Recollecting Hunger: An Introduction

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Oh Past! thou fragment of the Tale of Time!
Where lived the Spirit which is ages dead[1]

These lines from the anonymous poem 'The Feast of Famine, An Irish Banquet' (1870) address the dominant presence of history in the conceptions of Irish identities. As Emilie Pine has recently argued, 'Irish culture is obsessed with the past', that is, haunted by the thorny controversies and painful episodes of bygone days, and as such can only be understood in a 'framework of remembrance and trauma'.[2] Her claim of an Irish imagination haunted by the ghosts of the past is illustrated by 'The Feast of Famine'. The poem shows how a group of absentee landlords 'in a London square', about to enjoy a sumptuous banquet 'of viands all costly and rare', are confronted with a spectral throng of starvation victims who come to claim redress for the wrongs 'of centuries gone' when the ghost of Famine 'stalked . . . upon Irish earth'.[3]

In his seminal work on cultural memory, Jan Assmann introduces the term 'figures of memory' to describe 'fateful

1 *The Feast of Famine; An Irish Banquet with Other Poems* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1870), p. 32.
2 E. Pine, *The Politics of Irish Memory: Performing Remembrance in Contemporary Irish Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 3.
3 *Feast of Famine*, pp. 9–11.

events of the past whose memory is maintained through cultural formation', in artefacts and social practices.[4] Among the many fateful events that marked Ireland's colonial history is the Great Famine (1845–1851), a bleak period of wide-scale starvation, cruel evictions of tenant farmers, a mass exodus of mostly young Irish men and women and the financial decline of the Ascendancy class. The remembrance of these traumatic years has been performed not only in their immediate aftermath when a 'calm and just apportionment of blame and merit'[5] was often deemed problematic. The publication of Marita Conlon-McKenna's *Children of the Famine Trilogy* in the early 2000s and the commissioning of Famine memorials – such as John Behan's 'Coffin Ship' (1997) in Murrisk, Co. Mayo – to mark the Great Hunger's 150th anniversary are proof of the lasting impact of the period in current memory. The wide-scale commemoration of the Famine in Ireland and Irish diaspora countries such as Canada and the United States during the 1990s and the recent creation of sites with 'symbolic investment',[6] such as monuments, moreover, gave a significant boost to Famine scholarship in the fields of sociology, history and art.

From the mid-1990s prominent scholars in Irish studies have started to direct their attention to the presence of Famine recollection in literature, contesting Terry Eagleton's widely repeated claim that Famine remembrance is notoriously absent from the Irish literary canon, since according to Eagleton there are only 'a handful of novels and a body of poems' dealing with

4 J. Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', *New German Critique*, 65 (1995), p. 129.

5 A.M. Sullivan, *New Ireland: Political Sketches and Personal Reminiscences of Thirty Years of Irish Public Life* (Glasgow: Cameron & Ferguson, 1877), p. 58.

6 A. Rigney, 'Divided Pasts: A Premature Memorial and the Dynamics of Collective Remembrance', *Memory Studies*, 1, 1 (2008), p. 93.

the event.[7] Christopher Morash edited a pioneering anthology of Famine poetry, *The Hungry Voice*, and elsewhere discusses the representation of the Great Hunger in fiction by such authors as William Carleton and Anthony Trollope.[8] Margaret Kelleher's *The Feminization of Famine* examines feminine imagery in Famine literature by authors such as Margaret Brew and Annie Keary,[9] and Melissa Fegan's *Literature and the Irish Famine 1845–1919* lists and briefly discusses an important range of texts which are suffused with Famine memory.[10] These studies made significant strides in charting the hitherto overlooked role of Famine memory in key works of Irish literature. However, there is still a large unexplored corpus of lesser-known fiction which recalls the Great Hunger and which spans several post-Famine generations.

The present anthology constitutes the first attempt to bring together a body of both more familiar and lesser-known fiction remembering the Great Famine written between 1847, when the first Famine fiction was published, and 1922, the year the Irish Free State was established. It is our belief that these texts – many of which have never been published in modern editions and can only be accessed in copyright libraries – deserve more critical attention than most have received so far. We place these novels and short stories in the limelight for several reasons. First of all, many of these texts offer alternative perspectives to the large number of historical narratives which recollect the Great Hunger. The memories they (re)present were often omitted from historical accounts because they are

7 T. Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London: Verso, 1995), p. 13.

8 C. Morash, *The Hungry Voice: The Poetry of the Irish Famine* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1989; rev. edn 2009); and C. Morash, *Writing the Irish Famine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

9 M. Kelleher, *The Feminization of Famine: Expressions of the Inexpressible?* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997).

10 M. Fegan, *Literature and the Irish Famine 1845–1919* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002).

those of socially powerless groups, such as evicted tenant farmers, defeated rebels or bereaved mothers. As scholars in memory studies have observed, prose fiction as a genre accommodates different, often marginal and subaltern, narratives and memories[11] and is characterized by a 'multiperspectival expansion' in general,[12] which in the case of the texts incorporated here manifests itself in a wide range of narrative focalizers that cannot only be distinguished between texts but also within texts. Margaret Brew's three-decker *The Chronicles of Castle Cloyne*, for example, recalls the Famine through the perspective of both a native Irish lower-class woman and the ruined landlord Hyacinth Dillon. At the same time, the novels and stories in this anthology also engage consciously with the religious, political and cultural discourses of their time. That this is the case becomes clear from our annotations, which provide quotations from and links to both literary and non-literary contemporary writings, thus inviting readers to a New Historicist approach to the novels and stories. In a few cases, particularly in Emily Lawless's 'Famine Roads and Memories' and *Poor Paddy's Cabin*, texts also adopt the narrative mode of genres such as travel literature, history and political treatise, thus blending what may at first glance seem non-fictional elements with literary forms.

A second reason why these stories and novels deserve more scholarly attention is the fact that they were written in an age in which Irish nationalism flourished and during which the legacy of *An Gorta Mór*, 'the Great Hunger', was central to the

11 See A. Rigney, 'Portable Monuments: Literature, Cultural Memory, and the Case of Jeanie Deans', *Poetics Today*, 25, 2 (2004): 'This affinity between literature and the history "of the inside" might seem to suggest that novelists are somehow more sensitive than others to the sufferings of the downtrodden and to the importance of the marginal' (p. 375).

12 B. Neumann, 'The Literary Representation of Memory', in A. Erll and A. Nünning (eds), *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2008), p. 339.

development of an Irish (postcolonial) identity: between the event's immediate aftermath and the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922. Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone emphasize memory's function as a tool 'with which to contest "official" versions of the past', and their remark is particularly applicable to imperial contexts.[13] As Barbara Misztal states, '[c]ontesting memories was also an important strategy in the process of discursive resistance in colonial societies',[14] mainly because in the process of imperialism, as Oona Frawley contends, an 'official' colonial historical narrative overwrites 'an indigenous culture's version of its own history'.[15] The alternative, often subaltern recollections that one finds in such works as Richard Baptist O'Brien's *Ailey Moore* and Reginald Tierney's (Thomas O'Neill Russell's pen name) *The Struggles of Dick Massey* challenge the often official imperial versions of the Famine as, for instance, divine punishment or Providence. Furthermore, some of the texts included employ the recollections and even the setting of the Famine as a backdrop against which to discuss current national issues. For instance, W.C. Upton's *Uncle Pat's Cabin* and Emily Lawless's *Hurrish* perform the memories of the Famine in order to address current politics with regard to landowners and tenantry as well as the violence employed in the crusade of radical nationalism.

Thirdly, the often unexamined corpus of Famine fiction enables a study of the transformations of cultural memory over time. Recollection is a continuous process of change, an

13 K. Hodgkin and S. Radstone, 'Introduction: Contested Pasts', in K. Hodgkin and S. Radstone (eds), *Memory, History, Nation: Contested Pasts* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2006), p. 5.

14 B.A. Misztal, 'Memory and History', in O. Frawley (ed.), *Memory Ireland. Volume I: History and Modernity* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011), p. 7.

15 O. Frawley, 'Toward a Theory of Cultural Memory in an Irish Postcolonial Context', in Frawley (ed.), *Memory Ireland. Volume I: History and Modernity*, p. 31.

infinite dynamic between remembering and forgetting. As Mieke Bal writes, 'the past is continuously modified and redescribed even as it continues to shape the future',[16] and is therefore marked by transgenerational developments, often depending on what Marianne Hirsch calls 'postmemory'.[17] The fact that literature, as a so-called portable monument, can 'be recycled among various groups of readers living in different parts of the globe and at different historical moments'[18] not only implies that literature can affect the cultural recollection of different communities and generations, but also that the memories carried by works of literature interact with other modes of recollection and may therefore change.[19] The (extracts of) texts published in this anthology cover different time frames. Because in each section the texts are placed in chronological order, they display the as yet uncharted evolvements in the cultural memory of the Famine over time.

The excerpted texts are divided over seven sections which each centre on a specific cluster of mnemonic images. As James Wertsch, among others,[20] has rightly argued, the act of remembrance involves a narrative structuring of memory. This 'narrative organization' takes the shape of 'schematic narrative templates',[21] which involve specific plotlines, recurring tropes and stock characters. An investigation of Famine fiction reveals

16 M. Bal, 'Introduction', in M. Bal et al. (eds), *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), p. vii.

17 M. Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

18 Rigney, 'Portable Monuments', p. 383.

19 In this sense, following Michael Rothberg, memory can be called 'multidirectional'. See *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

20 The notion that memory is organized by narrative templates is becoming increasingly accepted in various disciplines. See, for instance, E. Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003), and D. LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

21 J.V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 57.

that the narrativization of Famine recollection also frequently involves such templates and that it is marked by emplotment, characterization and symbolism that can all be brought back to seven dominant mnemonic clusters. These thematic clusters, concerned with starvation, landscape, religion, landlords and tenants, nationalism, femininity and migration, will be discussed below. The presentation of our material in seven sections that are related to these clusters not only makes it possible for readers to study texts concerned with specific topics of their interest. It will additionally facilitate the study of transformations in Famine memory over time which this anthology seeks to promote as well as encourage an investigation of which literary aspects are carriers of cultural memory.

The Spectre of Starvation

Historians generally assume that the Great Famine killed approximately one million people.[22] As such, the Great Hunger classifies as a traumatic historical episode, and it dramatically altered Ireland's demography and rooted out the cultural traditions of the Gaelic-speaking rural classes. The texts incorporated in the first section all address the horrors of starvation, disease and communal mourning, and illustrate the transgenerational nature of a collective trauma over a long period.

Literature appears to have a significant function in trauma processing. As Cathy Caruth claims, '[s]peech helps integrating the experience of trauma',[23] and, as James Wertsch argues,

22 See C. Ó Gráda, *Ireland Before and After the Famine: Explorations in Economic History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 138–44.

23 C. Caruth, 'Recapturing the Past: Introduction', in C. Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 154.

unresolved trauma resists integration into narrative.[24] The stories and novels in section one display very different ways of coping with the trauma of Famine. In some, the spectacle of starvation is incorporated in the main plot and described in painstaking detail, while in other texts the gruesome picture of hunger is pushed to the margins of the narrative, as what Christopher Morash calls 'a series of tangents':[25] loose images in the text that are not fully integrated, and placed at a safe distance from the reader. Early texts such as Mrs Hoare's story 'The Black Potatoes' and Susannah Meredith's 'Ellen Harrington' clearly elucidate that the trauma of the Famine years is still too fresh to be confronted too openly. In Mrs Hoare's tale the pain of loss is often unspeakable, and the omniscient narrator glosses over the anguish of the suffering mother Mary Mahoney.

Moreover, as the excerpts show, both in 'The Black Potatoes' and 'Ellen Harrington' scenes of starvation are enframed in enclosed settings, such as cabins or hovels, from which the reader or focalizing characters can step back. While in these early stories hunger becomes a horror that is literally contained in space and therefore more controllable, a later novel like Patrick Sheehan's *Glenanaar* zooms in on the bodily effects of starvation in its description of Nodlag. *The Hunger* by Andrew Merry (Mildred Darby) takes starvation scenes into the political arena by making them part of the discussion between an absentee landlord and his more socially engaged nephew.

The stories and novels evoke similar mnemonic images and issues, such as the inedibility of Indian meal, the keening rituals of the local inhabitants and the excessive number of corpses which makes it impossible to observe proper burial rites. Another recurrent motif is that of spectrality. Often, emaciated

24 J.V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, p. 47.
25 C. Morash, *Writing the Irish Famine*, p. 187.

Famine victims are compared to walking spectres who have also been transformed mentally, becoming ghosts of their former selves. This is, for instance, the case in Rosa Mulholland's story 'The Hungry Death', which is included in section five.

Ghosts and living skeletons in Famine literature also have more symbolical functions, representing dead generations who claim retribution for the atrocities perpetrated against them, and therefore haunt the present; or as metaphors for the need to remember the painful past. As Emilie Pine has recently observed, '[t]he ghost represents the unbiddable, irrepressable, and uncontainable nature of memory', and is a 'manifestation of the excessive grip of the past on the imagination of culture in the present'.[26] In 'Slieve Foy's' story 'Attie and His Father', the grandmother's dream of a gigantic, almost sublime skeleton that embodies hunger and forebodes her own death is an unerasable trope that will continue to trouble her mind.

Golden Hills and Blackened Fields

While texts such as Emily Lawless's 'Famine Roads and Famine Memories' and William Carleton's *The Black Prophet* inform us that nature gave several warnings of the great calamity, the Famine still came as a devastating shock. This sense of a sudden calamity is evoked in Famine fiction by descriptions of an overnight dark mist hovering over and destroying the crops, followed by images of blackened fields and the stench of rot – figures recurrent through the decades which suggest that the performance of memory often resides in the remembrance and reappopriation of previously used tropes.[27]

26 Pine, *Politics of Irish Memory*, p. 16.

27 In *Writing the Irish Famine* Christopher Morash argues that authors who had no direct experiences with Famine Ireland resorted to collective memories and 'semiotic systems of representation' (p. 54).

As Oona Frawley observes, the Famine signified 'the literal failure of the pastoral',[28] in that a pastoral version of the Irish landscape functioned as an identity marker. In Famine fiction a strong link is established between the inhabitants and the landscape, which appears to naturalistically reflect the inner turmoils of the Irish and figures as a symbolical space. The emptiness and desolate spirit of the Irish landscape hint at the death of its inhabitants. In *The Struggles of Dick Massey* Tierney describes newly created pastures as wastes of grass, and in *The Black Prophet* the scenery resonates with the disappearance of the people: a 'brooding stillness, lay over all nature; cheerfulness had disappeared'.[29]

In his seminal work of that title, Pierre Nora introduces the term *lieux de mémoire* to describe physical and symbolical spaces where 'memory crystallizes and secretes itself'.[30] In fiction which recalls the Famine, landscape serves as a *lieu de mémoire* which provides access to remnants of the past and bears witness to history. This is especially the case in Lawless's work, and in 'Famine Roads', the unfinished Famine roads – metaphors for the abruptly and prematurely ended Irish lives – haunt the landscape. Like the ruins of cottages also described by Lawless, such roads serve as traces of memory of who or what has been lost rather than what has survived.

In Famine fiction, the representation of the landscape often takes on a pastoral and even picturesque tone. These pastoral and picturesque representations then come to function as both an escapist 'breathing spell from the fever and anguish of being',[31]

28 O. Frawley, *Irish Pastoral: Nostalgia and Twentieth-Century Irish Literature* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2005), p. 45.

29 W. Carleton, *The Black Prophet: A Tale Of Irish Famine* (London: Simms & M'Intyre, 1847), p. 17.

30 P. Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations*, 26 (1989), p. 7.

31 R. Poggioli, 'Pastorals of Innocence and Happiness', in B. Loughrey (ed.), *The Pastoral Mode* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), p. 104.

and a critical contrast to the disruptive influences of English colonization, industrialization and modernization.[32] Thus, the artistic principles of the pastoral and picturesque not only figure as a return to nature, but can also be used to voice strong social critique.[33] For example, the excerpts from *The Struggles of Dick Massey* included in this section present the (Anglo-Irish) city as highly corruptive and full of temptation and vice. Russell – in a manner common in Irish literature in the aftermath of the Famine[34] – then juxtaposes these urban dystopias with utopian representations of the Irish landscape, thus highlighting the disruptive influences of English colonization and modernization on the Irish traditional landscape and way of life.

Priests and Proselytizers

The wide-scale outbreak of the potato blight and the subsequent mass starvation were often interpreted in providential terms. Many contemporary commenters claimed that the Famine was a divine scourge to discipline Ireland, a God-given opportunity to enforce a policy that 'would transform Irish behaviour' and thus make Ireland susceptible to modernization along British lines.[35] Yet harsher critics read the Famine as divine intervention aimed at rooting out Catholicism in

32 O. Frawley, *Irish Pastoral*, pp. 4–5, 59. For a discussion of the Irish pastoral as an identity marker for Irish diaspora famine fiction, see M.C.M. Corporaal, 'From Golden Hills to Sycamore Trees: Pastoral Homelands and Ethnic Identity in Irish Immigrant Fiction, 1860–85', *Irish Studies Review*, 18, 3 (2010), pp. 331–46.

33 C. Fairweather, 'Inclusive and Exclusive Pastoral: Towards an Anatomy of Pastoral Modes', *Studies in Philology*, 97, 3 (2000), p. 278.

34 Seamus Deane in *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing Since 1790* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) points out that in the aftermath of the Famine, a common tendency among the Irish both at home and in diaspora was to gloss over the Famine and its impact on Irish life and cultural identity and to look back to pre-Famine and pre-colonial history and landscape and to infuse these images with Irish folklore and mythology (p. 51).

35 P. Gray, 'Ideology and the Famine', in C. Póirtéir (ed.), *The Great Irish Famine* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1995), pp. 92–3.

Ireland. Revd Hugh McNeile, in his infamous *The Famine a Rod of God* (1847), declared that '[p]lagues, pestilences, famines, wars are used by God as national punishments for sin'.[36]

Many of the novels and stories that recollect the Famine, such as Richard Baptist O'Brien's *Ailey Moore*, address the religious rhetoric that surrounded the dire event. Moreover, considering the intensive religious controversies about the Great Hunger, many of its literary recollections are written from a particular sectarian perspective, each laying claim to 'true' Irishness and often lambasting other religious positions. For instance, William Francis Barry's *The Wizard's Knot* approaches the Famine from a strictly Catholic brand of Celtic nationalism, while Margaret Percival's *The Irish Dove* and the anonymous *Poor Paddy's Cabin* are fiercely anti-Catholic in their depiction of the conditions of the famishing peasantry.

As Jeffrey Alexander observes, in 'creating a compelling trauma narrative, it is critical to establish the identity of the perpetrator, the "antagonist"'.[37] In Famine fiction, this antagonism is often translated to a scenario or mnemonic 'emplotment'[38] of sectarian conflict in which two recurrent characters feature: the proselytizer and the priest. In Catholic Famine fiction, the souperist, who attempts to convert famished Catholics by offering them food if they forswear their faith, is presented as the villain, whose efforts to harvest souls with the promise of relief are usually fruitless. In *Ailey Moore*, but also in Emily Bowles's *Irish Diamonds*, the Catholic characters stay true to their religion and thus set an example to a Catholic readership. In Protestant novels, such as *Poor Paddy's*

36 H. McNeile, *The Famine a Rod of God: Its Provoking Cause – Its Merciful Design* (London: Burnside & Seeley, 1847), p. 8.

37 J.C. Alexander, 'Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma', in J.C. Alexander et al., *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), p. 15.

38 E. Zerubavel, *Time Maps*, p. 15.

Cabin, priests are ineffective in offering relief and sacrifice their parishioners in order to retain their tyrannous power over the Irish. By contrast, Catholic fiction depicts the priesthood as the embodiment of charity, morality and piety.

This portrayal of a devoted, moralizing clergy, which can be found in *Irish Diamonds*, appears to be influenced by the post-Famine Devotional Revolution. This reform campaign, started in the 1850s by Archbishop Paul Cullen, sought to use the identity crisis caused by the Famine's eradication of traditional culture[39] to formalize the faith of the Irish peasants by emphasizing clerical discipline, mass attendance, confession, and devotional practices such as the rosary and vespers.[40] The fact that in some novels of the 1850s and 1860s Famine remembrance is coloured by current religious concerns furthermore underlines that recollection 'is an active and constantly shifting relationship to the past, in which the past is changed retrospectively'[41] by ongoing processes of 'cultural negotiation'.[42]

Landlords and Tenants

One of the recurrent schematic plots in fiction that recalls the Famine is sectarian conflict between the Ascendancy and the impoverished peasants. Partly due to restrictions preventing Catholics from acquiring land,[43] the relationship between landlords and tenants had been strenuous before the Famine, and several militant secret societies, such as the Whiteboys and

39 P. Ward, *Exile, Emigration and Irish Writing* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2002), p. 145.
40 See E. Larkin, 'The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850–75', *American Historical Review*, 77, 3 (1972), pp. 625–52.
41 A. Rigney, 'Plenitude, Scarcity and the Circulation of Cultural Memory', *Journal of European Studies*, 35, 1 (2005), p. 17.
42 M. Sturken, 'Memory, Consumerism and Media: Reflections on the Emergence of the Field', *Memory Studies*, 1, 1 (2008), p. 74.
43 M. Cronin, *A History of Ireland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 82.

Ribbonmen, were established.[44] The potato blight and the subsequent inability of many tenants to pay the rent led to evictions on a massive scale.[45] Eviction scenes feature prominently in the fiction which remembers the Great Hunger, and novels such as *Frank O'Donnell* by Allen H. Clington (David Power Conyngham) focus on the suffering of the poor cottiers who have to face the brutal measures of archetypal evil landlords with speaking names such as Lord Clearall.

One of the largest problems of Irish rural society was absenteeism, for it usually meant that landlords spent little time and money on agricultural improvements.[46] Many felt that absentee landlords were partially to blame for Ireland's dire condition during the Famine years.[47] The character of the absentee landlord figures in various novels, including Charles Lever's *The Martins of Cro' Martin* and Lalla McDowell's *The Earl of Effingham.* When landlords did not reside on their Irish estates, they left their management to so-called middlemen. In various fictional works the middleman is an almost diabolical creature, striving to belong to the upper Anglo-Irish echelons of society and willing to get there at any cost. A representative example is Hester Sigerson's agent Billy Finnigan in *A Ruined Race*, who removes the starving protagonists from their cottage without a moment's compassion.

44 T. Garvin, 'Defenders, Ribbonmen and Others: Underground Political Networks in Pre-Famine Ireland', *Past and Present*, 96 (1982), pp. 140, 154.

45 M.E. Daly, *Social and Economic History of Ireland since 1800* (Dublin: Educational Company of Ireland, 1981), pp. 39, 47.

46 Mary Daly explains in *Social and Economic History of Ireland since 1800* that '[t]he most valid criticism which can be made of Irish landlords concerns their spending on improvements. On average they spent a mere 5% of their income on improvements, considerably less than their English counterparts' (p. 40).

47 As 'an Irish Landlord' stated in *Ireland: Her Landlords, Her People, and Their Homes* (Dublin: George Herbert, 1860), 'it is certain that while the masses of the Irish people are dependent on a certain class for support and protection; while they do not possess the means of acquiring independence themselves, but must look to their landlords for employment and subsistence, the absence of that class from the country, and from the proper sphere of their duties, is a great and serious evil' (p. xii).

While the representation of a stereotypical uncaring Ascendancy class and its conflicts with a pitiable tenant class may seem central to Famine fiction, in fact the corpus of novels and stories conveys variegated perspectives, and with this, a mnemonic heterogeneity. For one thing, some texts, such as Anthony Trollope's *Castle Richmond*, show how the fortunes of the landed classes were also affected by the consequences of the blight, and even became debt-ridden by governmental measures such as the Encumbered Estates Act of 1848–49.[48] Furthermore, some novels, such as William Carleton's *The Squanders of Castle Squander*, *The Earl of Effingham*, and William Barry's *The Wizard's Knot*, provide a multifaceted picture of landlord–tenant relationships, depicting members of the Ascendancy who are genuinely concerned about the fate of their suffering tenantry. Interestingly, these compassionate characters are often upper-class heroines who passionately plead for an improvement of tenant conditions. The fact that their empathy contrasts starkly with the views expressed by their peers makes the novels dialogic and even multidirectional in their presentation of Famine memory, thus exposing the 'public sphere as a malleable discursive space in which groups do not simply articulate established positions but actually come into being through their dialogical interactions with others'.[49]

Young Ireland and Colonial Rebellion

The Great Famine took place in an era of nationalist struggle, during which Daniel O'Connell, the 'Liberator', unsuccessfully

48 As *The Spectator* of 5 August 1848 wrote, Parliament had passed a bill that made it possible to 'sell encumbered lands without the concurrence of all persons interested' (p. 743), thus facilitating the passing of heavily endebted property from landlords to new owners.

49 Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 5.

sought to repeal the Union[50] and the Young Ireland movement launched a fruitless rebellion against British imperial rule.[51] Nationalist sentiments were prompted by the many casualties of starvation, for many Irish considered the administrative response to the disaster inadequate, especially after Lord John Russell succeeded Sir Robert Peel as Prime Minister in 1846. Russell's adherence to the doctrine of Political Economy, which combined Malthusian economics with Adam Smith's laissez-faire principles and religious rhetoric, meant that many relief efforts were discontinued and landlords were made responsible for the afflicted tenants on their estates.[52]

The close intersections between Irish nationalism and the Famine also surface in the fiction included in section five. Louise Field's *Denis* refers back to Daniel O'Connell's political campaigns, and novels such as Annie Keary's *Castle Daly* and W.G.Wills's *The Love that Kills* are peopled with historical characters like William Smith O'Brien and Thomas Francis Meagher. Justin McCarthy's *Mononia* is a nostalgic reflection on the Young Ireland movement of 1848, describing how the Young Irelanders were driven to rebellion by witnessing the government's disastrously lacking response to the Famine. In Walsh's *The Next Time*, one nationalist character concludes that 'all this destruction and misery and ruin and death might have been avoided, if we had had a native government'.[53]

50 See P.M. Geoghegan, *King Dan: The Rise of Daniel O'Connell 1775–1829* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2008).

51 See R. Sloan, *William Smith O'Brien and the Young Ireland Rebellion of 1848* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000).

52 As John O'Rourke writes in *The History of the Great Irish Famine of 1847* (Dublin: M'Glashan & Gill, 1875), Russell showed 'great ignorance or forgetfulness' (p. 249) in assuming that the landed clas were able to bear these responsibilities for relief single-handedly.

53 L.J. Walsh, *The Next Time: A Story of 'Forty-Eight* (Dublin: M.H. Gill, 1919), p. 230.

Many of these texts were written by authors who can be regarded as a 'postmemory' generation, that is, offspring of Famine survivors whose lives were 'dominated by narratives' of a past that 'preceded their birth'.[54] As Daniel Levy remarks, in processes of cultural recollection 'present political concerns and dominant (nation state) interests are projected onto the past'.[55] These writers' revisitation of the Famine past indeed seems to be directed by the nationalist concerns of their own age. Their works invoke the Famine to legitimize the Irish struggle against British colonial rule, using the traumatic past as a canvas on which to project the anti-colonial discourses of their own era. Patrick Sheehan's *Glenanaar* and William Francis Barry's *The Wizard's Knot*, for example, appear to have been heavily influenced by the cultural climate in which they were written: they display the impact of Celtic revivalism, looking back to a (partly imagined) Gaelic past to reinvent the island's culture which had been changed deeply by centuries of imperial oppression.

While these novels conjure up a shared, fateful past to transform it into a source of identity for a generation struggling against colonial power,[56] there are also novels set during later episodes of Irish history, implying that there are significant connections between the Famine and other events of national importance. W.C. Upton's *Uncle Pat's Cabin* and Emily Lawless's *Hurrish*, for instance, suggest parallels between the Famine and the Land Wars of the 1870s and 1880s, which once again saw intense conflicts between landlords and tenants and the threat

54 Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p. 22.

55 D. Levy, 'Changing Temporalities and the Internationalization of Memory Cultures', in Y. Gutman et al. (eds), *Memory and the Future: Transnational Politics, Ethics and Society* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 15.

56 Barbara Misztal argues that a 'shared sense of the past' often 'becomes a meaning-making repository which helps define aspirations for the future'. See 'Memory and History', p. 16.

of another famine.[57] As such, these two novels demonstrate the transgenerational significance of the Famine past.

Maidens, Mothers and Old Crones

As Birgit Neumann asserts, '[n]arratology... has proven to be of great value in the exploration of the representation of memory' in literature,[58] for plot and focalization display how processes of recollection and forgetting interact and which perspective on the past is privileged. In the schematic narrative formats employed in fiction to give shape to memories, recurring characters also play a significant role.

According to Margaret Kelleher, the strong presence of women in Famine literature can be attributed to Ireland's colonial condition: Ireland was symbolically embodied by female figures in response to a 'hypermasculine' regime of imperial oppression.[59] One of the major roles that women play in Famine fiction is that of the suffering mother who is made to go through the ordeal of seeing her children die of starvation. This image can, for instance, be found in Mrs Hoare's story 'The Black Potatoes' in section one. Among the texts included in section six, we find other representations of maternity. Oonagh McDermott in Margaret Brew's *The Chronicles of Castle Cloyne* adopts her cousin's toddler when she collapses with disease, and subsequently manifests the 'heroic, self-sacrificing attributes' which Margaret Kelleher notes in maternal figures in Famine fiction.[60] The substitute mother who takes up the care of a Famine orphan can also be

57 See B. O'Hara, *Davitt: Irish Patriot and Father of the Land League* (Temple, PA: Tudor Gate Press, 2009).
58 Neumann, 'Literary Representation of Memory', p. 333.
59 Kelleher, *Feminization of Famine*, p. 187.
60 Ibid., p. 74.

found in the character of Mrs Gwynne in *Forlorn; but not Forsaken* by 'Ireland', although her concern with little Biddy means training her to become a servant and educating her in Protestant doctrine. Here Mrs Gwynne's position as part of the Anglo-Irish landed class clearly adds a colonial context to her charitable enterprise.

Ascendancy women feature frequently in Famine fiction, often as providers of Famine relief. Examples of these high-born philanthropic female characters are very common presences in fiction dealing with the Famine; thus, they also feature in many of the texts included in other sections of this anthology. A good illustration can be found in Anthony Trollope's *Castle Richmond*, in section four, which illustrates how young girls from the gentry help out in a flour shop run by the relief committee. In several texts excerpted in section four, such as Thomas O'Neill Russell's *The Struggles of Dick Massey* and Charles Lever's *The Martins of Cro' Martin*, Anglo-Irish maidens play a pivotal role in mediating between the conflicted classes of Protestant landlords and Catholic tenants by showing concern for the latter without betraying their own caste. Moreover, the young Ascendancy daughters in these texts display a cultural hybridity which transcends social contention, while they also negotiate their gender roles. Often, these women simultaneously comply with the ideal of the empathic Angel of the House who safeguards the moral well-being of her family, while overstepping gender boundaries by challenging the authority of a paternal figure who represents colonial power.[61]

61 As the article 'Employment for Women', published in *The Dublin Review*, 52 (1862–63) states, a woman should instil her family with moral principles, and thus guarantee the moral well-being of the public sphere in which her relatives engage: '[t]he very soul and secret of a nation's strength is its sound morality' (p. 17). For further reading, see M.C.M. Corporaal, 'Memories of the Great Famine and Ethnic Identity in Novels by Victorian Irish Women Writers', *English Studies*, 90, 2 (2009), pp. 142–56.

Powerful female figures in Famine fiction are as often from the Catholic, Gaelic-speaking class. A telling example is Brigid Lavelle in Rosa Mulholland's 'The Hungry Death', who forms a stark contrast with the traditional female figure of the *aisling* tradition who is 'in need of protection and comfort' from British imperialism and the disasters that have hit the nation.[62] Brigid provides rather than seeks assistance, saving the lives of many who nearly perish with hunger. Describing her as majestic, the characterization of Brigid moreover alludes to the mythical Cathleen Ni Houlihan figure, with the difference that she gives her life for her former lover and his new mistress rather than demanding offers from him.

Often, the conflicts between landlords and tenants are translated in a seduction plot centring on a landlord who rapes a young peasant girl or leads her astray. Louise Field's *Denis* and Julia and Edmund O'Ryan's *In re Garland* present such a plotline, but *In re Garland* at the same time subverts this narrative template by showing how the cruel landlord in the end has to rely on the charity of his illegitimate daughter in order to survive the blows of Famine. As such, this novel gives expression to a changing social order in post-Famine Ireland.

Emigration and Exile

Between 1845 and 1855 an estimated 2.1 million Irish, mostly poor Catholic labourers and tenant farmers, left for Britain, the Americas and Australia, in an attempt to escape the effects of the Famine.[63] While the statue of Annie Moore and her brothers in Cobh – the port of departure for most Irish

62 C.L. Innes, *Woman and Nation in Irish Literature and Society, 1880–1935* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1993), pp. 16–17.

63 See J.S. Donnelly, *The Great Irish Potato Famine* (Stroud: Sutton, 2003), p. 179.

emigrants – is one of the most significant *lieux de mémoire* crystallizing the recollections of the massive Irish exodus, Irish and British fiction which recollects the Famine years equally addresses the traumatic memories of departure and exile. As Caroline Brettell argues, migration is a 'rite of passage' which 'involves departure, the liminal status of being away, and the reintegration of return'.[64] All three stages are represented in the texts incorporated here, which feature emigrant characters, both outbound and returning, who face the difficulties of settling on foreign soil, and who, in, for instance, Margaret Brew's *The Chronicles of Castle Cloyne*, return to an equally foreign, utterly changed post-Famine Ireland.

As these texts were written mostly by authors who had no direct experience with emigrating themselves, but had to rely on the mediated, 'prosthetic' memories[65] of those who had relocated to far-off territories, the novels shed an interesting light on how the isolation and alienation concomitant with emigration and the new homelands of Irish émigrés were imagined in the mother country.

A central topos in Famine literature depicting transatlantic emigration is the coffin ship.[66] Steerage conditions on board the ships taking the Irish to the US and Canada were notoriously dire; on average, up to 30 per cent of all passengers perished at sea due to the insalubrious atmosphere below-decks, which often resulted in epidemic disease,[67] as Thomas O'Neill Russell's *The Struggles of Dick Massey* also illustrates.

64 C. Brettell, *Anthropology and Migration: Essays on Transnationalism, Ethnicity, and Identity* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2003), p. 18.

65 The term is derived from A. Landsberg's *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 2.

66 For an extensive discussion of this topos see M.C.M. Corporaal and C.T. Cusack, 'Rites of Passage: The Coffin Ship as Site of Immigrants' Identity Formation in Irish and Irish-American Fiction, 1855–1885', *Atlantic Studies*, 8, 3 (2011), pp. 343–59.

67 K.A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 292.

Not all texts focus on transatlantic emigration. Miss Mason's *Kate Gearey*, for example, relates the experience of an Irish girl who moves to London to make a living as a domestic servant. The novel highlights the differences between rural Ireland and metropolitan England, and it tries to dispel the notion that emigration will always lead to improved circumstances. Texts depicting immigrant life in America similarly evoke a transatlantic urban climate which corrupts the religious and sexual morality of the Irish newcomers. While Charles Kickham's *Sally Cavanagh* suggests that the New World opens up opportunities for acquiring wealth, the novel remains unconvinced about the benefits of emigration, for two immigrant females come to bad ends: Rose Mulvany loses her virtue, whilst her sister Mary perishes during the crossing to New York. As the novels in this section imply, Irish immigrants should focus on the retention of the Irish identity, and, specifically, Catholicism. Thus they should espouse an essential, continuous Irish identity which is to be strengthened by the establishment of Irish immigrant 'imagined communities'[68] in diaspora, forming heterotopic spaces used to resist assimilation in host societies.[69]

68 See B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1987), p. 15.

69 For the concept of heterotopia see M. Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics*, 16 (1986), pp. 22–7.