen describes as "the unhappiest person I ever knew" (323) is portrayed as silent and subdued and completely dependent upon her husband, reminiscent of the relationship between the Irish and the English: "My mother was the emotional equivalent of an extinct volcano...She couldn't leave him, of course, with the

pregnancies and the poverty and Ireland, and anyway she had nowhere to go” (368).

Marriage is viewed as a union based on indifference rather than love, leaving the spouses trapped and embittered. As Kathleen tells Nora in a voicemail message after a visit back to the homestead, “I didn’t bother going up to the graveyard to the parents, in the end, I finished off, knowing she’d be pleased with me about that. She’d never forgiven either of them. She said they’d put her off marriage so thoroughly that she’d never even wanted a boyfriend, much less a husband” (319).

While on this journey back home, Kathleen discovers revelations about her own self as she examines her life and in the process, confronts the past: “Now, I think that I always shied away from happiness. I steered as near as I could to arranging for fate to destroy my happiness, always, because that was what I *knew*. I *knew* disappointment” (255). Because of her upbringing in Ireland, Kathleen views love, too, with this same degree of cynicism: “There was no real love anywhere. There was a worm hidden in every rose” (326). And later she tells us, “I just stepped back from the whole love thing, as if there’d been a terrible event that happened once, when I’d fallen into a snake pit, and then realized that the snake pit was inside me” (369). What is so significant about this novel is that Kathleen’s past emerges through memories that are shared with the reader, memories that she has, if not completely buried, at least been reluctant to revisit, much like many survivors of the Famine. The author also explores Carruth’s notion of what does it mean to survive and how it effects future generations, indicating that the legacy of the Famine is far from over and that Irish Literature will continue to explore that legacy as a means to determine what it means to be Irish in the twenty-first century.

As the above examples illustrate, the function of history in literature is much more than simply providing a backdrop to tell a story. As is the case with the Famine when so many died without a name or without a face and were massed together under the impersonal classification of Famine victims or lumped together into dehumanized statistics of how many died or how many were evicted or how many emigrated, literature can give voice to the voiceless and a measure of dignity to those who suffered silently. Literature can provide enough inspiration to liberate a nation and topple an empire. It can help a people work through a trauma so severe that it would linger for generations to come. Like voices from the grave, Famine literature would give presence, purpose, and potency to the millions who suffered so needlessly and so mercilessly and the wounded descendants that followed.

Where is the Great Famine in Irish Literature? It is there. One only has to look for it to find it.

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