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# *An Analysis of Irish Famine Texts, 1845-2000: The Discursive Uses of Hunger*

**Jerome Joseph Day, O.S.B.**
**Department of Art History and Communication Studies**
**McGill University, Montréal**

**March 2001**

**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Ph.D.**

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## ABSTRACT

The Great Famine (1845-1852) was not only a catastrophic moment in Irish history, it was and remains an important source of textual production, particularly in regard to literature and drama. These cultural products carry a powerful discourse used to communicate various social and political agendas. From the beginning, Irish novelists, poets and dramatists have confronted the question of the Famine's meaning *then* and *now*. At each historical moment, they have interrogated the Famine and have employed various discursive strategies to communicate to their readers and audiences.

This dissertation makes four primary claims: a.) The historical Irish Famine has remained a source of discursive activity by Irish writers, and so constitutes a phenomenon that merits communication research; b.) This discursive content constructs the Famine in ways that communicate its meaning for contemporary readers in successive historical periods; c.) The multiple discursive meanings of the Famine are often contradictory, and demonstrate the conflicting socio-cultural and political goals of both writers and their readerships; and d.) The emergence and evolution of Famine discourse, which consistently recruits pre-existing discourses, provides an important site for examination of the communicational function of imaginative literature and drama.

A survey of Famine literature and drama reveals inconsistent patterns of textual production and discursive content. By determining the historical periods of Famine literary and dramatic production, and by analyzing the contextual dimensions and textual features of representative works, the reasons behind periods of high and low output, the purposes of discursive maintenance and manipulation and the relationship between literary and dramatic discourse and readerships can be approached. To undertake this analysis, five central tropes -- land, national identity, religion, gender and agency -- are employed. These themes are multi-layered and mutually implicated both on the level of textual production and consumption, that is, in their writing and in their reading/viewing. These tropes have been employed in and through the communicational perspectives of several thinkers, notably Pierre Bourdieu and Teun van Dijk.

Termed *an Gorta Mor* in the Irish language, the Famine dramatically altered Ireland's social, economic and political fabric, triggered massive emigration to America, Britain and Canada, and etched itself into the Irish psyche as an enduring, if frequently repressed, moment of trauma. As such, a study of its role in communication, in human meaning-making, can illuminate not only Irish experience but the human capacity to tell a bitter, painful story, for specific ends, by remembering and manipulating its elements and to use that story as tool in achieving social and political goals, and in obtaining or maintaining power.

## LE PRÉCIS

La Grande Famine (1845-1852) ne fut pas seulement un moment catastrophique dans l'histoire irlandaise, elle fut et reste une source importante de production textuelle, notamment en la littérature et le drame. Ces produits culturels créent un discours puissant pour communiquer de nombreux agendas sociaux et politiques. Dès le début, les romanciers, les poètes et les dramaturges irlandais ont confronté la question de la signification de la Famine *en son temps* et *en leur leur.* À chaque moment historique, ils ont interrogé la Famine et ils ont employé une variété de stratégies discursives à communiquer à leurs lecteurs et spectateurs.

Cette dissertation fait quatre assertions de premier rang: a.) La Famine irlandaise persiste à être une source d'activité discursive pour les écrivains irlandais, et donc constitue un phénomene, lequel mérite la recherche en études de communications; b.) Ce contenu discursif explique la Famine de manière à communiquer son sens aux lecteurs contemporains des diverses époques historiques et successives; c.) Les multiples sens discursives de la Famine sont souvent contradictoires, et démontrent les conflits des buts socio-culturels et politques à la fois des écrivains et de leurs lecteurs; et d.) L'émergence et l'évolution du discours de la Famine, compte tenu des discours précedénts, offrent un mandat important pour l'examen de la fonction communicative de la littérature et du drame.

Une revue de ces oeuvres révèle un dessin inconsistent de la production de textes et de contenu discursifs. En déterminant les époques fixes de la production de textes littéraires et dramatiques de la Famine, et à l'analyse des aspects contextuels et des traits textuels des oeuvres représentatives, on peut déterminer les raisons pour les niveaux disparates de rendement textuel, les buts du maintien et de la manipulation du discours et les relations entre le discours littéraire et dramatique et les lecteurs et spectateurs. Pour entreprendre cette analyse, on emploie cinq thématiques majeures -- la terre, l'identité nationale, la religion, le gendre et l'agence. Il y a beaucoup des niveaux dans ces thématiques et ils sont impliqués les uns les autres à produire et utiliser des textes, c'est à dire, à écrire et à lire. Ces thèmes sont employés en considération des perspectives de communication de plusieurs penseurs et penseuses, notablement Pierre Bourdieu et Teun van Dijk.

C'est appellé *an Gorta Mor* en langue irlandaise, la Grande Famine a changé dramatiquement les liens sociaux, economiques et politiques d'Irlande, a précipité l'émigration massive en l'Amérique, en la Grande Bretagne et au Canada, et s'est gravée en la psyché irlandaise comme un moment traumatique qui dure, encore même si souvent réprimé. Comme ça, une étude de son rôle dans la communication humaine, à faire de signification, peut éclairer non pas seulement l'expérience irlandaise mais aussi la capacité des hommes et femmes à raconter une histoire aigre et douloureuse, à des fins specifiques, à se souvenir de ces éléments et à les manipuler, et à utiliser cette histoire comme un instrument pour atteindre des objectifs sociaux et politiques, ou pour obtenir ou maintenir le pouvoir.

# *Acknowledgments*

This dissertation, in a strict sense, represents the culmination of my studies in the former Graduate Program in Communication, now part of the Department of Art History and Communication Studies, at McGill University. In a larger sense, however, the dissertation is the fruit of more than 30 years interest and participation in the process of human meaning-making in journalism, literature and drama. Consequently, many people deserve a genuine expression of my thanks.

At McGill, Professor Gertrude Joch Robinson, my dissertation supervisor, has afforded me keen insights and valuable critiques throughout the process of research and writing, and her encouragement has been unfailing. I owe her a great deal, perhaps most for helping me develop new perspectives in thought. Teachers and colleagues in the GPC have provided a stimulating and challenging environment in which to study, and my thanks go to Professors George Szanto, Alain Péricard and David Crowley; Lise Ouimet, administrator; colleagues Michael Dayan, Dipti Gupta, Geneviève Cimon, Beatrice Wanjiku Mukora and many others. I am also grateful to the staff at Copie Nova, Montréal.

The curé, the Rev. Camille Doucet, M.S., religious communities and parishioners at Paroisse Notre Dame de LaSalette, Montréal, have welcomed me with friendship and fellowship, and it is appreciated deeply. In addition to Father Doucet, I am grateful to the Rev. George Dube, M.S., the Rev. Roland Vandal, M.S., Bro. Wilfrid Violette, M.S., Bro. Fernand Henaire, M.S., as well as Soeur Bernadette, s.s.m., and Gabrielle Major. I particularly appreciate Father Dube's assistance with the French version of the abstract. *Mes remerciements à tous!*

Dissertations require research, and the staffs of the McLellan Library at McGill; Trinity College Library, Dublin; the National Library of Ireland, Dublin; the O'Neill Library at Boston College, Boston; and the Geisel Library at Saint Anselm College, Manchester, N.H., have been routinely kind, gracious and helpful. I am particularly indebted to Nancy "Sam" Urtz at the Geisel Library.

Within the context of my McGill studies, from 1998-2000, I received a M.Phil. degree in Irish Theatre Studies at Trinity College Dublin. My teachers, colleagues and fellow students at the Samuel Beckett Centre, Department of Drama and Theatre Studies, contributed in many ways to this dissertation. In particular, my gratitude goes to Anna McMullan, Brian Singleton, Antony Tallow and Steven Wilmer. Professor Terence Brown of TCD was also most generous with his time and insights. My TCD work was

supplemented with important contributions from the Department of English faculty at University College Dublin, particularly Christopher Murray, Andrew Carpenter, Eamonn Jordan and Cathy Leeney. In the course of my dissertation work, I again relied on the work of the late Roger McHugh, professor of Anglo-Irish Studies at UCD, with whom I studied for a M.A. degree in the field in 1977-1978. In addition, Christopher Morash and Margaret Kelleher of the Department of English at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, County Kildare, were especially kind in discussing their foundational work in the field of Famine literature and offering suggestions.

While in Ireland, I also received assistance from playwrights Eoghan Harris and Jim Minogue, TEAM Educational Theatre, Dublin, and The Passion Machine, Dublin, through the loan of manuscripts. Mairead Delaney, archivist of the National Theatre Society, the Abbey Theatre, Dublin; and Mary Clarke, archivist, Irish Theatre Archive, Dublin, were especially helpful. David Marcus and his wife, Ita Daly, were also kind and helpful.

While living in Dublin, I received a wonderful welcome from the Redemptorist community and staff at Marianella, Rathgar, under the direction of the Rev. Con Casey, C.Ss.R., and, later, the Rev. Eamon Hoey, C.Ss.R. I am grateful to the Rev. Brendan McConvery, C.Ss.R, for his many incisive observations, to the Rev. Kevin Donlon, C.Ss.R., for a wealth of observations on Irish writing and its purposes and to the Redemptorist students for many kindnesses. The participants in the Redemptorist formation program were especially kind.

In a special way, I add my appreciation to the Benedictine communities at Glenstal Abbey, Murroe, County Limerick, which welcomed me warmly on a number of occasions, and at Rostrevor, County Down, to whom I wish much success.

Professor Kevin Whelan and his colleagues in The Irish Seminar at the University of Notre Dame's inaugural Dublin program in the summer of 1999 also merit my appreciation, as does Professor James W. Fowler, Emory University, Atlanta, who offered me helpful background on the psychological implications of shame and guilt.

On a more personal level, I wish to express my deep thanks to family and friends in Ireland, especially those in Drangan and Carrick-on-Suir, County Tipperary; Maynooth, County Kildare; Warrenpoint, County Down; Westport, County Mayo; and Dublin. Special thanks to Aodh Ó Cearra and his family.

Closer to home, my thanks extend to friends and colleagues in the Department of English at Saint Anselm College, as well as past students, in particular Erin E.B. Brown. I am grateful also to my old colleagues at the Office of Public Relations, particularly Paul Dowd, John Greene, Drew Bennett and, absolutely, Loretta Martineau. Cathy Strausbaugh and Linda Warden-Burglund were very helpful in preparing the final manuscript. My thanks extends to Lew Cuyler, the Rev. Robert Sullivan, the Rev. Robin Ryan, C.P., Johann Moser and Denise Askin, and I acknowledge the late Margaret Mary

Toole, professor of English at North Adams State College, now Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, who first encouraged me to pursue graduate studies dealing with Irish literature. I still owe a great debt of gratitude to the Sisters of Saint Joseph and their lay colleagues at Saint Joseph's School and Regional High School at home in North Adams, Mass.

Many people have encouraged me in my work in Montréal and Dublin, but I would be remiss in failing to mention the Rt. Rev. Abbot Gerald F. McCarthy, O.S.B., the Rev. Bernard G. Holmes, O.S.B., the Rev. Richard F. Clavelle, O.S.B., deceased confreres at Saint Anselm, the Most Rev. Leo E. O'Neil, D.D., late bishop of Manchester, N.H, and especially the late Veto F. Navarro. Likewise, I deeply appreciate the encouragement of my family and many old friends, particularly the Rev. Daniel G. Dempski, O.S.B., the Rev. Aquinas F. Cafarelli, O.S.B., Bro. Malachy R. McCarthy,O.S.B., Bro. Nicholas F. Dello Russo, O.S.B., Kevin P. Green, Neil R. Johnson, Mary Bagnell and Patricia Shaw. I am especially grateful to the Rev. Placidus H. Riley, O.S.B., my novice master of some years ago, for reviewing the manuscript and offering many helpful suggestions.

Without the prayer and support, fraternity and encouragement of the Rt. Rev. Abbot Matthew K. Leavy, O.S.B., and my confreres in the Benedictine monastic community at Saint Anselm Abbey, Manchester, N.H., as well the prayer and support of the Soeurs de Ste. Jeanne d'Arc, my studies would not have been possible. I owe them all an inestimable debt of gratitude as well.

Finally, and in the deepest sense, my gratitude goes to my late parents, Charles F. Day and J. Marjorie (Costello) Day, as well as my late aunt, K. Agnes Costello. From my Mom and my Aunt Agnes, I first learned the love of language, its amazing uses and the beauty, power and enchantment of Irish stories. This work is dedicated to them, and in a larger sense, to those whom the Irish Famine claimed, to those who ministered with compassion to the suffering during those terrible years and to those who have told their story.

*Tiomnaim an saothar seo do m'athair do mo mháthair agus do m'aintín ónar chuala mé don chéad uair na scéalta lán de hionadh agus na scéalta lán de thragóid agus dóibh siúd a fuair bás uaigneach anaithnid le linn an Ghorta Mhóir, go háirithe iad siúd ó dhúiche Shliabh na mBan, ceantar dúchais mo shinsir. Go gcumhdaí muid a gcuimhne agus go ndaingnaí muid ár rún Cothrom na Féinne a lorg do chách.*

***Ut in omnibus glorificetur Deus***

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## INTRODUCTION

# *The Irish Famine and Its Hungers*

Less than two miles from the Roddick Gates, the principal entrance to Montréal's McGill University, stands a memorial at the foot of Victoria Bridge, spanning the Saint Lawrence. The monument, popularly known as "The Black Rock," commemorates the mass grave of more than 6,000 Irish men, women and children. After escaping the miseries of hunger at home, they sought refuge in Canada only to succumb to typhus, a famine-related disease. For many years, the monument was largely ignored. (Hustak, 1998, 38) Even the city's large Irish community paid scant attention until Montréal, like cities around the world, was swept up in a tide of interest, research and commemorations relating to the Irish Famine of the 1840s. That interest peaked in 1997, with the 150th anniversary of "Black '47," a reference to 1847, widely acknowledged as the Famine's worst year. Throughout the commemorative period, "Famine discourse" has re-emerged as a potent force shaping the nature and direction of public discussion, political decision-making, educational policy, religious observance and artistic production. While this discourse has been especially prevalent in Ireland, the Famine has grown as a topic of significant and deliberate concern in Irish "diaspora" communities in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and the United States. This engagement with the Famine is all the more remarkable after nearly a century of relative silence both at home and abroad.

The following study approaches this communicational phenomenon by examining one of its key aspects, the emergence and evolution of Famine texts and the discourse they manifest in Irish literature and drama from the start of the Famine in 1845 to the present. By periodizing literary and dramatic works dealing with the Famine in whole or in part, it becomes clear that Famine discourse once played a major role in shaping Irish literary and public life, then receded into a bog of forgetfulness, with some notable exceptions, only to return to the public literary sphere with renewed vigor in the second

half of the 20th century. By critically evaluating this pattern of expression, repression and recovery in selected texts, and by considering its social and cultural environments and discursive dynamics, this study will demonstrate how literary and dramatic textual production participates in, and contributes to, the construction and negotiation of social, political, economic and cultural agendas. During the past three decades complex Famine discourse not only has confronted national trauma but become a major cultural resource.

Few events in Western history have been more catastrophic for a nation than Ireland's *an Gorta Mor*, the Irish language term meaning "the Great Hunger" for the crisis occasioned by the potato blight of the 1840s. Historians debate the precise dating of the Famine; the years 1845 to 1852 will be considered here as the most useful period. Persistent blight over successive years on the potato crop, on which most Irish depended almost entirely for sustenance, led to massive death by starvation and related diseases. Roughly 1 million died, while another million emigrated, and within short order the Irish population was halved from approximately 8 million in the 1841 census to 4 million in 1851, and reducing Irish-speakers to a quarter of the population. It imposed a cultural malaise, the "Great Silence," that endured for decades. (Deane, 1986, 72, 79) Economic historian Joel Mokyr, arguing that the Famine's devastation had less to do with Irish poverty or lack of industry and more to with alienation, writes:

> The real problem was that Ireland was considered by Britain as an alien and even hostile country. ... Most serious of all, when the chips were down in the frightful summer of 1847, the British simply abandoned the Irish and let them perish. There is no doubt that Britain could have saved Ireland. (Mokyr, 1983, 291)

In its intensity and brevity, in its ability to mock representation, if not in its underlying causes, the Famine has been likened, albeit with some hesitation, to the Shoah, and its effects on the Irish population are analogous to those of Hitler's "Final Solution" on European Jewry. (Kelleher, 1997, 3-4) Ireland's trauma, however, stemmed from the combination of a natural crop failure, an imperialist economic and land ownership system and a *laissez-faire* government relief policy imposed by Britain, which controlled the island and indeed claimed to govern it as an integral part of the U.K. once the Act of Union became effective in 1801. (Foster, 1992, 166-167) Anti-Irish sentiment in Britain

and the motivations of some landlords in dispossessing tenants, however, have led some nationalists to brand the Famine as tacit genocide. (Deane, 1991, 120) In any case, its direct and indirect consequences included years of emigration and social dislocation, rising anti-British nationalism, intensification of the drive for independence, erosion of the Irish language and consolidation of a farming middle-class, as well as establishment of Irish communities in much of the English-speaking world.

What, precisely, is "Famine discourse"? For the purposes of this work, it is the discussion in imaginative literature and drama of the causes and effects of the Irish food crisis of the 1840s, as well as the treatment of the forces and personalities involved in its creation. Likewise, it is the relation of that historical construction to ongoing and newly emergent forces, processes and characters in such a way as to suggest their interpretation in light of the Famine. The terms "historical" and "construction" in the foregoing sentence are important, because all recollection of the past in discourse is an exercise in selection. Events and characters, whether fictional or historical, language, narrative structures and interpretative perspectives must be *chosen* and *organized* by an author, who then *deploys* them in a work for audience or readers. Indeed, writers choose such elements from within pre-existing discourses. As this study will demonstrate, however, Famine discourse is not monolithic. It is often diverse, usually contentious, sometimes contradictory and frequently transgressive. Famine discourse merits communicational study because it exemplifies in discrete and significant ways the effects of language and social action on each other. Broadly understood, studies in communication examine the ways men and women construct meaning as they interpret experience, lived and received, individually and socially. "Meaning" enables them to make sense of the past, understand the present, and manipulate power.

Famine discourse in poetry, novels and drama affords the communication scholar an opportunity to investigate important phenomena. The relatively quick rise of a field of discourse after a long period of absence and the recovery of historical resources is seen in the re-emergence and development of Famine discourse since the 1960s. Such a phenomenon invites consideration of how and why fields of discourse emerge and

submerge. The relationship between historical event, communal memory, imaginative construction and historiographical philosophy can be examined through fluctuating interest in the Famine theme, its ebb and flow into an overall pattern of initial expression, widespread repression and vigorous recovery in the Irish literary and theatrical communities. This pattern is seen in the five phases of textual production to be discussed in the next section. In light of the contentious nature of aspects of this discourse, the struggle within interpreting communities to shape meaning becomes readily apparent. The discursive use of historical memory is not simply a matter of retrieval, but of debate. Moreover, a community's need to confront its traumas and their consequences are intimately related to shared representations of both past and current identity. Yet these representations, and not only particular memories, become the sites of contestation. The role of literary forms -- the novel, the lyric, the tragedy, etc. -- in communicating Famine "meaning" enables the scholar to examine the impact of distinctive genres on a discourse, and, recursively, of a discourse on a genre. Famine discourse also invites the scholar to investigate the mutual interpenetration of popular culture, high culture, market considerations and socio-political agendas, and their collective impact on a discourse. The relationship between the "originating" source of a discourse and its diasporic reach can be examined in the ways Irish novels, poetry and drama are received in communities outside the country as they maintain contact, interpret their shared historical experience and construct their identities. Finally, the investigation of Famine discourse demonstrates the heuristic potential of discourse analysis for communication and Irish studies.

Famine texts and the discourse they carry should be situated within two distinct but related phenomena. The first is the historic continuum of such discourse. Ireland did not suddenly discover its Famine past. Indeed, during the first two generations after the Famine, Irish writers intensely developed discourse to confront, explain and exploit the Famine for social, political, religious and economic reasons. The second, however, is the surge in global interest in things Irish. For decades, Ireland was regarded as a quaint outpost of the Third World on the margins of the First. With the steady pace of Irish

economic and social development since the 1960s, and with the rapid transformation of Irish life since the 1990s, the country is seen now as a technological pioneer, social trend-setter and economic powerhouse -- the Celtic Tiger. Three factors have been critical for this change: massive infrastructure investment by the European Union, which Ireland joined in 1973; heavy investment by U.S. and other international firms, particularly in the high technology sector of the Irish economy; and the availability of an educated work force, achieved by a deliberate government policy. Culturally, Irish music, both traditional and rock, enjoys worldwide audiences. "Riverdance" has received continuing acclaim. Irish novelists, poets and playwrights regularly win plaudits far from home, with Seamus Heaney's 1995 Nobel Prize for Literature as the most recent example. Such advances have encouraged the Irish to revisit their national heritage, including its bleakest moment, the Famine. Within the past decade, monuments, museums, interpretative heritage centers, exhibitions, academic conferences, journalistic and other media attention, special projects and an outpouring of literary and historical works, on local, national and international levels, have emerged. For example, in 1994, the combined Strokestown Park House and Irish Famine Museum opened in County Roscommon. The site combines the elegance of a landlord's Big House with the brutally frank realities of the Famine in a comprehensive, interactive museum. In 1997, on the shores of Clew Bay, President Mary Robinson unveiled Ireland's National Famine Monument in Murrisk, County Mayo. Sculptor John Behan designed the monument to depict a "coffin ship" made up of skeletons. Coffin ships were the numerous unseaworthy vessels that transported Famine emigrants, often riddled with disease, to America and Canada. New "heritage centers" in County Mayo and County Cork remind visitors of the precarious existence of Irish peasants, the vast majority of the population, in the 19th century. Diaspora communities, likewise, have claimed the Famine as part of their heritage too, erecting monuments literally around the world: Melbourne, Liverpool, Glasgow, Boston, New York, Phoenix, Montréal. Canada's own engagement with the Irish Famine centered around a controversy to redevelop Grosse Île, in the Saint Lawrence downriver from Québec, into an entertainment and theme park. The country's Irish community was

outraged, and, eventually, Grosse Île was preserved as a national memorial to the Famine dead and a monument to the contribution of the Irish and other immigrants to Canadian life and development. It is against this background of an outpouring of discourse, broadly considered, that Famine literary and dramatic texts must be considered. This is particularly true of the production of texts in the past three decades, in the wake of major changes in Ireland.

**SECTION I: FAMINE TEXTS IN SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXTS**

Even such a discrete section of Famine discourse as its literature and drama amounts to a considerable body of material. Poetry, novels and drama were among the first sites for Famine discourse, and such discourse has developed over more than 150 years. The central phenomena to be explored here is the emergence of Famine discourse in the teeth of the crisis, its proliferation in the first 65 years after 1845, followed by its relatively sudden decline, almost to the point of disappearance, in the next 40 years, and, then its gradual return since the 1960s and its dramatic rise in the past decade and a half. Two principal concerns will occupy this study. On a macrotextual level, the reasons for proliferation and decline in the production, distribution and content of Famine works will be investigated. At issue will be intended readers, types of works produced, circulation and political and socio-cultural circumstances. On the microtextual level, interest will shift to discursive content: its rhetorical elements, narrative strategies and social purposes. Dominick LaCapra offers a helpful theoretical approach to these two levels of concern when he distinguishes between the "documentary" and "worklike" characteristics of a text. (LaCapra, 1983, 29-30) The term, "text," of course, is slippery. It is not simply the written material on a given set of pages; it is a set of interpretations and influences that shape, and are shaped by, their social setting. LaCapra writes:

> What is meant by the term 'text'? It may initially be seen as a situated use of language marked by a tense interaction between mutually implicated yet at times contestatory tendencies. On this view, the very opposition between what is inside and what is outside texts is rendered problematic, and nothing is seen as being purely and simply inside or outside texts. Indeed the problem becomes one of rethinking the concepts of 'inside' and 'outside' in relation to processes of interaction between language and the world. (LaCapra, 1983, 26)

The appearance of a novel such as William Carleton's *The Black Prophet* (1847) demonstrates its documentary character by its publication data (publisher, year of publication, editions, distribution, etc.), its audience and its readership, but it also manifests its worklike, or rhetorical, features through the social impact it originally had and continues to have as the first major example of Famine discourse. This micro-level impact comes from impressions and interpretations of readers, critics, historians and others, as well as from the specifics of its internal discourse and their relation to the ensuing tradition of Famine discourse. LaCapra writes:

> The documentary situates the text in terms of factual or literal dimensions involving reference to empirical reality and conveying information about it. The 'worklike' supplements empirical reality by adding to and subtracting from it. It thereby involves dimensions of the text not reducible to the documentary, prominently including the roles of commitment, interpretation, and imagination. The worklike is critical and transformative, for it deconstructs and reconstructs the given, in a sense recreating it but also bringing into the world something that did not exist before in that significant variation, alteration, or transformation. With deceptive simplicity, one might say that while the documentary marks a difference, the worklike makes a difference -- one that engages the reader in ... dialogue with the text and the problems it raises. (LaCapra, 1983, 29-30)

As LaCapra notes, the worklike impact of the literary record often is "filtered out" of historical accounts, and yet its significance is not to be overlooked. (LaCapra, 1983, 31)

The role of text and context in mapping the Famine's discursive field may seem simple, conceptually, but contexts are themselves descriptions of reality constructed by different participants or observers whose perspectives change. LaCapra cautions:

> An appeal to the context does not *eo ipso* answer all questions in reading and interpretation. And an appeal to *the* context is deceptive: one never has -- at least in the case of complex texts -- *the* context. ... For complex texts, one has a set of interacting contexts whose relations to one another are variable and problematic and whose relation to the text being investigated raises difficult issues in interpretation. (LaCapra, 1983, 35)

LaCapra lists six "contexts" identifying the worklike, or interpretive, features in a text: relations between the author's intentions and the text; the author's life and the text; society and texts; culture and texts; text and the corpus; and modes of discourse and texts.

(LaCapra, 1983, 36-61)

Of these six approaches, the two most useful for this *communicational* study are the social relations of texts and their cultural impact because they deal with the *social* nature of meaning-making. Novels, poems and plays about the Famine do not simply emerge Athena-like from the minds of individual writers, although their creative agency certainly must be acknowledged. Rather, such writers encounter social forces and institutions, each engaging in discursive practices, that provide both occasion and material for textual production. Dense, interconnected and layered, these cognitions and practices may be conscious or repressed:

> The text may then be seen not only to exemplify discursive practices or ideologies in a relatively straightforward way but also to engage in processes that, whether consciously or not, render them problematic, at times with critical implications. The question then becomes how precisely the discursive practice, deep structure, or ideology -- even the prejudice -- is situated in the text other than in terms of instantiation or simple reflection. (LaCapra, 1983, 42)

In Irish society, where for centuries, contending communities have sought to claim moral authority for their "cause" and where historical causes tend to be polarized variations on a theme, at least in discursive practice, any given work emerges from a long tradition of texts and social contexts, and often is enlisted in a cause before its ink is dry. LaCapra observes: "The text is seen as the 'place' where long tradition and specific time intersect, and it effects variations on both. But the text is not immobilized or presented as an autonomous node; it is situated in a fully relational network." (LaCapra, 1983, 44) Identifying a discursive network, however, does not deny a work its own interpretation and impact -- but social circumstances diversify interpretations:

> The question of 'impact' is best seen in terms of complex series of readings and uses which texts undergo over time, including the process by which certain texts are canonized. Any text reaches us overlaid and even overburdened by interpretations to which we are consciously or unconsciously indebted. Canonization itself is a procedure not only of selection but of selective interpretation, often in the direction of domestication. We as interpreters are situated in a sedimented layering of readings that demand excavation. But the process of gaining perspective on our own interpretations does not exclude the attempt to arrive at an interpretation we are willing to defend. (LaCapra, 1983, 45)

A text both affects and is affected by the culture around it. Social relations and cultural impact may be distinguishable but not separable. If a text has links to the social actors, forces and institutions surrounding it, if it is formed by their discourse or turns against it, it consequently is connected to their ideas and practices. Culture subsists in the principles, prejudices, perspectives and practices of its society. Just as society is segmented and sedimented, so too is culture, which fashions overlapping communities of discourse. Such communities embrace, in varying degrees, a broad spectrum from "high" to "low" culture zones. For example, Famine discourse in the "priestly" fiction of the Rev. Patrick Augustine Sheehan serves the larger idea of peaceful political change, Catholic nationhood and opposition to violence. By advancing constitutional politics, Sheehan attracted upper-class Protestant readers, while his Catholic ethos and attention to history, such as the Famine's consequences, attracted nationalists. Within that audience were both middle-class merchants and large farmers, usually supporters of a "go-slow-with-the-status-quo" approach, and the poor, often recruits for armed struggle. LaCapra writes:

> To the extent that a text is not a mere document, it supplements existing reality, often by pointing out the weaknesses of prevailing definitions of it. In a traditional context, texts may function to shore up norms and values that are threatened but still experienced as viable. ... In a revolutionary context, texts may help to break down the existing system and suggest avenues of change. But it is at times difficult to distinguish clearly between the traditional and the revolutionary context. And any text that pinpoints weaknesses in a system has an ambivalent function, for it may always be read against its own dominant tendency or authorial intention. (LaCapra, 1983, 48-49)

LaCapra's approach opens up the communicational significance of Famine discourse. From a catastrophic natural event, Ireland moved into the Famine, which included starvation, disease, emigration, social chaos, massive death, institutional breakdown, social polarization, political radicalization and, finally, a long and uneven recovery. Each historical stage saw production of literary texts from competing points of view. As a phenomenon of popular culture, Famine discourse relied in part on written, published materials. Because such texts provide a sustained medium for this discourse,

other manifestations of Famine discourse -- folk memory, film, television, art, museum displays, heritage center, monuments, re-enactments, political rhetoric, memorial services, etc. -- have been excluded. Generally more recent in appearance, with the exception of folk accounts, these alternative forms of discourse constitute a fascinating field for investigation, but they lack the historical continuity of literary materials. Moreover, the high literacy rate among the Irish and their esteem for literature and drama make print the dominant medium of Famine discourse. To the extent that drama relies on largely fixed scripts and conventions, and is distributed by print, it may be considered here as part of the print tradition. Initially, texts helped sustain rival communities of discourse, unionist or nationalist, in the polemics for Ireland's political future. From the 1960s and afterwards, such texts often became means for groups to distinguish themselves from the dominant Catholic, nationalist, patriarchal middle-class majority. In many ways, Famine discourse helps energize and radicalize the pre-existing discursive flows from which it is derived.

**SECTION II: MAPPING THE UNIVERSE OF FAMINE LITERATURE**

Evidence for this study will come from the extensive selection of imaginative materials produced in Ireland between 1845 and 2000. Novels, poetry and drama will comprise the bulk of this material, although reference will also be made to relevant political rhetoric. Figures 1-4, accompanying this introduction, will indicate the universe of principal works reflecting aspects of Famine discourse. These charts will indicate historical periods and textual production by genre and author. The conclusion will outline upcoming chapters. Each chapter will focus on two particular works, with some reference to others, during each of the five phases. Appendix II offers a fuller discussion of related texts.

The charts at the end of this introduction represent a wide universe of Famine texts initially derived from and destined for the nationalist and unionist communities from the 1840s onwards, but continuing to be produced on the eve of the 21st century. Despite polarization within Irish political sentiment for more than 70 years after the Famine, considerable diversity existed within these broad, evolving groups. After Irish

independence in 1922, it makes little sense to speak of the "unionist" community in the 26 counties, although a unionist majority dominated the six counties of the North. Likewise, Famine discourse, from its beginnings in Carleton, has looked beyond its Irish audience. The significance, both for sales and political influence, of the British and, later, diaspora audiences was considerable. Until the Government of Ireland Act in 1920, the Parliament in Westminster determined Irish policy, and British public opinion was to be courted. Likewise, growing Irish communities abroad were both sustained and explained in part by Famine texts. This process was especially important for the diaspora in the U.S. and Canada, crucial bases for political and financial support. Differences existed within communities. Nationalists, for example, were hardly monolithic. Several novels by priests make a strong effort to persuade readers to follow their clergy in non-violent Home Rule efforts. Such "Catholic" discourse was seen by hard-edge Fenians and the Irish Republican Brotherhood a generation after the Famine as aid for unionism, not nationalism. Early in independence, under Eamon de Valera, with unionism a memory, there was little sense that Ireland was comprised of competing discursive communities relative to the Famine. When the de Valera era ended in 1959, however, the door opened for change. Writers who had chafed under the cultural restrictions of the period soon turned to the Famine. In the horrors of the 1840s, they found thematic and metaphoric approaches to their own circumstances. New social groups were emerging; the rural ideal was fast giving way to an urban reality and a new set of problems. Texts produced from the 1960s to the 1980s wrestle with historical legacy and contemporary issues. By the Famine's 150th anniversary, environmental, feminist, refugee and secularist agendas had joined public discourse. Literary and dramatic works helped hasten the process, and were affected by it. As this study will demonstrate, content is implicated in context, depicting a time in history *and* constructing a narrative with contemporary thematic relevance.

## SECTION III: DEFINING A DISCURSIVE FIELD: A REVIEW OF KEY TEXTS

Despite widespread interest in the Famine on the historical, economic and commemorative levels, relatively little attention has been paid to its communicational

significance through the analysis of texts and their contexts, including their role as a field of discourse. Focus has been on individual works, but as a field of discourse, as a textual universe, Famine literature has had few students. Two recent works, however, underline the significance of the 1840s crisis on imaginative literature. Christopher Morash, a Canadian-born lecturer in English at Saint Patrick's College of the National University of Ireland in Maynooth, published *Writing the Irish Famine* in 1995, while two years later, Margaret Kelleher, also teaching in the English program at Maynooth, saw the publication of her work, *The Feminization of Famine: Expressions of the Inexpressible?* Morash engages the Famine from a cultural studies perspective, and is particularly interested in the Famine as a moment of absence that resists representation. Examining a number of 19th century works, he charts the ways the Famine is constructed by narratives of social progress and punishment in novels, poetry and political rhetoric. For some writers, he argues, the Famine is a cruel, lamentable, but necessary step in a process of ultimate social transformation. For others, it is a sign of divine judgment, the harbinger of an ultimate apocalyptic vengeance for Ireland's religious and/or political failures. Yet out of this crucible, some literary texts manifest a conviction that a new era of political freedom will emerge. Writing reaches its representational limit in confrontation with the Famine for Morash, and texts become a means of reclaiming the dead. (Morash, 1995, 1-7) Meanwhile, Kelleher explores 19th and 20th century literary texts to show that the female figure becomes the site of vulnerability in the Irish Famine and a similar crisis in what is now Bangladesh in 1943-1944. Moreover, the female becomes the means through which the relentless process of famine can be narrated. Kelleher acknowledges the particular place of the personified female representation of Ireland -- Kathleen ni Houlihan, Sean Van Vocht, Mother Ireland, Erin -- in the literary tradition, but also shows the relationship between victimization and femininity in Famine texts, which rely on such a connection to establish narrative structure. (Kelleher, 1997, 5-6) Both the Morash and Kelleher perspectives will play important roles in this study, but theirs are primarily literary analyses, not communicational ones. Contextual relationships and rhetorical analysis can enhance understanding of the constructed and constructing nature

of Famine discourse.

Two other related works deserve mention; although they are anthologies, not analyses, they point the reader in the direction of discourse analysis by organizing materials from the Famine. Seamus Deane, writer and academic, served as general editor of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, published in three volumes in 1991. He also served as editor of the section titled, "The Famine and Young Ireland," in Volume III, a collection that includes work by members of the Young Ireland movement, which advocated cultural revival and separation from the United Kingdom. Folk memories are included as well. Deane writes:

> By now, the Famine may not appear quite so apocalyptic; its seems to be the culmination of a process that had been evolving over thirty years .... But the view of it taken by those who had lived through it governed later responses to a remarkable degree. Young Ireland's twin contribution -- the genocide theory of [John] Mitchel and the plea for a revolution in the land-tenure system made by [James Fintan] Lalor -- had political consequences that reverberated well into the twentieth century. (Deane, 1991, 121)

Earlier, in 1989, Morash edited a collection of poems titled, *The Hungry Voice: The Poetry of the Irish Famine.* While both volumes serve important purposes, they are limited by genre and time period. This study attempts to cross genres to study the full range of literary and dramatic discourse deployed since the Famine, and to explain why it follows a pattern of expression, repression and recovery. In his foreword to Morash's first volume, Terence Brown calls the poems "testaments to the human need to comprehend what may in the end prove incomprehensible." (Morash, 1989, 13) The Famine shares with the Shoah, slavery and other evils elements that are both banal and profound, and its discourses expose communicational significance. What narrative structures, discursive elements and interpretive strategies have writers chosen? What social forces and cultural conditions prevailed at the time of a text's production, and how did they influence its production? Did the text in turn reshape those "external" conditions? How do the "internal" elements of a text relate to the "external" features of its formative context? What competing audiences existed? What forces created the cyclical pattern of initial expression, subsequent repression and recent recovery of Famine textual production? A

communications perspective on Famine texts offers an opportunity for discovery both in the production of Irish works and in the use of discourse analysis itself.

## SECTION IV: METHODOLOGY: PERIODS, THEORIES AND TROPES

### 1. Periodizing and assessing the phases of textual production

Periodization will be central to the methodology of this study. Through a diachronic tabulation of literary output about the Famine, it becomes possible to determine those times of greatest attention and interest, as well as those when the Famine recedes from public discussion. Likewise, a synchronic consideration of works within a period can attend to the specific manipulation of genre and theme, as well as the relationships between socio-political developments in Ireland and the production of imaginative works. For the purposes of this study, five major periods have been identified. In determining these historical periods, the following criteria have been employed: historical context, level of textual production, audience/readership formation and discursive motivation. Phase I involves production during the bleak years of the Famine itself from 1845 to 1852, when writers appealed for relief and expressed outrage in the teeth of the event. Phase II covers the years 1853 to 1910, and saw heavy production of literary works as Fenianism, the Land War and the Home Rule movement repeatedly turned to the Famine to fuel their discourses for political autonomy; by 1910 constitutional efforts toward separation suffered from fatal flaws. Phase III, from 1911 to 1950, was both turbulent and inward-looking. With a plunge in textual production, the period was marked by the collapse of Home Rule, World War I, the Easter Rising of 1916, the War of Independence, partition and establishment of the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland, the Irish Civil War, consolidation of the state, World War II and economic depression. Phase IV embraces the relatively brief time frame from 1951 to 1983, when the Famine's centenary was observed and the first glimmerings of a national confrontation with its past could be felt in the wake of new political and social initiatives. Tom MacIntyre's *The Great Hunger* in 1983, and its revision in 1986, signals a genuine change. A new urbanized, television-influenced audience was emerging. Finally, Phase IV covers the years from 1984 to 2000, during which interest in the Famine has exploded

even as the "Irish" audience becomes more Europeanized, urban and fragmented. As the chart in Figure E will show in some detail, a large number of writers wrestle with the Famine during most of the first and second phases, when the human and political ramifications of the catastrophe were dramatic. Phase I saw publication of four of Carleton's novels and publication of more than two dozen Famine-themed poems by a dozen or more poets. Phase II, substantially longer in time, saw publication of at least 10 novels and at least one short story by 11 fiction writers, two plays by two different writers, and at least half a dozen poems or poem-sequences by as many poets. During Phase III, literary and dramatic output declined markedly. Only two novels and a short story by two writers, plus two plays by two different dramatists appeared, and it is this abrupt and prolonged absence that makes Famine textual production and discourse intriguing. Why the sudden fall-off in production? What significance is to be attached to the Famine discourse that does appear? During Phase IV, when five novels, three plays and two poetical works by 10 various writers appeared, the key questions to be asked are what stimulates a new examination of the Famine. Finally, Phase V shows a significant increase in output with publication of 13 novels, at least two short stories, six new plays and more than half a dozen poetical works, some extended, by more than two dozen different writers. The ways the catastrophe serves as a literary resource and one genre's advantages over another's become questions.

Literary genres do not simply to reflect the diversity of human creativity. They are forms of literary expression with characteristic features, which, although they may be subject to considerable adaptation, enable a writer to choose elements which best serve his or her purposes. A genre "as something imposed, not inherent" is thus yet another one of the selections a writer must make in order to communicate a particular message. (Chapman, 1992, 435) However, because genres also participate in a discursive flow, they are hardly innocent. Instead, they provide writers with a set of structural, linguistic, narrative and interpretive strategies with which to shape meaning. The three principal genres considered in this study, the novel, the poem and the drama, each have distinct characteristics and emphases. The novel permits extended treatment of a large number of

characters over extended time, as well as attention to select individuals. It tends, however, to adopt a single or limited number of perspectives from which to view action. The drama, however, provides a range of perspectives or points of view which operate simultaneously in a play. Narrative time can be compressed and expressed fluidly. Poetry highlights emotional and psychological perspectives through linguistic concentration and metaphoric exploitation. Only one dramatic comedy, for example, John Banville's *The Broken Jug* (1994) depicts the Famine, and it sharply contrasts the peasant and Ascendancy worlds.

By organizing the world of Famine texts into five historical periods, the social and cultural conditions of their meaning-making process will be highlighted. Attention to their genre-specific characteristics will emphasize the link between medium and message.

**2. Five theoretical perspectives to shape methodology**

Analysis of selected Famine texts will proceed within a theoretical framework designed to highlight their documentary and worklike dimensions, on the macrotextual level the conditions of their production and on the microtextual level their discursivity. Unlike a literary analysis in which primary emphasis falls on a text's internal structures and dynamics, or connection with its author, genre, period or canon, a communicational analysis sees the process of social communication as a whole. Consequently, a communicational study will distinguish messages, elements and dynamics of messages, producers and receivers of messages, social and cultural conditions of production and reception and interference, as well as relationships among these moments. The five primary thinkers whose work will be applied here have deepened a communicational analysis of discourse. The first four point to a macrotextual analysis of documentary and worklike dimensions with emphasis on social and cultural context, while the fifth offers insights for a microtextual analysis of specifically worklike, or rhetorical, features.

***Hall's encoding and decoding model.*** British cultural studies theorist Stuart Hall locates the structural elements of message transmission within his famous encoding and decoding model of communication. Transmission is enmeshed within the process of production, which, in turn, is culturally determined. For Hall, "the interconnection

between societal structures and processes and formal or symbolic structures is absolutely pivotal." (Hall, 1973, 1) Regardless of genre and narrative, Hall argues that a message -- as in the case of any literary output -- emerges "in the form of a symbolic vehicle constituted within the rules of 'language,' through which this 'phenomenal form' circulates the 'product.'" (Hall, 1973, 2) Hall sees symbolic encoding and decoding, though part of a broader process of communicative production, as "determinative moments." (Hall, 1973, 2) Consequently, in the case of Famine literature and drama, the symbolic selections a writer makes in constituting a particular work will manifest both literary independence and discursive dependence. Hall argues, "In the moment when the historical event passes under the sign of language, it is subject to all the complex formal 'rules' by which language signifies. To put it paradoxically, the event must become a 'story' before it can become a 'communicative event.'" (Hall, 1973, 2) Stories, however, already participate in a discursive tradition, and narrative structures exist both in the minds of writers and readers. In other words, as Hall suggests, "In a determinate moment, the structure employs a code and yields a 'message': at another determinate moment, the 'message,' via its decodings, issues into a structure." (Hall, 1973, 3) Whatever the purposes of producers and consumers of Famine literature and drama, pre-existing structures of meaning will help shape a narrative and its understanding. The relative positions -- socially, intellectually or politically -- of encoder-producers and decoder-receivers and the difference in the actual codes they employ in the process account for asymmetry in comprehension. (Hall, 1973, 4) However, the two processes may be so closely aligned that one has little trouble in transmitting a message. The stronger a discourse, and the more consciously a writer participates in such a flow, the more likely is such an outcome:

> ... these 'rules of encoding' were so diffused, so symmetrically shared as between producer and audience, that the 'message' was likely to be decoded in a manner highly symmetrical to that in which it had been encoded. This reciprocity of codes is, indeed, precisely what is entailed in the notion of stylization or 'conventionalization', and the presence of such reciprocal codes is, of course, what defines or makes possible the existence of a *genre*. (Hall, 1973, 6)

Here, Hall speaks of television Westerns and their conventions as a genre; one may place Famine literary and dramatic works in a similar niche. Particular elements, some violent -- starvation scenes, landlord indifference, agent rental demands, peasant evictions, popular resistance -- are set within discursive codes and structures which guide interpretation.

Hall's comments on violence in the Western can be instructive. While conventional elements may be "polysemic," they may be so constructed as to offer a "preferred meaning," though such a meaning may not be unquestioned. (Hall, 1973, 9) Saussurian predeterminism in semiotic signification has no place in Hall, who sees a coded field as liberating. He suggests

> ... how an attention to the symbolic/linguistic/coded nature of communications, far from boxing us into the closed and formal universe of signs, precisely opens out into the areas where cultural content, of the most resonant but 'latent' kind, is transmitted: and especially the manner in which the interplay of codes and content serve to displace meanings from one frame to another, and thus to bring to the surface in 'disguised' forms the repressed content of a culture. (Hall, 1973, 11)

True to his neo-Marxist perspective, however, Hall insists that not all codes are equal; society's power and interest arrangements so ordain that some interpretative structures will call for the assignment of particular meanings. He writes:

> 'Polysemy' must not, however, be confused with pluralism. Connotative codes are not equal among themselves. Any society/culture tends, with varying degrees of closure, to impose its segmentations, its classifications of the social and cultural and political world, upon its members. There remains a *dominant cultural order*, though it is neither univocal nor uncontested. This question of the 'structure of dominance' in a culture is an absolutely crucial point. We may say, then, that the different areas of social life appear to be mapped out into connotative domains of *dominant or preferred meanings*. New, problematic or troubling things and events, which breach our expectancies and run counter to our 'common-sense constructs', to our 'taken-for-granted' knowledge of social structures, must be assigned to their connotational domain before they can be said to 'make sense': and the most common way of 'mapping them' is to assign the new within some domain or other of the existing 'maps of problematic social reality.' (Hall, 1973, 13)

Among the codes Hall identifies are the dominant and hegemonic, the professional, the

negotiated and the oppositional. (Hall, 1973, 16-18) In Famine discourse, such codes might reflect the nationalist Irish and the unionist Ascendancy, both dominant, though for different audiences; the sympathetic, compassionate landlord, negotiated; the impartial relief works, the professional; and the anti-nationalist or anti-unionist view, as oppositional, depending upon the audience.

Hall also offers insight into renewed interest in ethnicity, a particularly important element in considering 19th century cultural nationalism and contemporary "Celtomania."

> Though ethnicity continues to be, in many places, a surprisingly resilient and powerfully reactionary force, the new forms of ethnicity are articulated, politically, in a different direction. By 'ethnicity' we mean the astonishing return to the political agenda of all those points of attachment which give the individual some sense of 'place' and position in the world, ... in relation to particular communities, localities, territories, languages, religions or cultures. (Hall, 1996, 236-237)

For the diaspora Irish, as well as those at home, positioning is crucial in the face of rapid economic, political and social changes. Indeed, such positioning has historic importance in the construction of Irish identity. For those interested in maintaining political union with Britain, a dismissal or subordination of native heritage pointed out the advantages of government from Westminster. For those seeking autonomy or independence, an exaltation of Irish heritage and accomplishment was a discursive necessity. Hall cites the importance of "positioning" through ethnic coordinates amid processes that efface individual and communal identity. (Hall, 1996, 237)

***Radway's interpretive communities.*** American feminist thinker Janice Radway provides a necessary caution to Hall's perspective on the deep structures and semiotic codes used to transmit messages in discourse. As a communication theorist, Radway cites particularities shaped by gender and sees women as active subjects. Social circumstances shape a reader's response to a given text -- and such a perspective is especially helpful in confronting the social uses of Famine discourse. A reader's agency is not destroyed by the preferred meanings of a text. Radway writes:

> All [reception theories of reading], conceive of textual meaning as the product of a complex transaction between an inert textual structure, composed of verbal

> signifiers, and an actively productive reader, who constructs those signifiers as meaningful signs on the basis of previously learned interpretive procedures and cultural codes. Although the reader often attempts to construe the text by referring to the codes and strategies she believes the author intended her to use, nothing in the text constrains her to do so, nor, if she does, is she necessarily successful. ... Reading, then, is a complicated semiotic and fundamentally social process that varies both in place and in time. That is to say, different readers read differently because they belong to what are known as various interpretive communities, each of which acts upon print differently .. for different purposes. (Radway, 1991, 468)

Even Famine materials that may hold political messages at variance with readers' own may be received -- books purchased and read, poems remembered and plays seen -- because they provide narrative elements that readers and audiences may decode in their own ways. Tom Murphy's 1968 play *Famine*, for example, is unstable. Comedy, brutality, political messages seem to contend with each other, and audiences freely employ interpretive strategies. As Radway observes, "Books are always read within a set of specific circumstances, and their final meaning and impact may well be a function of the way those circumstances constitute the reader as a social being." (Radway, 1991, 480) One of the paradoxes of Famine discourse is the presence of contentious voices within it.

Radway's feminist caution helps one to dismiss the "consumption model" of literary production, dramatic performance or discursive flow. She writes:

> The consumption analogy is dangerous when it is carried too far, as it is when employed to characterize the actual process of text comprehension itself. To do so is to petrify the human act of signification, to ignore the fact that comprehension is actually a process of making meaning, a process of sign production where the reader actively attributes significance to signifiers on the basis of ... learned cultural codes. (Radway, 1984, 6-7)

Radway acknowledges, as does Hall, that possibilities for resistance and alterity exist even within a discursive flow. "Because reading is an active process that is at least partially controlled by the readers themselves," she argues, "opportunities still exist within the mass-communication process for individuals to resist, alter, and reappropriate the materials designed elsewhere for their purchase." (Radway, 1984, 17) It is not simply the social circumstances that apply here, however. Radway argues that an art form itself, because it is lifted up out of mundane experience, exhibits a form and a shape that may be

positioned in new and creative ways. Both writer and readers and audiences may interpret a conventional sign in an unconventional, but useful manner. Radway writes, "Clifford Geertz maintains that all art forms, like the Balinese cockfight, render 'ordinary everyday experience comprehensible by presenting it in terms of acts and objects which have had their practical consequences removed and been reduced ... to a level of sheer appearance, where the meaning can be more powerfully articulated and more exactly perceived.'" (Radway, 1984, 72) Rarely in Famine discourse is a landlord attractive or compelling, but in Beatrice Coogan's 1969 novel *The Big Wind*, a handsome, young Roman Catholic from the ancient Gaelic aristocracy owns the estate. Likewise, his beautiful, wild and self-indulgent daughter becomes the heroine after his assassination. Recalling Radway's suspicion of dominant meanings, one finds the class that nationalists usually hate and the sex that habitually swoons assume new positions in Coogan.

***Bourdieu's 'habitus' and 'social field'.*** French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theory of "habitus" helps explain differences in interpretive communities. Why do some narratives, images, structures and strategies change and others remain consistent within Famine texts? "Habitus" for Bourdieu is "a set of dispositions which incline agents to act and react in certain ways. The dispositions generate practices, perceptions and attitudes which are 'regular' without being consciously co-ordinated or governed by any 'rule'. The dispositions which constitute the habitus are inculcated, structured, durable, generative and transposable," according to John Thompson. (Bourdieu, 1991, 12) Habitus enables one to see how a discourse can maintain its power over time and across space, particularly within groups sharing similar characteristics, such as the Irish and their diaspora communities. Ordinary experience inculcates dispositions in early human development, molding both body and attitude. Social situations then structure these dispositions, which endure and often are reinforced, more or less, throughout the life of the individual, who is rarely conscious of such attitudes, behaviors and characteristics. Moreover, new practices are generated and transposed, that is, derived from and related to, the initiating dispositions, according Thompson. (Bourdieu, 1991, 12-13) Irish stereotypes show them as "green," nationalist and still aggrieved by British political

oppression, economic discrimination and religious persecution, while Famine narratives make clear the presence of multiple, contending Irish audiences to which writers appealed. Depending upon the audience, certain images, actions and attitudes have only to be suggested to trigger a whole lexicon of meaning. Bourdieu writes:

> But comprehension within established forms would remain empty and formal if it did not often mask a kind of understanding which is both more profound and more obscure, and which is built on the more or less perfect homology of positions and the affinity of the habitus. To understand also means to understand without having to be told, to read between the lines, by re-enacting in the mode of practice (in most cases unconsciously) the linguistic associations and substitutions .... (Bourdieu, 1991, 159)

Something of the relationship between discourse and its effects lies in Bourdieu's account of "symbolic power," that capacity of words to effect what they enunciate. Bourdieu sees this power in the willing acceptance by one party of the dominance and authority, and therefore the words, of another. This he traces through social mastery of one kind or another, but one might broaden his concept to include the negotiated acceptance of certain discursive elements within a group, using them for self-understanding. He writes:

> Symbolic power -- as a power of constituting the given through utterances, of making people see and believe, of confirming or transforming the vision of the world and, thereby, action on the world and thus the world itself, an almost magical power which enables one to obtain the equivalent of what is obtained through force (whether physical or economic), by virtue of the specific effects of mobilization -- is a power that can be exercised only if it is *recognized*, that is, misrecognized as arbitrary. (Bourdieu, 1991, 170)

The triadic nationalist construction of "wicked landlord, rapacious agent and noble peasant," or the dyadic "oppressive Britain," in a greedy landlord, and "suffering Ireland," in a consumptive girl, served as narrative frames. Habitus sustains mental constructs.

Bourdieu's concept of "misrecognition" and "euphemization" are important here, too, for they show that a discourse may accomplish much more than users realize. On one level, the discourse is manipulated by writers and readers. On another, its depths may be opaque, and users are caught unaware in its flow. By "misrecognizing" the display of symbolic power, one sees it as the "transfigured and legitimated form of the other forms

of power." (Bourdieu, 1991, 170) Its raw, even violent imposition is elided into the socially acceptable. Misrecognition occurs because power has been "euphemized." Government failure became "market freedom" during the Famine.

Bourdieu sees the importance of the habitus for discursive analysis. While a flow of speech often breaks into disparate subjects, a discourse is managed by its practitioners to achieve particular ends. These ends -- power, status, etc. -- are seen, both by senders and receivers as part of a broad agenda. Likewise, pursuit of an end helps maintain the coherence of discourse. (Bourdieu, 1991, 188) The struggle to dominate a field of discourse and to extend its reach also involves authenticating users. Who speaks? For what purpose? On behalf of whom? With what authority? Answers depend upon "mental respresentations" which reveal social cognitions and recognitions, and upon acts, "self-interested strategies of symbolic manipulation," which shape perceptions. (Bourdieu, 1991, 220-221) These representations arise in literary and dramatic works, by particular writers, and are invested heavily with "symbolic capital," giving the discourse entry into a "cycle of consecration," of reputation. (Bourdieu, 1986, 132-133)

***Habermas's 'public sphere'.*** Jürgen Habermas considers the broadening of the public sphere and offers ways to appreciate the liberating character of Famine discourse in print and on stage. In the case of the Irish theater, ever since formation of the Irish Literary Theatre in 1899, the stage has been a kind of public square, designed to educate, stimulate and activate Irish audiences. While not without commercial implications, the artistic ethos of Irish drama resists pure consumerism and commodification. As a result of dialogue between dramatists and performers, directors and actors, casts and audiences, and critics and readers, a critical engagement emerges. Evidence for a public sphere function for Irish fiction and poetry is less clear. Readers encounter novels and poems privately. However, reading circles, discussion groups, conversation with family and friends and reviews in journalistic and literary publications, as well as serialized publication, suggest formation of a literary public square as a counterpart to the dramatic. William Carleton, whose early 19th century work began Famine discourse, is a case in point. As Habermas suggests, once a field of discourse develops, it holds potential to

change its practitioners and their social environment. Development of the "Famine play," particularly in light of the work of Tom Murphy and Tom MacIntyre from the 1960s to the 1980s, interrogated Ireland's past, critiqued its present and rethought its theatrical tradition. As silence gave way to dramatic engagement, the Famine came to be seen as a potent, if intimidating, force of multiple meanings in a changing society that had repressed its memory but was unmistakably marked by its consequences. No longer could the Famine be ignored; a renewed discourse had begun.

Habermas argues that the emergence of the "public sphere" in the Renaissance began a process by which various and contending voices could find an audience and an opportunity to change in emergent bourgeois society. With coffee shops and taverns, reading rooms and literary societies, the enlargement of the domestic sphere spatially and temporally created opportunities for expression that was not policed by central political or ecclesial authority. By the 18th century, this process was well under way, aided by a burgeoning printing industry. As a result, social discourse began to flower. Monarchical power eroded and rational, liberal democracy edged forward. Habermas contends that the appearance of a "public sphere" occasions a rise in social discourse. Although he laments how the mass media of the 20th century has eroded that sphere, the concept is useful. (Habermas, 1996, 202-203) Habermas makes a useful theoretical contribution in understanding the reception of Famine discourse on the macrotextual level.

***Van Dijk's social cognition theory.*** For Teun Van Dijk, a critical interplay circulates in what a society is as a whole and in its parts, its knowledge, its assumptions, its organization and its claims and assertions. This triangle of discourse, society and cognition provides an important way of accessing the micro-textual level of Famine discourse. (Van Dijk, 1994, 122) What a society, or a distinct group, expresses stems from human knowing. "Social cognition" is a critical element in deconstructing the flow of discourse. Van Dijk sees such cognitions as "socially shared mental strategies and representations that monitor the production and interpretation of discourse." (Van Dijk, 1994, 108) Such cognitions participate in a system of power relations; they endeavor to maintain or obtain power. Consequently, shared knowledge in a discourse may be

revealed, situated or contextualized in prejudicial ways. Van Dijk argues:

> Processes of reproduction and relations of dominance not only involve text and talk, but also shared representations of the 'social mind' of group members. ... 1.) Discourse is actually produced/interpreted by individuals, but they are able to do so only on the basis of socially shared knowledge and beliefs; 2) discourse can only 'affect' social structures through the social minds of discourse participants, and conversely 3.) social structures can only 'affect' discourse structures through the social cognition. Social cognition entails the system of mental strategies and structures shared by group members, and in particular those involved in the understanding, production or representation of social 'objects', such as situations, interactions, groups and institutions. (Van Dijk, 1994, 110)

Even a cursory review of Famine texts shows that standardized representations of the crisis, causes and consequences, reflecting author and readers, emerged relatively early.

An important distinction should be made. Famine discourse acknowledges the existence of social cognitions within structures of power in an "outside" world it endeavors to describe, but it likewise can challenge them "inside" the fictional world it creates. Van Dijk, speaking of white racial dominance in news reporting, says:

> ... Social representations, such as knowledge scripts, attitudes and ideologies, may be derived from event and context models. This happens through processes of abstraction, generalization and decontextualization. Individual knowledge and opinions about particular events are transformed into socially shared scripts about stereotypical episodes and thus into white group attitudes about ethnic minority groups or their prototypical members. (Van Dijk, 1994, 114)

With little effort, one can read "white" as "Anglo-Irish Ascendancy" or "British government" and "ethnic" as "Irish" or "nationalist" or "Catholic." But a somewhat greater flexiblility is required as Famine discourse moves into stages where the victims own the dominant voices in the discursive structure, or where several generations after the Famine, writers reconfigure the paradigms of victimization. In either case, however, Van Dijk's perspective is helpful in identifying power as the end and social cognition via discourse as the means. He writes:

> Critical discourse analysis is interested in *dominance*, defined here as an abuse of social power ..., that is, as a deviation from accepted standards or norms of (inter)action, in the interest of the more powerful group, resulting in various forms of social inequality. ... Dominance is reproduced by enforcing privileged access to

> social resources by discrimination. It is also reproduced by legitimating such access through forms of 'mind control' such as manipulation and other methods of seeking acceptance or compliance .... . (Van Dijk, 1994, 109)

While van Dijk primarily inspects the mass media, his perspective can be applied to literary discourse. Even in the face of a *natural* disaster as great as the Irish potato blight, the ensuing Famine was of keen *political* interest to competing social groups. Landlords and peasants were the most immediately involved, but so were civil servants, local and imperial, military personnel, clergy of competing churches, merchants and bourgeois farmers. "Control" in 19th century Ireland was at stake. Indeed, the Act of Union in 1800 had been motivated precisely by the need for political, military and economic domination of the "third kingdom." (Foster, 1992, 153-154)

Van Dijk argues, "The reproduction of dominance in contemporary society is largely managed by maintaining and legitimating such unequal access patterns to discourse and communication, and thus to the public mind: who is allowed (or obliged) to speak or listen to whom, how, about what, when and where and with what consequences." (Van Dijk, 1994, 110) The elite in the 1840s, the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, was beginning to see control of the means of communication slip increasingly into the hands of their opponents, the Catholic and nationalist Irish majority. Literary and dramatic production was one key area where transgressive voices could be heard. Later, as the "green" Irish achieved economic and political parity and then supremacy, the tables were turned -- yet the novel, the play and the poem remained sites of contestation between dominant cultural voices and resistant ones. Van Dijk writes:

> In sum, given a specific ideological framework, for instance that of nationalism or ethnocentrism, attitudes are favoured whose opinions support the interests (goals, values) embodied in such a framework. This means that special attention is paid to those models that allow 'self-fulfilling' generalization towards such attitudes. (Van Dijk, 1994, 115)

On one hand, the dominant Anglo-Irish view that the native Irish were inept, lazy and imprudent enshrined a view that the Famine, whatever its immediate cause, ultimately was the fault of the majority's moral deficiency. On the other, the prevailing native Irish

view that the Ascendancy, the London government and their local agents were rapacious, hostile and intolerant tended to see the Famine as the inevitable consequence of the moral faults of the ruling class. Famine discourse rarely constructs cartoon-like figures, although many readers unacquainted with landlord agents and "gombeen men" might see them as pure fantasy. History, unfortunately, gives the discourse warrant. Famine texts, in fact, offer relatively believable, sometimes sympathetic characters faced both with crisis and routine. Van Dijk writes, "For such models to succeed, they must be subjectively credible (not wildly inconsistent with known facts), have prototypical characters, clearly mark the differences between them (negative) and us (positive), and be newsy ("interesting, relevant and remarkable"). (Van Dijk, 1994, 116-177) Discourse not only transmits and sustains situations of dominance, but also produces or resists them. Van Dijk tends to examine discourse from a maintenance position, but one could as easily examine its transgressive, destabilizing potential and effects. He writes:

> While being able to variously code and enact relations of dominance, or other social structures, through the social minds of group members, discourse may in the same way also reproduce such dominance. It does so by affecting the models and social representations of social members, which in turn monitor social actions and interactions that 'implement' dominance. At the macro level, discourse thus indirectly conditions the group relations, organizations and institutions that define social structure. Research ... should focus on the more subtle and complex of these relationships between discourse, cognition and society. (Van Dijk, 1994, 123-124)

That, in part, is one of the objects of this dissertation.

Precisely because the British elite and their landed, wealthy clients in Ireland and the Irish majority saw each other as different rather than similar, Van Dijk's perspectives on racial discourse can be helpful. Those in control of Irish society, those who derived the greatest political and economic benefit from the Famine, and, conversely, those who took charge as the nationalist period waxed, may be likened to Van Dijk's racial elites:

> Political, media, academic, corporate and other elites play an important role in the reproduction of racism. They are the ones who control or have access to many types of public discourse, have the largest stake in maintaining ... dominance, and are usually also most proficient in persuasively formulating their ethnic opinions. (Van Dijk, 1999, 542)

Frequent friction between the perceptions, aspirations and needs of the two groups makes "difference" a frequent topic within Famine discourse, one hunger threw into high relief:

> In ethnically mixed societies, minority groups and ethnic relations are a major topic of everyday conversation. Whether through direct personal experience, or indirectly through the mass media, white people in Europe and North America learn about minorities or immigrants, formulate their own opinions and thus informally reproduce -- and occasionally challenge -- the dominant consensus on ethnic affairs through informal everyday talk. (Van Dijk, 1999, 543)

The literary and dramatic expression of this discourse tends to focus not only on the immediate impact of the Famine but on the historical issues that exacerbated it. Famine discourse demonstrates that Van Dijk's insight about minorities -- their social problems are magnified and their cultural achievements and social normalcy minimized - can apply to majorities dominated by minority elites, or to minority elites challenged discursively by majorities. (Van Dijk, 1999, 546)

Numerous discursive structures and approaches exist through which dominance may be sought. These include topics, which "express the most important (highest level) information of mental models, and are also used by readers to build such models," as they define a given situation. (Van Dijk, 1994, 118) Other elements include schemata, which involve the structure and set-up of a narrative and which can contribute to the global level of significance; local meaning, which shapes coherence relations, implicitness, presuppositions, details and other levels of representation; strategic relations, which may include denials, affirmations and concessions; style, diction and word choice; syntax, which provides foregrounding, emphasis on agency, victimhood, etc.; and forms of rhetoric. (Van Dijk, 1994, 117-122)

Van Dijk's approach to social cognition and its manifestation in discourse that seeks power and control lies at the root of the contestatory nature of Famine texts. In "Lamentation of Jeremias over Jerusalem" (1847), James Clarence Mangan exploits the Biblical paradigm not only to depict Famine-plagued Ireland -- but also remind readers that divine vengeance tomorrow awaits those who deride the victim today. The Biblical model describes Jerusalem, suffering from famine, pestilence and military defeat, in thrall

to the pagans, who have co-opted even her nobles and priests. Van Dijk's approach opens up Mangan's explosive implications.

The theoretical perspectives upon which this study will draw are designed to provide insight into what LaCapra calls a text's documentary and worklike dimensions. Hall's interest in the symbolic encoding and decoding process, the assignment of preferred readings by encoders and the development of resistant ones by decoders, and the role of audience positioning will facilitate a conceptualization of the multiple messages in Famine texts and the uses to which they can be put. Radway's concern about gender and its impact on readership practices helps uncover the often ignored world of women in early Famine texts and the changing social roles of both women and men in more recent ones, as well as the uses of instability in gender relations occasioned by the Famine. The concept of readership communities clarifies how different interpretive communities emerge for various texts, as well as why some dominate textual production. Bourdieu's emphasis on social habitus speaks to the dominance of particular readings of Famine events and texts. Habermas's public sphere addresses the social impact of particular narrative strategies. Finally, Van Dijk's discussion of power arrangements in discourse provides both a micro-textual method of analysis and a means to identify discursive connections and disruptions on a macrotextual level. These theories open up LaCapra's emphasis on social and cultural contexts in terms of source, influence, use, meaning, discourse and dynamic.

**3. Determining the central themes in analysis of Famine texts**

To analyze Famine texts and their discourse, this study will turn to five specific tropes, or themes: land, national identity, religion, gender and agency. Daniel Corkery's *The Hidden Ireland* (1924) gives an impassioned account of the riches of 18th century Gaelic, or native Irish, culture. Corkery, an ardent defender of efforts to revitalize and popularize the Irish language, suggests that understanding his people comes from attending to the first three themes -- land, national identity and religion. (Corkery, 1956, 1-30) Corkery's problematic essentialism in articulating "Irishness" is a response to a tradition which marginalized and denigrated what he celebrates. Corkery, whatever his

faults, recognized an important communicational reality. Land, national identity and religion, as well as gender and agency, at least in the Irish context, are the principal objects of social practice -- the critical medium of which is language. Textual production, and the discourse it bears, all depend upon linguistic use. Anthony Giddens shows how authors participate in discourse, which is inevitably broader than individual works or careers, and engage in social practice. Language, for Giddens, is not simply descriptive but performative. Social actors use it to accomplish their ends -- and Corkery enunciates those ends in Ireland. "Language is a medium of social practice, and as such is implicated in all the variegated activities in which social actors engage." (Giddens, 1979, 245) Society, Giddens argues, is made up of both structures, which are beyond any single individual, and systems, which are the collective actions of individuals to make such structures work. He sees "a distinction between system and structure, the former being ordered in terms of the reproduction of spatially and temporally situated events, the latter being both the medium and outcome of such reproduction." (Giddens, 1979, 256) His notion of the "duality of structure" emphasizes how competent social actors reflexively draw upon structures and, in turn, reconstitute them within a temporal frame. (Giddens, 1979, 255) Language is the medium of exchange and interaction, perhaps the key tool, in social dynamics.

Corkery's categories are also useful because, regardless of politics, they identify central, historic issues for all constituencies. A review of cultural, social and historical studies confirms that no competent authority ignores these categories, which are intimately bound together in Irish experience. English invasion and colonization was an appropriation of land, which led to increasing dispute over identity and nationalism, a dispute charged by religious difference. Contending forces organized around these categories. The nationalist community, largely Catholic, sought Home Rule and, later, independence in a republic. Despite efforts to win control over the whole 32-county island, nationalists settled for 26 counties in the south, but paid for their compromise with a vicious civil war. The unionist community, largely Protestant, sought continuing ties with Great Britain, and insisted that at least the six northern counties remain in the United

Kingdom. Northern Ireland has undergone political crisis and sectarian violence in the years since partition. These categories of land, national identity and religion certainly pervade Famine discourse, although they risk envisioning a simplistic, bifurcated Ireland. To these three themes, however, the key categories of gender and agency have been added. Gender is a primary identity and behavior marker. In Ireland, where essentialist notions have prevailed in discourse at many levels, its relationship to Famine destabilization is especially important. Likewise, agency, both for writers and characters, is significant in a study of a textual and discursive phenomenon. To what extent can individuals be understood to act freely? This study's theoretical perspective on communication supports selection of these categories, all constitutive of the communities that both wrote and responded to Famine texts.

***Land: Sacred reality, economic resource, political ambition.*** Few literary and dramatic traditions are bound so intimately to the land as the Irish. That "land" should be a key index of Famine discourse is hardly surprising. On the most basic levels, the Famine was occasioned by a failure of the land to produce a particular crop on which most people depended. Their dependency stemmed largely from a land-tenure system which made farms less productive and more vulnerable over the years. When the potato failed, tenants inevitably were unable to pay their rent and were evicted. Landless, homeless, without sufficient relief, they faced disease and death or emigration. Such a summary of the peasant's tenuous connection to his farm, however, does scant justice to the deep links between the Irish and their land. From the ancient "mating" of the high king to the earth goddess to the young man carrying sod from home into exile, the land has been more than merely economic resource. (De Paor, 1985, 44) Liam de Paor writes that ancient Irish literature

> ... assumed, for example, that the Irish audience will have a detailed knowledge of Irish places and place-names, and a knowledge of a particular kind. '*Dindshenchus*,' the lore of places, was part of the common culture. Almost every place which found a niche in the literature had a story or an attribute attached to it. This is interesting because it survives so vigorously in Ireland today ... . (De Paor, 1985, 38-39)

Proinsias MacAna argues that from the ancient Celts to the modern Irish, the landscape bears specific names and associations, often with explanatory legends -- a kind of discourse. This is reflected in the literary tradition, so that the lore of place "is thus a kind of comprehensive topography." (MacAna, 1975, 48) This lore, at least in part, passed into English-language writing. Certainly, the dependency of an agricultural society on the fruitfulness of the land lies at the root of the relationship. Ancient Celtic belief in divine and spiritual presences throughout the landscape over time was united with Christian associations with holy wells, monasteries, high crosses, sacred mountains and other features of the land. Meanwhile, relations between clan chieftain and his clients were deeply territorial. Bitter battles between Gaelic clans and successive waves of invaders -- Anglo-Normans, Tudor English and Cromwellian settlers -- were fought for control of territory and maintenance of culture. Ironically, the first two waves of English invaders were successfully Gaelicized, developing a similar attachment to land and people. Even the Anglo-Irish gentry of the 18th and 19th century had moments when tenants and landlords saw mutual, if ambivalent, links, as Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (1800) makes clear. The Famine and the subsequent Land War sundered any return to this easy relationship. Ireland's move toward political independence ended in partition, and continuing struggle in the North is related to territorial control. Land, then, is a fundamental concern in Irish Famine discourse, one almost with "ontological," economic and ideological implications, according to Deane. (Deane, 1997, 71).

***National identity: Split society and essentialism.*** Like land, national identity is another theme by which Famine discourse will be analyzed. Given the vicissitudes of Irish history, national identity is a complex question. At least since the Anglo-Norman invasion of 1167-1170, Irish society has been bifurcated, but its division has been anything but clear. "English" settlers, who initially saw themselves as Norman, were Gaelicized over time. With the Elizabethan Conquest and the Cromwellian invasions, English political loyalty itself was divided by religion and the Crown. Establishment of a Protestant Ascendancy class in Ireland was complicated further by the plantation of Ulster

by Lowland Scots, who sided with the victorious William of Orange, a Protestant, in the conflict with James II, the Catholic Stuart king, in 1690. The religious divide and the effort to extirpate Gaelic political leadership and cultural hegemony led many settlers to maintain ties to Great Britain. However, efforts to forge a common *Irish* identity flowered periodically. Northern Protestants in large part led the Rising of 1798. The Act of Union in 1800 united the Kingdom of Ireland with her "sister" realms of England and Scotland in a "United Kingdom," thus further complicating national identity into a common "British" polity. The Famine, however, showed how attenuated national identity had become. A majority of "Irish" landlords lived in Britain and knew little of the conditions of life for their tenants. Estates were seen by many as cash cows. While the Famine and its aftermath helped consolidate the drive for Irish political independence, it also revealed the complexity of "national identity." While some nationalists were certainly "green," that is, Gaelic, Catholic, educated in hedge schools or abroad and from the peasant or emergent middle classes, others were "orange," Anglo-Irish or Scots-Irish, Protestant, educated at Trinity College Dublin, Oxford or Cambridge, and from the Ascendancy. Likewise, it was a dangerous assumption to cast all unionists as Protestants; some Catholics, many from the mercantile class and drawn tightly into the capitalist economic system of the British Empire, opposed Irish independence. Similarly, nationalist sentiment ranged from republicanism to Home Rule within the Empire under a common Crown. From the Famine onwards, nationalist sentiment likewise had political and cultural dimensions, and advocacy of one did not mean support for the other. Celtic Revivalists, for example, called for a return the Irish language, which after the Famine had eroded dangerously, and a complete cultural transformation through a return to traditional music, lore, art, literature and drama. But their program did not translate, necessarily, into direct political action. During the establishment and consolidation of the Irish Free State and later Republic of Ireland, the "green" view of Irish nationality was widely, but not universally, held. Ireland's entry into what is now the European Union in 1973 suddenly framed the question of identity differently. No longer was it Ireland *against* Britain, but Ireland *in* Europe. Many of the old arguments about and markers of

identity, such as religion, no longer mattered. As efforts to confront and resolve the Troubles in the North began to increase in the 1980s, however, it became increasingly necessary to reopen the question of national identity. Likewise, from the mid-1990s, there arose new issues of identity in a globalized world, where Ireland attracted both foreign investment and refugees.

Relative to the Famine and its aftermath, two additional and inter-related elements demand consideration in approaching the question of national identity. The first is language. For the greater part of its history, Ireland's popular and literary language was Irish, or Gaelic. This study examines Famine discourse only in English, a language employed by the settler class and the British government. Certainly, large numbers of Gaelic Irish used English, but it was not the tongue of historic Irish experience. When the Irish spoke, or wrote, in English, a measure of suspicion arose. The accuracy of its account was somehow suspect. Moreover, when members of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy class told the story of the Famine in English, they usually recounted the experiences of Irish-speakers. In either case, there was a division, a kind of double-vision:

> Irish English was not only a dialect or patois; it was one that was consistently characterized as suffering from deformity -- excess, illogic, mispronunciation. It was a language that lacked rational order and was therefore incapable of providing an acceptable analysis of the condition of the people who spoke it. For to represent their speech as deformed was also to represent their account of their social and political condition as deformed. Verbose, inaccurate, melodramatic, unreliable, in sad need of some form of sobriety, Irish speech and the Irish political condition required a rational articulation that was beyond the capacity of the national character to produce. Irish eloquence became the index of Irish inarticulacy, speech removed from fact -- blarney. Speech of this kind could not accurately define a condition; for Irish speech to be trusted, and its account of Irish experience to be acceptable, it must be subjected to the protocols of English speech and, in consequence, to the 'improving' English account of the Irish condition that accompanied the Union. (Deane, 1997, 55)

While the "problematic" nature of Irish speech lessened over time, the question has not been eliminated, as a discussion of Famine historiography will show. The split vision of Irish writing is a characteristic that will find its way into treatment of Famine discourse.

The second element of Irish national identity is the issue of deformity and

deviation. Precisely because a British government and colonial society determined the norms of propriety, at least in English, Irish experience was seen as exceptional, ignorant, against the grain, bizarre and, frequently, dangerous. Driven by economic, educational, cultural and military policies that reduced the living conditions of the Gaelic Irish population, these negative views became self-fulfilling prophecies. Although important changes in the Irish social fabric had occurred before the Famine, notably Catholic Emancipation and the beginning of national education in English, the 1840s population was among the most vulnerable in Irish history. British weeklies of the period, such as Punch, depicted the Irish as human potatoes or creatures with rough, simian features. The Irish drank too much, fought too much, prayed too much. They over-bred and under-thought. (MacLaughlin, 1999, 57) Claims to Irish exceptionalism cut both ways, however. Nationalists marshaled their forces to show the Gael as lyrical, poetic and mythic. The Gael was ancient, with a culture and a tongue older than any other European vernacular, traduced by history and a bastion of hearth and kin amid imperial oppression, industrial dehumanization and capitalist exploitation. In each case, identity was cast as pre-ordained.

***Religion: Holy Ireland and some unholy alliances.*** Religion is the third element Corkery identifies. Although his excessively Catholic interpretation needs correction, he points to a key factor in Famine discourse, and, indeed, in most Irish writing. As the preceding discussions suggest, religion is inextricably bound up with efforts to interpret the Irish. For the purposes of Famine discourse, it is important to recognize religion as a hugely important marker of identity. Most victims of the Famine were Irish Catholics, those responsible for the land tenure system, relief and administration of justice were English or Anglo-Irish Protestants. For more than three centuries, Roman Catholicism had been proscribed and its adherents, priests and bishops and others hounded into exile or handed over for trial, imprisonment or execution. The end of the 18th century saw a general relaxation of the infamous Penal Laws, so that churches could be rebuilt and ecclesial life begin to return to normal. But what is "normal" in Ireland? The Anglican Church of Ireland had been established as the state church, and the entire population was

required to pay it tithes. The same Ascendancy that imposed rackrents and sent collection agents and bailiffs to the door also imposed this religious tax. Catholic clergy received no such assistance, although individual landlords offered help from time to time. During the Famine, both Catholic and Anglican priests, ministers, religious women and lay persons, as well as representatives of other denominations, notably the Society of Friends, played important roles in offering consolation and relief. Many paid with their lives. But religion also served to enflame passions, and Famine discourse, reflects the divide. Because some relief schemes demanded or expected recipients to attend religious lectures, or in some cases, to embrace Protestantism, most Catholics scorned their efforts. Strong community pressure was exerted against "soupers," who were seen as having sold their spiritual birthright and endangered their salvation. (O'Dwyer, 1995, 227-228) The Famine, then, is a discursive site for religious identity, fidelity, enlightenment, tolerance and compassion.

Historically, the Famine dramatically altered religious practice among Irish Catholics. It introduced a period of change in devotional life, tightened religious discipline, increased the number of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, and linked Ireland to an increasingly centralized and ultramontanist, or Roman, Catholic ideal. Luke Gibbons writes, "It is often forgotten that what are now taken as traditional values -- myths of community, the sanctity of the family, devotion to faith and fatherland -- are not a residue from an old Gaelic order but are of quite recent vintage, dating in fact from what Emmet Larkin has called 'the devotional revolution' in post-Famine Ireland. As such they were part of the first phase of modernization rather than an obstacle to it." (Gibbons, 1996, 85-86) Given the religious divide in Irish society during the Famine and the first decades afterwards, the Catholic priest emerged as the dominant figure in the rural community. He was educated. He had social standing. He could speak English even if his parishioners could not. Despite the adoption of paternalistic, authoritarian positions, the parish priest and his curates were able to confront landlords, agents and civil authorities on behalf of the common people. (O'Dwyer, 1995, 222-223) The priest becomes a key figure in the development of the discourse, and, in recent years, as the

Catholic monopoly over Irish life has weakened, his literary and dramatic construction sometimes has migrated from champion to enemy. Finally, the Famine and subsequent emigration enabled the Irish to spread their religious life, and its discursive representation, through most of the English-speaking world. Overall, in 19th century Irish fiction, writes Barbara Hayley:

> Classification by religious affiliation is a sharp binary one .... It categorises in a more rigid way than class, rank, money, moral worth, works or deeds, and it does so by dividing into two irreconcilable opposing forces. If one is not Catholic one is Protestant. From that proposition depend all one's habits, foibles, virtues or vices, and social attitudes. In fiction, characters are seen as good or bad depending on whether their religious denomination is that of the author. (Hayley, 1992, 32)

Throughout the 20th century, however, this rigidity shifts perceptibly in fiction, poetry and drama until the contemporary moment when religion is unstable and problematic. In any case, it is a pivotal element in accounting for Famine textual production and discourse.

***Gender: Polarization and creative instability.*** When writing essentializes and polarizes national identity and religion, gender, a central marker of identity, is likely to manifest a similarly strict bifurcation, and Irish society during the 19th and 20th centuries happily obliged. Famine discourse, however, destabilized this division because the catastrophe shook every aspect of Irish society. Assumed and assigned gender roles suddenly lost significance in a collapsing world. Yet post-Famine Ireland, as it modernized agriculturally and developed commercially, became increasingly Victorian in its gender relations. Mary Daly challenges Joseph Lee's assertion that

> '... the Great Famine drastically weakened the position of women in Irish society. Before the Famine, women's economic contribution was so essential to the family economy that they enjoyed considerable independence.' The Famine is widely regarded as ushering in a period of economic modernization and commercialization within Ireland. The idealization of women's roles in prefamine Ireland and the belief that the economic status of women declined in postfamine decades can be read as an Irish variant [of arguments claiming that the British industrial revolution harmed the lives of English women]. (Daly, 1997, 107)

Daly, however, argues that the very nature of Irish women's historiography is problematic

and underdeveloped, contending with myths of an idyllic golden age of Celtic equality in the Brehon laws, with an excess of 19th century politicization at the expense of all other values and with contemporary sexual politics that overlook or misread gender developments of earlier periods. The important social and political role of Roman Catholic sisterhoods, which dominated education and health care, has been largely ignored. Likewise, the relationship of Ireland to other European nations, not simply Britain or the United States, shows that Ireland may not be as exceptional as some claim. (Daly, 1997, 106-107) Daly writes, "The first two decades of the twentieth century are generally and justly regarded as a time when Ireland boasted an extremely active women's movement. After independence, however, ... [it] went into decline, due, allegedly, to the inhospitable climate found in the independent Irish state. ... To the baleful effects of Catholicism and the famine, many writers have added the deadly embrace of Irish nationalism." (Daly, 1997, 107)

However complex the face of Irish gender relations may be, the fact remains that only in recent years has Ireland joined other Western nations in key social developments. After some dispute, Ireland acceded to European directives, and enacted fair wage and employment laws in 1977. (Jackson, 1999, 386) Contraceptives became legal and available progressively through legislation in 1979, 1985 and 1995. The X-case over abortion availability mobilized many women, and in 1992, the Irish Supreme Court ruled that abortion is permitted if the life of the mother is in danger. Abortion restrictions had been inserted into the Constitution in 1983, and controversy now surrounds proposals for a referendum on legalized abortion. Homosexual acts between consenting adults over age 18 were decriminalized in 1993. A narrow majority approved the legalization of divorce in 1995. Politically, women have made progress on the national and local levels, and the election of Mary Robinson as president in 1990 was both a symbolic victory for women and a stimulus for further political action. (Shannon, 1997, 264-269) Mary McAleese was elected to succeed Robinson in 1997. The Famine set in train two important developments. First, fertility rates fell with many men and women delaying marriage until they were in their 30s or later. Likewise, a strictly enforced moral code reduced pre-

marital fertility, while numerous religious and priestly vocations further cut the rate. Second, continuing emigration up until the 1960s, and renewed in the 1980s, siphoned off young men and women from Irish society. Daly writes:

> Ireland's precocious politicization and attachment to the United Kingdom meant that Irish feminism was relatively advanced, perhaps artificially so, by the eve of World War I. The doldrums into which feminism fell after 1920 mirror developments in other countries where women gained the franchise; however, it also appears that Irish feminists found it difficult to replace the pre-war focus on equal rights with an ideology that might have been more in keeping with the culture of the independent Irish state. The continuing high level of marital fertility reduced the political dividends gained from pronatalism and probably meant that most Irish women lacked the leisure to engage in political and social activities outside the home. ... The slow rate of transition to a modern urban and industrial-cum-service economy delayed both the onset of fertility decline and the emergence of the demands associated with the modern women's movement. It can be argued that it was only when the fertility patterns desired by Irish couples began to conflict with state legislation, and when a critical mass of suburban housewives existed, that the modern women's movement could emerge in Ireland. We might also suggest that Ireland's ambiguous status as a rural Catholic country that had been governed and strongly influenced by a Protestant industrialized state, confuses the picture in many ways, not least in our expectations of Irish women and of Irish society historically. (Daly, 1997, 119)

Famine discourse flows through this historical reality, which both shapes and is shaped by discursive practice. It manifests a variety of elements shaped by gender: bodily display, nakedness, madness, self-sacrificing love, maternal instincts, prostitution, competition, wildness beyond social control, survival strategies, child care, relief and charity, the idealization of wives and mothers and power usage in both private and public spheres. Margaret Kelleher writes:

> In much of women's famine fiction, however, the by now familiar spectacle of a woman's famine body returns. Where detailed portrayals of individual victims occur, they are mostly of women -- mothers and, frequently, widows. ... Recurring characters include the self-sacrificing famine mother and her 'monstrous' other. (Kelleher, 1997, 70)

Finally, the narrative gaze and its direction have gendered consequences in discourse. Is the writer a man or a woman? Is the gaze directed toward an object or a subject? Is the gaze returned?

***Agency: Consciousness of the freedom and power to act.*** The final theme through which Famine discourse will be analyzed is agency, a more elusive factor than the preceding identity markers. "Agency," derived from the Latin term for the capacity to act, is a critical element in any analysis of discourse. Giddens defines agency as "a theory of action" which depends upon a "conception of conduct as reflexively monitored by social agents who are partially aware of the conditions of their behaviour." (Giddens, 1983, 253) He contends, "Human beings reflexively monitor their conduct via the knowledge they have of the circumstances of their activity." (Giddens, 1983, 254) Human initiative, creativity, will and responsibility require a theory of agency. Such a theory proposes to examine the various ways individuals -- in this case, writers who employ Famine discourse -- manipulate, shape and change the conventions of speech in which they operate. Individuals can engage in a discourse naively, without realizing they are following, in fact, a pre-existing pattern of ideas and power relations. Van Dijk demonstrates this in his discussion of racist discourse among those who profess to be opposing such prejudice. (Van Dijk, 1999, 556-557) But this does not negate agency.

Michel Foucault's wholesale dismissal of authorial agency is extreme. He challenges the notion of a single, unified "author" whose work may be taken as a given. Instead, Foucault distinguishes between an author's "historically given function," which is "inverted" through discourse to become an "ideological production." (Foucault, 1991, 119) Suspicious of "authors" as dangerous totems, marking ideological ground, he writes:

> The author allows a limitation of the cancerous and dangerous proliferation of significations within a world where one is thrifty not only with one's resources and riches, but also with one's discourses and their significations. The author is the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning. ... The author is not an indefinite source of significations which fill a work; the author does not precede the works; he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction. (Foucault, 1991, 118-119)

Yet Foucault's grim assessment of authorial agency in favor of discursive flow may be read as a grudging acknowledgment that some functions do remain for writers. They may

not have complete mastery over their texts and the discourses they employ, but they can manipulate, shape and limit them to some degree. Writers, in fact, may be fully conscious of a discourse and deliberately employ it. Because discourse depends upon social cognition, which writers may wish to acknowledge, advance, challenge or subvert, some conscious engagement with these cognitions within a discursive flow is necessary. Here, discourse intersects with rhetoric, which requires a theory of agency, and with ethics, which imposes values, accountability and responsibility. Peter L. Shillingsburg, commenting on new theories of editorial collaboration, observes:

> The social contract as a 'school of editing' has not done away with agency for authority, it has not done away with personal responsibility for textual variation, it has not done away with intentionality, and it has not done away with the author. What it has done is complicate the editorial and readerly activity and demonstrate the inadequacy of the editorial and literary theories of thirty years ago. Those theories and the practices they justified were inadequate because they defined the problem too narrowly, not just because they mistook the object of our interest altogether. (Shillingsburg, 1997, 163-164)

Famine literature, given its political and social characteristics, certainly suggests agency; an author creates with a purpose. In turn, the work affects the status quo:

> For the notion of human action logically implies that of power, understood as transformative capacity: 'action' only exists when an agent has the capability of intervening, or refraining from intervening, in a series of events so as to be able to influence their course. The introduction of a theory of action into sociology thus entails regarding power as ... essential and integral to social interaction ... . (Giddens, 1983, 257)

Historically, from the ancient Gaelic order, where the *fili* were recognized as a class of poets with considerable power, to the contemporary era, where writers help set the national agenda, literary and dramatic agency has been an important aspect of Irish society. Giddens writes, "We [sociologists] have to relate power as a resource drawn upon by agents in the production and reproduction of interaction to the structural characteristics of society." (Giddens, 1983, 257) A survey of the uses of Irish writing, including Famine texts, would confirm that insight. In considering agency, then, this study will examine ways authors manipulate Famine discourse.

Land, national identity, religion, gender and agency provide a comprehensive analytical grid to apply to Famine texts and their discourse. Their worklike dimensions require analysis both communicationally valid and historically appropriate. Because textual production and discursive dynamics are rooted in language as social practice, and because the objects of the practice are conditioned, the five selected themes hold promise.

**SECTION V: DEVELOPMENT IN FIVE CHAPTERS**

The historical and theoretical frameworks proposed here will emerge in the five chapters to follow this introduction. Each chapter will confront two central questions during a specific time frame. First, why has the production of Famine texts varied so greatly over time and genre? Second, how have the five major tropes of land, national identity, religion, gender and agency changed over time and shaped the production of Famine discourse. To answer these questions, each chapter will rely on four sections: 1.) an overview of the two works selected for detailed analysis; 2.) an examination of the socio-cultural and political circumstances during the appropriate historical phase; 3.) a discussion of particular authorial backgrounds and the evolution of the appropriate reading and viewing publics, and 4.) a worklike, or rhetorical, analysis of the chosen texts using the five tropes which have shaped Famine discourse.

Of the several contextual approaches LaCapra identifies, the social and cultural conditions of a work's production and consumption are most appropriate in framing the emergence and evolution of Famine discourse. Given the scope of Famine texts, this study is necessarily selective. Apart from the two principal works, drawn from available plays, poems and novels, Appendix II offers a brief examination of other selected texts from various phases. In selecting the texts for detailed discussion, preference generally will be given to drama and fiction because their overall length sustains detailed discussion. Poetry, by nature intense, concise and personal, will be seen in relation to these extended works as either confirmatory or contestatory. Short stories, although a popular genre in Irish fiction, have been excluded because so few address the Famine. Overall, the proposed analytical grid will demonstrate the validity of the study's central thesis that this textual phenomenon and the discourse it facilitates follow an historical

pattern of expression, repression and recovery -- and thus confront national trauma and negotiate political and social agendas. In so doing, the Famine has become a discursive resource for Irish society and culture.

Chapter I, "Words unto Death," will examine the emergence of Famine discourse in Phase I, 1845-1852, the years when the Famine raged in Ireland. William Carleton's novel, *The Black Stranger* (1847), and selected poetry by Jane Elgee, Lady Wilde, known as "Speranza," will be considered in detail. Carleton and Lady Wilde are two of the first writers to confront questions of the Famine, and their work was fundamental to the emergence of Famine discourse. In addition, a brief history of the Famine and its position amid continuing Irish historiographical controversies, a vital context for the textual production and discursive construction, will be considered.

Chapter II, "First Bitter Pangs" will cover Phase II in Famine textual production, the long period from 1853 to 1910. With the Famine having scarred Ireland deeply, many Irish writers marshaled its historical, metaphoric and thematic possibilities into the quest for nationhood. In contrast, others, intent on preserving links with Britain and maintaining the economic, political and social status quo, acknowledged the Famine, but attributed its causes to a failure within the Irish themselves. By applying the thematic grid of land, national identity, religion, gender and agency, emergent Famine discourse should become apparent in the worklike dimension of 19th century and early 20th century literary production. Two novels, Elizabeth Hely Walshe's *Golden Hills* (1865), strongly unionist, and Margaret Brew's *The Chronicles of Castle Cloyne* (1885), unabashedly nationalist, will be the primary works examined. In addition to a number of Phase II novels, two of the first dramatic works to confront the Famine will be mentioned, Hubert O'Grady's play, *The Famine* (1886); and W.B. Yeats's play, *The Countess Cathleen* (1892), which shifts Famine discourse at the *fin de siècle*. Both are developed in Appendix II.

Chapter III, "Empty, Swollen Belly," confronts Phase III, the 1911-1950 period, when Ireland wrestled with the last gasps of Home Rule, the Easter Rising of 1916, independence, civil war, partition, state consolidation and the formation of Northern

Ireland, as well as two world wars and a global economic depression. The sharp decline in production of Famine texts is startling. The catastrophe remained within the living memory. However, the fall-off clearly is related to more immediate Irish political and economic crises. The cultural agenda of the Irish Literary Revival could find little useful in stories of hunger, emigration, disease and death. Critics have claimed that Ireland was withdrawn, backward and repressed, due to prevailing Church and State ideologies. Famine discourse, such as it was, reflects these ideologies and resists them. Despite a general paucity of material, some important works emerged, including Liam O'Flaherty's novel, *Famine* (1937) and Gerald Healy's play, *The Black Stranger* (1945), the primary texts here. Patrick Kavanagh's poem, "The Great Hunger" (1942) also merits attention. While overt Famine discourse fell off, a lingering memory and fear of hunger may be heard in the rhetoric of Irish self-sufficiency. The world is tough, not to be trusted, suggested the arguments; history and the surrounding world gave the Irish good reason to believe them.

Chapter IV, "Feeding on Hunger," addresses Phase IV, the years from 1951 to 1983, when interest in the Famine developed anew, both in and beyond Ireland. Popular novels, such as Walter Macken's *The Silent People* (1962), and new histories, such as *The Great Famine* (1956) by R.D. Edwards and T.D. Williams, and *The Great Hunger* (1962) by Cecil Woodham-Smith led to a recovered consciousness of the key event in modern Irish experience. Later, plays, such as Tom Murphy's seminal work, *Famine* (1968), followed by Brian Friel's *Translations* (1980) and Tom MacIntyre's *The Great Hunger* (1983), an adaptation of Kavanagh's poem, erupt on the Irish stage. Coupled with other works, including poetry, a new awareness and utilization of the Famine for artistic and social expression emerges. Primary texts for consideration here will be Murphy's *Famine* and MacIntyre's *The Great Hunger.* These two dramas ignited major discussions of the Famine in light of contemporary conditions. Postwar Ireland, under Sean Lemass, as *taoiseach,* or prime minister, modernized and grew economically and socially. Ireland joined what is now the European Union, and in 1960, saw John F. Kennedy, great-grandson of a Famine emigrant elected president of the U.S. and return to his County

Wexford roots in 1963. (Percival, 1995, 141) Religiously, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) would change the face of Irish Catholicism.

Chapter V, "Cultural Food" will address Phase V, the period since the mid-1980s, when Irish playwrights, novelists and poets have produced numerous Famine texts probing its social, physical and psychic impact. New areas of social concern have been investigated, and, in turn, the Famine itself has generated alternate ways to examine topics. Dramatic works have confronted such issues as religious sectarianism, gender repression, social stagnation and deceit, ecological dilemmas, moral ambiguity, racism and immigration and social perspective. Poets and novelists, including those writing for children, continue to engage the Famine, and Phase V is rich in textual production -- even on the World Wide Web. Frank McGuinness's play *Mary and Lizzie* (1989), which exposes the silencing of women's histories and links the Famine to capitalism and imperialism, and Seán Kenny's novel *The Hungry Earth* (1995), which challenges contemporary Irish capitalism and hedonism will be the primary texts here. The subjects of both texts are related closely to prevailing Irish socio-cultural conditions.

Chapter VI, "Memory, Manipulation and Morality," will contend that production of Famine texts has moved from its initial confrontation with a traumatic national catastrophe, albeit an encounter with specific political agendas, to an appropriation of the event with broad, strategic discursive purposes. Theoretical perspectives will be reconsidered in light of evidence and methodology to show that a.) Famine texts, through their worklike dimensions, are deeply implicated in the social and cultural forces producing them; b.) Famine texts produce distinct, recognizable discourses; c.) Famine texts employ narrative strategies and structures to pursue political, social and cultural goals; and d) Famine texts and their discourses shape their literary forms.

LaCapra writes that "... texts should be seen to address us in more subtle and challenging ways [than merely trawling them for historical data would suggest] , and they should be carried into the present -- with implications for the future -- in a dialogical fashion." (LaCapra, 1983, 63) This communicational study will explain why Famine texts proliferate at one period and decline in another, and show that such texts, spanning more

than 150 years, bear a discourse of continuing relevance for Ireland and beyond.

## *Figure 1*
## *Selected Literature and Drama on the Irish Famine: Fiction*

| Year | Title | Genre | Author |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Phase I: 1845-1852** | | | |
| 1847 | *The Black Prophet* | Novel | William Carleton |
| 1848 | *The Emigrants of Ahadarra* | Novel | William Carleton |
| 1849 | *The Tithe Proctor* | Novel | William Carleton |
| 1852 | *The Squanders of Castle Squander* | Novel | William Carleton |
| **Phase II: 1853-1910** | | | |
| 1853 | *New Lights: Or, Life in Galway* | Novel | Mary Ann Sadleir |
| 1856 | "Fair Gurtha, or The Hungry Grass" | Short story | William Carleton |
| 1860 | *Castle Richmond* | Novel | Anthony Trollope |
| 1865 | *Golden Hills* | Novel | Eileen Healy Walshe |
| 1875 | *Castle Daly* | Novel | Annie Keary |
| 1885 | *The Chronicles of Castle Cloyne* | Novel | Margaret Brew |
| 1886 | *The D'Altons of Crag* | Novel | R.B. O'Brien |
| 1896 | *Denis: A Study in Black and White* | Novel | L.F. Field |
| 1901 | *Mononia* | Novel | Justin M'Carthy |
| 1903 | *The O'Donnells: A Tale of Famine Years* | Novel | D.P. Conyngham |
| 1905 | *Glenanaar* | Novel | Canon Sheehan |
| **Phase III: 1911-1950** | | | |
| 1914 | *Dubliners* ("The Dead") | Short story | James Joyce |
| 1922 | *Ulysses* ("Cyclops/Citizen") | Novel | James Joyce |
| 1937 | *Famine* | Novel | Liam O'Flaherty |
| **Phase IV: 1951-1983** | | | |
| 1962 | *The Silent People* | Novel | Walter Macken |
| 1969 | *The Big Wind* | Novel | Beatrice Coogan |
| 1972 | *The Famished Land* | Novel | Elizabeth Byrd |
| | *The Hungry Grass* | Novel | Richard Power |
| 1979 | *The Music Makers* | Novel | E.V. Thompson |

**Phase V: 1984-2000**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1984 | *Dreams of Other Days* | Novel | Elaine Crowley |
| 1986 | *The Hungry Land* | Novel | Michael Mullen |
| 1988 | *The Bitter Word* | Novel | Michael Allen |
| 1990 | *Under the Hawthorn Tree* | Novel (ch) | M. Conlon-McKenna |
| 1995 | *The Hungry Earth* | Novel | Séan Kenny |
| | *Mary Anne's Famine* | Novel | Collette McCormack |
| | *The Hanging Gale* | Novel | Ray Evans |
| 1996 | *The Darkest Years* | Novel | Michael Mullen |
| | *The Brass Thimble* | Novel (ch) | John McCullen |
| | "Famine Fever" | Short story | Helena Mulkerns |
| 1997 | *Groundwork* | Novel | Robert Welch |
| 1998 | "Counting the Days" | Short story | E. O'Donoghue |
| | *Duggan's Destiny* | Novel | Séamus Martin |
| 1999 | *The Whitest Flower* | Novel | Brendan Graham |
| | *Tales from the Poorhouse* | Novel (mon) | Eugene McCabe |

## *Figure 2*
## *Selected Literature and Drama on the Irish Famine: Drama*

| Year | Title | Genre | Author |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Phase I: 1845-1852** | | | |
| **Phase II: 1853-1910** | | | |
| 1886 | *The Famine* | Drama | Hubert O'Grady |
| 1899 | *The Countess Cathleen* | Drama | W.B. Yeats |
| 1904 | *Dawn* | Drama | Maude Gonne |
| 1908 | *The Miracle of the Corn* | Drama | Padraic Colum |
| **Phase III: 1911-1950** | | | |
| 1945 | *The Black Stranger* | Drama | Gerald Healy |
| 1947 | *Tenants at Will* | Drama | George Shiels |
| **Phase IV: 1951-1983** | | | |
| 1968 | *Famine* | Drama | Tom Murphy |
| 1980 | *Translations* | Drama | Brian Friel |
| 1983 | *The Great Hunger* | Drama | Tom MacIntyre |
| **Phase V: 1984-2000** | | | |
| 1985 | *Souper Sullivan* | Drama | Eoghan Harris |
| 1989 | *Mary and Lizzie* | Drama | Frank McGuinness |
| 1994 | *The Broken Jug* | Drama | John Banville |
| | *The Last Potato* | Drama | Joe O'Byrne |
| 1995 | *Black '47* | Drama | R. Bartlett/Galway Youth Th. |
| 1996 | *Two Houses* | Drama | John McArdle |
| | *Flight to Grosse Île* | Drama | Jim Minogue |

## *Figure 3*
## *Selected Literature and Drama on the Irish Famine: Poetry*

| Year | Title | Genre | Author |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Phase I: 1845-1852** | | | |
| 1845 | "The Sleeping Warriors" | Poetry | E.M.P. Downing |
| 1847 | "A Supplication," etc. | Poetry | Lady Wilde |
| | "The Living and the Dead" | Poetry | T. D'Arcy McGee |
| 1849 | "The Funerals," etc. | Poetry | James Mangan |
| | *Inheritor and Economist* | Poetry | Samuel Ferguson |
| | "Pro and Con" | Poetry | Miro |
| 1850 | "The Dawning of Morning" | Poetry | M.R. Leyne |
| 1851 | *The Spectre* | Poetry | Anonymous |
| **Phase II: 1853-1910** | | | |
| 1869 | "The Three Dreams" | Poetry | T. D'Arcy McGee |
| | *Irish Odes* ("Widowhood: 1848," etc.) | Poetry | Aubrey DeVere |
| 1897 | *Poetical Works* | Poetry | Aubrey DeVere |
| 1898 | "The Black '47" | Poetry | A.P. Graves |
| **Phase III: 1911-1950** | | | |
| 1942 | *The Great Hunger* | Poetry | Patrick Kavanagh |
| 1947 | "The Hungry Grass" | Poetry | Donagh McDonagh |
| **Phase IV: 1951-1983** | | | |
| 1964 | "My Dark Fathers" | Poetry | Brendan Kennelly |
| 1966 | "Digging" | Poetry | Seamus Heaney |
| 1968 | "Rituals of Departure" | Poetry | Thomas Kinsella |
| 1970 | *Ledges* | Poetry | Richard Ryan |
| 1970s | "In the Fourth Year" | Poetry | Michael Brophy |
| 1975 | "The Famine Road" | Poetry | Eavan Boland |
| **Phase V: 1984-2000** | | | |
| 1987 | "What Shall I Wear to *The Great Hunger* | Poetry | Paul Durcan |
| 1988 | "Return" | Poetry | Seamus Heaney |
| 1991 | "The Scar" (in *Collected Works*) | Poetry | John Hewitt |
| 1994 | "That ... Cartography is Limited" | Poetry | Eavan Boland |
| | "March 1, 1847: By the First Post" | Poetry | Eavan Boland |
| 1997 | *Famine* (poetry suite) | Poetry | Desmond Egan |
| 1999 | *Tenant* (from poetry on WWW) | Poetry | Máighréad Medbh |

# Figure 4: Famine Literature and Dram

| | Phase I: 1845-1852 | Phase II: 1853-1910 | Phase |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Fiction**<br>**- Novels**<br>**- Short stories** | 1847 - Carleton - *The Black Prophet*<br>1848 - Carleton - *Emigrants of Ahadarra*<br>1849 - Carleton - *The Tithe Proctor*<br>1852 - Carleton - *Castle Squander* | 1853 - Sadleir - *New Lights in Galway*<br>1856 - Carleton - "Fair Gurtha"<br>1860 - Trollope - *Castle Richmond*<br>1865 - Walshe - *Golden Hills*<br>1875 - Keary - *Castle Daly*<br>1885 - Brew - *Castle Cloyne*<br>1886 - O'Brien - *The D'Altons of Crag*<br>1896 - Field - *Denis: A Study in Black-White*<br>1901 - M'Carthy - *Monomia*<br>1903 - Conyngham - *The O'Donnells*<br>1905 - Canon Sheehan - *Glenanaar* | 1937 - O'F |
| **Drama** | | 1886 - O'Grady - *The Famine*<br>1899 - Yeats - *The Countess Cathleen*<br>1904 - Gonne - *Dawn*<br>1908 - Colum - *The Miracle of the Corn* | 1945 - Heal<br>1947 - Shie |
| **Poetry** | 1845 - Downing - "The Sleeping Warriors"<br>1847 - Lady Wilde - "A Supplication," etc.<br>1847 - McGee - "The Living and Dead"<br>1849 - Miro - "Pro and Con"<br>1849 - Ferguson - *Inheritor and Economist*<br>1849 - Mangan - "The Funerals"<br>1850 - Leyne - "The Dawning of Morning" | 1869 - McGee - "Three Dreams"<br>1869 - DeVere - *Irish Odes* ("Widowhood: 1848," "Ireland: 1851," etc.)<br>1897 - DeVere - *Poetical Works*<br>1898 - Graves - "The Black '46" | 1942 - Kava<br>1947 - McD |
| **Political Rhetoric**<br>**Travel**<br>**Historiography** | 1847 - Ferguson - *On the Expediency*<br>- Bennett - *Narrative Recent Journey*<br>1848 - Trevelyan - *The Irish Crisis*<br>- Smith - *Irish Journals* | 1854 - Mitchel - *Jail Journal*<br>1864 - Mitchel - *Last Conquest*<br>1904 - Davitt - *Fall of Feudalism*<br>1910 - James Connolly<br>- *Labour in Irish History* | 1938 - Gonn<br>*the Q* |
| **Historical Event** | 1845 - 1852 - The Great Irish Famine<br>1847 - Black '47; Death of Daniel O'Connell<br>1848 - Young Irelander rising | 1867 - Fenian risings<br>1869 - Church of Ireland disestablished<br>1870 - First Land Act<br>1889 - Parnell-O'Shea scandal<br>1891 - Charles Stewart Parnell dies<br>1893 - Gaelic League founded<br>1899 - Irish Literary Theatre's first plays | 1914 - Home<br>1916 - Easter<br>1918 - War f<br>1920 - Gov't<br>1921 - Irish I<br>1922 - Irish (<br>1929 - Shann<br>1932 - Eucha<br>1939 - World<br>1941 - Nazi (<br>1949 - Repub |

| Phase III: 1911-1950 | Phase IV: 1951-1983 | Phase V: 1984-2000 |
|---|---|---|
| 1937 - O'Flaherty - *Famine* | 1962 - Macken - *The Silent People*<br>1969 - Coogan - *The Big Wind*<br>- Power - *The Hungry Grass*<br>1972 - Byrd - *The Famished Land*<br>1979 - Thompson - *The Music Makers* | 1984 - Crowley - *Dreams of Other Days*<br>1986 - Mullen - *The Hungry Land*<br>1988 - Allen - *The Bitter Word*<br>1990 - Conlon-McKenna - *Under Hawthorn Tree*<br>1995 - Kenny - *The Hungry Earth*<br>- McCormack - *Mary Anne's Famine*<br>- Coughlan, ed. - *A Child's Famine*<br>- Evans - *The Hanging Gale*<br>1996 - Mullen - *The Darkest Years*<br>- McCullen - *The Brass Thimble*<br>- Mulkerns - "Famine Fever"<br>1997 - Welch - *Ground Work*<br>1998 - O'Donoghue - "Counting the Days"<br>1998 - Martin - *Duggan's Destiny*<br>1999 - McCabe - *Tales Poorhouse*<br>1999 - Graham - *The Whitest Flower* |
| 1945 - Healy - *The Black Stranger*<br>1947 - Shiels - *Tenants at Will* | 1968 - Murphy - *Famine*<br>1983 - MacIntyre - *The Great Hunger* | 1985 - Harris - *Souper Sullivan*<br>1989 - McGuinness - *Mary and Lizzie*<br>1994 - Banville - *The Broken Jug*<br>- O'Byrne - *The Last Potato*<br>1995 - Bartlett/Galway Youth Theatre - *Black '47*<br>1996 - McArdle - *Two Houses*<br>- Minogue - *Flight to Grosse Île* |
| 1942 - Kavanagh - "Great Hunger"<br>1947 - McDonagh - "The Hungry Grass" | 1964 - Kennelly - "My Dark Fathers"<br>1966 - Heaney - "Digging"<br>1975 - Boland - "Famine Road" | 1987 - Durcan - "What Shall I Wear to *Great Hunger*"<br>1988 - Heaney - "Return"<br>1991 - Hewitt - "The Scar"<br>1994 - Boland - "Cartography," etc.<br>1997 - Egan - *Famine*<br>1999 - Medbh - *Tenant* ( Famine Hunger on WWW ) |
| 1938 - Gonne-MacBride - *A Servant of the Queen: Reminiscences* | 1956 - Edwards & Williams - *The Great Famine*<br>1962 - Woodham-Smith - *The Great Hunger* | 1990s - Robinson - Presidential discourse<br>1990s - Museums, heritage centers, monuments and WWW sites<br>1990s - Proliferation of academic studies<br>1995 - Famine's 150th anniversary commemoration<br>1998 - Drumm - *Famine* (global hunger) |
| 1914 - Home Rule, World War I<br>1916 - Easter Rising<br>1918 - War for Independence begins<br>1920 - Gov't of Ireland Act<br>1921 - Irish Free State established<br>1922 - Irish Civil War<br>1929 - Shannon hydroelectric scheme<br>1932 - Eucharistic Congress in Dublin<br>1939 - World War II - "The Emergency"<br>1941 - Nazi Germany bombs Belfas<br>1949 - Republic of Ireland proclaimed | 1958 - Industrial development effort<br>1961 - RTÉ begins transmissions<br>1962 - Second Vatican Council<br>1963 - U.S. President John F. Kennedy visits<br>1968 - "Troubles" begin in North<br>1972 - Ireland, U.K. join EU<br>1979 - First papal visit (John Paul II) | 1995 - Irish economy begins expansion<br>1997 - Famine's 150th anniversary<br>1998 - Good Friday/Belfast peace accords<br>1999 - Northern Ireland Assembly opens |

## CHAPTER I

# *Words unto Death: Texts 1845-1852*

The first discursive manifestations of the Famine in Irish imaginative works emerged even in the midst of catastrophe, from 1845-1853. While virtually no one in Ireland could be unaware of the mounting toll and the increasing social chaos, not everyone was affected in the same way. The Famine devastated tenant farmers with small, precarious holdings, and especially the landless cottier-class, who lived in small settlements called *clachans* and who worked for their wealthier neighbors in return for the right to farm a small portion of property. Many others, however, even though they represented a fraction of the population, could survey the situation from relative ease, and so were able to express not only horror as Ireland starved, but also to employ discursive strategies designed to prompt British assistance, trigger Irish resistance and assign blame. Textual production during the immediate Famine period, 1845 to 1852, identified here as Phase I, was surprisingly rich. Poetry dominated the period, and is highly polemical, but novels also were published. Political tracts also appeared and heated controversy.

La Capra's argument that texts manifest both documentary and worklike dimensions will inform this chapter and succeeding ones. On a macrotextual level, when a particular literary or dramatic piece is seen as a whole or as part of a group, works will be examined against features of their social and cultural context. Here, Bourdieu's theory of habitus helps explain important features. On a microtextual level, when a work is seen according to discrete parts and their inter-relationships, rhetorical features and strategies will be analyzed. Van Dijk's emphasis on social cognition in discourse, as well as Bourdieu's habitus, illuminates how key elements work. Additional theoretical perspectives will come from Hall, Habermas, Radway and others. In considering the Famine's representation, the two primary works will be William Carleton's novel *The Black Prophet*, published in 1847, with additional insights drawn from his 1848 novel,

*The Emigrants of Ahadarra,* and the contemporaneous Famine poetry of Speranza, otherwise known as Jane Elgee, Lady Wilde. Other Famine era poets, especially James Clarence Mangan, are discussed in Appendix II. The rationale for selecting Carleton and Elgee lies in primacy and popularity. Key voices in the first group of writers to engage the Famine on a literary level, their works attracted a wide audience both in Ireland and Britain. They maintained a confrontational stance with regard to public authorities, Carleton as an Irish patriot within the United Kingdom, Lady Wilde as an Irish nationalist. Principal sections of this chapter will be 1.) a synopsis of Carleton's novel; 2.) a brief historical account of the Famine; 3.) biographical material on both Carleton and Elgee and a description of the reading public in Phase I; and 4.) the construction of the disaster by Phase I writers and their discursive elements and purposes.

When LaCapra calls for an analysis of a text's documentary dimensions, he includes the social and cultural circumstances of its production. For Famine writers, particularly during Phase I, when an agricultural crisis became a national catastrophe, these circumstances were geographically pervasive, politically charged and psychologically traumatic. A nation was starving. Hunger and disease claimed tens of thousands -- eventually more than 1 million. Emigration rose to a flood-tide. But even amid such conditions, what is told is conditioned by who is telling the story to whom and why. This fundamental communicational reality shapes history, which is no more innocent in its story-telling than imaginative works. The telling of the Famine is inextricably bound up with historiographical practices, philosophies and prejudices. As Alvin Jackson observes:

> Out of this apocalypse springs much political and intellectual controversy. The horrendous loss of life helps to invest discussion of the Famine with a passion which, even by the standards of Irish political and historical debate, is unusual. Conflicting interpretations of the Famine have fuelled the 'revisionist' debate within modern Irish historical scholarship, and have caused some soul-searching within the history profession." (Jackson, 1999, 69)

This debate has served as a background for discursive practice. Most historians, however, agree on some basic points, including the overwhelming dependence of most Irish on the

potato, "the food [which], at least in dietary terms, was quite adequate most of the time because ... the poor had chosen 'the only simple cheap food that supports human life when fed as a *sole* article of diet.'" (Ó Gráda, 1989, 111)

## SECTION I: OVERVIEW OF REPRESENTATIVE WORKS IN PHASE I

### 1. Carleton's examination of the world of the Irish Famine

The fiction of William Carleton forms a particularly important part of Phase I textual production. As Ireland confronted devastation, his novels provided an opportunity for sustained discussion of significant political, economic and social issues from an *Irish* perspective -- unlike journalistic and government reports. The discussion may be simplistic and moralistic, but through memorable characters and dramatic situations, Carleton exposes issues later writers will develop. Moreover, by attracting British, as well as Irish, readers, he deepened Famine knowledge.

Carleton's *The Black Prophet* is the first Famine novel and comes from a pen that charts an ambiguous and ambivalent course through Anglo-Irish letters. Although the Famine is clearly related to the system of landlordism, absenteeism and inaction by the British government, the novel does not primarily blame the system but wicked individuals. Highly moralistic in tone and didactic in purpose, its narrative includes a murder mystery and two intertwined, competing love stories, as well as significant comic relief, thus mitigating the text's impact as a manifestation of Famine trauma. Donnel Dhu, the "black prophet," is shrouded in mystery and augurs trouble. Meanwhile, his daughter, Sarah M'Gowan is in love with handsome, noble Condy D'Alton, whose heart, in turn, is given over to Maeve Sullivan. The D'Altons have lost their farm and are in rapidly declining circumstances. "Famine fever" rages in their home, while the estate agent's son plots to exploit the virtuous Maeve. Donnel's character derives from "The Irish Prophecy Man" (1841), which Carleton included in *Tales and Sketches of the Irish Peasantry* (1845). In pre-Famine Ireland, such figures were common at fairs, where they sold chapbooks and made predictions. (Welch, 1996, 50) Carleton's realistic details of human suffering are profound and echo non-fiction narratives of visitors and reporters. These details, which Carleton claims in his preface come from the 1817 and 1822 famines he

witnessed and are "depicted ... in the midst of living testimony, and ... [which] not only have escaped contradiction, but defy it," contrast with the novel's romance and melodrama. (Carleton, 1899, viii) Sophia Hillan King observes:

> In fact, the plot serves mainly as lurid illustration to the plight of the Irish people in that time of crisis, and is -- with the exception of his pertinent comments on the abuses of the middleman system -- almost a distraction from the socio-historical account which gives the work its power. The reader need not go to this novel for plot, but rather for its evocation of the realities of famine. Its threatening onset is rendered immediate and terrifying by a lowering, almost unbearably oppressive atmosphere. (King, 1995, 82)

As interesting as the novel is its preface and dedication, in which Carleton pointedly calls upon his *British* readers to come to Ireland's assistance. From the beginning, then, the Famine's imaginative literature has been self-consciously discursive. Even *The Black Prophet's* 1899 edition, published in London by Lawrence and Bullen Ltd., includes an introduction by D.J. O'Donoughue that likens a contemporary famine to the 1845-1850 catastrophe. *The Emigrants of Ahadarra,* another Carleton novel, was published by Simms and McIntyre, London and Belfast, in 1848. It tells the story of the M'Mahons, tidy, hard-working and loving tenant farmers, who ultimately escape emigration, despite a corrupt neighbor's plots.

**2. An overview of Lady Wilde's poetic response to catastrophe**

Under the pen name Speranza, Jane Elgee, Lady Wilde, a woman with "a love of the pose and a theatrical personality," lacerated with savage indignation the causes and perpetrators of the Famine. (Kiberd, 1996, 33) Although her poems were collected and published in 1864, their immediate impact was felt largely through *The Nation*, the nationalist newspaper. (Welch, 1996, 599) Because poetry can be written relatively quickly, can compress thought and emotion and can metaphorically mask incendiary social and political thought, it was the ideal genre for immediate response to the Famine. As a young woman with radical republican politics, Elgee was part of the nationalist Young Ireland movement. She denounced British relief failure, predicted divine retribution for the historic oppression of Ireland, demanded not simply justice but revenge, called for a national uprising and attempted to hector and shame Irish men into

rebellion. Much of her poetry is laced with contrasts between the Famine present and the heroic glory of ancient Celtic Ireland, as well as a strong sense of ethical demands now and divine judgement to come, in opposition to the evangelical soon-to-come historical millenarianism. Her poems include "Attendite Populae," "Enigma," "The Famine Year," "Foreshadowings," "France in '93," "A Supplication," "The Voice of the Poor" and "Work While It is Called Day." Morash notes that her use of "prosopopoeia," the infusing of the dead with speech, reclaims Famine victims and challenges their listeners, her readers. (Morash, 1995,182-183)

**SECTION II: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW FOR PHASE I**

Despite recurrent crop failures and consequent food shortages in the 18th and 19th centuries, Ireland's experience with *an Gorta Mor*, the Great Hunger, from 1845 to 1852 was traumatic and its legacy enduring. While this section offers a brief overview, a detailed history of the Famine era is provided in Appendix I.

Beginning with outbreaks of *Phytophthora infestans*, at the time an unknown parasitical fungus that thrives in the damp and is carried by the wind, on the potato crop, Irish peasants by the millions soon found themselves starving, diseased, dispossessed and exiled. The *Freeman's Journal* of 11 Sept. 1845 reported:

> We regret to state that we have had communications from more than one well-informed correspondent announcing the fact of what is called 'cholera' in potatoes in Ireland. In one instance the party had been digging potatoes -- the finest he had ever seen -- from a particular field and a particular ridge of that field up to Monday last; and on digging in the same ridge on Tuesday he found the tubers all blasted; and unfit for the use of man or beast. (MacKay, 1990, 220)

The British government, despite initial efforts at relief, adopted a *laissez-faire* economic policy. Fearing that any substantial intervention in the Famine would only worsen Irish dependence on Great Britain, the government refused to provide general food relief, refused to prohibit exports of Irish foodstuffs and shifted the cost of relief to Irish property-owners. Relief projects were generally ineffective, and emergency grain supplies limited and restricted. Because the Whig government of Lord John Russell feared that intervention would upset the market, particularly in Britain, and grain prices soared as

shortages increased.

In many societies, a single crop failure would occasion hardship, but not mass starvation. For Ireland in the 1840s, however, the vast majority of the population, peasants on holdings rented from landlords, most of whom lived outside the country, depended on the potato as the dominant, and virtually only, foodstuff. Other crops were harvested to pay rising rents to landlords, whose estates were increasingly encumbered by debt. If rents could not be paid, tenants were evicted to make way for others who could turn a profit or to consolidate holdings into more efficient farms. Ever since the end of the 18th century, the Irish population had been soaring, and in 1845, it is estimated that more than 8.1 million persons lived in the country -- still the highest recorded population. Many landlords, anxious to make their estates more profitable, evicted tenants with little concern about their fate. Some arranged emigration schemes to North America to clear their property, while some peasants desperately sought to organize their own escape from Irish or British ports. Relief came from soup kitchens and the local workhouse, which offered little food, mandatory family separation by sex and plenty of crowding, disease and filth.

In the wake of repeated crop failures, the Famine brought not only starvation and eviction but also numerous diseases. Cholera, typhus, dysentery, relapsing fever and bloody flux were the principal diseases, which the Irish struggled with at home and which followed them to America or Canada. Emigration for many meant an Atlantic crossing on the dreaded "coffin ships," unsafe vessels riddled with disease. The Famine's toll is difficult to determine precisely, but even by a conservative estimate approximately 1 million died from starvation and disease, while another million emigrated, and within 20 years, as a direct result of the social chaos engendered by the Famine, the Irish population of 1845 was halved. (Kee, 1989, 258)

Compounding the desperate conditions of the Famine were social tensions arising from historic grievances and attitudes. The vast majority of peasants were Gaelic Irish in ethnicity and Roman Catholic in religion. After several centuries of restriction and persecution, anti-Catholic legislation was being removed, but the Anglo-Irish

Ascendancy, Protestant in faith and descended from 16th century English settlers, who gained title to Irish lands through British conquest and royal or parliamentary grants, retained a dominant and legally sanctioned social, economic and political position in Ireland, which, since 1801 had been the part of the United Kingdom. To secure their position, the Ascendancy relied on the British military and a militarized police, the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC).

## SECTION III: AUTHORS AND READERS

### 1. Producing literary texts amid the catastrophe: Pleas and outrage

During the Famine itself, historiographical positions had not yet hardened. Writers could observe the Famine for themselves. Ideological positions, however, did exist already and the first literary responses to the Famine reflect deepening division in Irish society. As it became clear that Lord Russell's government would not provide substantial assistance, and that landlords were more inclined to evict or arrange emigration than provide for tenants, Irish fears in the face of famine soared, and the old British-Irish, Catholic-Protestant, Ascendancy-Gaelic peasant tensions took on new force. Textual production during Phase I is dominated novels and poetry; the Famine did not make an immediate appearance in drama. Carleton's novels include *The Black Prophet*, published in 1847, followed by *The Emigrants of Ahadarra* in 1848, *The Tithe Proctor* in 1849 and *The Squanders of Castle Squander* in 1852. Poetry during the period was prolific, with simple verse being relatively easy to compose and newspapers hungry for copy. Among the prinicipal publishers of such poetry were *The Nation*, the weekly organ of the Young Ireland movement, and *The Irishman*, the *United Irishman,* all nationalist newspapers, as well as publications such as *Duffy's Irish Catholic Magazine*. Jane Elgee, Lady Wilde, such poems as "The Famine Year," originally published as "The Stricken Land" (1847), "France in '93" (1847), "Attendite Populae" (1848), "The Enigma" (1848), "The Voice of the Poor" (1848), "Foreshadowings" (1849), "A Supplication" (1849) and "Work While It is Called Day" (n.d., published in *Poems by Speranza*, 1864).

**2. Carleton and Lady Wilde: Crossing social and cultural borderlands**

***Carleton as novelist of the peasantry.*** William Carleton (1794-1869) was born to Irish-speaking peasants in County Tyrone. Educated in a local "hedge school," he joined the Ribbonmen after his family's eviction in 1813. Eventually, he became a teacher and made his way to Dublin, where he came under the influence of the Rev. Caesar Otway, a writer, millenarian and anti-Catholic polemicist in the heated period before Catholic Emancipation in 1829. Carleton rejected Catholicism and embraced the Church of Ireland, although some critics and biographers question the depth of his conviction. (Welch, 1996, 81) His early literary works, encouraged by Otway, attack Catholicism and attempt to expose its errors as they depict priests, peasants and other folk characters and exploit a rich form of Hiberno-English. "The Lough Derg Pilgrim" and *Father Butler* (1828) are among these first works, followed by two volumes of *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry* (1830, 1833) His middle phase emerged with publication of his first novel, *Fardorougha the Miser* (1839). Subsequent works include *Valentine M'Clutchy, Art Maguire, Rody the Rover* and *Parra Satha* (all 1845), the last three written for a series promoted by *The Nation*. Carleton addressed the Famine in the novels *The Black Prophet* (1847), *The Emigrants of Ahadarra* (1848) and *The Tithe Proctor* (1849). Like several of his other works, *The Black Prophet* was published first in serial form by *Dublin University Magazine* (*DUM*) from May through December 1846, then in book form in 1848 by Simms and M'Intyre of Belfast. (Wolff, 1980, 107) The works of this period are strongly didactic even as they depict, sometimes comically, sometimes satirically, traditional Irish types. Carleton criticizes systemic problems ranging from absentee landlords to agrarian violence, and links cause and effect. For example, in *The Tithe Proctor*, he sees enforced payments by Catholic peasants to support the Church of Ireland as a source of discontent and violence. With *The Squanders of Castle Squander* (1852), tension between Carleton's attraction to the "quaint eccentricities of a class he refers to as 'social antiquities'" and his "avowed desire to see the 'advance of science, civil liberty, and education'" erupt into a "rambling diatribe on the need for Irish modernization." (Welch, 1996, 82)

A third and final stage in Carleton's literary career came with publication of the novels *Red Hall, or The Baronet's Daughter* (1852) and *Willy Reilly and his Dear Colleen Bawn*, one of the most popular Irish works, and adapted for the stage by Dion Boucicault in 1860 and sold out at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, as recently as 1998. Other works include *The Evil Eye, or The Black Spectre* (1860), *The Double Prophecy, or Trials of the Heart, Redmond Count O'Hanlon, the Irish Rapparee* and *The Silver Acre and Other Tales* (all 1862), as well as poetry and short fiction. Carleton almost single-handedly embodies the tensions in Anglo-Irish literature. An Irish-speaker from the oral tradition, he wrote in English and achieved commercial success in print. Born a Catholic, initially destined for the priesthood, he became an Anglican when militant evangelical Protestantism was strong -- yet he criticized both churches and was at once sympathetic and condescending to Catholic peasants. Patriotically Irish, he was no nationalist and opposed restitution of a Dublin parliament -- yet had no trouble targeting British culpability in the Famine. An advocate of modernization and liberalization, his career focused on traditional rural culture. He wrote for publications with wildly divergent political and religious agendas. (Welch, 1996, 83) It has been observed, "In short, Carleton offers a challenge to any reductivist literary history." (Welch, 1996, 83) Carleton long sought a government pension, though he risked it by attacking the Russell administration in *The Black Prophet*. Through Anglo-Irish novelist Maria Edgeworth and others, he obtained an annual pension of £200 in June of 1848, but was unable to escape debt and died in poverty without support for his large, beloved family. (King, 1994, 87)

***Lady Wilde as nationalist aristocrat.*** Jane Francesca Elgee, Lady Wilde (1826-1896) was born in Wexford, "the great granddaughter of an eminent Dublin physician who had been a friend of Swift," and wrote for *The Nation* under the pen-name of "Speranza," under which her collected poetry was published in 1864. (Eagleton, 1999, 44) Through association with Young Irelanders and *The Nation*, she became increasingly nationalistic and, from a British perspective, treasonous. As a principal *Nation* writer, she announced in 1848 that "the long pending war with England has already commenced" and issued a call to arms. (Welch, 1996, 599) During the trial of Charles Gavan Duffy,

whom she replaced on the paper's staff, she revealed her authorship of the inflammatory comments but escaped prosecution. In 1851, she married Dr. William Wilde, an eye and ear surgeon who also pursued folklore and topographical interests. He had been the medical commissioner for the 1841 and 1851 census projects, the latter of which included a medical appendix considered a "pioneering work in medical history and statistics." (Malcolm, 1998, 592) Speranza excoriates the politics behind the appendix in her poem, "The Exodus," likely written in 1851, and published in 1864. With the failure of the Young Ireland movement, her politics were tamed somewhat. The Wildes had three children, including Oscar, the poet and dramatist. An accomplished translator of French literary and historical works, she and her husband maintained a literary salon at their Merrion Square home in Dublin. Her husband was knighted in 1854, the same year she was prosecuted in a case involving Mary Travers, who had an affair with Dr. Wilde. The court ruled in favor of Travers, but assessed Lady Wilde damages of only a farthing. After Dr. Wilde's death in 1876, she moved to London and reopened her salon, though in shabbier surroundings. Her works include *Driftwood from Scandinavia* (1884), a travel book; *Notes on Men, Women and Books* (1891); and *Social Studies* (1893), a kind of feminist world history. She published her husband's unfinished works on folklore, *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms and Superstitions of Ireland* (1887) and *Ancient Cures, Charms and Usages of Ireland* (1890). She died during Oscar's imprisonment; she urged him to face trial rather than flee to continental Europe, according to Yeats's *Autobiographies* (1955). (Welch, 1996, 599)

For Lady Wilde, her intellectual and artistic function in textual production was pointed; she once declared, "The utterances of a people, though always vehement, are often incoherent; and it is then that men of education and culture are needed to interpret and formulate the vague longings and ambitions of the passionate hearts around them." (Eagleton, 1999, 37) If Carleton represents a challenge to assumptions, Speranza's case is even more puzzling. Clearly a part of the Ascendancy's upper middle class, she was a rebellious nationalist with a title. Terry Eagleton observes that she belonged to a coterie of writers associated with *DUM* and such figures were a "deviant intellectual wing of a

military, professional and landowning upper class." (Eagleton, 1999, 41) Their politics were primarily *cultural* nationalism, with radical conservatism. As a feminist, a Young Irelander gone sour on violent change and a cultural nationalist, Elgee straddles many divides. She opposed abolition of landlordism because Ireland needed Ascendancy culture, science, wealth and intellect to prosper -- and to avoid a philistine Catholic, and Fenian, middle-class. (Eagleton, 1999, 60) Like others associated with *DUM*, she sought "to recall ... [her] own class to its civic responsibilities." (Eagleton, 1999, 41) Eagleton writes:

> The ideological ambivalences of the upper-class radical persist throughout her exotic career, as a patrician preoccupation with style, bravura and romance can veer either to left or right. As with Yeats, the nonchalance of the nobility finds an echo in the anarchic streak of the underdog, thus by-passing the aesthetically unappetizing middle classes. But if this anti-bourgeois iconoclasm is radical in respect of the hot-faced money-changers, it also contemns the nationalist middle class which was to do rather more for Irish underdogs than write poetry about them." (Eagleton, 1999, 61)

Lady Wilde, then, represents as much a cross-over phenomenon as Carleton.

**3. Identifying the readership in Phase I**

During the Famine's biblical seven years, writers confronted the problem of a small and preoccupied readership. While the population in 1841 exceeded 8 million, the highest ever, more than three-quarters of the Irish were peasants, nearly half of whom did not speak English and most of whom were illiterate in Irish or English. This left a small mercantile and farming class, that included many Protestants, as the primary Irish audience for Phase I texts. However, Irish writers could count on British publishers to disseminate their work in England, Scotland and sometimes America and Canada. This readership held considerable potential for a novelist, and because of the Famine, works on contemporary Ireland likely could attract landlords, government officials and clerics throughout the U.K. Correspondence between Carleton and Sir Robert Peel and Lord John Russell and a petition presented to Lord Clarendon, the viceroy, on his behalf from leading figures such as Edgeworth, Sir Samuel Ferguson, Sir William Wilde (Elgee's husband), the provost of Trinity College Dublin and the president of Maynooth, the

national Catholic seminary, over his pension certainly indicates a prominent readership. (King, 1995, 86) According to the introduction of D.J. O'Donoghue, his biographer, to an 1899 edition of *The Black Prophet*, Carleton himself writes in an unpublished letter from 1851:

> 'I called to Amen Corner, to Simms & McIntyre's London establishment, and heard from an honest Englishman, who did not know who I was, that the sale of *my* works -- especially *The Black Prophet* -- is as extensive and active as when they first published them. This is a great advantage, and I hope before another year to have reached such a popularity as Dickens and Thackeray have at present, and consequently to have the English publishers at my feet and willing to come to my own terms.' In another letter, he says, with some exaggeration, 'You could not imagine my popularity, not only in London, but throughout England. My *Black Prophet* everyone has read.' (Carleton, 1899, x-xi)

For many of the poets considered here in Phase I, however, the domestic audience provided the preferred readers. They were, after all, the ones who needed to be galvanized into political action, and they extended beyond the mere one percent of the population estimated to constitute the Irish intelligentsia. (Eagleton, 1999, 144, n. 22) Literacy was increasing, so that of those in school between 1791 and 1810, 57 percent of men and 36 percent of women claimed to be able to read, according to the 1841 census, although over all only 37 percent of males and 18 percent of females could read and write. (Connelly, 1989, 89; Ó Gráda, 1989, 110) The number of children in school had reached 560,000 in 1824, representing 40 percent of the school-age generation. (Connelly, 1989, 89) The efforts of the Catholic Association, which sought full political emancipation, helped expand literacy and interest in English-language politics. (Connelly, 1989, 90) *The Nation* (1842-1848; second series, 1849-1896), a weekly journal of cultural and political affairs, was the mouthpiece of the Young Ireland movement. Founded by Thomas Davis, John Blake Dillon and Duffy, the journal enjoyed a circulation of about 10,000 per issue, and could deliver an estimated readership of 250,000. Espousing both cultural and political nationalism, its leading contributors were Davis, Duffy and John Mitchel. Originally formed in support of O'Connell's pacificist Repeal Association, the paper moved toward the radical Young Irelanders in eschewing constitutional nationalism in 1846. Until its

suppression in 1848, in connection with the abortive 1848 Young Ireland rising, *The Nation* was home to many Irish essayists and poets, including Mangan, Thomas D'Arcy McGee and Denis Florence McCarthy. The moderate wing of the original *Nation* group -- Gavan Duffy, Lady Wilde, and A.M. Sullivan -- began the second series of *The Nation.* Other important publications during the period include *The United Irishman*, founded by Mitchel, a militant journalist, in 1848, after he quit *The Nation* the previous year. In 1849, John Brennan founded *The Irishman*, and the publication also served as a home for many nationalist poets. (Welch, 1996, 389) Development of an Irish readership may well be related to the rise of a Temperance Movement, organized by Fr. Theobald Matthew (1790-1856), a Capuchin Franciscan from Cork, which began in 1838 to curb drinking at home and in public. More than 5 million Irish had taken "the pledge" by late 1842. (Foster, 1989, 165) The movement won the support of the growing Catholic urban middle class, radical Protestants and peasants, some of whom saw the priest as a miracle worker. (Malcolm, 1998, 537-538) Throughout the period, the Irish middle class, which could be counted on to provide readers, was growing at a high social cost. As estates fell under the hammer, as the cottier class was cleared, "big farmers" prospered. E.R.R. Green writes:

> Despite the loss [of population], Irish production had increased rather than diminished. The area under cultivation had increased by over a million acres. The loss of population was paralleled by a decline in the number of holdings. Holdings of not more than five acres had fallen from 45 percent of the total to just over 15 ... . Holdings of over 30 acres were 26 percent, not 7 ... . (Green, 1994, 274)

The role of Carleton's novels and the proliferation of Famine poetry, fiction and essays in publications such as *The Nation*, *The United Irishman*, *The Irishman* and *DUM* provided Irish writers and polemicists with a public sphere Habermas could recognize. While the Famine *per se* did not occasion such publications, it radicalized their content in new ways. No longer did historic grievances have to be mustered in order to make Ireland's patriotic case; here was a present-day disaster, one that increasingly seemed to be deliberately manipulated or malignly neglected, which could be deployed ideologically in imaginative literature. Without an effective Irish party in Parliament in Westminster, where O'Connell's age and health had hobbled his effectiveness, with a generally hostile

or indifferent British press, Ireland's own literary and journalistic resources were employed to seek relief and rally the public and, often, promote resistance. Radway's understanding of the diverse interests of readership groups points to the types of intended readers. For those with the nationalist press at home, writers generally provided graphic descriptions of the Famine and ascribed blame to Irish dissension and British oppression in political and economic systems, notably land tenure. For British readers, who might sympathize with the plight of their neighbors but who would reject Irish nationalism, Carleton's novels certainly provide the pathos of poverty, starvation, disease and emigration, but responsibility shifts to morally reprobate *individuals*, whose wrongdoing against the virtuous can be put right by the upright without substantially changing the system. Thus Carleton and Lady Wilde employ two different discursive strategies on the basis of their prospective readership. "Interpretation and textual meaning," Radway writes, "... are as dependent on who the reader is, on how she understands the process of reading, and on the cultural context within which she operates, as they are on the text's verbal structure itself." (Radway, 1991, 468) As the diversity of publications which accepted Carleton's work suggests, there is not a always perfect overlap between writer, content and readership in terms of politics and social background. Precisely because of the social circumstances of Phase I readers, Radway's discussion of readership groups suggests ways to consider how, why and to whom Famine literature mattered.

From consideration of the documentary features of Phase I Famine works on a macrotextual level, this chapter will move to a microtextual, or rhetorical, examination of Carleton's *The Black Prophet* and Lady Wilde's poetry, and related texts.

## SECTION IV: THEMATIC ANALYSIS: DESPERATE PLEAS, OUTRAGE

### 1. Land: Abundance and starvation within a corrupt system

***Carleton's landscape as prophet.*** Set in Glendhu and Grey Stone in a generalized West of Ireland, *The Black Prophet* underscores the precarious hold of peasants such as the virtuous D'Altons on land their ancestors controlled. Emphasizing that most peasants are tenants-at-will, the novel shows how they are subject to the whims and cruelties of landlords and their agents. Carleton demonstrates the peasant's attachment to land, his

twin desires for a secure holding and for justice, all demonstrated by the break-up of the Henderson estate at the conclusion. In an aside, the narrator observes, "Many of our Landlord readers, and all, probably, of our Absentee ones, will, in the simplicity of their ignorance regarding the actual state of the lower classes, most likely take it for granted that the picture we are about to draw exists nowhere but in our own imagination. Would to God that it were so!" (Carleton, 1899, 238) Carleton himself sees his upper class audience as afflicted with some of the pernicious effects of Bourdieu's habitus. Absent and ignorant of the human crisis, preoccupied with economic concerns, landlords and their friends in government need a change in their social cognition. Carleton's Famine novels endeavor to facilitate that change, just as van Dijk's discourse theory suggests.

Landscape in *The Black Prophet*, as in many subsequent Famine novels, mirrors the collapse of Irish society. As Fr. Hanratty, the parish priest, and Nelly, travel in the countryside, the stumble upon a starvation scene. A mother lies languishing with two dying children, while another girl is dead already. Carleton's description will be the first of many narrative strategies. It combines a relationship with the land (an isolated, tumble-down cottage in a dark, forbidding and silent setting) with a social scene designed to elicit an emotional response. A dying mother and her struggling children provide a gendered, essentialist image high in emotional content. Wind rustling the hair of the dead girl returns the reader to the landscape. Carleton writes:

> Lying close to her cold and shivering breast was an infant of about six months old, striving feebly from time to time to draw from that natural source of affection the sustenance which had been dried up by chilling misery and want. Beside her, on the left, lay a boy -- a pale, emaciated boy about eight years old, silent and motionless, with the exception that, ever and anon, he turned round his heavy blue eyes, as if to ask some comfort or aid, or even some notice from his unfortunate mother, who as if conscious of these affectionate supplications, pressed his wan cheek tenderly with her fingers, to intimate to him that, as far as she could, she responded to, and acknowledged these last entreaties of the heart, whilst, again, she felt her affections called upon by the apparently dying struggles of the infant that was, in reality, fast perishing at the now exhausted fountain of its life. Between these two claimants was the breaking heart of the woeful mother divided, but the alterations of her love seemed now almost wrought up to the last terrible agonies of mere animal instinct. ... Beyond the infant again, and next the wall, lay a girl, it might be about eleven, stretched, as if in sleep, and apparently in a state

> of composure that struck one forcibly, when contrasted, from its utter stillness, with the yet living agonies by which she was surrounded. ... There, however, did the corpse of this fair and unhappy child lie; her light and silken locks blown about her still and deathlike features by the ruffian blast. ..." (Carleton, 1899, 344-345)

Kelleher's argument that Famine portrayals are feminized is particularly relevant here. As with the death of Margaret Murtagh, who "sins" with Tom D'Alton and dies as she is denied grain by the rapacious Darby Skinadre, the scene above "allows the author to move the discourse on famine away from the political and economic spheres and into a moral register." (Kelleher, 1997, 39) This deviation notwithstanding, the novel's conclusion, the break up of the estate holdings controlled by agent Henderson, provides in microcosm what Irish peasants require: land of their own and justice -- two of the central political themes for Famine discourse in the years to come.

Land in *The Emigrants of Ahadarra* is the locus of family happiness, economic survival, social intrigue and political dispute. For millions of Irish throughout the 19th century and much of the 20th century, emigration loomed as blessing and curse; it provided a means of survival and economic and social development, but it removed them from their land, families and society. In the novel, when old Tom M'Mahon returns home from Dublin, where he has renewed his lease, he declares: "However, thank God, here we are at home; an' blessed be his name that we have a home to come to; for afther all, what place is like it? Troth Peety, my heart longed for these brave fields of ours -- for the lough there below, and the wild hills above us; for it wasn't until I was away from them that I felt how strong the love of them was in my heart." (Carleton, 1848, 21) Carleton fails to indict the land tenure system and the colonial apparatus that sustained it, but, as Morash argues, demonizes those outside the family farm system, such as the Hogans, itinerant tinsmiths, who belong to a landless class long despised in Ireland, and Tim Phats, the poteen-maker. (Morash, 1995, 167) The landless are "scapegoats" for a land tenure and electoral system that threaten the M'Mahons, representative of solid farmers. (Morash, 1995, 167) For Carleton, the Famine unleashes forces that could destroy social progress and reduce the strong farmer to "the great body of pauperism which oppresses and eats up

the country." (Morash, 1995, 165)

***Lady Wilde's topological speech.*** Poetic texts during Phase I grapple with the impact of the Famine and its significance for the Irish. The five central analytical themes employed here -- land, national identity, religion, gender and agency -- all can be found in Famine poetry. Jane Elgee, Lady Wilde, is representative of this phenomenon, and her work was widely popular. Famine poetry deals heavily with the sufferings of the land, and the nationalist perspective lost no time in cataloguing them. The political and economic imbalance created by the Act of Union was a frequent target of criticism, and the pervasive presence of starving and diseased Famine victims provided graphic imagery. In "A Supplication" (1847), Elgee links natural landscape and human dying. She writes, "By the last groans of our dying, / Echoed by the cold wind's sighing / On the wayside as they're lying, Kyrie Eleison." (4-6) (Morash, 1989, 228) Likewise, "Round their forms no shroud is clinging / Save the rank grass newly springing, Kyrie Eleison." (14-15) (Morash, 1989, 228) Even as death abounds, a "golden harvest" is available for export, "But for us our bread is weeping, Kyrie Eleison." (16-18) Morash, 1989, 228) The wanderings of the evicted become a kind of map, for "Whereo'er our steps are led, / They can track us by our dead, / Lying on their cold earth bed, Kyrie Eleison." (22-24) (Morash, 1989, 228) Linking the natural topography with the liturgical line from the Catholic Mass, *Kyrie Eleison* (Greek for "Lord, have mercy"), Elgee establishes the human-divine connection and locates it in an anguished land. This same process of yoking opposites occurs in Elgee's "The Enigma" (1848). Lush descriptions of the Irish landscape in the first two lines are undercut by images of Famine, which mirror nationalist complaints that starvation continued amid plenty. "Where corn waves green on the fair hillside," "Where broad rivers flow 'neath a glorious sky, / And the valleys like gems of emerald lie," "young men, and strong men, starve and die / For want of bread in their own rich land." (6, 10-13) (Morash, 1989, 217) Van Dijk argues that social cognition underlies discourse; changing that discourse requires an alteration in social understanding, which involves decoding, interpretation, structuring, cyclical processing, semantic macrostructure formation, narrative superstructure formation, representation in

episodic memory, situation models, learning via knowledge and belief formation and subjectivity and discourse production. (Van Dijk, 1988-b, 103-107) Elgee's discursive strategy is to challenge readers, cast as Famine victims, to rise up in rebellion and re-establish control over their own country. Consequently, she must contrast the two realities -- plenty and power on one hand, starvation and slavery on the other -- that occur simultaneously in the same space. Her landscape never allows the reader to escape the Famine. Its intrusion in an otherwise beautiful setting creates cognitive dissonance that refuses any retreat into pastoral harmony. Nationalists needed models of British culpability and Irish resistance.

The intended readerships for Carleton and Lady Wilde prompt them to examine many of the same features in the Famine landscape. Death, disease and suffering were pervasive. But Carleton aims to elicit sympathy for the Irish from the British elite, and he constructs scenes of somber beauty and touching pathos. Lady Wilde, seeking to foment resistance, shows the contradiction between an abundant land and a starving people.

**2. National identity: Celtic passion, control and responsibility**

***Need for outside control in Carleton.*** Carleton's *The Black Prophet* depicts the Irish peasant class as generous but hot-headed, impassioned, gullible, superstitious. Carleton thus anticipates Matthew Arnold's essentialist reading of the Irish in *The Study of Celtic Literature* (1867). Indeed, this implicit need for overall outside control undermines Carleton when he laments abolition of the Irish parliament. As a limited nationalist, however, Carleton shows the capacity among the Irish for hard work and production, evidenced by the D'Alton family, but denied any permanency by landlordism. Sir Vincent, the landlord, never appears in the text -- indicative of Carleton's contempt for absenteeism. Only his agent appears and reveals the danger of folly and greed:

> Dick o' the Grange [Henderson] was ... a middleman, and as such found himself an interested agent in the operation of one of the worst and most cruel systems that ever cursed the country or the people. We, of course, mean that which suffered a third party to stand between the head landlord, and those who in general occupied the soil. Of this system, it may with truth be said, that the iniquity lay rather in the principle on which it rested, than in the individual who administered it, because it was next to an impossibility that a man anxious to aggrandize his

> family -- as almost every man is -- could, in the exercise of the habits which enable him to do so, avoid such a pressure upon those who were under him as amounted to great hardship and injustice. The system held out so many temptations to iniquity ... that it required an amount of personal virtue and self-denial to resist them that was scarcely to be expected ... . (Carleton, 1899, 87)

If Dick, depicted with a measure of comedy, is guilty by weakness, the dark side of Irish character exudes from every pore of Skinadre, who is guilty by deliberate price gouging and all the other practices of a "gombeen man." Carleton writes:

> There is to be found in Ireland, and, we presume, in all other countries, a class of hardened wretches, who look forward to a period of dearth as to one of great gain and advantage, and who contrive, by exercising the most heartless and diabolical principles, to make the sickness, famine, and general desolation which scourge their fellow creatures, so many sources of successful extortion and rapacity, and consequently of gain to themselves. These are country misers or money-lenders, who are remarkable for keeping meal until the arrival of what is termed a hard year, or a dear summer, when they sell it out at enormous or usurious prices, and who ... dispose of it only on terms dictated by their own griping spirit, and the crying necessity of the unhappy purchasers. (Carleton, 1899, 57)

From the Famine's beginning, then, profiteering within the emergent Irish bourgeoisie was targeted in texts, although the novel's moralistic tone shifts the issue from the question of class conflict to personal morality. Carleton exposes hidden features of the Irish *absentee* landowning system, and thus discursively challenges it in ways van Dijk would recognize. For upper class British readers, land was meant for a responsible elite. To change attitudes, Carleton reveals the features of absenteeism that undermine the system. This contrasts with the widespread nationalist recognition of wrongs in an upper class perceived as alien. In contrast, young Condy, Maeve and Sarah represent ideal Irish traits; they are handsome, high-spirited, loyal, just and passionate.

Carleton's *The Emigrants of Ahadarra* probes moral complexity within a simplistic construction of national identity. Hycy Burke's family stands in sharp contrast to Bryan M'Mahon's. Hycy is a wastrel and rake, while his mother is a greedy social-climber. His father is unable to restrain his family. Meanwhile, the M'Mahons, who have improved their land, are headed for destruction because of opportunists. Bryan's alleged selling of his vote to a Tory candidate opposed to Catholic Emancipation, but whose

honesty and willingness to assist him, is at the center of the novel's political and social concerns. The franchise was limited to those who held land minimally worth 40 shillings or more after rent and other charges were paid. "Forty-shilling freeholder" was "a synonym for the poorest class of voter," often led to the polls by his landlord or agent and expected to vote for his landlord's candidate. (Connolly, 1998, 204) Bryan, however, refuses to vote in an election pitting conscience against politics. (Carleton, 1848, 208)

***Unity through suffering in Lady Wilde.*** An ardent nationalist, Lady Wilde uses "The Famine Year" (originally published as "The Stricken Land" in 1847) to reach back to Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones in Ez 37:1-14 to haul Britain into the judicial dock. Elgee does not problematize national identity. She writes as one united with the suffering masses, although she makes no effort to hide one of the dark sides of Famine victimization: family abandonment. For Lady Wilde, these are only desires for self-annihilation, not enacted realities. "No; the blood is dead within our veins -- we care not now for life; / Let us die hid in the ditches, far from children and wife; / We cannot stay and listen to their raving, famished cries -- / Bread! Bread! Bread! and none to still their agonies. / We left our infants playing with their dead mother's hand: / We left our maidens maddened by the fever's scorching brand: / Better, maiden, thou wert strangled in thy own dark-twisted tresses -- / Better, infant, thou wert smothered in thy mother's first caresses." (17-24) (Morash, 1989, 221) The masculine voice expresses the neutering effects of the Famine on Irish males -- which nationalists use to shame and rouse opposition toward British rule. National sin may exist -- "O Christ! how have we sinned, that on our native plains / We perish houseless, naked, starved, with branded brow, like Cain's?" -- but the speaker feels no compulsion to answer how; instead, attention shifts to those who exploit the Irish as "human tools" and who, inevitably, will be judged by God. (29-30) (Morash, 1989, 222) Elgee here targets the British government and its restrictive aid policy, not her fellow Ascendancy members, thus employing a strategy designed to construct national unity. Unlike government bureaucrats, who reduce the Famine to financial statistics and economic policy, Elgee employs a scale of biblical proportions with eternal significance. "Now is your hour of pleasure -- bask ye in the world's caress; /

But our whitening bones against ye will rise as witnesses, / From the cabins and ditches, in their charred, uncoffin'd masses, / For the Angel of the Trumpet will know them as he passes. / A ghastly, spectral army, before the great God we'll stand, / And arraign ye as our murderers, the spoilers of our land." (43-48) (Morash, 1989, 222) Elgee reverses the standard rhetorical stance in which a modern, civilized Britain examines the small, neighboring island as a regressive, semi-savage nation. Instead, she imagines a divine tribunal in which victim Ireland will receive redress. Her description, moreover, draws upon Famine realities: burials without coffins, cabins burned to purge pestilence and the emaciated like ghosts on the march.

In "France in [17]'93: A Lesson from Foreign History," Elgee compares cries for bread in Famine Ireland and the collapsing French *ancien regime*. The warnings for British authorities and Ascendancy landowners is clear, for "'Tis the famished cry for Bread / From an *armed* multitude." (13-14) (Morash, 1989, 225) No longer will the crowd submit meekly; instead, "Bloody trophy they have won, / Ghastly glares it in the sun -- / Gory head on lifted pike, / Ha! they weep not now, but *strike*!" (17-20) (Morash, 1989, 225)The reference raises the spectre of the Rising of 1798, with the pike as its emblematic weapon. British fears that the French Revolution had inspired an Irish rising led to the Act of Union, which the Irish blamed for absentee landlordism, the loss of a Dublin parliament and policies that exacerbated the Famine. Now, in Elgee's poem, the pike returns as a veiled threat precisely because of decisions made in fear of the "French disease." Hunger is personified and demands to be sated by royal and aristocratic blood, for "Wildly on the people goeth / Reaping what the noble soweth." (51-52) (Morash, 1989, 226) Here, Lady Wilde sees division on the basis of class, not ethnicity or religion. But division need not be permanent; indifference to legitimate needs, not class *per se*, stirs revolution. Despite her nationalist enthusiasms, Elgee reveals the claims of her own status. Part of the Anglo-Irish minority, her poetry critiques her class, but does not abandon it. Habitus means difficulty in abandoning one's own class perspective:

> Habitus are generative principles of distinct and distinctive practices -- what the worker eats, and especially the way he eats it, the sport he practices and the way he practices it, his political opinions and the way he expresses them are

> systematically different from the industrial owner's corresponding activities. But habitus are also classificatory schemes, principles of classification, principles of vision and division, different tastes. They make distinctions between what is good and what is bad, between what is right and what is wrong, between what is distinguished and what is vulgar, and so forth, but the distinctions are not identical." (Bourdieu, 1998, 8)

The Anglo-Irish elite to which Elgee belonged share in the sense of habitus, and the poet's critique of society does not go so far as to call for the destruction of her class, only its reform. Political independence would still leave the Anglo-Irish elite in charge at home. For Elgee, the fire of her early nationalism would die down in the wake of the failure of the Young Irelanders. She pleads for assistance from the landowners in "A Lament for the Potato: A.D. 1739," taken from the Irish. The poem depicts the "sorrow and despair" in the "green fields of Munster lying desolate and bare." (3-4) (Morash, 1989, 227) The potato has failed, but in the midst of "misery and want, we have one protecting man, / Kindly Barry, of Fitzstephen's old hospitable clan." (21-22) (Morash, 1989, 227) The Fitzstephens, Old English landowners since the 12th century have produced another champion to care for the people. By implication, Lady Wilde interrogates the new champions of "Lorc's ancient kingdom, sunk in slavery and grief." (5) (Morash, 1989, 227) Although she ends with a plea for divine protection, Elgee's poem adopts a two-pronged strategy to press the nationalist cause. She reminds readers of the historic roots of Gaelic society and recalls the aid of landowners in earlier times, but she also subjects current landowners to inspection according to an ancient model. She also employs a figure from the early Anglo-Irish elite, Barry Fitzstephens, as the exemplar of social and civic virtue. Bourdieu's habitus is not a static reality, but one in a social field in which positions occupied by players are contestatory. (Bourdieu, 1998, 6) He writes:

> This structure is not immutable, and the topology that describes a state of the social positions permits a dynamic analysis of the observation and transformation of the structure of the active properties' distribution and thus of the social space itself. This is ... the global social space as a *field*, that is, both as a field of forces, whose necessity is imposed on agents who are engaged in it, and as a field of struggles within which agents confront each other with differentiated means and

> ends according to the position in the structure of the field of forces, thus contributing to conserving or transforming its structure. (Bourdieu, 1998, 32)

Given such a perspective, one sees how the divided, or multiple, loyalties of text producers and their seeming contradictions, as illustrated in Lady Wilde, make sense.

Carleton and Lady Wilde reflect different discursive responses to the Famine in construction of national identity. Carleton's novels, because they deliberately include a British readership, foreground images of noble, beautiful Gaels who can live harmoniously with the Ascendancy and the Empire. Wicked individuals, whether estate agents or exploitative merchants, bear personal responsibility for their faults; they do not reflect their national origins. The central problem for Carleton is not Gaelic Irish tenancy, Anglo-Irish landlordism and British rule, but absenteeism. Lady Wilde's poems, however, drive a discursive wedge between Irish and British national identities. The suffering Irish are victims of British exploitation and indifference, and they must rise and resist their oppression. But Speranza's poems carefully construct "Irish" to embrace the whole of the national community -- tenant, landlord, Gael and Ascendancy.

**3. Religion: Consolation, condemnation and the wages of sin**

***Famine as man's doing in Carleton.*** Religion, for Carleton, exposes the Famine as the work of man, not God. While Carleton follows demographics -- most peasants were Catholics, most landlords and agents Protestants -- he tends to be even-handed denominationally. Peasants show a natural attachment to Catholic rituals and clergy, but some exchange occurs among and within groups. The Catholic, and very feisty servant Jemmy remains attached to old Dick o'the Grange Henderson, despite his faults in *The Black Prophet*. Young Dick Henderson, meanwhile, is willing to consort with Sarah M'Gowan, but only for sexual pleasure, not marriage. He is repaid by contracting Famine fever. The local priest, Fr. Hanratty, faithfully visits fever cabins with Donnel Dhu's common-law wife, Nelly. The narrator has no trouble acknowledging Mr. Travers, the new agent for Sir Vincent, as just. Justice ultimately belongs to God, and Donnel Dhu's crime is discovered -- with the implication that the evils causing the Famine will be exposed one day too. Carleton's narrator observes:

> The laws of the country, at that period, had but one aspect -- that of terror; for it was evident that the legislature of the day had forgotten that neither an individual nor a people can both love and fear the same object at the same time. ... We hope ... the day has come when education, progress, improvement, and reward will shed their mild and peaceful lustre upon our statute-books, and banish those Draconian enactments, that engender only fear and hatred, breathe of cruelty and have their origin in a tyrannical love of blood. (Carleton, 1899, 329)

Later, as Donnel Dhu is convicted of murder and sentenced to death, the judge notes "the certainty with which Providence never ... loses sight of the man who deliberately sheds his fellow-creature's blood." (Carleton, 1899, 382) Earlier, Maeve Sullivan, asking her parents' permission to minister to the D'Altons, asks, "'Are they to die in a Christian country for want only of some kind person to attend upon them? It is not our duty when we know how they are sufferin'?" (Carleton, 1899, 270) Later, Maeve observes, "Father, let us do what is right and lave the rest to God Himself. Surely you aren't afeard to trust in *Him*? I may take the fever here at home, without goin' at all, and die; for if it's not, it matthers little where I go: His divine grace and goodness will take care of me and protect me. It's to God Himself, then, you're trustin' me, and that ought to satisfy you." (Carleton, 1899, 272) Similarly, Sarah, Maeve's rival for Condy, murmurs when delirious, "'Come what will,' she said to her own heart, 'we ought to return good for evil, an' there's no use in knowin' what is right unless we strive to put it in practice.'" (Carleton, 1899, 323) Human suffering, then, is not occasioned by God, but by an economic and social system in which virtue or vice determines outcomes. When van Dijk describes prejudice in news discourse as the result of negative "stereotypical situations," he could be describing the construction of Irish peasants. (Van Dijk, 1988-a, 188) By providing alternative views, Carleton works to change social cognition. Just as Donnel Dhu hides his crime, Maeve, Condy and Sarah display compassion. So can governments and societies. Religion is not simply faith, but also moral behavior, and compassion must be freely chosen -- as with Famine relief in his discursive strategy. Carleton's later work, according to R.L. Wolff, exudes this moralistic tone. (Wolff, 1980, 105)

*The Emigrants of Ahadarra* demonstrates the power of religious rhetoric when the hero, Bryan M'Mahon nearly loses the girl of his dreams, because of religious loyalty.

When he is accused of having sold his vote to an anti-Emancipation candidate, Kathleen recoils in disbelief and refuses to marry him. For Kathleen, national identity and religion are virtually synonymous. "Bryan McMahon at traitor! Am I a dreamin'? I am not asleep, Bryan M'Mahon is false to God and his country! I did think that he would give his life for both, if he was called upon to do so; but not that he would prove false to them as has done." (Carleton, 1899, 221) Bryan is even "denounced from the altar," a tactic used by some Catholic clergy to keep parishioners in line. (Kerr, 1994, 16) Carleton calls the practice "disgraceful and detrimental to religion and the peaceful intent of mankind." (Carleton, 1899, 223-224) Altar denunciations belong to a kind of religious capital that was linked to political power in Ireland. Priests largely controlled it, and the emergent farming class sought it -- and writers such as Carleton recognized it. (Inglis, 1998, 176)

***Sword of vengeance in Lady Wilde.*** Religion, given the strong strain of Roman Catholicism among the Irish and the rise of apocalypticism, millenarianism and evangelical fervor among Protestants, finds its way into many poetic texts during Phase I. The pervasive presence of death and suffering inevitably stimulated a turn to God. But, as with the others, this trope was not without ideology. The theological problem of innocent suffering lies at the heart of much Famine poetry. Unlike land and national identity questions, where blame can be attached easily, if unfairly, religion carries a reflexive dimension. Even if *they* are to blame, why are *we* suffering, especially if *He* loves us? Poets saw religion as a way to address questions of human sin and evil.

For Lady Wilde, wrong was easily seen; it lay with British officials who failed to respond to the Famine crisis, and with those Irish who failed to defend themselves. In "The Enigma," she marshals divine rectitude to the cause of political resistance: "Go in the strength of eternal right, / Go in the conquering Godhead's might -- / And save or AVENGE your Fatherland!" (49-51) (Morash, 1989, 218) She calls for a righteous anger that can count on divine approval and help. In "The Exodus," in which she catalogues the mounting Famine toll, she excoriates the government's political economy approach to the catastrophe, represented by statistical records. "'A million a decade!' Count ten by ten, / Column and line of the record fair; / Each unit stands for ten thousand men, / Staring with

blank, dead eyeballs there; / Strewn like blasted trees on the sod / Men that were made in the image of God." (13-18) (Morash, 1989, 219) The speaker realizes that even though Ireland has not yet begun to move toward freedom, "The soil is fed by the weed that dies; / If forest leaves fall, yet they fertilise." But the deaths of Famine victims contribute little or nothing to the national struggle; the starved and diseased are "martyrs" unknown and unsung in "A Nation dying of inner decay -- / A churchyard silence where life has been -- ." (29, 44-45) (Morash, 1989, 219-220) Elgee's reserves her strongest denunciation for the "Crowned and crownless rulers of men" who have betrayed Christ by failing to care not simply for strangers but the Lord's own sheep. (50) (Morash, 1980, 220) She asks whether they have "fed" the sheep or "fled" the crisis "like hireling shepherds ... / Leaving the fold the gaunt wolf's prey?" (52-53) (Morash, 1989, 220) This attack includes Queen Victoria herself, and carries a particularly sharp rebuke because the royal coronation ceremony is likened to marriage between sovereign and people. When Lady Wilde asks whether the "purple" and "gold" have been used to aid starving subjects, she draws on traditional royal imagery, and when she invokes the shared "Sacrament-bread," she again invokes both Eucharistic and nuptial imagery. (55-56, 59) (Morash, 1989, 220) For Elgee, the answers to her questions are obvious and lie in *laissez-faire* economics; divine judgement is now. "Ye're judged and doomed by the Statist's pen." (66) (Morash, 1989, 220) Van Dijk's social cognition theory illustrates the discursive change Lady Wilde seeks. The statistical approach ("Statist's pen") rationalizes and normalizes what, in fact, is an outrageous situation. By reversing the standards, and making the analytical and evaluative forces of the British state serve as prosecutorial witnesses against their masters, she endeavors to change perceptions of the dominant government discourse. Van Dijk writes, "Only through ... social cognitions can textual structures be connected with these features of the social context. ... All processes of understanding of social effects and functions are controlled by social cognitions of individual group members and of entire groups." (Van Dijk, 1988-b, 99) A change in discourse, or resistance to a dominant discourse, begins with a change in cognition. "A Supplication" provides a vision of social harmony through reconciliation among Irish factions. Here the question of national sin as

a cause for the Famine arises, and Elgee is quick to identify national division as original sin. "We have sinned -- in vain each warning -- / Brother lived his brother scorning, / Now in ashes see us mourning, / Kyrie Eleison." (25-27) (Morash, 1989, 229) Again, the liturgical language of the Mass becomes a repeated theme throughout the poem. In place of "senseless hate," Elgee urges Irish men to kneel together as brothers so that in "holier zeal / May we Christian patriots feel / Oh! for our dear country's weal, / Kyrie Eleison." (32-34) (Morash, 1989, 229) The scene is then feminized, as Elgee brings warring brothers to common prayer "For Ireland, our mourning mother." (39) (Morash, 1989, 229) Speranza never forgets her agenda, here invoking the Kathleen ni Houlihan / Hibernia image.

Religion becomes a contested space for differing views of the Famine's cause and effect For Carleton, religion demonstrates the consequences of *personal* vice, thus exonerating British rule, Anglo-Irish landlordism or Gaelic Irish national character of blame. Absenteeism is a virus in the system and individuals often behave immorally as a result. Likewise, Carleton shows the difference between religious rhetoric used by the clergy as a club for social control and genuine virtue among peasants. For Lady Wilde, the concept of *national* sin emerges as an explanatory device, but discursively is used to call for Irish unity and resistance by nationalists, for imperial loyalty, moral regeneration and industry by unionists. Bourdieu's notion of habitus and van Dijk's understanding of social cognition help explain group behavior and efforts to maintain their discursive hold on adherents through supporting or altering key elements of Famine experience: landlord behavior, peasant victimization, government relief and religious affiliation. Religion thus offers a powerful trope through which to console or cajole, consolidate or condemn.

**4. Gender and agency: Good girls, bad boys and the process of change**

***Essentialism in Carleton.*** *The Black Prophet* constructs gender along flat, essentialist lines. Female characters bear the weight of virtue, but develop only marginally -- with the exception of Donnel Dhu's daughter, Sarah, whose complexity is considerable. Spirited and beautiful, she can be tender and compassionate or violent and abusive. Male characters, meanwhile, bear the weight of vice, weakness, evil -- or hot-

headed foolishness. Carleton provides some exceptions in the just, if cold, Mr. Travers, the new agent, and in Tom D'Alton, who, desolate over the death of the young woman he abandoned after impregnating, finally eschews his desire for respectability. In *The Emigrants of Ahadarra*, the Kathleen ni Houlihan figure is Kathleen Cavanaugh, willing to sacrifice her love for Bryan M'Mahon over his alleged betrayal of faith and nation. Carleton also plays with unstable gender. Kate Hogan is as brutal as any male in her family, yet she assists Kathleen Cavanaugh. "Kate Hogan, though a tigress when provoked, ... was touched by the sufferings, ... [and] was still a woman." (Carleton, 1899, 245-246)

Both Carleton novels are strong in agency. *The Black Prophet*, because of its focus on justice, underscores the significance of individual action. Actions have motivations and carry consequences, a point reinforced by the religious emphasis on moral action. Actors choose among options and devise strategies for their success within a social structure. Sometimes, they resist. Sarah, who wants to steal young Condy from Maeve, but relinquishes him and jeopardizes her life by serving his family, constructs a morally admirable depiction of agency, while the deceits of Donnel Dhu -- his crime and cover-up, his change of identity and his false prophecies (and accurate one, the Famine's arrival) -- reveal his wickedness. The relentless pursuit of the Black Prophet by the Widow Hanlon, sister of his victim, suggests individual power. On the negative side, Skinadre, the miserly meal monger; Tom D'Alton; and the Hendersons, father and son, cause needless suffering through deliberate choices. Carleton's emphasis on agency mirrors the socio-political purposes of his novel. In his dedication to Lord Russell, the prime minister, he writes:

> ... for although I believe that both you and he [Sir Robert Peel, Russell's predecessor] are sincerely anxious to benefit our unhappy country, still I cannot help thinking that the man who in his ministerial capacity, must be looked upon as a public exponent of those principles of Government which have brought our country to her present calamitous condition, by a long course of illiberal legislation and unjustifiable neglect, ought to have his name placed before a story which details with truth the sufferings which such legislation and neglect have entailed upon our people. (Carleton, 1899, v)

The policy change adopted by Russell in 1846 restricted assistance, such as expanding funds, limiting exports, organizing productive works and increasing grain imports. (O'Neill, 1994, 223) Habitus among Carleton's British readership resisted change in social cognition in discourse. Meanwhile, *The Emigrants of Ahadarra,* with its "justice will prevail" theme, positions the moral uses of agency. Hycy Burke's plots only ensnare him, although Carleton also shows the contradictions in an enmeshed, corrupt judicial and land system. (Carleton, 1848, 294-296)

***Lady Wilde's challenge to Irish masculinity.*** In urging resistance through rebellion, Lady Wilde yokes together gender and agency. She calls upon Irish males to live up to the ideal of manhood and fight for liberty. However, she acknowledges the emasculating effect of the Famine. In "The Famine Year," she writes, "... the blood is dead within our veins -- we care not now for life; / Let us die hid in the ditches, far from children and from wife; / We cannot stay and listen to their raving, famished cries -- / Bread! Bread! Bread! and none to still their agonies." (17-20) (Morash, 1989, 221) To reverse this process, she writes in "The Enigma," "What! Are there no MEN in your Fatherland, / To confront the tyrant's stormy glare, / With a scorn as deep as the wrongs ye bear, / With defiance as fierce as the oaths they sware, / With vengeance as wild as the cries of despair, / that rise from your suffering Fatherland?" (31-36) (Morash, 1989, 218) She continues, "Are your right arms weak in that land of slaves, / That ye stand by your murdered brothers' graves, / Yet tremble like coward and crouching knaves, / To strike for freedom and Fatherland?" (42-45) (Morash, 1989, 218) Challenging a man's sense of masculinity and appealing to his beloved dead are typical rhetorical stimuli to action, although Elgee takes the unusual approach of assigning Ireland a masculine identity as "Fatherland." Her readers in *The Nation* were likely to be male. Most poets invest Erin with femininity, as the pervasive Kathleen ni Houlihan trope indicates. When Elgee does invoke a feminine figure, as in "The Itinerant Singing Girl," she mixes Famine suffering and resistance. While the speaker identifies herself as an orphan -- "Fatherless and motherless, no brothers have I, / And all my little sisters in the cold grave lie" -- she herself soldiers on, despite "lonely and bitter" tears. (1-2, 4) (Morash, 1989, 79) The

sonnet depicts the pathetic struggle between survival and desolation. Claiming she has become a beggar, she is a kind of entertainer on the move, "Singing while my faint heart is breaking fast with woe / Smiling in my sorrow, and singing for my bread --." (6-7) (Morash, 1989, 80) The speaker's lament is also a critique of social indifference. The itinerant girl looks suspiciously like Kathleen ni Houlihan, or Hibernia herself, harp in hand, who fails to win the interest or sympathy of the British government, the strangers to whom she pleads. But even though the girl admits "wishing I were dead," she is "Smiling and singing still, tho' hunger, want, and woe, / Freeze the young life-current in my veins as I go." (15, 13-14) (Morash, 1989, 80) The lament achieves its most painful feature in her Beckettian inability to imagine a future. As Kelleher argues, the Famine frequently takes on a feminine face, but for Elgee, this suffering girl survives. (Kelleher, 1997, 9) Before a future can be built, one must survive -- and the girl/Hibernia appeals to masculine protective instincts.

In some ways, "The Itinerant Singing Girl" synthesizes "The Voice of the Poor" and "Work While It is Called Day." Agency for Elgee requires vision and hope, and for some peasants, the Famine devoured both. In "The Voice of the Poor," Elgee invests Famine suffering with biblical value, linking the pain of victims to Mary, who witnessed Christ's crucifixion. Amid starvation, disease and human indifference, the joy of youth and the spirit of life are crushed as the Irish "toil on, on with fever burning / In heart and brain." (41-42) (Morash, 1989, 230) But such toil lacks purpose and direction; Famine victims can only pray, "'Lord, grant us *Death*!'" (56) (Morash, 1989, 231) In "Work While It is Day," however, Lady Wilde, offers a different perspective. Drawing on biblical parables, she likens Ireland to a Garden of Eden, replete with resources and opportunities, yet Irish men are without work, as in the Famine. When the Lord comes, he sees the failures to work and care for the garden. "'Ye have sinned', He said, and the angel lustre / Darkened slowly as bright clouds may; / Weeds are growing where fruit should cluster -- / 'Yet ye stand idle all the day.' (37-40) (Morash, 1989, 232) Christ's interrogation of the idle poor emphasizes that work must be done to win control over the land, and then offers consolation that "the time of the new dispensations" will come when

"the last may yet be first amongst nations." (49, 51) (Morash, 1989, 232) The desolation of the itinerant singing girl is reversed here, where an unknown future holds promise. "Who know? Who knows? for our future story / Lies hid in the great sealed Book of God." (55-56) (Morash, 1989, 232) The poem holds out a millennial hope *beyond* and *in spite of* the Famine, not because of it. Morash observes, "In establishing a national (as opposed to a personal) theology of sin, Evangelical millenarians unwittingly bequeathed to Irish nationalists the basis of a doctrine of national salvation arising from endured suffering upon which a sanctified edifice called 'Ireland' could be constructed." (Morash, 1989, 113-114) Common suffering, discursively deployed, can restore hope.

Lady Wilde's "Foreshadowings" depicts the Famine as an apocalypse, and draws upon the biblical Book of Revelation. The apocalypse, because it occurs at an indeterminate, eschatological, future "time," may be written as occurring "now" for the reader -- as indeed the Famine surrounded Elgee's first readers. As Morash observes, "this powerful textual strategy" enables Famine victims to become martyrs -- thus investing death from starvation and disease with meaning and reversing defeatism. Again, in the face of appalling conditions and a discourse of Irish national sin, Elgee and other nationalist poets seize every discursive opportunity to change social cognition. Death must have a meaning, and a future must be envisioned. Performing one's duty leads to the martyr's crown; endurance amid trial is rewarded in the end.

As a nationalist, however, Elgee understands "duty" as national resistance. Van Dijk writes, "Discourse is not just text but also a form of interaction," and that interaction for nationalists carried a political agenda. (Van Dijk, 1988-b, 29) "Still Freedom must send forth her young heroes glowing / Though her standard be red with their life-current flowing; / Still the preacher must cast forth the seed, as God's sower, / Though he perish like grass at the scythe of the mower. / Still do the Lord's work through life's tragical drama, / Though weeping goes upward like weeping at Rama." (45-50) (Morash, 1989, 224) God sees, and to nationalists, the apocalyptic New Jerusalem, "the jewelled-walled city, where walketh in splendour / Each one who his life for God's truth did surrender," bears a striking resemblance to Gaelic Ireland, free and independent. (63-64) (Morash,

1989, 224) The poem elides Famine suffering into religious glorification into national liberation. Defeat and death become agency.

***Trevelyan assigns agency to God.*** Elgee, Mangan and other nationalist poets share a sense of agency that is situated, at least potentially, among the Irish people. British rule denies them even the possibility of rescue, and only by repudiation of that rule can full agency be exercised. Charles Trevelyan, Treasury secretary for Irish relief policies and expenditures, offers a dramatically different approach to agency. His 1848 apologia, *The Irish Crisis*, even in the midst of the Famine, ascribes agency primarily to God. This prose text provides a strong contrast to the understanding of nationalist poets. For Trevelyan, relief efforts lie in a political economy meant to stimulate responsibility and regeneration:

> The deep and inveterate root of social evil remained, and this has been laid bare by a direct stroke of an all-wise and all-merciful Providence, as if this part of the case were beyond the unassisted power of man. Innumerable had been the specifics which the wit of man had devised; but ... the sharp but effectual remedy by which the cure is to be effected had never occurred to anyone. (Gray, 1995, 153)

Trevelyan's idea of social evil is Ireland's excess population and its land tenure system, which required rationalization to achieve productive units free of government aid. Likewise, he argues that any relief must originate locally, thus targeting the most needy but also eliminating the cry of the "'poor mouth,' as it is expressively called in Ireland." (Gray, 1995, 153) Trevelyan, like unionist poets, adopts a Famine-as-progress narrative and sees the "appointed time of Ireland's regeneration is at last come," a time when, after centuries of strife when the native Irish "were treated as foreign enemies, and were not admitted to the privileges and civilizing influences of English law, even when they most desired it." (Gray, 1995, 153) Certainly, "time must be allowed for morbid habits to give place to a more healthy action," but he prays that with hard work a new order will emerge so that "Ireland fully participates in the social health and physical prosperity of Great Britain." (Gray, 1995, 153) By imagining the Irish "remedy" to be massive depopulation, Trevelyan betrays a position that flirts with the nationalist genocide charge. If Trevelyan

adopts a millenarian position, it comes after a Malthusian apocalypse. Moreover, the millennium is to be in an Ireland indistinguishable from England. (Morash, 1995, 24-25)

God may be manipulating affairs for Trevelyan, but for Carleton and Lady Wilde gender and agency remain important tropes of meaning to portray the reality of the Famine for readers. For Carleton, essentialist views of gender facilitate his moralism. Those who bear responsibility for the Famine usually have disordered gender behavior -- they are veritable lechers or virtual eunuchs. Carleton's heroes and heroines, conversely, are models of virtuous masculinity and femininity. Agency underlines moral purpose; individual acts carry consequences -- and in a Famine context that has implications for authority at the highest level. For Lady Wilde, idealized gender depictions of ancient heroes and heroines are to stimulate resistance to British misrule. Phase I poetry, especially among nationalists, claims agency even in death by invoking martyrdom, spiritual value and promise.

**CONCLUSION: THE FAMINE EXPOSES AND EXACERBATES TENSIONS**

Faced with a national catastrophe, Phase I writers reacted in two ways. First, they endeavored to document the Famine's cause, extent and impact for readers to elicit emotional response and teach moral lessons. Second, their texts reveal an ideological effort to enlist those same readers in the political and social causes of the late 1840s. Coming as the Repeal Movement was collapsing, the Famine magnified the issue of union with Great Britain. Nationalists saw separation as a way to give Ireland control over relief, while unionists saw continued links as a bulwark against even worse conditions. Through the five tropes of land, national identity, religion, gender and agency, existing discourses endeavored to construct a sense of the Famine, and, in turn, collectively became Famine discourse. Diverse perspectives, ranging from Gaelic, Catholic, nationalist and peasant to Anglo-Irish/British, Protestant, unionist and aristocratic, shape these worklike, or rhetorical, features of Phase I texts. Ironically, the writers themselves, as is evident in Carleton and Lady Wilde, frequently cross *some* of the ideological borders of their birth, class, education or religion. Many poets and polemicists in Young Ireland were Trinity-educated and came from the Protestant elite, while

Carleton, son of Irish-speaking peasants eventually came to renounce Catholicism and separatism. (Welch, 1999, 83)

In the teeth of the Famine, increasing polarization in Irish society and culture had significant discursive consequences. Lady Wilde, for example, avoids ethnic and religious division as she warns her fellow Ascendancy members to work to alleviate suffering and as she marshals a united Irish front against Britain. She appeals to her readers without denying her social origins; despite her radical politics, she exhibits Bourdieu's habitus. Carleton pleads for British assistance in *The Black Prophet*, then exposes the underlying problems in Famine Ireland -- an unproductive land tenure system, absentee landlordism, profiteering middlemen, corrupt judicial system, exploitative merchants and religious bigotry. In *The Emigrants of Ahadarra*, Carleton achieves much the same end with a focus on Famine-induced emigration. By shifting the locus of responsibility from political and economic systems, policies and institutions to individual behavior, however, Carleton endeavors to make his critique and his plea for help palatable to his readership. True to his origins, his fundamental sympathy for the Irish peasant remains intact. In both Carleton and Lady Wilde, as well as Mangan and others, Bourdieu's concept of social habitus and its deployment in a contested field of action helps explain their textual production. Likewise, van Dijk's emphasis on social cognition in discourse production points to important strategies in the Famine's first novels and poems. Following LaCapra's emphasis on the documentary and worklike dimensions in a text, this chapter has examined four principal areas: 1.) the action and characterization in two representative works, *The Black Prophet* and the poetry of Lady Wilde; 2.) the central historical features of *an Gorta Mor* from 1845 to 1852; 3.) the background of Carleton and Elgee and their readership; and 4.) the worklike, or rhetorical, features of the representative texts. In the face of one Europe's worst social calamities, Phase I writers spoke "words unto death," employing them discursively to attempt to rescue their compatriots and change, or preserve, their political circumstances. During Phase II, social, political and cultural tensions, worsened by the Famine, would harden into the nationalist discourse of Fenianism, the Land War and the Home Rule movement and their

unionist opposites.

## CHAPTER II

# *First Bitter Pangs: Texts 1853-1910*

After the Famine, Irish literary and dramatic works became substantially more complex than during Phase I. Textual production during Phase II, 1853-1910, manifests a worklike dimension that draws upon, and contributes to, a contentious world. The political and social stakes were high, as demonstrated by narrative and discursive strategies. The two works highlighted in this chapter each show this complexity in ways simultaneously subtle and incendiary. Elizabeth Hely Walshe's 1865 novel, *Golden Hills: A Tale of the Irish Famine*, offers a strong defense of good landlords and their agents, and critiques those who fail to care for their estates and tenants. Walshe esteems the political connection to Britain, and constantly stresses its value. Relief failure has more to do with the scope of the Famine than with government intentions. For Walshe, the Famine swept away an unproductive, dangerous system of landholding. The Famine then may be related in what Morash calls a "narrative of progress." (Morash, 1995, 85) Likewise, she relentlessly identifies flaws in Irish character, personality and culture, which conspired with landlord deficiencies to trigger a catastrophe. Conversely, Margaret W. Brew's 1884 novel, *The Chronicles of Castle Cloyne, or a Picture of the Munster People*, a nationalist work, asserts the rights and capabilities of the native Catholic population to govern themselves. For Brew, resources for Irish pride are critical, and she locates them in virtually all the characteristics ridiculed or dismissed by Ascendancy or British commentators: Irish culture is not retrograde and bankrupt, but historic and enriching; Irish prodigality is generosity to neighbor and stranger alike and support for the community, not improvidence; Irish interest in dreams is not superstition, but a living connection to divine mysteries; and Irish religiosity is a national resource, not an impediment to progress. While Walshe and Brew sharply diverge on matters of land, national identity and religion, they show surprising accord on gender and agency. In

reference to the substantial body of Phase II Famine work, the points where Walshe and Brew diverge and converge will be helpful indications of general literary tendencies.

## SECTION I: SYNOPSES OF REPRESENTATIVE WORKS IN PHASE II

### 1. Walshe's unionist religious zeal and moral improvement

Walshe, writing her *Golden Hills* 20 years after the Famine began, defends landlords who improve their estates and benefit tenants by teaching them the principles of prudent, hard-working Protestantism. Her publisher was the Religious Tract Society in London, and her readers would have included a new middle-class landowner who expected a measure of religious and economic vindication. One key to maintaining the Union was the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, which saw its middle-class rise as its aristocratic elite eroded. Walshe writes during the height of Fenian agitation, and her readers would have found encouragement in an agent who faces down the Ribbonmen of an earlier generation. The novel focuses on R.B. Kingston, a landowner and an agent for an absentee landlord whose neglect of his estate and tenants is mitigated by his representative's solicitude. Not only does Kingston confront Ribbonmen, who are intent on killing him for defending justice, but he administers relief. This he does both on professional and personal levels, and in the process comes to a religious conversion, a deep personal commitment to Jesus Christ. Kingston shares this conviction with his daughter Lina, who runs a school for the children of tenants. The novel suggests that personal moral improvement will lead to national salvation. Likewise, personal degeneracy leads to national woes, at the root of which is corrupt absentee landlordism and fatalistic Roman Catholicism. Walshe's villains are Ribbonmen and they are described in essentialist Celtic terms -- they are feared and must be controlled, removed or extirpated. The Famine may have been horrific, but its causes are not hard to find, Walshe argues. Laziness and lawlessness must be eliminated, and Kingston is emblematic of improvement. Nonetheless, he too suffers, having contracted the fever. The Famine is the price of massive national improvement. The novel restores order in the marriage of Lina and Philip Orme, a friend of her brother, Alick, a student at Trinity College Dublin. Philip buys Golden Chase, the neighboring encumbered estate, and plans to invest and

improve. Moreover, Philip's links with Britain make marriage with Lina politically significant. Even Alick reforms, helps educate his brother and enters the ministry.

**2. Brew's narrative of nationalist political commitment and Gaelic restoration**

Brew's novel frames its action in the prophecies revealed in dreams to three young girls, primarily the heroine, Oonagh MacDermott. On All Hallow's Eve, the girls share the ritual of the "dumb cake," which requires them to maintain strict silence until the following morning. Any dreams they have indicate their futures -- and in Oonagh's, a handsome young priest enters her life. Because her father, Michael MacDermott, has slipped into debt because of bad harvests, Oonagh must sell the small farm they rent in Ballycross on the estate of the Dillons of Castle Cloyne in County Cork. With the Famine, Oonagh, the small-time heiress, becomes a servant and later an itinerant peddler. Her efforts to survive become a passion once she assumes responsibility for an infant orphaned by the fever. The child of Oonagh's old, but exceedingly false love, John Malloy ("Shawn Sugagh"), and her beloved cousin Susie, Johnny Malloy becomes the object of all her affections and ambitions. Through the village priest, Fr. O'Rafferty, Johnny is educated and eventually ordained a priest -- the prophecy is fulfilled -- and Oonagh dies at his first Mass.

Loosely paralleling this plot is a second story-line involving the Dillons. Dominic Dillon, like MacDermott, his tenant, is being beggared by conditions and his own generosity. A Catholic descended from an old noble house, Dominic finally manages to win election to Parliament, but soon dies leaving his dashing son, Hyacinth, and consumptive daughter, Grace, penniless. Hyacinth takes a British army commission, but gives it up to travel to California to find his fortune. He not only becomes rich but befriends a troubled young Englishman, who, at his death, directs him to his sister, Sydney. Hyacinth and Sydney wed and soon Castle Cloyne is recovered.

For Brew, writing almost 20 years after Walshe and almost 40 years after the start of the Famine, establishing the majority's moral competence was a political necessity. The 1880s crackled with a surging Home Rule movement. (Fitzpatrick, 1992, 180-181) Published by the London house of Chapman and Hall, Brew had an increasingly large

Roman Catholic middle class and peasantry more literate than ever as potential readers in Ireland, while to her British readers she could show a politically responsible Irish Catholicism. Brew dedicated her novel to Florence, Lady Dixie, "the true and steadfast friend of Ireland and her people." (Brew, 1884, n.p.)

These brief synopses demonstrate the importance of the three thematic concerns Corkery mentions: land, national identity and religion. The narrative outlines already show intimate inter-connections. Despite their differences, however, both Walshe and Brew take similar approaches to gender and agency. Both women create heroines who manifest agency not only in the absence of effective male leaders but also in confrontation with them. Walshe's Lina sees her middle-class family on the precipice of ruin, and manages to assist her father in saving not only his family and estate, but his life. Meanwhile, she maintains her own independent relief scheme. Brew's Oonagh loses her security to become a single, working adoptive mother. She chooses this condition amid extreme national distress. She will be tested repeatedly. Analysis of the two texts through the five tropes, with reference to the perspectives of Bourdieu, van Dijk and others, will expose the novels' rhetorical dimensions. Appendix II references other Phase II texts.

Throughout the period, competing Famine discourses turned to popular novels to win and maintain adherents. Novels spanned the ideological spectrum and allowed sympathetic characters to proselytize on behalf of a preferred vision of Ireland, assign blame and excuse fault. Famine "facts" remained much the same, but emphasis shifted on victimhood, causation, social structures and dynamics and future prospects.

## SECTION II: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: EMPIRE OR INDEPENDENCE?

### 1. Fenianism and the cultivation of the 'physical force tradition'

Ireland during the long Phase II period of 1853 to 1910 avoided the violence of the 1798 Rising and the Famine, but the country was anything but calm. Three dominant forces emerged during the period: Fenianism, the Land War and the Home Rule movement, each of which could trace its origins to the Famine. Fenianism, growing out of the Young Irelanders, advocated physical force. Only violent revolution would win Irish independence and improve social and economic conditions in the hard Fenian view.

Fueled by support in Irish America, the movement advocated a republic and organized large numbers of men into secret units poised to strike. The Irish Republican Brotherhood was founded in 1858, followed the next year by establishment of the Fenian Brotherhood in the U.S. With the availability of large numbers of Irish officers released after the American Civil War ended in 1865, the Fenians, named after the *fianna,* Ireland's ancient warriors, awaited a call to arms that year. Dublin Castle, seat of British rule, however, struck first and rounded up the top Fenians, who were subsequently exiled. When the rising finally occurred in March of 1867, it was, like the Young Ireland rising, ineffectual. (Kee, 1989, 42-43) The movement was betrayed by informers, rent by internal divisions and defeated by British surveillance and discipline. As would be the case in 1916, the severity of British reaction to the Fenian rising, including the execution of three Fenians in the wake of an attack on a police van in Manchester, England, that September, led to national agitation for an amnesty, triggered the Home Rule movement and helped prompt Prime Minister William Gladstone to adopt reforms. (Loughlin, 1998, 190) In 1876, the radical IRB withdrew its support for Home Rule.

**2. The Land War demands redistribution as landlordism unravels**

The second major Phase II socio-political development was the Land War of the 1880s. Ever since the Famine, the problems of landlordism had become increasingly obvious. Peasants did not own the land they worked. Their security was tenuous. Much of the nation's agricultural wealth was in the hands of absentees, whose connection with Ireland was limited to rent receipts. And the combination of absenteeism and Ascendancy class status emphasized British dominance. With agricultural problems in 1879, the Irish National Land League was founded by Michael Davitt (1846-1905) as a way to attack landlordism. Charles Stewart Parnell (1846-1891) became the league's president, and its political impact gradually spread. While rent reduction was the official aim, many in the league recognized its revolutionary potential -- and so did Dublin Castle. Parliament's Land Act of 1881 and Arrears Act of 1882 provided some rental relief, but also helped undermine the cohesion of the league. The government, however, arrested Parnell and his chief aides, but they responded with a "No Rent" manifesto. In turn, British authorities

outlawed the league in October of 1881.

The league's Land War manifested the power of ordinary peasants. The league's weekly newspaper *United Ireland* was widely distributed, and its rallies recalled the power of O'Connell's Repeal meetings. When landlords failed to grant reductions in rents or improve security of tenure, peasants withheld payments and interfered, sometimes violently, with efforts to force collections, evictions and replacement of tenants. (Comerford, 1998, 296-297; 300-301) The league's famous "boycott" policy against Lord Erne's agent, Capt. Hugh Cunningham Boycott in 1880 in County Mayo, was the first act in a social ostracism policy used against landlordism. Despite the league's collapse, pressure for reform continued, and a succession of land acts was passed until establishment of the Irish Free State in 1921-1922. One of the Land War's most notorious events was the Phoenix Park murders in 1882, when "the Invincibles" shot and killed Lord Frederick Cavendish, newly arrived chief secretary for Ireland, and his aide, T.H. Burke. The murder came on the heels of an agreement between Gladstone, who would make further tenant concessions, and Parnell, who would call off further agitation. Despite worry, the accord held, and Gladstone delivered on his promise. (Moody, 1994, 287-288)

**3. Home Rule as a constitutional route to political autonomy**

The third major development during Phase II was the emergence of the Home Rule movement under Parnell. The movement sought not a republican break with the United Kingdom, but domestic autonomy on a federal level. However, "Home Rule" was a sufficiently, and deliberately, ambiguous term capable of enlisting support from unionist landlords and nationalist radicals. Home Rule dominated political discourse in Ireland from the 1870s until 1918, when World War I ended. By that time, however, the Easter Rising of 1916, the British reaction and the overwhelming support Sinn Féin had won for establishment of a republic rendered Home Rule largely moot. Indeed, by 1910, when Protestant-led opposition in Ulster erupted, Home Rule already was in trouble. But in 1870, when Isaac Butt (1813-1879) founded a Home Government Association to promote a federalist system, the idea seemed to be a genuine political option. By 1873,

the group had been supplanted by the Home Rule League. Gradually, Ascendancy involvement declined and nationalists, agrarian radicals and Catholic clergy increased, thus mitigating the movement's appeal to Northern Protestants and investing Home Rule with a decidedly anti-imperial ethos -- quite the opposite of Butt's original intention. Butt, who led the Home Rule effort in Parliament until his death in 1879, was succeeded as leader by Parnell, who forged an alliance between his Irish nationalists and Gladstone's Liberals. In 1882, the Irish National League was founded to promote and centralize the Home Rule cause -- and with 86 Nationalists among the 103 Irish Members of Parliament (MPs), Parnell was a powerful figure in Westminster until his affair with Katherine O'Shea became known in her divorce proceedings of 1889. He subsequently married her, but his political career collapsed and he died soon after. Three Home Rule bills emerged, one in 1886, defeated in Commons; one in 1893, rejected by Lords; and one in 1914, which passed but was put on hold by World War I. One of Home Rule's greatest ironies is that it was granted to the part of Ireland that most strenuously opposed it, that portion of Ulster that became Northern Ireland. (Loughlin, 1998, 245-246; 431) Closely related to the Home Rule movement was the expansion of the electorate under the Representation of the People Act in 1884. Two years later, opposition to Home Rule in the North led to the creation of the Irish Unionist Parliamentary Party. The United Irish League was formed in 1898, with the *United Irishman* newspaper as its principal organ. By 1900, the nationalist movement in Westminster, splintered after the fall of Parnell, had reunited under John Redmond of the Irish Parliamentary Party. Already, however, rivals had emerged. Arthur Griffith's Cumann na nGaedheal was formed the same year ostensibly as a cultural organization, but one which called for nationalist coordination, enunciated the principles of abstention from British political life and sought a broad consensus for separatism, both of which would fuel Sinn Féin, organized in 1908. As Irish separatism mounted and in the face of increasing hostility in the North toward repeal of the Union, an Anglo-Irish constitutional conference in London in 1910 failed. The end of Phase II and the beginning of Phase III also saw the increasing politicization of Irish women. Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, organized the Irish Women's Franchise League in 1908,

served two prison terms and helped in the Easter Rising of 1916. Maude Gonne, an Abbey Theatre actress, idealized by W.B. Yeats, founded Inghinidhe na hEireann (Daughters of Erin), a political and nationalist organization in 1900. Louie Bennett organized the Irish Women's Reform League and the Irishwomen's Suffrage Federation in 1911 as unionist groups. (Ward, 1997, 62-63)

**4. Social and cultural developments during Phase II**

Socially and culturally, Phase II was rife with major changes and developments, most of which were closely connected with political ferment. In 1869, the Irish Church Act occasioned disestablishment of the Church of Ireland, thus eliminating the preferred position of the Anglican Ascendancy minority which the majority Catholic tenants had supported through tithes, later incorporated into rent. A growing interest in Ireland's Celtic roots led to the establishment of the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language in 1876, although such a development points to the erosion of the language, which had suffered major losses in the Famine. The Intermediate Education (Ireland) Act in 1878 created a board for secondary schooling, which was spreading throughout the country. The Gaelic Athletic Association, formed in 1884, promoted traditional Irish sports, such as hurling, and, in the process, strengthened the sense of Irish masculinity and community. Ascendancy members, even if they were ambivalent about some political dimensions of the Celtic revival, were active in its cultural manifestations. The poet W.B. Yeats formed the Irish Literary Society in London in 1891, and in 1899, his Irish Literary Theatre performed its first plays in Dublin. From this start would emerge in 1904 the National Theatre Co., popularly known as the Abbey Theatre. Dramatically, national identity during Phase II became self-conscious in the Irish Literary Renaissance with the work of Yeats, J.M. Synge, Lady Gregory and, later, Sean O'Casey. Earlier, the "stage Irishman" had dominated theatrical depictions. In 1892, Douglas Hyde delivered his famous speech on "The Necessity of De-Anglicisizing Ireland" for a return to Gaelic roots.

Just as Ireland's political landscape was complexified, so was its economic organization. The year 1894 saw formation of the Irish Agricultural Organization Society

and the Irish Trade Union Congress. Religiously, the Phase II period saw massive growth and consolidation of Catholic dominance. Schools, monasteries, convents, churches and rectories were constructed in large numbers. Vocations to the priesthood and religious life flourished, and control over primary and secondary education increased. Higher education remained problematic in Ireland. Establishment of Queen's Colleges, open to Catholics, in Galway, Cork and Belfast in 1849 had attracted the fierce opposition of the Irish hierarchy, which regarded them as "godless." Efforts to create the Catholic University of Ireland, in Dublin, under John Henry Newman, succeeded in 1854, but the institution lacked widespread support. It became part of the Royal University of Ireland in 1882, which in 1908 became the National University of Ireland with the Dublin, Galway and Cork university colleges, and Queen's University in Belfast. (Milne, 1998, 78, 384) In the wake of the Famine, traditional Irish religious practices, such as pilgrimages, agrarian festivals and devotions at holy wells gave way to centralized practices such as daily and Sunday Mass in the parish church, preached missions and membership in sodalities and confraternities, each with associated devotions and religious practices. (Kerr, 1994, 321) Leading prelates, such as Paul Cardinal Cullen (1803-1878), initially archbishop of Armagh, and, later, Dublin, endorsed an ultramontanist policy of strong support for Rome and papal policies. In 1907, Pope Pius X issued *Ne Temere*, requiring children of mixed marriages be raised as Catholics, further polarizing Irish life. (Jackson, 1999, 443-449)

Precisely because the country was politically unstable, literary production dealing with the Famine was highly polemical. Those in favor of maintaining union with Great Britain constructed the catastrophe as a natural disaster that swept away social and economic conditions impeding progress, while nationalists, acknowledging new conditions for development, portrayed British misrule and prejudice, which compelled separation.

## SECTION III: AUTHORS AND READERS

### 1. Elizabeth Hely Walshe and Margaret Brew: Contending voices

Details of the life of Elizabeth Hely Walshe are sketchy. She is believed to have been born in Limerick, probably around 1835 and died in 1869. (Eirdata, 2000, n.p.) Her

principal works include *Cedar Creek, from the Shanty to the Settlement: A Tale of Canadian Life* (1863), reprinted in 1888 and 1902; *The Manuscript Man or, the Bible in Ireland* (1869), reprinted in 1889; *Within Sea Walls, or How the Dutch Kept the Faith* (1880), written with George E. Sargent; *Under the Inquisition: A Story of the Reformation in Italy* (1904); *Brothers of Doon: A Tale of the Irish Rebellion of 1798* (1906); *From Dawn to Dark in Italy* (1930). (Vernau, 1986, 314) Her publisher, the Religious Tract Society (RTS), was organized in 1799 to promote Evangelical Christianity. By 1816 the group had distributed more than 30 million inexpensive or free materials, and by the 1860s, it was circulating more than a million tracts, pamphlets, magazines and books annually. Through the years, the RTS shed its overt evangelical zeal in favor of producing guides to right conduct with at least a superficial secular tone. (Sutherland, 1989, 529-530) At various times, it used the work of Arthur Conan Doyle and Jules Verne to counter the so called "penny-dreadfuls." (Morash, 1995, 94, n. 60)

Margaret Brew is believed to have been born around 1850, likely the daughter of a County Clare landowner. She is known to have written two novels, *The Burtons of Dunroe* (1880) and *The Chronicles of Castle Cloyne* (1884), as well as poetry for *The Irish Monthly*, a religious and literary journal published from 1873 to 1954. Brew's novels were serialized in the journal, as were works by Oscar Wilde, W.B. Yeats, George Moore, Katharine Tynan and others. Both Brew's novels aim for social and religious harmony, although they defend Catholic and nationalist positions. She emphasizes the sophisticated and ancient lineage of Irish culture. (Welch, 1996, 63, 267) Her death date is not known.

**2. Rising literacy rate and increased publishing activity**

Both Walshe and Brew wrote for readers in a rapidly changing Ireland, as well as for British readers, on whom most 19th century Irish writers depended, as Vivian Mercier has argued. (Mercier, 1994, 36-37) The Famine had swept away the landless cottier class, and opened up possibilities for the expansion of the middle class. The "narrative of progress" strategy found in so much Famine literature, unionist and even nationalist, stems from a hardened sense of the immediate and long-term economic impact of

developments in land ownership and tenancy. Socially and culturally, Phase II saw a steady growth in education at every level and in literary and journalistic publishing, thus helping expand the number of available readers, even as the population wrestled with prolonged emigration. H.D. Gribbon writes:

> On the whole, people in Ireland were better off in 1880 than in 1850 and there was further, though perhaps slower, improvement by 1914. Published statistics attest to better housing and health, a lower incidence of pauperism, and increasing literacy. ... The proportion of the population over 5 years of age able to read and write rose from 33 per cent in 1851 to 87.6 per cent in 1911. (Gribbon, 1996, 332, n.1)

Increasing literacy in English is seen in a massive proliferation in postal activity, from 64 million letters delivered in 1870, to 79 million in 1880 and 113 million in 1894. National newspapers adapted to suit a wider reading public and the emergence of a flourishing local press. (Gribbon, 1996, 333) Because the years 1853 to 1910 were so politically charged, many newspapers and journals reflected the nationalist-unionist tension, which helped attract readers. As Irish emigrants left the country, they helped expand the number of readers available in new markets. "The proportion of emigrants able to read and write seems to have risen from three-fifths in the 1870s to well over nine-tenths in the Edwardian decade, the improvement being particularly rapid in the case of formerly 'backward' counties." (Fitzpatrick, 1996, 615) Improved educational services account for rising literacy, although Ireland lagged behind England and Scotland. Without adequate compulsory attendance laws, only about 70 percent of the school-age population attended classes regularly. Still, average daily school attendance increased by 130,000 from 1870 to 1890, even as population declined overall. Access to intermediate or "superior" education after primary school grew slowly, however. While nearly 1 million students received primary education in both national and church-sponsored schools, fewer than 25,000 enjoyed higher-level schooling, and only half of that number were Catholic. (Akenson, 1996, 522, 534, 536) Schooling suffered from parochialism and clerical dominance, a lack of resources, inadequate bilingual education and a compensation system that tied teacher pay to student examination performance.

**3. Literary production amid intense political rhetoric**

Phase II readers were surrounded by heated political rhetoric. In three classic examples of Irish political argument, Famine responsibility is linked closely to the nation's future. The first blames the British government, assigning it the most sinister motives, in an effort to rally nationalist, physical force support. The second shows the need of landlords and agents to control the Irish, but unconsciously reveals the multiple strategies of popular power, employed by groups such as the Fenians and Land Leaguers. Finally, the third shows how mass protest and parliamentary action destroyed landlordism.

John Mitchel, a Young Irelander and Fenian, accuses Britain of genocide. Relying on Irish "hatred and horror" of the outrages of the British Empire in Ireland, Mitchel claims in *The Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps)* (1861) that Irish national aspirations will outlive the imperial regime, which is little more than a "monstrous commercial firm." (Mitchel, n.d., 220) Mitchel argues that 1.5 million Famine victims

> ... were carefully, prudently and peacefully *slain* by the English government. They died of hunger in the midst of abundance, which their own hands created; and it is quite immaterial to distinguish those who perish in the agonies of famine itself from those who died of typhus fever, which in Ireland is always caused by famine. (Mitchel, n.d., 219)

Mitchel, damning *laissez-faire*, calls the catastrophe "an artifical famine" in the midst of plenty. (Mitchel, n.d., 219) He rejects the theory of divine cause, advanced by Charles Trevelyan's *The Irish Crisis* (1848), calls the British account a "fraud" and "blasphemy" and declares, "The Almighty, indeed, sent the potato blight; the English created the famine." (Mitchel, n.d., 219) Mitchel's popular *History of Ireland* (1868) assigns Britain its genocidal role when, citing French visitor M. de Beaumont on the Famine era, he writes "that Ireland and the Irish are under the control of mortal enemies, whose single policy is to abolish the Irish race off the face of the earth." (Mitchel, *History,* n.d., 245) Likewise, Mitchel's highly successful *Jail Journal,* first published serially in New York in *The Citizen* in 1854, stridently calls for Irish armed resistance to an illegitimate government, one maintained by coercion, corruption and cajolery. The genocide claim is

made again, when Mitchel asserts that the Devon Commission's call for the removal of 192,368 families from holdings too small to be productive means "the killing of a million persons. Little did the Commissioners hope then, that in four years, British policy, with the Famine to aid, would succeed in killing fully two millions, and forcing nearly another million to flee the country." (Mitchel, *Jail,* n.d., xxxviii) If Britain could be assigned such a role, it took little imagination to determine political separation, by force if necessary, as the Irish response -- which suited Mitchel's political agenda, not to mention that of his growing Irish-American readership.

W. Steuart Trench, a land agent, recorded his impressions in *Realities of Irish Life* (1868). While his work is addressed to a unionist and British audience, it llustrates the extent to which Irish peasants were at the mercy of landlords and agents and underlines the power of popular protest. Trench describes a scene in which peasants seek a rate reduction, which he denies on an across-the-board basis. He will investigate "a real grievance or injustice," but generally calls for "better management" and "more careful husbandry" so they can meet their obligations to "a most kind and indulgent landlord." (Trench, 1966, 22) Then, suddenly, Trench is shocked: "'*Down on your knees, boys!*' shouted the same [stentorian] voice. 'We will ask him once more upon our knees!' and to my horror and amazement the vast crowd, almost all at least who were in my immediate vicinity, dropped suddenly on their knees, and another dead silence ensued." (Trench, 1966, 22) Later, however, Trench reports that he was beaten, stripped from the waist up and dragged into the street. Eventually, the crowd again demands a reduction, and, anticipating his murder, he refuses:

> There was a pause and a dead silence. ... At length a shout was raised from the old stentorian voice again, 'Stand off, boys -- for your lives! no one shall harm him -- he is a good man after all!' and in a moment I was surrounded by a new set of faces, who dashed furiously towards me. They raised me on their shoulders, swept my old enemies away from me, procured me some water to drink, and carried me, now completely overcome ... into the demesne of Loughlea. (Trench, 1966, 26)

Meaning here is multi-layered. Trench's textual strategy is to justify his own position, showing the need to control the Irish peasant -- even if he deserves some measure of

justice, a call which, of course, nationalists can redeploy. The passage also shows that peasant leaders switch performative tactics with objective and circumstance, as Erving Goffman suggests. (Goffman, 1959, 30-31) Subservience often is an act to delude, as writers from Maria Edgeworth to G.B. Shaw show.

Michael Davitt, a Fenian, Land League founder and anti-Parnellite nationalist M.P., shows the link between land and power in *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland* (1904):

> The struggle for the soil of Ireland involved a combat for every other right of the Irish nation. The lordship of the land carried with it the ownership of government. The usurpers of the national claim to the possession of the source of employment, of food, and of social distinction, extended their power over every other privilege and right, and ruled the people only and solely for the security of that which the power of confiscation made the property of those whom England made the rulers of the country. (Davitt, 1904, xvi)

The Famine became the prism through which Irish nationalists saw the distress of their country, and it fueled their arguments into the next century. Imputing the Famine to divine will is blasphemy -- and Davitt attacks landlords, the British government and even clerics:

> No more horrible creed of atheistic blasphemy was ever preached to a Christian people than this; and looking back with a shudder upon that time one can well understand now how and why it was that myriads of human beings, into whose souls this moral poison had been instilled, should have lain down and died, 'in obedience to the will of God,' after having 'bravely paid their rent.' (Davitt, 1904, 50)

That priests restrained anger and expressed gratitude for minimal relief outraged Davitt.

Davitt acknowledges the power of Britain and its Irish client, the Ascendancy, "... the political garrison of England in Ireland, equipped with every weapon and resource at the disposal of a great empire for their protection." (Davitt, 1903, xvii) Binding together the Ascendancy's military, economic, legislative and judicial advantage was "the latent prejudice of anti-Celtic feeling in the English mind." (Davitt, 1904, xvii) Against this "buttressed feudal garrison," Davitt sees arrayed an historical chain of Irish nationalist agency -- cultural, religious, popular, criminal, violent, rebellious:

> It was always England's soldiers, England's laws, or England's judges that

> confronted the tenants, cottiers, or laborers of the land whenever, singly or in combination, they had to assert the ordinary claims of humanity, in illegal or other ways, against this despotic social and political ruling power. (Davitt, 1904, xvii)

Davitt leaves little room for establishing an *Irish* dimension to the landlord class, but he rejects preserving the Ascendancy as a *ruling class*. By establishing the might of his opponent, however, Davitt shows the strength of nationalist resolve. He shows

> ... how the poorest of workers -- the tillers of the soil in Ireland -- succeeded by combination in overthrowing an all-powerful territorial aristocracy, entrenched in the ownership of the chief means of employment in Ireland and in one of the legislative chambers of the Imperial Parliament; and how it induced the two great British parties conjointly, as governments, to loan £150,000,000, in state credit, towards curing some of the evils of class misrule. (Davitt, 1904, 725)

For Davitt, land reform was only one stop on the road to independence.

These examples of the socio-political rhetoric of John Mitchel, W. Steuart Trench and Michael Davitt represent a fraction of the materials available to the Irish reading public in newspapers and journals during Phase II, but they suggest how the Famine continued to be constructed in ways that advanced the agendas of competing groups within the country at the time. Imaginative literature from 1853 to 1910 both reflected and contributed to this process. Hall suggests that conditions of production affect and change that message, and Phase II texts illustrate the role of audience and political ideology in coding and decoding. (Hall, 1973, 3-4)

## SECTION IV: THEMATIC ANALYSIS: NATIONALISM VS. UNIONISM

### 1. Land: A good investment or the body of Kathleen ni Houlihan?

***Walshe sees economic potential.*** References to land and human ties in Walshe's *Golden Hills* are double those in Brew's *The Chronicle of Castle Cloyne*. Socially, the key to economic and political control for the Protestant Ascendancy class remained in land, while for the Catholic majority, religion and nationalist politics were the principal routes to power. Nonetheless, for both groups, and for their Famine discourse, land occupies an important place. Emotionally, it is the common tie between families and generations. Economically, it provides wealth and power. Historically, it bears the marks of claims and counter-claims. Spiritually, it inspires love, longing and hope. Because

competing factions within Irish society in the 1853-1910 period constructed their vision of themselves and their world for conflicting purposes, considerable difference pervades the discursive deployment of land in Famine texts.

In *Golden Hills*, Kingston, both agent and landowner, is secure in his position and confident in his moral rectitude. He relies on legal authority and has the British military and the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) at his back. Although land is emotionally significant, it is primarily a means of economic production in a strictly hierarchical order. Deane shows that a tripartitite understanding of land existed in 19th century discourse: "territory" was the extent of the state; "soil" was Ireland as a "cultural reality" and "natal source," and "land" was a means of economic production. (Deane, 1997, 70-71) Kingston clearly adopts the latter view. Those who live on the land, to some extent, are thus invisible. Peasants may earn his gratitude, but they are an undifferentiated mass:

> The eviction took place at Ballymore .... Houses were levelled, and families turned out on the roadside, to seek shelter in the Union workhouse. The poor people built themselves sheds in the dry ditches, as covering from the keen February weather. They were bitter ... ripe for any revenge. And so the lawless Riband confederacy flourished among them. (Walshe, 1865, 22)

Ribandmen, or Ribbonmen, were members of a secret, oath-bound but loosely organized group engaged in various acts of agrarian violence in an effort to confront the worst features of landlordism and its enforcement. Ribbonmen in the first half of the 19th century appear to have descended from Defenders, a similar group, dating from the late 18th century associated with the United Irishmen. Rivalry with Protestant groups invested both sides with militant sectarianism. Ribbonmen looked to political change, vaguely articulated. The Whiteboys, which also perpetrated agrarian violence, flourished in the latter half of the 18th century in reaction to enclosure, livestock encroachment on tillage and increased tithes -- even on potatoes. (Connolly, 1998, 139, 486, 591) In the 1860s, Fenianism, founded in 1858 as the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), looked to many unionists very much like Ribbonism reborn – and Walshe's novel can seen within this context. The movement, drawn from the lower middle-class and largely self-directed, had more than 54,000 members committed to political and economic change. Landlords had

reason to fear a group that in 1867 would declare war against "aristocratic locusts, whether English or Irish." (Jackson, 1999, 94-95, 100) Fenianism would remain as a potent force throughout the rest of the century and into independence. "Fenianism was overshadowed, but not suppressed: it survived, providing a cabalistic underpinning to the dominant parliamentary movement until 1916, as in 1858, constitutionalism was judged to have failed and the Fenian moment recurred." (Jackson, 1999, 108) The narrator's view in *Golden Hills* is not substantially different from the perspective of members of the Kingston family -- Ascendancy. Evictions are acknowledged but described efficiently, with minimal human engagement. At least half the description above concerns the impact on the landlord and agent class; it is seen as the motivation for violence, but the violence is cast as revenge and lawlessness. Bourdieu's habitus suggests not only a way of behaving but a way of seeing and thinking, as Walshe's novel illustrates. Social order, rather than compassion, is the primary concern. Later, the land is described as empty: "But the only animation through the country seemed on these works. Fields lay in scores uncultivated, and the cabins were roofless and deserted." (Walshe, 1865, 239) References to the evicted peasant have been elided into absence, silence and invisibility.

Ironically, a climactic moment occurs when Kingston meets an evicted peasant:

> 'Can it be possible?' said Mr. Kingston and William [his son] in a breath. 'Pat Mangan of Slievemon!' They recollected the comely broad-built farmer who had regularly brought his rent to the office ..., had given up his holdings with a touching submission, when in justice to the landlord he could no longer retain them; and had retired 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. (Walshe, 1865, 247)

Whatever sympathy Mangan elicits is set within Bourdieu's sense of habitus. Only because Mangan is submissive and deferential, as well as comely and big, does he merit tenderness. Even as Mangan is dealt out of the game, he plays by the social rules of the Ascendancy, rules of social performance well articulated by Erving Goffman. (Goffman, 1997, 95-96)

Like most Famine texts, *Golden Hills* exhibits the love of its principal characters for the land. However, unionist texts tend to express love for a particular estate or district

in preference to a broad love of Ireland. "Ireland" as the object of love is highly ambiguous for the unionist cause; it is unstable and potentially subversive. To love Ireland as a whole implies her equal dignity with England and Scotland in the greater British polity and, if she is equal, might she not be mistress of her own future? Consequently, a localized love can be just as intensely related to the land without straying into nationalist discourse. For Walshe, Lina and her young brother, Frank, manifest the greatest affection for the land; as the youngest, they can be free to express what adult rationality leaves unsaid:

> 'Darling old Golden Hills!' exclaimed Frank impulsively; 'don't I love every stone of it -- every blade of grass in the fields -- every wave on that big sea! I wonder whether I could bring myself to leave it at all, Lina.' And Lina fully entered into his enthusiasm for their beloved home. Others might say that the situation was bleak, that the absence of woodland gave the view a barrenness adverse to soft beauty; but these children of Golden Hills thought no place so enjoyable as their nest by the cliffs of the wild Atlantic main. Born in the sound of its ceaseless surge, its music was more to them than the most civilized loveliness ...; the blue expanse of waters fairer than miles of waving harvests; the scream of sea-birds more attractive than nightingales' melody.' (Walshe, 1865, 254)

That both Lina and Frank can express such sentiments at the height of the Famine, in a hard-hit district where they have encountered its ravages, suggests the distance between upper and peasant classes. Their love is for a littoral, rather than an inland, zone; their horizons are broader than those of their tenants, while, for unionists, the bleak, wild landscape mirrors the Irish themselves.

One of the strongest links between landlords and agents, on one hand, and the fate of their tenants, on the other, was an 1847 revision in the Irish Poor Law rates. The new law made Irish landlords responsible for tenants they dispossessed on a district-by-district basis via the local poorhouse. Parliament meant to force Irish landlords to assume a greater degree of responsibility for their actions. The law worked according to the following formula: the more evictions, the greater the number of the homeless, and thus the higher the tax for relief. (Kinealy, 1994, 134-135) As a result, many estates collapsed, thus clearing the way, under the Encumbered Estates Act, passed in 1848, for new entrepreneurs, but also disrupting centuries-old relationships between land, tenants and

gentry. (Kinealy, 1994, 217) Kingston remarks, "'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.'" (Walshe, 1865, 261) Famine novels seek a return to order, even if it must be a new order. In *Golden Hills*, Philip Orme, Alick Kingston's friend from Dublin, buys Golden Chase, a decrepit neighboring estate and helps Kingston by investing. Philip, in love with Lina, marries her, and her love for the land is vindicated. She is able to remain close to home in County Clare and become mistress of a worthy estate. Of Golden Chase Walshe writes:

> It was a fine place, though neglected and deserted for many a year; though much of the old timber had been cut down to stop chinks in the Everest exchequer, and the park was eaten bare by continual grazing of fat beasts, for the same purpose; and the house was grievously out of repair, weather-beaten and desolate. Yet was a tale afloat, to the intent that when old Mr. Everest was dying, he asked to have himself removed to the window of his room; and he gazed at the lovely prospect till the tears rained from his eyes, and he mourned bitterly -- 'My beautiful Golden Chase! how shall I die, and leave all this?' His successor preferred ... the salons of Bonn and Wiesbaden. (Walshe, 1865, 267)

Absenteeism becomes dereliction of duty. Conversely, moral reform means the land bears material and spiritual fruit. Alick, for example, once over his head in gambling debts, reforms, is ordained in the Church of Ireland and returns home often to help the saintly local rector, Mr. Brooke. Walshe concludes her novel with a return to the land -- and it writes the Famine, as Morash suggests, as a narrative of progress. (Morash, 1995, 85) She sees the Famine as a "national convulsion" and was "God's sore judgement." (Walshe, 1865, 266) She records the toll in lives lost, individuals emigrated and relief funds expended: "Nine millions of money [pounds] had been spent in relieving the Irish; yet twenty-one thousand men, women and children died of hunger during those famine years!" (Walshe, 1865, 266) Walshe's figures, which she ascribes to the 1851 Report of the Census Commissioners, contrast starkly with nationalist counts over more than 1 million dead and only £4.7 million in aid. (Rourke, 1989, 252) Walshe acknowledges, "How helpless was even the power of the mighty British empire before a small dark speck on a plant of the field!" (Walshe, 1865, 266) But the final consequence, from

Walshe's unionist perspective, is a change in the relationship to the land. She writes:

> But by 1850, the horizon was clearing. There were hopes of fair weather. 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. A great social change had been wrought by the establishment and operation of the Encumbered Estates Court. Land gradually rose to something of its former value, when capitalists found that the investment would be profitable. Overgrown estates, encumbered with heavy charges, were broken into a variety of smaller properties, freed from burden; passing from the effete hands of the old possessors into the vigorous hands of men from the middle class, who would spend their lives in connection with their estates, instead of dwelling afar from all duty and responsibility ... . (Walshe, 1865, 266-267)

The morally righteous -- honest, hardworking unionist middle-class Protestant landowners -- shall inherit the earth and make it bloom; the Catholic peasant is mysteriously absent.

***Brew highlights human relationship to land*** *The Chronicles of Castle Cloyne* by Brew stands in sharp contrast to *Green Hills*. Certainly, the characters in *Castle Cloyne* love the land. Their sentiment, however, is permeated by human relationships inseparable from the landscape. Moreover, Brew gives substantial voice to her peasants, not simply to landowners and agents. Indeed, the novel is essentially two plots -- Oonagh MacDermott's story and the Dillons' fate -- bound together by love for the same estate. It is a measure of the class distance, even within the Catholic majority, that prevailed in late 19th century that nowhere does Brew suggest the possibility of Oonagh's story merging with the Dillons' through love for Hyacinth. For Oonagh, personal happiness is rooted in the land, regardless of her poverty. When harvests fail and debts mount, however, she has no choice but to sell the holding she has inherited. Brew writes:

> 'There isn't a bush on this land that I don't love,' [Oonagh] ... went on. 'I love every stick ov the ould furniture, as if thy were all alive, an' had a feelin' for me. I always knew that I'd be heart sorry to part 'em, but I never knew till now how great my grief would be at the last. But sure I lost what I thought worse than the few brelawns [old furniture], an' I have to be satisfied, an' 'tis that wherever I go, or whatever becomes ov me, I'll never agin be as happy as what I was here.' (Brew, 1884, II-29)

Just as debt forces Oonagh to quit the land, it imprisons the Dillons. Castle

Cloyne is locked and barricaded to prevent bailiffs from arresting debt-ridden Dominic Dillon, the old Catholic proprietor . (Brew, 1884, I-141) Grace, his fair but fragile daughter, conducts his affairs. That the Dillons lack an agent underlines their warm relations with tenants, but their antiquated management. Castle Cloyne is fully mortgaged, and Dillon was "less the owner, than the steward thereof," one who followed the family tradition of an "easy-going and pleasure loving" ownership. (Brew, 1884, I-132) This tradition, less a moral fault than absenteeism, nevertheless manifested a dangerous prodigality. Brew writes:

> This was one of many reasons why he was so popular with them, to arrange their affairs, and settle their differences, without the intervention of a third party. ... Mr. Dillon's plan did not work well on the whole, but he said he would not have anyone going between him and his people, and that as he knew them and they knew him, things would be sure to come right in the end. (Brew, 1884, I-144)

Brew deliberately casts the Dillons in the mode of the ancient Gaelic chieftains and, later, Anglo-Norman aristocracy who adopted Gaelic ways, including personal relations with and responsibility for tenants and clients, as well as the duty of hospitality. The father is kind, dignified and public-spirited, as his efforts to secure a Parliamentary seat indicate, now that emancipation has come. The son is dashing, fearless, athletic and compassionate; the daughter almost ethereal. Modern agricultural production and financing are entirely alien. If, as Deane suggests, the idea of "land as economic unit" is missing in Brew, the concept of "soil as nation" is not. Brew movingly connects the Irish people and their land by showing first how it bears the effects of the Famine, then compares it to the distraught Oonagh and Grace. (Brew, 1884, III-52-55)

After an adventuresome plot, both Oonagh and Hyacinth Dillon -- his father and sister have died -- are restored to the old estate, returned to the land. Oonagh lives near the parish where her adopted son is assigned. Hyacinth has made his fortune in the California gold fields and has married well, so he has the wealth to redeem and restore Castle Cloyne -- although there is no assurance economic efficiency will secure its future. That is less important in Brew's nationalist narrative than the fact that peasant and aristocrat, both Gaelic Catholics, are restored. In the two novels, the names of the estates

differ significantly. For Walshe, Golden Hills is a perfectly appropriate English name for an Irish home, one that suggests both the gilding character of sunrise and sunset and economic potential. For Brew, however, Castle Cloyne has embedded within it an Irish language name meaning the Castle in the Meadow. The Irish name bears the old Gaelic order, the land itself and its human transformation.

**2. National identity: Who wants to be 'Irish'?**

***Walshe's British norm for Irish life.*** Walshe's *Golden Hills* is pervaded by a *British* sensibility, one which establishes England as the norm by which Ireland is to be judged. Young Lina, distressed by worsening conditions, exclaims, "Our unhappy country!" ... and asks, "will it ever be like glorious England?" (Walshe, 1865, 115) The author's hopes slip into her narrator's voice: "Even then was the sharp scourge preparing, which should greatly purify the land." (Walshe, 1865, 115) The term "purify" betrays not only a desire to be rid of the blight, but of the *Irish* social and cultural conditions which made blight pernicious and which construct national identity. The ignorant, stubborn, indolent and violent Catholic Celt must be civilized or replaced by the thoughtful, hardworking and brave Englishman or Anglo-Irish Protestant, such as Lina's father.

Kingston's goodness is visible both in his looks and actions. Although he is Everest's agent, he disapproves of the landlord's profligacy and irresponsibility, which have encumbered the estate. Kingston intervenes on behalf of the tenants, but can never show "disapprobation" of Everest. (Walshe, 1865, 12) Physically, Kingston exudes confidence and masculine good looks. "His was a quiet, breezeless face; clear-cut, composed features, with a keen, steady eye beneath the bronzed forehead. You could have told that a heart of iron bravery beat under that broad breast. From his front pocket projected the shining muzzle of a revolver." (Walshe, 1865, 7) Likewise, Lina's virtue shines in her school for peasant children and her embroidery relief project. When her high-spirited brother Frank thunders into the school with a whip and jokingly intimidates the boys, Lina intervenes, "... and if that hand had not touched him lovingly, and her eyes looked pleadingly into his, Frank's recklessness would have continued to make fun of their terrors for some time longer." (Walsh, 1865, 4) The novel seems unaware of the

implications of a gun and whip brandished by agent and son against Irish tenants. In contrast, tenants are portrayed negatively in general. Kingston's first confrontation involves the eviction of John Carmody, who shakes his fist at him, then slouches away. "A strongly built, black browed Celt he was, with a slouch in his broad shoulders, and a furtive look about his small eyes." (Walshe, 1865, 12)

Walshe takes characteristics understood positively in nationalist discourse and turns them into problems and vices, as does colonialist discourse. (Munns and Rajan, 1995, 385) Despite the hard work of the peasants on the coast, they faced the corruption of their crops -- "yet they could dance and sing and be happy, after the fashion of the wild birds whose nests lie within sweep of the mower's scythe. I know not if in this very vivaciousness of the Celtic race may not be found a source of their general wretchedness: the stimulus of discontent is wanting, to impel them to better their condition." (Walshe, 1865, 24) Likewise, sacrifices for hospitality, especially to pay tribute to the dead, become foolish prodigality. Walshe observes, "Yet poor as was the household, its most valuable possession, the pig, had been sold on 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." (Walshe, 1865, 31) Carmody's brother-in-law Tom Riley is drawn into a murder plan, but fails. Kingston confronts him, threatens to reveal all to the police unless Riley accepts his magnanimous offer of passage to Québec. Riley must go into permanent exile. Riley, grateful to God that he missed shooting his quarry and thus having murder on his soul, confesses his misdeeds. The scene is embarrassing, and nationalists would find it galling, but a unionist would find not only vindication of position but confirmation of prejudice. Walshe writes:

> Riley's face was a confession. The blank terror of his eyes, cowering beneath the steady gaze of Mr. Kingston, was as conclusive of his guilt as any evidence of accomplice. His wretched heart had played false, and turned betrayer through every line of his features. The colossal frame was unstrung by that consciousness; he was rather heaped against the wall than standing, in the misery of his fear. ...
>
> The criminal answered nothing: his huge bone and sinew might have crushed the speaker; but never did pigmy tremble in the grasp of giant, more than he cowered before his accuser. ...

> The poor creature flung himself on his knees before him. "Oh, sir, sir, don't give me up to the Peelers, an' have me hanged! My poor ould mother, that never wished harm but blessin' to every one alive, wud be put in her grave by it! They made me do it, sir, an' I was dhrawn in the lot, an' had to do it – . (Walshe, 1865, 63)

Size and strength submit to intelligence, resolve and virtue, much as the Irish masses were expected to submit to the enlightenment of British civilization and control. The Celt quakes before the Saxon. Likewise, his Hiberno-English is fractured and uncontrolled before the proper English of Kingston, whose precision, concision and decision mirror the imperial ethos. (Deane, 1997, 72-73) Moreover, the Celt refuses to accept responsibility for his actions. So craven is the Celt that not only does Carmody quail before Kingston, but Lina is able to face down Irish men. Walshe's narrator describes Lina's attempted identification of suspected Ribbonmen who had invaded Golden Hills: "It required some little courage, but Lina scanned quietly the bold reckless eyes and massive Celtic features, and said: 'I never saw that man before, to the best of my knowledge.'" (Walshe, 1865, 112) As the plot develops, Carmody takes up with another Ribbonman named Scanlon, who leads him to Captain Moonlight, head of the conspiracy in the county. But, in the end, Scanlon betrays Moonlight, and Carmody betrays Scanlon. Walshe's contempt for these so-called patriots is such that she has them inform on confederates, the unpardonable Irish political sin. Carmody is forced to seek

> ... refuge [in Canada] from the storm of opprobrium with which he was visited. If he had been merely a murderer, he would have received sympathy, for at that period the prejudices of the peasantry were all with the law-breakers; but his dereliction from the duty of agrarian outrage was unpardonable, and his guilt as informer was a dye blacker than the most atrocious criminality. (Walshe, 1865, 180)

The novel further attacks the nationalist view of identity when it describes relief works. Irish laborers are lazy, declares Walshe's narrator:

> In order not to interfere with agricultural employment, the wages were fixed at twopence a day below the current rate of payment in each district. But it was soon discovered that roadwork was only a species of laborious idleness; and as the peasant loved his ease better than the pence to be gained by harder exertion, he preferred a lazy fiddling with the pickaxe to the higher wage for which his sinews

should strive. (Walshe, 1865, 235)

Not only are Irish laborers idle, but they are duplicitous. She cites one "indolent fellow yonder" ... "a hulking able-bodied peasant" who does nothing, even as an engineer with one strike brings down "a quantity of earth and stones." (Walshe, 1865, 235) The laborer grins, and says to his critic, "Sure yer honour has twenty times the strength of the likes of me," he whined; "sure that yellow male [meal] doesn't lave us the power of a rish [rush] and he took up the pickaxe again, with an indolent shrug of his broad shoulders." (Walshe, 1865, 235) Overwhelming testimony shows those on relief were so undernourished and sick they were unable to work effectively. The novel ignores realities complicating its vision of Irish reality and focuses on features that confirm a pre-existing schema of understanding. Van Dijk's description of discursive patterns in news provides a model of how this "invisibility" of reality can be understood. The Ascendancy writes the victims, or the causes of victimization, out of the story to maintain its own discursive status and image. For example, the narrator equates the isolated cases of Riband attacks with pervasive crop failure, establishing a parity of victimization between the two classes: "... for in that year began the exodus from Ireland, stimulated by the Riband reign of terror, and by the newly developed potato blight." (Walshe, 1865, 77)

Irish ignorance extends to children, and is entrenched in the rituals of life, according to the narrative voice in *Golden Hills*. This, of course, contrasts with the compassion, liveliness and virtue of youngsters of the upper classes. Walshe writes:

> The children dropped in from their various play-places; and presently the potatoes were poured out upon the bare table, without the intervention of cloth or dish. Using neither knives nor forks, the family sat round and ate -- for the most part in silence. There can be no conversation among people wholly uneducated; and even when a naturally strong and observant mind proves this rule by being the rare exception, his interlocutor must have some intellectual qualities himself, to draw forth the latent power of mind into language. These people had lived much the same life from year to year, and expected so to live till old age: the monotony of past and present left few subjects that could be talked upon. Incident was seldom beyond the commonest. Christmas, Easter, John's-day in Midsummer, and Lady day in harvest were the four landmarks of the year; and their seasons were the potato-planting in May, herring shoals in July, potato-digging in October, and the two great annual fairs at Castlebay ... . (Walshe, 1865, 126-127)

Ironically, the narrator seems unaware of the contradiction between claims of ignorance and the intelligence inherent in the alleged duplicity and conspiracies of peasants.

In contrast to Gaelic Irish Catholic ignorance, laziness and fear, the Protestant Ascendancy achieves results. Kingston resists backsliding tenants and Ribandmen, despite murder attempts. He upholds justice by testifying against lawbreakers. He is concerned for the district, unlike landlord and tenants. Even his children emulate him. He tells Lina:

> 'There are terrible times coming in the country next autumn,' he said. 'Thoughtful men see the certain tokens of famine and pestilence. Now this district I regard as in a manner given into my hands, to save if I can. You will do no small share in this great work, if you persevere as you have begun. I have not helped you much, for I wanted to see whether the stuff for endurance was in you; I think it is, my daughter. Your scheme will be the better for standing without crutches at first, and yourself the stronger for independence. Just go on; make these girls industrious if you can -- give them money-getting power, producing power. Any help you want I shall freely and gladly give. We will work hand-in-hand, to try and save these poor people from the tempest ... -- shall we not?' (Walshe, 1865, 122)

When food riots erupt, Kingston and his son, William, defend Pat McFadden's shop. McFadden is likely a Catholic profiteer. Kingston, different in class and religion, again stands against lawlessness. At first, the crowd recoils at his rebuke, then surges forward, drags out McFadden and prepares to kill him until Kingston brandishes his pistol:

> 'But we're starvin', an' this villain McFadden has been makin' money of our blood an' our lives!' was the cry. Mark the culmination of evil: they had begun by intending an attack upon the shop, simply to obtain food, and now they were ripe for ... criminal revenge.'
>
> ...
>
> 'Now you spalpeen of the world, we'll pay you what's owin' to you this many a day. Who was it raised the yellow male to half-a-crown a stone, when 'twas only two shillings in Castlebay? Who was it refused credit to Pat Mahony, an' his family dyin' of the hunger? Come, boys, we'll not dirty our hands wid the likes of him; but as I said before, let's bring him to the cliff, an' hurl him over!'
>
> ...
>
> The shop had been totally cleaned out. The bins of meal and sacks of flour were empty. McFadden [who has recovered from his beating] looked into his till. The money had been tumbled about, but none of it was taken, whereat he was somewhat comforted; and yet more so at the thought of the presentment he would

have upon the county, to refund his losses. (Walshe, 1865, 232-233)

The incident reveals the lawlessness and violence of the mob, which Walshe, though marginally sympathetic, seems unable to reconcile with just cause. The Irish need law and order, and that control comes from Kingston, whose name recalls English and Ascendancy authority and virtue. In addition, however, the incident demonstrates native Irish greed, which Yeats will later deride as the "greasy till" in "September, 1913." (Yeats, 1950, 120). The novel suggests that the emergent Catholic middle class lacks the public spirit of the Ascendancy. Kingston, after all, resolves to buy meal for the crowd.

***Brew shows the Irish as competent.*** Brew's novel takes pains to show Irish national characteristics as positive or to minimize them as amusing. From a nationalist perspective, discourse must demonstrate competence. In part, this comes from the resources of Irish history. In her aristocrats, Brew links the Dillons with the old but ill-fated Catholic cause in support of James II, a Stuart, at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, and later at Aughrim and Limerick. In turn, this raises the specter of the Treaty of Limerick in 1691, when English authorities betrayed promises to the Irish, and the Catholic position in Ireland again eroded. (Simms, 1994, 216) Brew notes that the family is descended from the famous Theobald Dillon, who fought at Fontenoy, site of a famous victory over the English by the "Wild Geese," Irish troops fighting for the French during the War of the Austrian Succession in 1745. Not only were the Dillons part of an historic family with considerable élan, but they were warm-hearted and generous "... for it was characteristic of the Dillons that they never made an enemy, and never lost a friend." (Brew, 1884, I-121) Such an attitude did not in any way incline the Dillons to submit to injustice. Brew has Hyacinth, heir to the Dillon estate, defy anti-Catholic Penal Laws by reluctantly but resolutely killing the four elegant bays who pulled the family coach rather than surrender the horses to a Protestant, who, by law, could demand them for a mere £5 each. Henceforth, bullocks would draw the carriage! (Brew, 1884, I-127-130) Such behavior might shock a unionist or British audience, confirming their fears that the Irish were wild, violent and a little bizarre, but for a nationalist readership, Brew valorizes characteristics and behavior that political and ideological opponents have belittled.

Nationalist valorization continues throughout the novel. Just before her father, Martin MacDermott, dies, Oonagh discovers the Yuletide window candle has been extinguished on Christmas morning. Like the dumb cake dream, it connects the Irish to mystery. Brew's narrator, speaking of the wake and keen to come, argues that they "prove in the most conclusive manner, the great antiquity, as well as the Eastern origin, of the Celtic family." (Brew, 1884, I-186) Brew, like the 19th century Celtic Revival, wants to link the Celts with Jews, Greeks and Romans to demonstrate racial historicity. (Brew, 1884, I-187-188) Not all Celtic Revivalists wanted political separation, but nationalists valued the rhetorical and ideological edge antiquity conferred. (Kiberd, 1996, 31, 60) In that, they resembled other European cultural nationalists.

*Castle Cloyne* portrays the keen, or *caoine,* the Irish death wail, as a symbol of inherent, essential Gaelic characteristics. Overturning negative English impressions of the keen, the novel invests the chant with age, poetry and beauty. Brew writes:

> And all through this wail, wild and barbaric as it is, there runs an exquisite melody, a poetic cadence, which though harsh and savage in the ears of the stranger, and the foreigner, are full of beauty, and interest, for all who are the children of the old sod. The death chant of the Celtic race is dying away before the march of civilisation, and the hard realities of this nineteenth century -- more's the pity! -- but it is not yet altogether dead. It still lingers in the Scottish Highlands, and the remote districts of the south and west of Ireland. (Brew, 1884, I-188-189)

Celtic civilization may be on the ropes, but it remains the champion of antiquity and anti-modernism in ways that attract, rather than repel, as the British critique suggests. The connection between national identity and land is made clear by Brew's use of the keen when Castle Cloyne is sold. Tenants raise the keen because the old landlords are gone, the land sold -- and the future full of fear. (Brew, 1884, II-167) Nationalist novelists exploit the keen in similar ways; bizarre and repugnant to "civilized" ears, the keen is compelling to native ears. As Hall shows, the social situation is critical for encoding and decoding.

Brew allows her characters to manifest a certain generosity towards their unionist, non-Catholic neighbors. During the parliamentary election, the local priest dismisses the opposition as "Cromwellians" and "Dutchmen." (Brew, 1884, I-241) Such references immediately identify the opponent and his supporters as Protestants, a fact that would be

of some interest to a Roman Catholic cleric seeking to advance the political fortunes of his flock. But by reminding the Dillons that they are "Cromwellians," he invokes the historical memory of Oliver Cromwell's depredations in Ireland from 1649-1650 and the subsequent plantation of his military followers in Ireland. (Clarke, 1994, 202-203) Likewise, the "Dutchmen" are supporters of William of Orange, who bested the Catholic James II. But as the priest emphasizes the past, the Dillon heir sees the present and future:

> 'They are all of them Irishmen now, whatever their forefathers might have been,' remarked Hyacinth Dillon, 'and right good fellows, and gentlemen to the core, the greater part of them are ... . I am sorry so many of them will be arrayed against us, but when this brush is over, we shall all be as good friends as we ever were.' (Brew, 1884, I-241)

Hyacinth, who will save Castle Cloyne and bring it into the future, where Brew finds her readership, speaks of an inclusive Irish polity. The ambiguity of Hyacinth's "Irish" enthusiasm, however, is indicated by his willingness to accept a British army commission. Irish participation in British military service declined from the Famine to independence, but remained high relative to population. (Spiers, 1996, 339) Military service offered economic opportunities, social advancement and adventure. The irony, not lost on post-colonial theorists, is the complicity of some Irish nationalists in an imperial system that subjected others to the same exploitation resented at home. (Kirkland, 1999, 221)

Nationalist political rhetoric made clear that a self-governing Ireland would have to accommodate all social elements. Ironically, they looked fondly to the years prior to 1800, when the Kingdom of Ireland maintained its own parliament, albeit under the British king who claimed the Irish crown. This was a Protestant parliament, one where Catholics were excluded from office or the franchise, one designed to protect Ascendancy interests. Nonetheless, it was represented as a time when Ireland controlled its own affairs. Brew writes of the parliament house on College Green in Dublin: "... the exquisite beauty of a building that has been called more than once a poem in stone. ... In any city of the world it would be hard to find a *modern* superior to that which, less than a century ago, witnessed the last expiring struggles of a nation's independence, and whose walls

have so often echoed to the voices of her most gifted and eloquent sons." (Brew, 1884, III-217) She calls Robert Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh, "the chief traitor" for his role in using bribes to promote the Act of Union in 1800 -- "the political annihilation of his country." (Brew, 1884, III-218) Finally, Brew sees the reversal of the Penal Laws with Catholic Emancipation in 1829 as just and necessary. Dominic Dillon, for example initially was excluded from the Irish Parliament "for though his birth and fortune were superior to those of many who had seats in it, yet his creed as a Catholic debarred him from assisting in the councils of the nation." (Brew, 1884, III-218-219) For many nationalists, democracy could do with a touch of native, Catholic aristocracy.

Brew emphasizes virtues traditionally associated, from a nationalist perspective, with the Irish personality. Deep loyalty is seen in Pat's consistent, if unrequited, love for Oonagh. Committed to the faithless John Malloy and her cousin Susie, both dead from Famine fever, Oonagh cares for their child. Honesty and integrity is seen in her willingness to sacrifice her farm to pay off her father's debts and maintain his good name. Oonagh declares, "... I had no other way ov payin' my father's just debts, an' clearin' his name, that was ever an' always known to be honest. It goes very hard on me to part wid the ould place, but I may as well part with it dacently, than to have the sheriff dhrive me out ov it, an' no thanks to me into the bargain." (II-28-29) The Irish love of display, insistence on dignity and status, and emphasis on death occupies a particularly poignant place in the novel. When Dominic Dillon dies, although he has lost his estate, Hyacinth is determined to bury him in style. Brew writes, "The feeling of the county was with him [Hyacinth], for with the Irish, a private funeral is held as ignominious." (Brew, 1884, II-190) The funeral and its procession mattered to the Dillons and the peasantry:

> The hearse was drawn by six tall black horses, but when the coffin was brought outside the house to be placed in it, a great number of the Castle Cloyne tenantry came forward, and declared that as the graveyard was only three miles away, they would not suffer ... their late landlord to be taken there by horses, while they, his own people, with broad shoulders and willing hands, were there ready to carry his coffin. (Brew, 1884, II-190)

The scale of death during the Famine denied survivors the opportunity to bury their dead

according to custom -- and that, in turn, left psychic scars for generations.

Brew identifies a malaise that affected the Irish during and after the Famine. She describes the impact of the death of wife and child on "Mad Dick" Considine, who eventually receives Oonagh's help to emigrate to America. Brew writes:

> He [Dick] had got back a little of his old strength, and was not altogether the gaunt skeleton he had been when last she had seen him. But the expression ... was very sad, and his manner so subdued, that it would be hard now to realise the fact that he had once been known as 'Mad Dick Considine'! The terrible experience of the past few years had broken his spirit completely, or as his aunt expressed it, 'taken the fun an' frolic of ov him'; and the memory of his young wife and her baby dying of want before his eyes, had thrown a dark shade over his life that nothing could ever brighten or dispel. (Brew, 1884, III-42)

The Famine haunts subsequent Irish experience, as is reflected in literature and drama.

Both *Golden Hills* and *Castle Cloyne* turn to similar events, types of characters and stereotypical traits pertinent to national identity, but the Famine discourses that emerge are directed toward different readerships with conflicting political goals. Walshe seeks to justify the Ascendancy's role during the Famine and protect Protestant hegemony during the recovery period. To this end, the political link with Britain is upheld and British culture is seen as the progressive norm. Old Ireland as Little Britain will be successful. Brew, on the other hand, constructs Irish identity along nationalist lines. Ancient in heritage and Catholic in faith, native Irish identity has its own aristocracy and political skills; it is capable of self-government and does not require instruction from its neighbor.

**3. Religion: Famine response, practical charity and ideology**

***Walshe's emphasis on moral improvement.*** Few cultural forces have galvanized sentiment and behavior in Ireland as readily as religion. Religion marks both personal and communal identity. Not only are the stakes high in the next life, but they play a crucial role in this one. Beliefs shape attitudes and actions. Religious perspectives and social position, group affiliation and moral codes affect each other. In the Irish context, religion as a system of doctrines and morals is less important than as a marker of political identity. The general equation has been Protestant equals unionist equals Ascendancy, while

Catholic means nationalist means peasant or middle class, though the formula was fraught with contradictions and exceptions. Many writers found their constituencies through this formula, but others sought to refashion it. This was particularly true among those in the Irish Literary Revival at the end of the 19th century, which turned to pagan myth and legend for a foundation both sides could embrace. (Deane, 1997, 53) Walshe and Brew are useful examples, because they show how the paradigm was established discursively.

Because Walshe focuses on the need for and benefit of moral improvement across the board, religion plays an important role in *Golden Hills*. Walshe's unionist discourse, directed toward Ascendancy and British readers, is laced with a Protestant ethos. This ethos shapes characterization, plot and thematic understanding of the Famine itself. Kingston, for all his natural virtues, lacks a deep and abiding commitment to Jesus Christ as his personal savior -- hallmark of evangelical Christianity. The Church of Ireland developed an evangelical wing in the 1820s and this "Protestant Crusade" or "Second Reformation" continued during the Famine. Likewise, Presbyterians were active in this effort. Three leading names in the movement were the Rev. Edward Nangle, who established a Protestant colony on Achill Island in western County Mayo; the Rev. Alexander Dallas, who organized the Society for Irish Church Missions to Roman Catholics in 1849; and the Rt. Rev. William Magee, who was named Anglican archbishop of Dublin in 1822. (Kerr, 1994, 206-211) Despite Kingston's courage, prudence and temperance, he achieves full stature in the novel only when he makes a personal commitment to Christ as "my Saviour" in whom he wishes to be "born again" (Walshe, 1865, 251) This unites him with Lina, who is a kindred spirit in her own relief efforts. Lina's rapture and union with Jesus establishes her trust in divine Providence, despite the Famine's ravages. Even her embroidery relief scheme is grounded in a "durable motive," not simply a momentary exercise in compassion. Her benevolence must enlighten Irish peasant children with true religion. (Walshe, 1865, 76) Lina and her father are not immediately threatened by the Famine, but Walshe shows how the catastrophe ineluctably sucks in everyone and everything. The threat of violence, the

potential loss of the estate and the possibility of Kingston's death from fever all come calling at Golden Hills, yet the family escapes, the text suggests, through divine grace. In contrast to the Catholic emphasis on submission to God's will and reliance on his mercy, which, discursively, results in a kind of passivity, the Protestant confidence in divine Providence and personal election tends to fuel resolution and activity. Walshe writes, "'No!' he [Kingston] said aloud, ... 'I must remain here and brave it out. There is no chance in men's affairs: God ordains all, and I believe it is not his will that I should die thus.'" (Walshe, 1865, 158)

Unfortunately, the Irish did not share Kingston's escape. In seeking to explain why the catastrophe occurred, Walshe links Irish ignorance and Irish Catholicism. When Kingston defends a group of Protestants victimized by Catholic bigotry, he declares, "But while I can do anything, the unoffending shall not be oppressed; and if this Irish nation were Protestant, O'Brien, it would be in a very different condition. I only uphold the Scripture-readers by doing them justice; and if tenfold more of the rabble's hatred were to be incurred, I hope that I should still act in accordance with justice." (Walshe, 1865, 74) Kingston's rebuke is directed toward a mob, but his real targets are the Catholic clergy, who under the guise of religion, foment social division:

> 'Prejudice is a polite name for what breaks heads and houses,' remarked Mr. Kingston. 'Poor Meade is most unfairly treated, not so much from ... the people, as by order of their spiritual guides. He would not get a bit to eat in my neighborhood, but that my kitchen is open to him; nobody dare sell to him, who dreads the altar curse.' (Walshe, 1865, 73)

The problem, of course, is that Meade is a "souper," and has thus incurred the contempt of his neighbors for religious, and implicitly political, disloyalty. When a crowd of angry Catholics interfere with the burial of Meade's infant, Philip Orme seizes an assailant and thrashes him. Ironically, the crowd admires Orme for his boldness, even though they despise the souper. The novel connects religion, national identity and land:

> 'Right up against holy Saint Synan's Church, to be berrin' a souper! Ye shan't do it, one foot of ye,' and off the walls came the crowd, collecting threateningly about the grave. ... The O'Ryans' berrin'-ground -- rest their souls! Never! We might expect them -- for honest Catholics as they was -- to walk in ghosts if we let

> a Protestant touch their coffin! No -- we'll give you outside the whole counthry -- any ditch ye like; -- and good enough for ye.' (Walshe, 1865, 143-144)

Such attitudes are rooted in the unenlightened practices of Irish Catholicism in Walshe. Mass-goers "formed a picturesque mass of *chiaro-oscuro,*" a mixture of shadow and light. (Walshe, 1865, 170) Recent converts to Protestantism, "soupers" to the majority, send their youngsters to the Sunday School taught by Orme and Lina, and these children speak Irish, "a weary unknown tongue, distinct in its affinities from any with which she was acquainted." (Walshe, 1865, 174) The Famine provided an opportunity to highlight depressing social conditions and assign blame. In contrast, Protestants, despite poverty and discrimination, display character and enlightenment. The small Protestant community worships in a coarse schoolroom:

> ... the background concealed many miserably clad men and women; the converts were an oppressed race, and their lives were hard. Those who had a mind to leave the Roman Catholic church must be prepared to suffer the loss of all things. It was verily a preferring of the next world to this: it was the Bible purchased with a sacrifice of all the common sweetness of life -- love, friendliness, comforts. (Walshe, 1865, 173)

Given the anti-Catholic Penal Laws, Walshe's narrator engages in unintended irony, though Catholics were not exempt from practicing religious discrimination. The contrast between Catholic darkness and ignorance, and Protestant light and knowledge pervades the novel. When the door opens and the light reveals the Protestant service in progress:

> ... the surge of the sea, breaking on the pebbles of the strand a few yards away, sounded solemnly in the pauses of each prayer ... Mr. Brooke [the kindly Church of Ireland minister] preached shortly and simply -- altogether of Christ and his work for the sinner, and of his sufficiency as a stay in the trials of this troublesome world. The poor hearers needed some cordial note for the week of persecution past, and the week of persecution to come: they had no force of position, nor any great strength of will, to bear up against the many daily insults offered them. The looking continually unto their Master, Christ, must be their only comforter ... . (Walshe, 1865, 173)

Brooke ends by addressing the congregation in Irish -- an ironic shift, because Catholic officials had promoted the learning of English as a way to greater political, economic and religious security since emancipation and the introduction of national schools. (Lyons,

1973, 88-89) (Inglis, 1998, 137) Walshe wants her readers to see the rector sharing the lot of the people. William Kingston observes the rector and his wife dining on "a mess of turnips and Indian meal, with a little bread!" all "for the sake ... such people -- those who hated and persecuted him while ever they had the power." (Walshe, 1865, 237) That Catholic and dissenting neighbors paid tithes to the Church of Ireland is omitted.

Protestant confidence in divine Providence, their secure social position and, perhaps, the somewhat lighter Famine burden, enabled them to assert the catastrophe's "beneficial" consequences. Nationalist and Catholic writers generally avoid such assertions -- which may have seemed obscene to their readers and which have virtually no discursive or rhetorical utility for their position. This Protestant emphasis on divine will extends even to Lina's attitude toward her father's illness. Having made an "idol" of him, Kingston was shattered so that her trust would be placed in God, not in a man. (Walshe, 1865, 255) Lina understands his fever and recovery in terms of Psalm 103, which speaks of the brevity and "dust" of human life. Safe at Golden Hills, Kingston views the Famine philosophically:

> 'It seems to me,' said Mr. Kingston, one evening when the whole family were walking in the light of the sunset, ... facing the sea, 'that we owe something to the dark years, even though it brought us suffering. Looking into my own heart, I can see the good worked by what appeared an evil time. Perhaps each of you could say likewise?' (Walshe, 1865, 272)

Walshe's novel is one of moral improvement; Lina, Alick, Frank, Philip Orme, and Kingston all develop spiritually. Likewise, Ireland, in this construction, has weathered the Famine and is morally better. Improvement cost much, which Walshe acknowledges:

> Five years did the national convulsion last. God's sore judgement 'had been in the earth, to cut off from it man and beast.' The eight millions of Ireland had fallen in number by two and a half million, who had died of the famine or emigrated. Truly the omnipotence of Jehovah is best seen in his puniest instruments. Nine millions of money had been spent in relieving the Irish; yet twenty-one thousand men, women and children, died of hunger during those famine years! (Walshe, 1865, 266)

Her citation, derived from the 1851 census, when the first post-Famine count occurred, is peculiar. It stands in sharp contrast to Canon John O'Rourke's tally. He estimates the

government provided grants of only £4.7 million, slightly more than half what Walshe claims. The rest was charged. The death toll from starvation and disease, O'Rourke estimates from the same census, stood in excess of 1 million. (O'Rourke, 260, 252)

***Brew links Catholic aristocracy, resurgence.*** Brew's *Castle Cloyne* essentially describes the fall and rise of Catholic aristocrats and explores the triumph of the Roman Catholic Church. The implied message is clear: if Ireland is to be free, it must rely on its natural leaders, native Irish Catholic gentry and churchmen. The Dillons, despite their lack of financial skills, have an essential ingredient for future leadership: loyalty. Both to tenant and church, the Dillons have been faithful, even sacrificial. Brew writes:

> ... for as they remained faithful to the creed of their fathers they had to pay the penalty for their fidelity that was invariably exacted in Ireland. When the old faith went down, the prestige of those who adhered to it went down with it. They lived henceforth under a cloud that no ray of sunshine was ever allowed to pierce. The were frowned upon by the ruling powers, excluded from every office of trust and emolument, and treated in the land of their birth as an outcast and alien race. (Brew, 1884, 122)

While the legal position of the Catholic Church in Ireland gradually improved through late 18th century until Catholic Emancipation in 1829, the social position lagged and the majority lived under various impediments traceable to the religious gulf between native Irish and Ascendancy overlord. Brew takes care that Hyacinth Dillon should find a Catholic to marry, one from an equally old, recusant family in England. Sydney Dacre comes from a Catholic family in Northumberland in northern England. Moreover, it is to the Catholic societies of France and Italy that young Dillon goes to recover after his return from America. (Brew, 1884, III-276-277) An important part of Catholic nationalist discourse is to remind Irish Catholics that they were not simply an oppressed minority in a Protestant society, but part of a worldwide community of faith.

As the Famine overtook Ireland, the religious response became contentious, particularly due to the issue of "souperism." If religious loyalty was esteemed by Catholics, Protestants celebrated the enlightenment when one shook off superstition and Rome. Some Protestant relief organizations required religious indoctrination, others sought outright conversion. (Kerr, 1994, 213-214) For those Catholics who "took the

soup," even in dire circumstances, their neighbors had nothing but disgust, while for the perpetrators only scorn. Catholics and Protestants wanted to demonstrate that *their* church had provided the most effective and compassionate relief to the suffering. Moreover, the Famine itself was seen by some writers as a divine judgment, a providential winnowing. For some unionists, such as Walshe, improvement in social and economic conditions would lead to agricultural efficiency and political harmony. For other unionists, it was a divine punishment for tolerating Catholics and their agrarian violence. On the nationalist side, the Famine, if providential in any way, was a divine chastisement for Irish acceptance of oppression. Morash shows how Evangelical millenarianism, which spoke of divine chastisement for national sin, often used by unionists, could be turned on its head by nationalists. Which "nation" was at fault? Was there not one nation, the United Kingdom? What precisely was the sin? Even such figures as the Anglican Archbishop Whateley of Dublin, and himself a political economist, recognized this potential, when he warned against employing the "national sin" argument in his *Address to the Clergy and Other Members of the Established Church on the Use and Abuse of the Present Occasion for the Exercise of Beneficence* in 1847. (Morash, 1995, 102-105) It is important to stress, however, that most religiously-inspired relief was undertaken by persons of good will on both sides of the Atlantic who risked their own lives by assisting the starving, the diseased and the homeless. In addition to religious polemics regarding the Famine, personal and communal response must be considered. If the Famine occasioned a crisis in agency, religion helped provide the motivation and psycho-spiritual resources to cope and react.

The Catholic nationalist perspective provides two conflicting approaches to religion's role in the Famine. On one level, the Catholic teaching on submission to divine will and the endurance of suffering with the crucified Christ argues for a degree of passivity. One prays and relies on God's providence. Death is inevitable, and the best one can do is to prepare well for it. On another level, however, those producing Famine texts directed to largely Catholic audiences recognized the importance of portraying the clergy in a positive and active light. Priests, after all, were often leaders on many social levels in

Irish communities well into the 20th century. If the "P.P.," the parish priest, or pastor, did not take charge, the village risked collapse. Lay leadership, with one major exception, in the Catholic community did not emerge in Ireland until the second half of the 20th century. That exception is Daniel O'Connell (1775-1847). O'Connell, a County Kerry landowner, was elected to the British Parliament in 1832 from Clare, and served until his death in Black '47. Having spearheaded Catholic Emancipation in 1829, which permitted Catholics to run for Parliament, he next turned to repeal of the Union and restoration of an Irish Parliament -- under the British sovereign. A master of political rhetoric and mass mobilization through his "monster meetings" on behalf of Repeal, O'Connell remains a central figure in Irish political history, but his calls for comprehensive Famine relief schemes went unheeded. (Nowlan, 1994, 131-155) O'Connell, more than any other lay figure, appears in virtually every Famine literary text. Apart from O'Connell, however, at least two social reasons can be found for the excessive clericalism in Famine texts, especially during Phase II. First, the Catholic hierarchy tended to prefer accommodation with the British government, and constitutional reform leading to Home Rule. This helped split nationalists. Those who favored radical, violent means to achieve independence could not count on official church favor, only quiet support from individual priests. Second, extreme nationalists were republicans, and the Catholic Church's experience on the Continent with political liberals had been largely negative. The French Revolution of 1789, followed by the equally violent Bonapartist reaction, frightened Catholic leaders, and the upheavals of 1848 deepened their fears. Moreover, many of the most articulate leaders in the Rising of 1798 (Theobald Wolfe Tone, Robert Emmet and Henry Joy McCracken), in Young Ireland (Davis and Mitchel) and in Home Rule (Butt and Parnell) had been Protestants.

*Castle Cloyne* portrays suffering as endurable because of religious faith:

> And with all this acute suffering there was, strange to say, a profound apathy, a weary listlessness that made no complaint, no outcry, no struggle for life. With some it was a sort of dogged endurance, with others it was an utter carelessness of what might happen, and an indifference to life, which was hardly surprising, considering what little joy life had ever had for them, and what a fearful tragedy it had become. But with others -- and these were by far the greatest number -- it was

> the most sublime patience, which had its root in that religion which was all that was left to them, and to which they clung with unswerving and passionate devotion. Never in all their suffering did the Irish people during the Famine time lose their faith in God; they never despaired of His mercy and firmly believed that in another world -- that mysterious world beyond the grave! – they would be amply and gloriously compensated for all the trials and afflictions they had so patiently borne in the days of their terrible probation. (Brew, 1884, II-259-260)

Brew draws her description from the biblical models of Christ in the Garden and on the Cross and of the Virgin Mary at Calvary -- intense suffering transfigured, somehow, into glory if it is endured in reliance on God's ultimate goodness. Such piety, of course, is diametrically opposed to the republican rhetoric of figures such as Mitchel -- who see in the Famine the rallying cry for a repudiation of British rule. For the Catholic Church, however, texts with the message that popular patience is divinely rewarded, even in the midst of Famine, had political implications throughout the 1853-1910 period. Brew's Fr. John O'Rafferty channels his energy into strengthening the church. This kind and loving pastor assumes half the financial burden for educating Oonagh's adopted son, provides a home for the dispossessed Dillons and spends himself in fighting the effects of Famine. (Brew, 1884, III-98) He administers the sacraments, prays with the sick and dying, organizes relief efforts, buries the dead and helps secure the future by counseling young Hyacinth Dillon. He is the organizing principle of survival, as the church sought to be.

Oonagh's fervent desire to see Johnny ordained reflects the popular esteem, especially among Irish mothers, in which Irish priests were held. Vocations to the priesthood and religious life rose steadily during the post-Famine period. Increased centralization under Cardinal Cullen strengthened the Church. Influence in education and social services increased dramatically, and the number of priests went from one per 3,000 in 1840 to one per 2,000 in 1850 (when Famine-related death and emigration had slashed the population) to one per 1,250 in 1870. (O'Dwyer, 1995, 222, 232) For Oonagh, her dedication to Johnny combines sublimated maternal instincts, residual love for the faithless Shawn Sugagh, devotion to her cousin and a manifestation of her Catholic faith. Her commitment to the dumb cake prophecy stems less from belief in than desire for its promises:

> And then as she looked again at the altar, she remembered her dream! There was the fair-haired, young priest standing on the altar, and celebrating [his first] Mass, exactly as he had appeared to her on that past All-Hallow's Eve, after she had joined in the Dumb Cake with the two other girls. *Their* dreams had been fulfilled long ago, and lo! so now was her own! (Brew, 1884, III-294)

The dream's fulfillment coincides nicely with what many Catholic nationalists wanted for their clergy: equality with their Protestant rivals in education and cultural refinement, a dominant position in the community and some measure of sanctity and piety. (Inglis, 1998, 121; Kerr, 1994, 192) Moreover, the nationalist desire to show a native Irish victory over the Famine was strong. The Dillon and MacDermott families are vindicated in the end:

> There was her boy standing on it [steps of the altar], and 'wearin' the robes,' at last! He had been born in the direst poverty, his parents had both died on the same day, in the last extremity of want and disease that humanity could suffer, and no other fate remained to the only child they had left behind, than cold shelter in the workhouse of his youth, and in his manhood to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. But she had rescued the weak, delicate child from so hard a fate; made a gentleman of him, and given to the Church a good and pious minister. And then again she bowed her head and gave thanks to Him who had made her the humble instrument in doing His own work. (Brew, 1884, III-293-294)

It is at this moment of victory that Oonagh dies; she has received all she desired in one supreme moment of triumph. Ironically, Oonagh dies from the effects on her heart of rheumatic fever, contracted during the Famine -- and her death occurs just as Fr. Malloy is singing the *Dies irae,* a funeral lamentation that seems strange at a First Mass, yet which speaks directly of the ultimate victory of God, his coming judgement and his saving acts. (Brew, 1884, III-295) The novel ends as the new priest "fell on his knees, and kissed the dead hand. 'Oh, mother! More than mother!' he exclaimed, in a burst of sorrow. 'You have left me just when I could have helped to make you happy. The great loss is mine but the great gain is all your own!'" (Brew, 1884, III-297) The principle of patient endurance is vindicated in Oonagh's self-sacrificing love, the fulfillment of her dream and the promise of heavenly reward -- and if that principle implies, socio-politically, Catholic domination in Ireland, so much the better, according to much

nationalist discourse.

**4. Gender: Problems of essentialism, liberation**

Three points can be made about gender construction in Phase II Famine texts. First, the Victorian Age dominated the 19th century, and gender was accepted as naturally given. Second, the Famine introduced severe dislocations in Irish social relationships. And, third, many Famine literary texts experiment and manipulate gender performance, even if, in the end, identities and relationships return to the so-called "natural" or patriarchal order. Gender not only marks human identity; it helps constitute it. Under circumstances such as the Famine, this was a constitutive element and dynamic confused by starvation, disease, eviction, homelessness, workhouse confinement and emigration. Men's mortality rates were higher than women's, thus depriving many families of the conventional division of labor and social roles. (Kelleher, 1997, 9) Women were forced not only to prepare meals with next to nothing, but compete and forage for supplies. Increasing numbers of families were separated by partial emigration, often the father or elder brothers leaving Ireland for Britain, Canada or the United States, then sending back funds for others. During the most brutal years of the Famine, in some of the hardest hit areas, men simply abandoned their families, women killed their children and traditional gender roles collapsed. Victorian Famine writers do not confront the most disturbing elements of these social conditions, but they do portray women, and men, in divergent ways. The quintessential Famine victim is the starving mother, children at her breast, whose plight may be likened to that of Mother Ireland or Kathleen ni Houlihan. (Kelleher, 1997, 10) Walshe's *Golden Hills* and Brew's *Castle Cloyne* take some tentative steps in constructing gender with ambiguity.

***Walshe's virtuous Victorians.*** Gender in Walshe's *Golden Hills* is closely related to virtue and moral improvement. Those who confront the Famine most effectively are those who *seem* to perform their gender roles and identities in a straightforward manner. For example, Kingston exhibits all the traditional masculine traits: bravery, strength, conviction and resolve. He supports only sensible relief plans, and he condemns corruption in foolish public works. His daughter, Lina, is a proper young Victorian lady.

When the rector's wife speaks about "rules" in the classroom to Lina, she could just as well be speaking either of Ascendancy/peasant or gender relations. "'You must have rules and exact obedience to them firmly [said Mrs. Brooke]. Everybody is the better for being under laws which cannot be altered. Now, one essential rule should be strict cleanliness in the work.'" (Walshe, 1865, 98) Women who cope with the Famine effectively push beyond the boundaries of traditional femininity.

Lina's mother, Mrs. Kingston, is mistress of Golden Hills, yet she has virtually no impact on the narrative, confined to the shadows by her gender role. Lina, conversely, opens a school, begins a relief scheme, confronts Ribbonmen, administers relief to fever victims and assists her father in estate administration. Lina chafes at gender restrictions, unlike her sister, who uses conventional languid femininity to win a husband and a life of ease. For Lina, purpose and resolve are essential to morality, and any conception of gender that inhibits them has no legitimate claim:

> After a month's government of her own hours, she found vacuity aching beneath the pretty indulgences of amusing books, and pretty useless works; she longed for a tangible pursuit, for something which should be means to a worthy end. A little she was inclined to envy the stronger sex for their fixity of employment and reality of purpose: when her father would allow she wrought hard at transcribing letters, checking accounts, or other office work, simply because she delighted in usefulness. The idea of helping ... was pleasant. (Walshe, 1865, 94)

One of Lina's heroines is a stalwart Englishwoman, Miss Simpson, an older, unmarried woman who has organized an embroidery scheme to assist the Irish. Walshe positions the Englishwoman -- single and independent -- as wiser than any Irishwoman.

Two peasant women share transgressive characteristics, Crazy Sally and Mrs. Riley. Crazy Sally, a beggar who wears three beribboned bonnets stacked atop each other, warns Kingston of Riband plots. She is grateful for the welcome she has received at Golden Hills. Sally breaks social boundaries of every kind, not simply gender barriers, in her adventures. Because she is "crazy," and because the novel is from the Ascendancy point of view, her informing is not seen as treachery but loyalty. Mrs. Riley, mother of Tom Riley and mother-in-law of Carmody, warns Kingston of another assassination plot by Scanlon and her son. Her gratitude to Kingston for his kindness occasions the old

woman to journey across bog, field, mountain, river and bay. Insanity, age and comic portrayal already put these women on the margins of society, and thus narratively contain their gender transgressions. Courage, of course, does not necessarily require gender transgression; it can be manifested by gender performance. Walshe provides a largely essentialist vision of her peasants. Maternal self-sacrifice, for example, is seen as instinctive -- which, of course, limits the moral agency of peasants. If instinct dominates their behavior, their self-sacrifice must somehow be of a lower order than Ascendancy *noblesse oblige.* In any case, Walshe writes:

> Frank felt cold as he looked on the hollow eyes and claw-like fingers of the wretched mother, and the pinched, oldened features of the hapless child, whose life had yielded to the slow torments of hunger.
>
> 'The crathur! Her arm was about him to the last' said a bystander. 'I'll be bound it's more of him than of hersel' she was thinkin', even in the agony -- poor weenoch, his little hand is round her finger.' (Walshe, 1865, 203)

Walshe recognizes occasional Irish educability. Lina's school has its star pupil, Mary Burke, who embraces the English virtues of thrift and prudence of her teacher.

***Brew's Oonagh as Kathleen ni Houlihan.*** The peasant heroine of *Castle Cloyne*, Oonagh MacDermott, outshines every male character in the traditionally "masculine" attribute of independence and self-reliance. From the onset, she occupies a position superior to every peasant woman in the district and most men. She is due to inherit her father's farm at Ballycross. Much sought after as a bride, her legacy will enrich her future husband -- a point not lost on the shiftless Shawn Sugagh Malloy. Despite her efforts, she cannot escape her father's debts and successive crop failures. The moment Oonagh sells her rights to the leasehold, her value to suitors plummets. For nationalist readers, however, Oonagh emerges as precisely the kind of Irish woman required to achieve freedom and independence. Accompanied by her faithful dog, Bran, Oonagh enters into hard, physical service to earn enough to repay family debts:

> This feeling of independence was the first ray of comfort that shone on her since her father's death, for nothing sweetens life more than the consciousness of independence, no matter how humble or lowly it may be. It lightens the hardest labour, and gives sweet savour to the coarsest food. The unbearable load of debt

> that had so long weighed her down had been removed, and she could walk erect in the face of day. (Brew, 1884, II-98)

As Famine circumstances worsen, Oonagh risks working as an itinerant peddler. Brew's Oonagh is confident, independent and free, not defenseless, rootless and indigent. But Oonagh's status would be socially difficult, if not untenable, without child and Church.

Oonagh's maternal instincts and self-sacrificing behavior restore her to a conventional understanding of women. Having discovered Johnny Malloy's perilous situation:

> She bent once more over the child, kissed its dewy lips with a solemn tenderness, and raising her eyes to Heaven, she thanked God for the blessing He had sent her, and resolved ... that she would be faithful to the trust He had reposed in her, and to the voluntary promise she had made to the dead. The child of John and Susie should be henceforth hers, to love it, to toil for it, to garner her whole heart in it. (Brew, 1884, II-308)

Little Johnny offers Oonagh affection, and it is this incipient love that enables Oonagh to accept the difficulties she anticipates. "And when Oonagh felt the child's soft little arms round her neck, and his head laid to rest on her bosom, she felt herself more than repaid for her self-denial, and happier than she ever thought she could be." (Brew, 1884, II-324) Johnny's embrace echoes the one his mother Susie gives to Oonagh just before her death, and Oonagh's own embrace of Shawn's body after his death -- a Piéta-like posture, reminiscent of the Virgin Mary cradling the dead Christ. Narratively, this is not just sentimental overkill. It signals the vow that Oonagh will make. She resolves never to marry but to care for the child, who is destined for the Church. (The question of a divine call and Johnny's free response seems assumed.) This plot structure invests Oonagh with a Marian role: she will provide a priest for her people. In important ways, Oonagh resembles Kathleen ni Houlihan/Hibernia. She is strong, merciful, independent, passionate, sacrificial -- and self-controlled. Brew, however, switches narrative strategies; Oonagh will give Ireland a priest, not a patriot-martyr. In Brew's socio-political context, a priest was more valuable than a dubious patriot.

Closely related to Oonagh's vow to raise Johnny and give him to the Church is her

own vow never to marry. Having been first attracted to Johnny's father, Shawn Sugagh, despite warnings, Oonagh lets herself be "hand-fasted" to him. This peasant custom amounts to a formal engagement, and even though Malloy repudiates Oonagh after she loses her inheritance, she regards the contract as binding. This is less legalism than ill-considered love, as her grief in finding Malloy's dead body suggests. When Oonagh begins the keen, it is the lament for lost love. So intense is Oonagh's feeling that she repudiates other attractive offers. Faithful to her memories and vow, Oonagh is a celibate laywoman, and thus confounds gender relations and expectations.

Contrary to Oonagh's freedom in gender behavior is Sally's virtual servitude. Sally is a neighbor to the Malloys and provided assistance during their illness, despite her husband's orders. Such orders were common during Famine times. Fear of fever, typhus, bloody flux and other diseases was rife, and infection was not well understood. The sick were isolated and approached with great care. Nonetheless, Sally is a woman dominated by her husband's needs, desires and demands. However, she reveals the complexity in gender performance by asserting her own will and avoiding an open confrontation:

> 'I would [go to assist] if I had my own will, an' no one to think ov barrin' myself. But this man ov mine is terribly in dhread ov the faver, for a good many ov his own people died ov it, an' he swore that if I went next or nigh them, he wouldn't let me back agin into the house among the children an' himself. But when he goes off to his work airly in the mornin', and is fast asleep at night, I make a run over to their place, an' bring a jug of milk wid me, for they have great thirst on 'em. But I couldn't stay long then, though indeed I'd like to do it, for my husband is a very conthrary man in himself, an' can't put up wid anywan goin' agin him at all.' (Brew, 1884, II-274)

Sally, in sum, "... appeared a good-hearted creature, but in mortal terror of her lord and master, who evidently ruled his family with no very gentle hand." (Brew, 1884, II-275) If Oonagh signals possibilities in alternative gender constructions, Sally represents a stifling patriarchy.

Women are not the only ones whose gender expectations fluctuate in Famine texts. Brew's men also experience a measure of gender shift in *Castle Cloyne*. Pat Flanagan, whose efforts to woo Oonagh -- he proposes twice -- go nowhere, attaches

himself to his once and future landlord, Hyacinth Dillon. Pat accompanies him to America, works with him in the gold fields, defends him against thieves and accompanies him to England and the Continent. So devoted is Pat, who skates perilously close to the "stage Irishman," a mixture of lovable rogue and comic buffoon, that he insists on joining Hyacinth on his honeymoon. Likewise, Hyacinth becomes attached to Pat and grows to depend upon him. Brought up by his father to be adventursome, self-reliant and athletic, all conventionally masculine traits, Hyacinth is "in physique a perfect Hercules, who had been taught courage and endurance by the free, hardy, out-of-door life that he had led from his very birth." (Brew, 1884, III-131) He finds that he has nothing in common with "all the refuse of humanity in the world" he encounters in the American West. (Brew, 1884, III-128-129) Surprisingly, however, Hyacinth meets and befriends an Englishman named Brown, who is frail, slight, with an effeminate beauty of face and refined manners. Dillon and Flanagan decide to rescue Brown, now ill, from Hiram T. Jefferson, his American partner, and invite him into their tent to recuperate. (Brew, 1884, III-138-139) "It was touching to see how naturally the two great bearded men [Pat and Hyacinth] took to the role of nursing, and how soon they learned to become expert in their new task. They were patient and tender with him, and thought nothing was a trouble that helped give him ease, or soothe his pain." (Brew, 1884, III-140) Eventually Brown repays their trust, warning them of his old partner's attempt to steal their gold. In a melee, Brown is shot and killed. Before he dies, he reveals he is Harry Dacre, disinherited nephew of Sir Ralph Dacre, that he has a sister, Sydney, a governess in London in the house of a retired soap-boiler, and that he has a message for her -- but succumbs before giving it. (Brew, 1884, III-156) Harry is described as a "poor, weak, hysterical creature," a gendered view of women out of control. (Brew, 1884, 145) Harry's death-bed scene is engaging. He reveals his love for Pat and Hyacinth, while Hyacinth expresses his own feeling:

> 'Hush!' said Dillon in a solemn voice, while he raised a warning finger. A look of unspeakable softness and tenderness came over his face, making it for the moment almost woman-like. Then, stooping down, he kissed the forehead of the dead boy, as his own mother might have kissed it, and closed the eyes with reverent and gentle hand. Then he started up, and as he looked at Jefferson, every trace of softness and pity died out of his face. (Brew, 1884, III-179)

Dillon returns to conventional masculinity, just as Oonagh is tamed by surrogate maternity and ecclesial service. While Brew offers no gratuitous homoeroticism, the relations of Pat, Hyacinth and Harry are unusual, showing masculinity in loyalty, service and compassion.

**5. Agency: Amid catastrophe, the power of choice and action**

Famine and the concept of agency seem unlikely bedfellows. Starvation, disease, eviction and emigration all denied power to Famine victims, whose ability to influence their environment withered with the potato stalks in their fields. Yet literature depends heavily upon narrative structures that show characters exhibiting agency amid conflict. Against their own weaknesses, their oppressors or their environment, characters struggle and triumph. Phase II Famine texts present heroic characters, and they frame the Famine as a crucible in which nationalists and unionists can learn valuable lessons.

***Divine election at Walshe's Golden Hills.*** Evangelical religious fervor, as well as Ascendancy confidence in social superiority and political leadership, fuels agency in Walshe's *Golden Hills.* Because Kingston and his family belong to the elect, they expect to be preserved in the midst of the Famine. Such confidence likewise imposes a moral responsibility to assist victims. Fundamental to this understanding is personal commitment to Christ, manifested in Kingston and Lina. Kingston, as landowner and agent, represents a detested class. Although Walshe develops no reason for personal hostility toward him, his support of law and order invariably puts him in mortal danger. That he remains resolute Walshe attributes to moral rectitude, although the British military and RIC were always available for support. One of the ironies in Famine history is the fact that so many of the troops and police who enforced evictions came from the Catholic majority. (Lyons, 1973, 76; Lowe, 1997, 36) Landlords and agents held effective life-and-death power over cottiers. Kingston is depicted as kindly and just -- but his charity never clouds his socio-economic judgement. When he hears a cry from a lonely, wretched hut, he investigates and discovers a gaunt, distraught man surrounded by his children, whose silent stares were arresting, whose "weeping would have been less

affecting than this still suffering":

> 'The mother died last week, of the hunger an' the faver together. I was workin' at the road till then, but some days I could only earn three pence, for want of the strength. Now lave the water there anear me, good Christian people, an' shut the door tight when ye go out, *for I'm afeard of the dogs!*' (Walshe, 1865, 240)

Crazy Sally, with Kingston, recognizes him as Pat Mangan, once the generous holder of a "good farm on Slievemore," who celebrated "grand christenins" with "barrows of praties an' tubs of new milk, an' oul Maurice the piper." (Walshe, 1865, 245-246) Sally's instant economic assessment is no less telling than Kingston's, only more obvious. Mangan is a victim of a system in which he is complicit through the folly of excessive generosity. "'Strange it is,' he [Kingston] 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 stone for them by generations of indolence and animalism.'" (Walshe, 1865, 249) The difference between this view and the nationalist construction, which targets landlordism and colonialism, is striking. The Ascendancy exercised responsible agency, according to Walshe, and the peasantry eviscerated its capacity to act through laziness and stupidity. From an evangelical perspective, only eternity could resolve the crisis. When William suggests that "an early and certain heaven" may be best for peasants, Kingston remarks that "all we hope for is the same heaven." (Walshe, 1865, 250)

Inasmuch as both Catholic and Protestant clerics undertaking Famine relief suffered, Kingston's perspective seems a little theologically smug. Nonetheless, Kingston attempts to serve his benighted neighbors, but he does so through the institutional means of the local Relief Committee, where he was "daily ... dispensing food to the utmost of his ability, patient amid the despairing beggars that thronged round him for the means of life; circumscribing his family expenses in every possible way, that he might give the larger sums." (Walshe, 1865, 203)

When Lina opens her school, despite the difficulties, she knows it is God's will. Like her father, she sees her agency in religious terms, which Walshe's publishers and

readership share. Walshe writes of "stupidity and awkwardness from the learners," "carelessness," "invincible idleness" and "self-conceit" "... 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." (Walshe, 1865, 93) This sense of election coincides with Lina's own activism: assistance to her father, curiosity and confrontation with Ribbonmen. (Walshe, 1865, 94-100)

Unlike Kingston and his family, for whom agency is a central feature of life, Walshe's peasants manifest little or no capacity for action. Peasant agency, however, is nearly invisible from the unionist perspective. Peasant futility seems pathetically encapsulated when the charming little Harry Brennan is swept out to sea while his mother forages on shore. (Walshe, 1865, 209) The irony, discursively, is that a nationalist might rewrite the incident to highlight peasant determination, struggle and creativity. But Walshe's perspective is unionist. Her narrator declares:

> In his simple half-savage existence, [the peasant] ... felt neither the need nor the desire of it. If he were a farm labourer, his wage was a bit of ground for potato planting. If rent had to be paid, the pig was his bank-bill. Preference and frugality were terms the meaning of which were to him utterly unknown. He lived almost without the ordinary forms of barter. He was ignorant of the value of labour, or of time, or of money. ...
>
> I speak concerning the lowest of the people -- the great operative substratum of society in Ireland. The con-acre system -- that by which a tenant sublets a small portion of his holding for yearly crops, as payment to his labourers -- was much to blame for this disastrous feature ... . Happily it is now almost extinct. (Walshe, 1865, 202-203)

When Kingston returns from his recovery in England in May of 1847, the public works scheme has collapsed, the crops have failed again, emigration is increasing and more than 2 million Irish are receiving soup-kitchen relief. For the peasants, agency is all but removed. They are reduced to "famishing crowds" with "emaciated greenish countenances and sepulchral voices." (Walshe, 1865, 264) Only emigration offered a chance to survive.. "All who could do so, fled from the doomed land." (Walshe, 1865,

264) In contrast, the Ascendancy members, particularly in its middle class guise, plan to stay and profit from the situation. Philip Orme sees potential for

> '... all these storms are but heralds of clear weather for Ireland. Emigration is vastly increased. ... Poor Ireland! she has only human exports; and unless a trip across the salt water changes the character of these exports, makes the improvident thrifty, and the idle industrious, they will only have left misery here to find it there.' (Walshe, 1865, 262)

Again, the causes of the Famine are laid at the feet of victims, whose own efforts are ignored. At Kingston's suggestion, Orme declares, "'I hope to invest money in Irish land,' Philip observed quietly; 'for I have noticed that the lower a spring is pressed, the higher is its rebound: and shall the spirit of a nation be less elastic?'" (Walsh, 1865, 262) In Orme's view, with the majority emigrating and agency in the hands of the "new" bourgeois Ascendancy -- middle-class Protestant landowners, farmers and merchants taking over from the previous generation's aristocrats -- the "nation" looks remarkably like himself. For Kingston and Orme, the Famine is indeed a narrative of progress for its survivors. Walshe writes, "For the first time, he [the Irish peasant] must learn to be careful and saving: affection taught him the lesson. This 'immeasurably loving people,' as John Wesley styled the Irish, were forced to be provident, by what was to them the mightiest suffering -- separation of family ties." (Walshe, 1865, 264) Agency lies with

> ... those who went away, poor fellows, [who] toiled untiringly till they had gathered, gradually, around a new hearth in the strange land, all the dear ones of their old Irish homes. ... and who sent back ... [in 1846 alone a sum] estimated by a leading banker in Dublin at one hundred and twenty five thousand pounds. Poor Pat was more hard-working and self-denying than people gave him credit for being. (Walsh, 1865, 265)

***Parallel actions, social divide at Brew's Castle Cloyne.*** Brew's *Castle Cloyne* presents two characters whose capacity to be effective agents provides the novel's plot dynamics. Oonagh can rely only on her native intelligence, ambition and goal. As a servant and pedlar, her attachment to Johnny Malloy is critical. The orphan imbues her with a life-changing goal and interpretive key, which unlocks the "dumb cake" mystery. Brew writes of Oonagh's attitude toward the orphan, "She had something now for which

to live and work, something to love, something that would be her very own." (Brew, 1884, II-309) The child's priestly destiny is, in fact, the adoptive mother's. Johnny's ordination, however, is not simply a distant goal. It is the context and meaning for all of Oonagh's work and sacrifice. Even Oonagh's charity toward other Famine victims is conditioned by her overriding goal. Judy -- the third of the girls involved in the cake ritual -- and her son both die, and Oonagh takes charge of her distraught husband, "Mad Dick" Considine. She urges emigration, writes for him and gives him £2 from her scant resources:

> 'She [Judy] is gone, *foreer*! but sure she's wid God and His blessed Mother. It was His holy will to take her, an' we can't go agin that. You must put her out ov your mind, an' think ov her only in your prayers, for you have yourself to think ov now, an' to thry to get well an' strong agin. An' now, what do you say to this plan ov mine? 'Tis the best that I could think ov. The couple ov pound is yours, an' heartily welcome. I won't deny that I have it, but what I have I can hardly call my own. I have a delicate little boy dipindin' on me, and what I have is for him, an' not myself at all.' (Brew, 1884, III-35)

When Dick establishes himself in America, he sends £10 for a tombstone for his wife and son, as well as money for Oonagh and Johnny. His own capacity to act has grown from Oonagh's assistance. In this, Brew reflects the reality of Famine emigrants, who sent hundreds of thousands of pounds to Ireland for the emigration or relief of family and friends. Such funds remitted to family members in Ireland totaled nearly £3 million from 1848-1851 alone. Government and landlord support amounted to only a fraction of the cost, perhaps 5 percent. (Kinealy, 1994, 304)

If Oonagh represents agency among peasants, the Dillons, especially Hyacinth, show agency among the residual Catholic aristocracy. For Dominic, despite his financial miseries, agency is found in efforts to elude arrest for debt by ingeniously locking up his estate and delegating management to his daughter, Grace. A Parliamentary seat would give him immunity from prosecution, and he gradually secures it. Still another aspect of Dominic's agency is ancestral pride and faith, which goad him to eventual victory:

> When money was brought into play, the good blood, and the popularity were nowhere, and when the election resulted in his discomfiture, Mr. Dillon returned to his home, a sadder if not wiser man. His estate had been burdened with

> additional debt, and he had the mortification of knowing that he was beaten on his own ground ..., by a man whose father had been an English soap-boiler, and whose grandfather -- if he ever had a grandfather -- had never even been *heard of in* Castle Cloyne! (Brew, 1884, 135)

For her part, Grace, though frail and sickly, manifests a capacity to act in less flamboyant ways: a penny for youngsters bringing her flowers, care for Terry MacNamara, a cousin and a "second father," found in a squalid poorhouse, and payment for a proper funeral for him. Grace's agency is tied to position and wealth, which most Famine victims lacked.

For Hyacinth, the loss of the family estate, the death of his father and the perilous state of his sister's health are the motivations to change the family's circumstances. He will prospect for gold in California. Unlike the Protestant ethos of Walshe's novel, where the Kingstons risk nothing but rely on prudence and safe investments, the Catholic aristocracy must flirt with failure. Hyacinth's desire to return to Ireland becomes a passion, one other emigrants might recall:

> It was with feelings of the utmost joy and satisfaction, that both [Pat and Hyacinth] bid adieu to that auriferous Western land to which they had come poor, and left rich beyond all that they could have imagined in their wildest dreams. ... Dillon had borne it all well and patiently, as long as there was no remedy, but from the hour in which he had come upon the gold vein, his anxiety to get out of the country became a perfect passion, concentrating all his thoughts, his energies, and feelings, into one groove, ..., with only one exception [Harry Dacre]. (Brew, 1884, III-179)

Finally, agency also has authorial and audience dimensions for Brew. Chronicling the Famine and its victims physically and psychically challenges a writer, who can never master the subject. Readers, consequently, only obtain a partial view. By acknowledging the enormity of the Famine, Brew leaves room for the event to interrogate its interpreters:

> Now both reader and author can draw breath freely, for we have come to the end of the Famine. It is not an easy task to paint a feeble picture of that terrible time ... . Only the pen of Dante could describe it; only the brush of Rembrandt, in its darkest and most lurid colours, could portray it! (Brew, 1884, III-107-108)

Her Dante reference is instructive, for the Famine was a kind of Hell.

## CONCLUSION: SAME MATERIAL, DIFFERENT DISCURSIVE ENDS

Phase II (1853-1910) Famine texts from Walshe, who wrote 20 years after the Famine's outbreak and took a unionist perspective, to Brew, who wrote 20 years after Walshe and embraced a nationalist point of view, to those writing at the dawn of independence, appropriate Ireland's most disruptive event for competing political and social purposes. The Famine was constructed from essentially the same materials -- the arrival of the blight, its impact on peasants, the relationship between tenant and landlord, the role of agents, the actions of police and military, the impact of government, the strategies of survival, relief and consolation and death and emigration -- but it assumed very different shapes as writers exploited the conventions and possibilities of their genre, manipulated time and space and responded to dominant discourses of unionism and nationalism. The next period, 1911-1950, Phase III, will offer a starkly different picture, when the Famine, if not forgotten, was avoided.

## CHAPTER III

# *Empty Swollen Belly: Texts 1911-1950*

During the independence and national consolidation period, from 1911 to 1950, Ireland experienced a dramatic decline in the production of Famine texts. This decline is directly related to the communicational agenda of the historical players and forces that saw the last gasp of Home Rule, the violent but ill-fated Easter Rising of 1916, the subsequent War of Independence, partition, civil war, consolidation of the state, two world wars and a global depression. After rich production in Phase II, the fall-off in Famine texts is surprising. The Famine remained within the memory of the older generation and its social dislocation was still being felt. High emigration continued. Marriages were delayed. Economic self-sufficiency became a government obsession. But dramatic changes had occurred; the purposes and methods of message construction were different now. Likewise, the public sphere had shifted. The Famine was no longer useful.

Macrotextually, this chapter will examine the socio-cultural history of the independence and post-independence Phase III period from 1911 to 1950, and investigate its readership. Microtextually, two particular texts will be analyzed according to the five discursive tropes of land, national identity, religion, gender and agency. Other relevant Phase III works will be considered as appropriate. Liam O'Flaherty's novel *Famine*, published in 1937, and Gerald Healy's play *The Black Stranger*, written and first produced in 1945, are the two primary works, with attention also directed to James Joyce's short story "The Dead" in *Dubliners* (1914) and *Ulysses* (1922), both of which treat the Famine, and to Patrick Kavanagh's 1942 poem, "The Great Hunger." The few other texts may be noted in the charts in the introduction. Phase III is essentially a period of textual absence -- and this chapter will explore the phenomenon. Ironically, Phase III also produced, in O'Flaherty's novel, one of the most popular of Famine texts ever. *Famine's* popularity and *The Black Stranger's* status as a commemoration of the

catastrophe's centennial provide the rationale for their selection as primary texts here.

LaCapra's concern about the documentary dimensions of textual production will be addressed first: who were the producers of texts? who were their readers? what were the prevailing social and cultural conditions? how did the political climate of the time help set the textual agenda? As LaCapra also suggests, a text's worklike dimensions, that is, its rhetorical, discursive and narrative features, are permeated and shaped by their context. This dissertation examines these cultural and social phenomena, yet the first half of the 20th century was hardly hospitable to Irish Famine texts. By examining the rhetorical features of key works during Phase III, as well as their socio-cultural circumstances, their communicational role will be become apparent. Land, national identity, religion and gender are the dominant tropes. Irish men and women struggled during Phase III to find the meaning of their new independent identity. Simple "green" nationalism gave way to shades of gray in national identity. The old polarities -- unionist/nationalist, etc. -- no longer applied, and for some, the Famine would help in their search.

The old Anglo-Irish Ascendancy class, which had supplied so many notorious landlords, was declining rapidly as a social and political force. From the Land War onward, major land redistribution schemes by the British government had removed an Ascendancy role in Irish vulnerability. Only 7.4 percent of the Free State population was Protestant, according to the 1926 census. (Brown, 1985, 109) The Ascendancy's historical and metaphoric relevance was overtaking its political and economic significance. The Irish Literary Revival, which straddles Phases II and III, manifested a political and philosophical agenda alien to stories of hunger, emigration and death. The 1898 letter for the Irish Literary Theatre, forerunner of the National Theatre Society, declared:

> We propose to have ... certain Celtic and Irish plays, which whatever be their degree of excellence will be written with a high ambition, and so build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature. We hope to find in Ireland an uncorrupted and imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory, and believe that our desire to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland will ensure for us a tolerant welcome, and that freedom to experiment ... . ...

> Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of ancient idealism. We are confident ... [in the] Irish people, who are weary of misrepresentation, in carrying out a work that is outside all the political questions that divide us. (O'Connor, 1999, 187-188)

The conventional nationalist construction of the Famine hardly fits such a lofty conception, and it is easy to see why Yeats employs his highly symbolic approach in *The Countess Cathleen.* Moreover, the leaders of this revival came from the Ascendancy -- though mostly its middle class -- that nationalists had indicted so heavily. There was little motive and less reward in addressing a subject in which their own families were complicit. The "Gregory clause" is a glaring example. Named after Sir William Gregory (1816-1892), who represented Dublin in Westminster, the legislation succeeded in amending the Poor Law Act of 1847 to deny aid to anyone occupying more than a quarter-acre of land, and, initially, their dependents. The clause helped landlords clear their estates, but proved lethal to many smallholders who clung to parcels they farmed. (Connolly, 1998, 230) Sir William was the husband of Augusta, Lady Gregory, Yeats's literary colleague. Meanwhile, conflicts within the republican camp would erupt into civil war, and the Famine could hardly be invoked as a discursive strategy where everyone suffered. Now, the land was firmly in the hands of the "Irish people," though repressed anxieties about the majority society emerged. Now, patriotism meant making choices in creating a civil society. Now, Roman Catholicism dominated society and politics in ways it could never have under the British. Now, emigration, delayed marriages and female farm ownership made gender an issue. Conditions of their socio-cultural habitus were changing in Phase III -- and demanded literary and dramatic investigation. For O'Flaherty and Healy, the Famine past offered insight into the Irish present.

## SECTION I: SYNOPSES OF REPRESENTATIVE WORKS IN PHASE III

### 1. The past indicts the present in O'Flaherty's novel

Both O'Flaherty's novel and Healy's play turned to audiences for whom the Famine was a transmitted memory, though often a repressed one. Both utilize their works, at least in part, to achieve contemporary social and cultural goals. Both employ historic discourses that appropriate the Famine, but deploy them in characterization, plot

development and other features according to Phase III's political and social agendas.

O'Flaherty's *Famine* is an historical novel chronicling the lives of the Kilmartin family, who suffer deprivation and death as a result of the 1840s catastrophe. Brian and Maggie Kilmartin struggle as tenant farmers in the West of Ireland, but rely on their two sons, Michael, the elder, and Martin. Michael, however, suffers from consumption, though not lack of spirit. Martin, meanwhile, is quiet and retiring, cowed by the patriarchal demands of his father, who vacillates between abuse and kindness. Michael's illness wins his father's compassion, though it occasions great expense. When Martin weds Mary Gleeson, she brings a new spirit into the family and seems to strengthen Martin. Her determination brings her into conflict with her in-laws, and, as conditions worsen, she regards the no-expense-spared care for Michael as dangerous. Eventually, Michael dies and Mary and Martin's baby is named for him. When Mr. Crawford, the local landlord's agent, is killed, Martin is suspected and flees. Crawford's cruel and capricious treatment of tenants had been fueled by his own desperation to recover his lost wealth and his desire for Mary's sister, who had worked in his Big House. During Martin's absence, the Kilmartins experience the worst of the Famine, and Mary emerges as provider and protector of the family until death claims all but her and her son. Eventually, Martin rejoins his family, and they emigrate; future armed struggle at home is suggested.

O'Flaherty leaves little doubt of his support for hard-edged republicanism or his disdain for the bourgeoisie. Like Carleton, O'Flaherty also displays considerable insight into the complexity of the Irish peasantry. *Famine* chillingly recounts the realities of the 1840s and the strategies victims employed to survive. *The Irish Times* saw the novel as

> ... a folk tale [for] does not almost every inch of Ireland hold still the grim story of those terrible years? The 'hunger' lived in the memories of people until a little while ago, and they transmitted the memory to their living descendants. It is this tranquilised memory that Mr. O'Flaherty has now given to literature. There is still the burning indignation, without which Mr. O'Flaherty would not be himself; but there is also a deep brooding pity that is new. Accepted merely as an historical reconstruction of one of the turning-points in Irish history, *The Famine* [sic] is a great achievement; but it rises beyond that to be an interpretation and an experience. (*Irish Times*, 13 Feb. 1937, 7)

The concept of "tranquilized," or tamed, memory suggests Hall's encoding and decoding theory. The move from folk transmission of Famine memories to its literary portrayal changes not only medium, family-based oral story-telling to written accounts within commercial publishing, but also focus and purpose. As Hall observes, transmission levels and changes in media shift message. (Hall, 1973, 2) Patrick F. Sheeran writes:

> *Famine* ... combines the sharp pictorial clarity of ... [O'Flaherty's] short stories with his best narrative skill. Alone of all his novels he accepts here a social pattern of norms and values against which to dramatize the lives and destinies of his characters -- indeed, in this sense, *Famine* is his most realistic work. Characters are placed within a well defined and intelligible society, and they are motivated by real human passions and concerns. ... A number of the multifarious characters of *Famine* appear in previous works by O'Flaherty but are seen here with a difference. In *Famine* they are shorn of their wildest excesses, rooted in a place and time which contains and defines them. Perhaps the most remarkable quality of this work is its feeling for the ordinary, everyday life of rural Ireland in the nineteenth century. The famine corrodes and finally destroys that life and the reader is left, not so much with a sense of the individual tragedies ....but with a feeling of loss for a whole society and a way of life. (Sheeran, 1976, 216-217)

Paul A. Doyle calls *Famine* O'Flaherty's "most comprehensive and successful literary achievement." (Doyle, 1971, 96) The novel has its detractors. James H. O'Brien sees its failure to show a "profound vision of the past" and to "pierce deeply" into human "weakness and nobility." Instead, the novel relies on typical myths of the period. (O'Brien, 1973, 43-44) John Zneimer observes that the novel departs from O'Flaherty's usual naturalistic detachment from the world of good and evil, "has abandoned this higher path of stark tragedy," turns to a formula to please Irish critics and, in the wake of having sold the movie rights to his novel *The Informer*, achieve commercial film success. (Zneimer, 1970, 132) The novel is dedicated to film director John Ford, who made *The Informer* (1935). Moreover, *Famine's* dust jacket claims that the film has made O'Flaherty popularly known. (Zneimer, 1970, 124) *Famine*, however, has never been filmed. A.A. Kelly makes the claim that Roland Barthes' sense of interrogation, not mere assertion, gives the major historical novels, *Famine, Land* and *Insurrection,* a sense of

detachment. (Kelly, 1976, 45)

**2. Emigration as the lingering effect of the Famine in Healy's play**

The other work considered in detail in this chapter, Healy's *The Black Stranger*, has a restricted theatrical history. The play suffers from excessively melodramatic moments, such as its conclusion. Dramatic development tends to respond to conditions outside and off stage, rather than proceed from its characterization. Yet it managed to earn praise as "leanly written, understated, tightly structured piece of realism that remains persuasive, powerful and moving." (Hogan, 1996, 534) The play relates the stories of two families -- and questions whether they will survive the ravages of the Famine, stay on the land or emigrate. Patrick Corcoran and his wife Kate have two sons, Michael, the elder, and Bart, handsome young men with divergent approaches to life. Michael is fiery, a labor organizer and political agitator. Though he can turn the head of any female in the district, he has little time for steady work or romance, much to the distress of Bridie McCarthy, who idolizes him. Bart, conversely, is a hard and diligent worker much attracted to Bridie. Meanwhile, old Peter McCarthy, Bridie's father, shares the passions of Michael for armed resistance. The play points to what Bourdieu might see as the family and community ground for development of a malevolent habitus throughout the 1911-1950 period -- the deification of land and the lure of emigration -- as lingering consequences of the Famine. (Bourdieu, 1998, 61) On stage, Healy opens up what Habermas calls an alternative social space, where a different outcome can be explored. (Habermas, 1989, 38) It excavates the issue of the heroic, mythic death, long remembered in Irish history, and the anonymity of the Famine, repressed and dismissed. It points to land clearance and food distribution policies that indict British and *Irish* authorities at the time. And it underlines brutality, including desperate measures taken by Famine victims: infanticide and the abandonment of the sick. Healy's melodramatic play underlines naturalism's limits, pointing to thematic potential in Murphy's *Famine* and MacIntyre's *The Great Hunger.*

**SECTION II: POLITICAL AND SOCIAL HISTORY FOR PHASE III**

During the four decades from 1911 to 1950, Ireland went from unwilling member

of the U.K. to independent republic. Consequently, this period forms both a distinct political era, though one with intense changes, and a discrete period in Famine textual production. The era saw a massive drop in Famine novels, poems and plays, even as production of material on other aspects of Irish experience was burgeoning. Dramatic political and social changes left a deep fissure in Irish society. Amid such division, violence and the building of a modern nation-state, the 1840s national calamity seemed to afford little creative potential and less solace.

The Famine left a broad spectrum of society dissatisfied with British rule and intent on re-establishing an Irish parliament. While the separatist and republican tradition continued, many Irish looked to Charles Stewart Parnell and later John Redmond, leaders of the Irish Parliamentary Party, pledged to achieve dominion status for Ireland on the model of Canada. Growing Northern opposition to Home Rule, however, complicated devolution just when sufficient numbers in Westminster were willing to vote for it. Meanwhile, a succession of land reform acts redressed the worst tenant grievances and, increasingly, transferred property to small farmer-owners. In 1914, Home Rule was approved but suspended until after World War I, which began that August.

For Irish republicans, not content with a continued relationship with Britain under the Crown in any case, the European conflict seemed to offer just what they needed. On 24 April 1916, the Easter Rising erupted in Dublin. While few approved of the rebellion, intended to spread across the country, the Easter Rising became an icon of heroic Irish resistance after the British crushed the insurrection and executed most of the leaders. When World War I ended in 1918, Home Rule was not forthcoming, and by 1919, the Anglo-Irish War for independence was under way. The 1919 British parliamentary elections saw the return of an overwhelming majority of Irish delegates from Sinn Féin ("Ourselves Alone"), the party pledged to an independent republic. These delegates refused to go to Westminster, establishing instead Dáil Éireann as an Irish parliament. British authorities declared the Dáil illegal, and violence began to sweep the land, exacerbated by Britain's introduction of the Black and Tans, so-called from their attire, as a paramilitary unit to assist the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) and military forces.

Westminster passed the Government of Ireland Act in 1920, allowing for a devolved administration in Ireland, both north and south. (McCartney, 1994, 311-312) By July of 1921, a truce existed between the IRA and British forces, followed by the election of the second Dáil and the conclusion of the controversial Anglo-Irish Treaty, in which the 26 southern counties won an independent parliament, but which retained the British king as chief of state. Many IRA supporters violently opposed the treaty, and 1922 saw not only establishment of the Irish Free State, but the repudiation of the authority of the Dáil in a civil war between pro- and anti-Treaty forces.

Despite violent beginnings, the Irish Free State moved ahead, and in 1923, Cumann na nGaedheal ("Party of the Gaels") won parliamentary elections, formed a government and brought Ireland into the League of Nations. Swallowing hard, anti-Treaty forces ran as members of Fianna Fáil ("Soldiers of Destiny) and entered the Irish parliament in 1927. The transfer of power in 1932 from a pro-Treaty, Cumann na nGaedheal government to Fianna Fáil was peaceful -- even if some members of the legislature still had revolvers tucked in their belts. Eamon de Valera, leader of the anti-Treaty movement, became taoiseach, or prime minister, and the modern pattern of Irish politics was put in place. By 1936, references to the Crown had been deleted from the free state constitution. A new constitution was adopted in 1937, and the following year, Douglas Hyde became the first president of Ireland, even though it remained within the British Commonwealth and, presumably, acknowledged the king as its head. The controversial, yet elastic nature of the Treaty, ironically, provided precisely what its advocates had claimed, "the freedom to achieve freedom." (McCartney, 1994, 312) To pressure Westminster to return the six counties of Northern Ireland, which had its own devolved parliament, the IRA began a bombing campaign in Britain. The Dáil proscribed the IRA, showing the drift between old comrades. In September of 1939, World War II erupted. Ireland declared its neutrality during the "Emergency," infuriating Britain, but quietly providing some assistance. Indeed, more than 50,000 Irish served in the British military during the war. (Brown, 1985, 172) The following year, the Luftwaffe bombed Belfast, killing more than 700, and fire brigades from Dublin rushed north to assist. The

war ended in 1945, and in 1949, Ireland declared itself a republic and left the Commonwealth. (Jackson, 1999, 275-295)

Socially, the decades between 1911 and 1950 were dominated by the tasks of stabilization, nation-building and modernization. Not the least of the challenges facing an extremely poor nation was an estimated £50 million reconstruction bill for the civil war. (Fallon, 1999, 6) In place of the disbanded RIC, which continued as the Royal Ulster Constabulary in the North, the Irish Free State adopted an unarmed, national police force, the Gárda Síochána (Guardians of the Peace), in 1923 "as a remarkable gesture of confidence in the future." (Lyons, 1973, 480) Radio Éireann began broadcasting in 1926, and the following year, the Electricity Supply Board and Agricultural Credit Corporation were formed, thus laying the foundation for rural electrification and agricultural expansion. The Shannon hydroelectric project, using German, not British, technology, commenced in 1929, the year the Great Depression began. When, in 1932, the Irish government refused to pay land annuities, repayments to Britain over mortgage funds granted for land purchases prior to independence, a two-year economic war began. The dispute, however, helped Ireland begin to industrialize. In 1936, Aer Lingus, the national airline, was organized, and in 1950, the Industrial Development Authority was founded. (Jackson, 1999, 450-456) Local government, social welfare and health care were reconfigured. (Lyons, 1973, 482-483)

Despite substantial progress, Ireland's population continued to age and leave. Irish agriculture was dominated by family-owned farms -- a massive improvement from the Famine era -- but an aging sector was reluctant to invest and improve:

> By 1881, 34.7 percent of Irish farmers were under 45 years; 43.5 were between 45 and 65, while 21.8 percent were over 65. Women farmers accounted for only 13.5 percent of the total, and of these no more than 3.6 percent were over 65. But by 1946, a situation had been reached where a third of all farmers were over 65. Women accounted for one-sixth of the total; nearly half of these were over 65 and three-quarters were widows. ... [An] infallible recipe for rural conservatism. (Lyons, 1973, 606)

This scenario would be fodder for Kavanagh's devastating critique in *The Great Hunger*. Equally problematic was a national population decline in the 26 counties; from 2.2

million in 1911, it fell to 2 million in 1926, and by 1936, it had dropped to 1.9 million. Net emigration from 1911 to 1926 was 405,209. Departures slowed in the next decade to 166,751, then fell substantially due to the Great Depression. After 1936, however, "the old wound began to bleed as heavily as before." (Lyons, 1973, 609) Between 1939 and 1945, the World War II years, more than 100,000, mostly male, left and did not return. From 1945-1947, the average outflow was 30,000 per year, and increasing thereafter. People spoke of the "vanishing Irish." (Lee, 1989, 226, 288, 360)

Culturally, Ireland made progress, but there was a growing dissatisfaction on the limits of the new society and its seeming failure to realize the potential of independence. Throughout this period, a heavy emphasis on Irish history and language developed in the schools. De Valera himself was a forceful advocate of restoration of the national language as a means to pride and self-reliance. Not everyone, however, agreed. David Fitzpatrick writes, "The effects of cultural coercion were often negative. Censorship nurtured a dissident counter-culture which generated much of the finest Irish writing of the century; compulsory inculcation of the language failed to revive its vernacular use and virtually killed the Gaelic League and cultural revival." (Fitzpatrick, 1989, 221) Efforts to promote an *Irish* culture also included a measure of resistance to materials deemed licentious or immoral. The Censorship of Publications Act of 1929 authorized the banning of materials seen as indecent or obscene, excessively interested in crime, or pro-contraception and pro-abortion. The law generally "reflects the moral concerns and principles of the leaders of the new Irish Free State." (Carlson, 1990, 3-4) In reaction, W.B.Yeats and G.B. Shaw founded the Irish Academy of Letters in 1932; its 19 founder members were among the period's most eminent writers, including O'Flaherty, who along with seven others, had work banned. (Carlson, 1990, 8) Julia Carlson writes, "The rhetoric by which the majority of people were swayed was that of Ireland's priests and politicians, who believed that by purging Ireland of all 'indecencies' and foreign influences, they could shape it into a spiritual model for the world. De Valera, who came to power in 1932, saw Ireland as having a spiritual mission." (Carlson, 1990, 8) One has only to recall the Famine poetry of Phases I and II to realize the extent to which the nation's spiritual mission was linked

to the discourse of its suffering from oppression and its struggle for freedom. In his much maligned 1943 radio address on Saint Patrick's Day, De Valera had declared:

> That Ireland which we dreamed of would be the home a people who valued material wealth only as a basis for right living, of a people who were satisfied with frugal comfort and devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit; a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with sounds of industry, the romping of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youths, the laughter of comely maidens; whose firesides would be the forums of the wisdom of serene old age. (Carlson, 1990, 9)

Children, youths, maidens and the old joined with the rest of the nation in 1929 and in 1932 for two massive religious exercises that helped associate the new Irish state with Catholicism. Centered in Dublin, the centenary of Catholic Emancipation in 1929 and the International Eucharistic Congress in 1932 expressed faith and devotion, but they also may be read as triumphal celebrations of the state's consolidation, as well as its pervasive Catholic identity. The events also helped push north and south further apart. (McIntosh, 1999, 83-85) The Church had a leading role in education, health care, social services and publishing. Vocally anti-communist, it was allied with the big farming class -- the clergy as "strong farmers in cassocks" -- even as the number of agricultural laborers was halved to 150,000 from 1911 to 1936. It lobbied successfully for censorship and the elimination of legal divorce inherited under British law. Dublin banned not only pornography, but works by O'Flaherty, Joyce, O'Casey and Clarke, "whose perspective cut too close to the purse for the comfort of the flint-minded men and women whose grandparents had done well out of the Famine and who intended to do even better themselves out of the Free State." (Lee, 1989, 158) By 1937, Catholic values would be enshrined in a new constitution. (Lee, 1989, 158-159) "Rarely has the Catholic Church as an institution flourished, by materialistic criteria, as in the Free State. And rarely has it contributed so little, as an institution, to the finer qualities of the Christian spirit." (Lee, 1989, 159)

## SECTION III: AUTHORS AND READERS

### 1. O'Flaherty's 'humanized' naturalism and approval of violence

A native of Inishmore, one of the bleak, beautiful Aran Islands, Liam O'Flaherty (1896-1984) was imbued in his youth with a love for the land, the Irish language and the

"physical force" tradition. In *Famine,* published by Victor Gollancz in London, he endorses armed struggle for Irish freedom, and disdain for negotiation and pacifism. Polarization after the Irish Civil War helped to stymie progress during Phase III. Ironically, O'Flaherty himself crossed a number of cultural divides. His father was involved in Land League politics, but his mother was descended from Protestants. O'Flaherty had tried his vocation as a postulant with the Holy Ghost Fathers. In 1915, he left school to join the Irish Guards regiment in the British Army and was wounded two years later; he afterwards suffered from acute melancholia. He received his bachelor's degree from University College Dublin in 1918. Radical politics attracted his interest, and during the civil war, he raised the red flag over the Rotunda Hospital in Dublin and proclaimed himself chairman of the "Council of the Unemployed." (Welch, 1996, 430) He appropriated food from a commercial bakery in 1922 over "starvation conditions among the poor." (Doyle, 1971, 14) Following an affair with Margaret Curtis, wife of a Trinity College historian, O'Flaherty married her in 1926. He separated from her and their daughter in 1932. Having won notoriety, as both a communist and an atheist, he suffered several nervous breakdowns and lived in Europe and North and South America for a time. A novelist and short story writer in both Irish and English, O'Flaherty won praise for his realism, though it is often permeated with a sense of doom, and found himself compared to Joyce and Sean O'Casey. However, some later works lack the sophistication of *Thy Neighbor's Wife* (1923), *The Black Soul* (1924), *The Informer* (1925), *Mr. Gilhooley* (1926), *The Assassin* (1928), *Two Years* (1930), as well as the short stories in *Spring Sowing* (1924) and *The Tent* (1926). Critics see works such as *The Return of the Brute* (1930), *The Martyr* (1935) and *Hollywood Cemetery* (1935) as crude and preoccupied with obsessions. *House of Gold* (1929) and *Skerrett* (1932), however, offer incisive social commentary and vision, while *Two Years* (1930) and *Shame the Devil* (1934) are autobiographical. O'Flaherty's last novels were *Land* (1946) and *Insurrection* (1950), part of the historical trilogy. (Welch, 1996, 430)

**2. Healy, actor-playwright, targets emigration**

Gerard Healy (1918-1963), playwright and actor, was born in Dublin and educated

at Synge Street and Christian Brothers schools, and later joined the acting school at the Abbey Theatre. In 1942, he married Eithne Dunne, an actress. Healy's first play, *Thy Dear Father,* "a study of fanatic religiosity," was produced at the Abbey in 1943 and met with critical and popular success. (Hogan, 1996, 534). Unhappy over Abbey policies, he left the national theater in 1945, and formed the Players' Theatre with his wife and Liam Redmond. Healy's *The Black Stranger*, with Dunne in the lead, provided the Irish stage with its first full-length, unabashed encounter with Famine drama. First presented by the Players' Theatre at the Cork Opera House on 26 Feb. 1945, the play arrived at the Gate Theatre, Dublin, on 6 March. The group moved to the Olympia Theatre, Dublin, for the following season, but failed to repeat their initial success and disbanded. The members worked subsequently with British film companies. Healy suffered from tuberculosis, but later recovered to resume acting. While playing in Hugh Leonard's *Stephen D* to appreciative audiences in London, he collapsed and died in the theater. (Boylan, 1998, 171) *The Black Stranger* depicts the struggles of Patrick Corcoran and Peter McCarthy and their families as they confront the ravages of the blight. The central question, apart from survival, is whether characters will remain on the land or emigrate. For mid-20th Century Ireland, emigration was a central concern; its Famine link is well documented.

**3. Avoidance and elusive confrontation: Phase III contributions**

Apart from O'Flaherty, Healy, James Joyce (1882-1941) and Patrick Kavanagh (1904-1967), who became "a fierce critic of the post-Independence Irish State and of literary-revival romanticism," Phase III had little else to offer in textual production. (Welch, 1997, 283) The Abbey Theatre's production of *Tenants at Will*, a comedy by George Shiels (1886-1949), is worth mentioning, however. The play opened on 24 Sept. 1945 as the national theater's Famine centennial commemoration. The play is set *before* the Famine, when the Devonshire Commission, appointed by the British government to investigate "how far the land system of Ireland was responsible for discontent and violence and whether Parliament might with public advantage intervene," according to Sheils's forward. (Sheils, 1947, n.p.) The commission sat in Ireland in 1843 and 1845, and was composed of four landlords under the chairmanship of Lord Devonshire, who

held an Irish estate. Like the works discussed in detail, *Tenants at Will* exposes the danger of an excess population's reliance on a single crop, the policy of rackrents and exploitative agents and their underlings, the consequent eruption of violence, the resistance of the Church both to proselytism in the guise of assistance and to armed resistance, and, significantly, the role of the Irish themselves in exploiting their social and economic inferiors. When Rock, a substantial farmer in the district, and his son are murdered, it is because they have been conniving with an unscrupulous agent in gouging tenants on an estate, arranging their evictions and then consolidating the holdings for themselves at favorable, long-term rents from Sir Andrew. As will be seen, though there are few Famine texts, the targeting of the Irish middle class -- which could trace its origins in the Famine -- is a common discursive strategy. As a comedy, *Tenants at Will* functions through a *reductio ad absurdum*, Sir Andrew's insistence on the growing of turnips as a panacea. Moreover, the play, produced just as Europe learned of the Holocaust's toll, and Ireland wrestled with mixed feelings over World War II neutrality, avoids directly confronting the Famine. Shiels writes:

> The record of the sworn evidence given before ... [the Devonshire Commission] reveals the appalling conditions in which millions of small farmers and labourers, North and South, lived immediately before the Famine. What happened when ... Famine descended upon them is best left to the imagination. (Shiels, 1947, n.p.)

**4. Preoccupations of Irish readers turn interest away from the Famine**

Irish society was preoccupied with other concerns -- and Famine memories, at least as they were constructed by nationalists dominating the social and political landscape, contributed little to the prevailing social and cultural agendas. Even Irish secondary and primary school curricula offered only passing references to what had been a national cataclysm. (Thomas Mullins, telephone interview by author, Cork, Ireland, 11 Feb. 2000) Precisely because of the absence of Famine texts during the period, Phase III is easily recognized in the sequence of literary and dramatic production. If Phase I provides initial response, and Phase II reveals evolving tensions between nationalist and unionist aspirations, Phase III emerges as a period of emptiness. While there is not nothing, there is little enough of something. Ironically, however, two of the most

enduring Famine texts, the novel *Famine* and the poem *The Great Hunger* come within five years of each other during the period. O'Flaherty's novel merits consideration here for several reasons. Reprinted many times, *Famine* is the most popular novel of the catastrophe and has had the largest readership. Brian Fallon writes:

> This work towers over his other novels -- the novelist John Broderick even claimed it to be the greatest Irish novel and forecast that it would be regarded as such when Joyce would have been relegated to the universities. Leaving Joyce himself out of the reckoning, that is possibly as close as the decade came to producing a genuinely great novel .... (Fallon, 1999, 14)

Healy's drama, on the contrary, is largely obscure, but one which, like Shiels' play, was intended to mark the centenary of the Famine. The play attracted acclaim when first performed, but the originating troupe disbanded and the text languished. Moreover, O'Flaherty's well-crafted novel exploits its genre conventions, while Healy's play employs the increasingly tired naturalistic style. By 1937, O'Flaherty already enjoyed a strong reputation on both sides of the Atlantic. Finally, the thematic concerns of the two works diverge. Although *Famine* and *The Black Stranger* both deal with survival and emigration, the former interrogates the Irish past and relates it to the Irish present, while the latter presents the Irish past as the cause of the Irish present -- and offers a largely unpalatable solution to problems still being felt during Phase III. Relative to the other works, Joyce's attention to the Famine is brief, and within the nationalist camp, while Kavanagh's poem will be considered in Chapter 4 in connection with MacIntyre's *The Great Hunger*.

**5. Tradition, economics and essentialist views reinforce each other**

From the pre-independence period through consolidation of the state, an essentialist vision of Irish nationhood developed, accompanied by corresponding fixity in gender and religious perspectives. The dominance of the land was evident in both agricultural and social policy. Emigration reinforced existing patterns of behavior and thinking. Terence Brown observes, "The Irish Free State in those decades was a largely homogeneous, conservative, rural society, in which critics of the dominant ideological consensus could make little headway." (Brown, 1985, 182) Language, religion, sport and

social tradition dominated concerns, and "conservative ideology and the social fabric were bound up with one another, both expressive of the atavistic and widespread conviction that the essential Irish reality was the uniquely desirable, unchanging life of small farm and country town in the Irish-speaking west." (Brown, 1985, 182) Brown adds:

> For despite the degree to which much of rural Ireland had been penetrated by modernizing influences in the early decades of the century, and the ways in which the change had been at work there since the Famine, much of the social life of the country-side as it had developed in the late-nineteenth century remained apparently intact ..., until well into the 1930s. It was only in the 1940s that things in rural Ireland began to change more rapidly and more noticeably. (Brown, 1985, 183)

One aspect of Irish life that had changed was the increasing availability of publications for readers. *Eason's Monthly Bulletin of Trade News*, a journal aimed at booksellers and news agents, indicates that readers turned to popular foreign romances and westerns, by writers such as Charlotte M. Brame and Zane Grey. Irish adaptations of these genres were also popular, as were spiritual titles and weekly periodicals such as the British *News of the World* and the home-grown *Ireland's Own.* Most of the material was largely escapist. (Russell, 15, 1999, 18-19) Conservative as the society was, however, its portrayal as backward, repressive, isolationist and anti-intellectual is largely a caricature, as Fallon has argued. Ireland was like many nations, particularly small, emergent ones, and was considerably more open than some. (Fallon, 1999, 9) In neither the political nor the social history of the period is there much attention to the Famine, seen by most Irish as the shameful nadir of their national struggle. Ireland wanted political independence, national sovereignty and economic prosperity. A time of starvation, death and emigration seemed to contribute little to such projects. For some writers, however, with different interests and agendas, the Famine remained a powerful vehicle -- to critique a changing society.

## SECTION IV: THEMATIC ANALYSIS: CRITIQUING INDEPENDENCE

The following four sections will examine LaCapra's worklike dimensions in the novel and play according to the analytical grid of land, national identity, religion and gender. As the new Irish Free State coalesced, political agency had been institutionalized

and celebrated. As time went on, however, the loss of personal agency became a major concern, which Phase IV texts make clear. Here, in Phase III, agency is contested and determined in relation to issues of place and identity. Perspectives from Bourdieu and van Dijk, as well as Radway, Habermas, Hall and others will be applied as appropriate.

**1. Land: Emigration as blessing and curse for the Irish**

O'Flaherty is at his most literary in depicting the Irish landscape, investing it with an emotional content that mirrors the narrative. The land serves not only as setting but as semiotic code by which elements of his narrative are telegraphed and reinforced. Healy, while not developing the physicality of the land, makes it his emotional and thematic center. Both writers integrate land as a theme into their worklike textual features.

***O'Flaherty's landscape carries emotional, narrative value.*** The village of Crom, the Kilmartin farm in Black Valley, the neighboring valley of Glenaree, the town of Clogher, all in County Galway, chronicle in their physical features three important elements: the stages of the Famine, the sweep of Irish history and the desolation of characters. Land becomes a shorthand way to telegraph meaning for O'Flaherty's readers; because they recognize the coded nature of his descriptions, he communicates more than he states overtly. Hall's link between "societal structures" and "symbolic structures" is not far removed. (Hall, 1973, 1) If a change in medium and historical circumstance alters message construction, so a change in the condition of land and society, insofar as they are understood to encode messages, must affect meaning-making.

Famine effects constitute the most obvious feature of landscape. The earth betrays its sinister intentions by shadow, storm and stench. Amid a land sunlit and beautiful, in the opening passages, lurks danger like the serpent in Eden:

> They all looked at the garden towards which he pointed. The sun's rays now came slantwise through a gap between two high peaks on the west, gilding the sombre Valley with a gorgeous light. The vast shadows on the mountains made a ghostly pattern of extraordinary beauty. Now the dim colours of the gorse, the heather and the decaying green of the potato stalks were brought forth. The white walls and faded thatch of the cabins that stretched in a crooked row from where they stood to the Valley's end above the western bank of the stream, all shone in the brilliant evening light. Even the parched grass and the stubble of the shorn oat fields stood out distinctly against the solemn darkness of the unlighted mountain caverns.

(O'Flaherty, 1992, 31)

Light in Black Valley is ephemeral, darkness prevails. Decay is present. The painful choice between potatoes for food and oats for rent is relentless. Human effort is circumscribed.

The foul smell of rotting potato stalks, and the subsequent corruption of the tubers, is a hallmark of Famine narratives, literary and folk. Few writers rival O'Flaherty in stimulating the olfactory sense. Early on, Patch Hernon's land is blighted and the stench wafts down the valley toward the Kilmartins. Old Brian, out sniffing the air, checks his potatoes. Martin confirms the fact: "It's a smell. ... It begins with a smell." (O'Flaherty, 1992, 25) Hernon's plight, however, is only the first of the attacks to visit Black Valley. The Kilmartins are devastated when their fields are blasted the following year, despite expectations of an abundant harvest. O'Flaherty writes:

> There was a peculiar silence in the Valley. The air was as heavy as a drug. There was not a breath of wind. The birds did not sing. And then, as the people watched, the cloud began to move lazily down upon the Valley. It spread out on either side, lost its form and polluted the atmosphere, which became full of a whitish vapour, through which the sun's rays glistened; so that it seemed that a fine rain of tiny whitish particles of dust were gently falling from the sky. Gradually a sulphurous stench affected the senses of those who watched. It was like the smell of foul water in a sewer. Yet, there was no moisture and the stench left an arid feeling in the nostrils. Even the animals were affected by it. Dogs sat up on their haunches and howled. Not a bird was to be seen, although there had been flocks of crows and of starlings about on the previous day. Then, indeed, terror seized the people and a loud wailing broke out from the cabins, as the cloud overspread the whole Valley, shutting out the sun completely. (O'Flaherty, 1992, 300)

Famine pervades the landscape and serves as the bond between the social and physical landscape. Even the weather is drawn into O'Flaherty's picture.

Van Dijk shows that discourse depends upon social cognition. (Van Dijk, 1985, 5) The Famine was a mystery at first, but its close association with weather made it seem pervasive, inescapable and inevitable. O'Flaherty writes of the almost tropical heat in June of 1846, the Famine's second year. Blossoming plants grew luxuriously, and hope soared:

> At noon, on the feast of St. John, they sat down to a meal that was for them a real feast. Mary had got a few young onions from the plot at the back of the house. She chopped them up and mixed them with the new potatoes. There was piece of salt fish which Sally O'Hanlon had given her .... Although there was no milk ..., hunger supplied its place as a savoury. They all gorged themselves. (O'Flaherty, 1992, 295-296)

Then, a massive storm struck and it was taken as a portent of disaster by the Kilmartins; within a day, their fields were blighted. Narratively, through weather and land, O'Flaherty draws his readers, into the same isolated, trapped conditions the Famine's victims felt.

O'Flaherty recognizes the deep connections between Irish landscape and history. Topography and historical monuments encode centuries. For example, *Famine's* narrator reminds readers of both the remote and proximate causes of the 1840s crisis by describing population increase after Catholics, deprived of property steadily during the English occupation, were allowed to own land. For the gentry, the tracts were worthless.

> The dispossessed Catholic peasantry swarmed into the bogs and on to the mountain-sides as a result of this Act [of 1742], became landholders and multiplied., so that the population of Ireland rose from under four millions at the passage of the Act to eight millions .... With the rapid increase in population the struggle for ... the 'unprofitable bogs' became intense, giving rise to all manner of secret society, that sometimes verged on civil war. (O'Flaherty, 1992, 78)

O'Flaherty deftly links the historical reality of dispossession and historic internecine Irish rivalry. As the new Irish state was consolidating itself, political discourse tended to emphasize the wrongs Britain had perpetrated, communal violence was ignored or minimized. For his readers, civil war bitterness still rankled, but O'Flaherty's republican support for physical force will not allow him to turn a blind eye toward those who failed the struggle. His social habitus shapes his text; he creates a land that "autonomously" reminds readers of their history. Fueling this process, with roots in ancient Celtic tradition, is the land's personification as Mother Ireland, the Shan Van Vocht and Kathleen ni Houlihan. Father Geelan, sympathetic to armed rebellion, advises Dr. Hynes:

> 'Learn to love this Irish earth, as your real mother,' whispered the curate. 'Then it will speak to you and tell you deep, deep things and beautiful things that are

> stronger than any misfortune. Listening to the wind, I dream. Come on, now.' (O'Flaherty, 1992, 123-124)

Geelan is one of those literary Irish priests instinctively connected to the land.

Landscape also reveals the extent and depth of the Famine. The human body, dying or decaying, becomes part of the physical terrain, as with Thomsy, Martin's uncle. After his search for his nephew, Thomsy tells Mary:

> 'Don't be talking, but there is terrible country between here and there. The poorness of Black Valley is nothing compared to it. ... The people are eating one another in the villages, after eating the cats and dogs. ... They are used to dead people in that far country. I saw two more dead people on the road. One of them had his face half eaten off him ... .' (O'Flaherty, 1992, 381)

Later, when Thomsy dies on a mountainside, the same process occurs. His body becomes indistinguishable from the earth upon which he falls. Simultaneously, however, the narrative voice reveals how the earth is the inspiration for dreams of freedom and death:

> At each step, his body seemed to rise from the ground and then fall down heavily. He was not conscious of movement and he no longer recognised the earth. It was all a blur -- the sky, the mountains, the road. Forward! ... Here was the hut where Martin had taken refuge on the day he fled wounded from the riot in Crom demesne. ... He lay down on the earthen floor and then the bubble burst. .. Now there was no more pain and the roar of the water was distant. It was soft and melodious, receding into the distance, where the man with yellow hair stood on the mountain top, his naked sword flashing in the spears of the rising sun. Now the great horde of marching people called him and he went with them, marching through the sweet-smelling heather to the summit of the promised land. (O'Flaherty, 1992, 409)

The peasant is literally one with the land, in death and in life, but for O'Flaherty, this is strength. In the new Ireland, where the increasingly urban middle class sought control, O'Flaherty's assertion of the primordial status of the peasant becomes a discursive strategy of historical depiction with contemporary implication.

Another melding of social and physical environment occurs in O'Flaherty's depiction of the local Big House. Unlike many of the earlier novels in Phases I and II, and certainly unlike Yeats, O'Flaherty has no sentimental attraction toward the Big House. It represented conquest, appropriation and exploitation during the Famine, and its decay is

less lamentable than symbolic of the state of the Ascendancy and the condition of the country. Crom House had been the seat of the Thompsons, Anglo-Irish gentry who abandoned Ireland after the Act of Union. Jocelyn Chadwick, a dispossessed landlord now agent for the Thompsons, lives there alone with a handful of servants whom he abuses and exploits. In its heyday, the Ascendancy sought to transform the Irish landscape; now, the Big Houses are returning to the land physically and symbolically. During the 1920s, more than 190 were torched. (Brown, 1985, 110) O'Flaherty writes:

> The process of decay, which had reached a climax during Chadwick's residence, made it look like an abandoned museum. A saddle and a pair of riding-boots lay on a very ornate French chair. A mass of fishing tackle on a writing-table. Paintings of the Thompsons and primitive weapons from Africa decorated the walls. The floor was partly in mosaic and in the centre of it was a large table .... Some dishes, fragments of bread, a bowl of butter and a plate, on which there was a fork stuck in a piece of sausage, still remained on the cloth. There was a dank smell in the room. (O'Flaherty, 1992, 166-167)

Nostalgia may be absent, but the observation is acute. African trophies of imperial expansion, diversion instead of intellect, brutality over refinement can be seen. While the countryside starves, Chadwick has more than enough to eat, and the knife in the sausage suggests the land tenure system's violence. In contrast, the Kilmartin household, though poor, is tidy and organized. The link between land and habitation is emphasized when old Brian Kilmartin addresses his daughter-in-law as she leaves to emigrate. "When she was going out the door, the old man gave her a piece of mortar, which he had taken from the wall over the fireplace. 'Give that to Martin,' he said." (O'Flaherty, 1992, 435) This bit of Irish hearth and home, taken from the land, will accompany them to America. Van Dijk's social cognition in discourse and Bourdieu's habitus are relevant concepts here. (Van Dijk, 1988-b, 109-119; Bourdieu, 1998, 7-8) O'Flaherty, having left and returned to Ireland, accepts emigration as necessary, and perhaps even desirable. A Famine era necessity is part of the Phase III social landscape.

The physical environment also refracts the moral and emotional state of characters. O'Flaherty likens the two Famine profiteers, John Hynes and his son Tony, to predators as unaware of the beauty of the snowy lowlands as they are of their tracks in

Irish history. "Like two wolves, they trotted down from their mountain lair towards the town, huddled in their cloaks, leaving deep tracks in the pure fresh snow, of steel shod shoes and of wheels." (O'Flaherty, 1992, 184) Symbolic progenitors of the bourgeoisie, the lupine father and son expose the Irish middle class as cunning but unreflective.

For Brian, the land and the peasant comprise a single, enduring entity -- and loss of the land is unthinkable. O'Flaherty executes three discursive steps here. He already has reminded readers that the peasant attachment to land, at least to this particular property, is of recent vintage for Irish peasants have been dispossessed often. He shows that emigration, frequently, is the only escape. And, he expresses the land's mystical power:

> 'What's that?' said the old man, terrified by the suggestion of leaving the land. 'You're sick, woman, and cowardly with your troubles. In your right mind, you wouldn't say such things. Leave the land, is it, at the first sign of trouble? Where else would you get land, or the riches that comes out of it? It's foolishness and a temptation of the devil to dream of leaving it. Taking the good times with the bad, there's no more peaceful life on this earth. It's the life that God ordained, tilling the earth with the sweat of the brow. To be master of your own plot of ground and of your own hearth. And making things grow, like a miracle, out of the cold earth. Tyrants come and go, but the landsman goes on for ever, reaping and sowing, for all the generations of time, like the coming and going of the year, from father to son. To Liverpool, is it, you'd be inclined to take me? Where I'd die and leave my bones, with the deep sea between them and this earth? Huh! No tyrant will drive me from this plot .. . I'll die here ... .' (O'Flaherty, 1992, 257-258)

Brian's view encapsulates much of the political rhetoric that dominated Ireland in the 1930s and 1940s under Fianna Fáil governments. Radway's stress on the "interpretive community" of readers with different purposes is illustrated by O'Flaherty's largely rural, or rurally-raised, readers who would have shared Brian's view and felt vindicated, as dictated by their social habitus. (Radway, 1991, 468; Bourdieu, 1998, 7-8) Agrarian society, devastated by the Famine, has rebounded and those still on the land can appropriate Brian's conviction. Irish rural policy was a development of the nationalist agenda of Phases I and II, and saw personal growth and fulfillment in communitarian terms in an essentially agricultural society ordained by God -- and victimized by Britain.

As the Famine rolls over the country, Brian's hope evaporates. O'Flaherty shows him alone with Oscar, his dog, on a mountain surveying the emptiness and silence of the

Black Valley. "All life had fled. What awful silence! Even the river, shallow with the summer drought, was silent. All life had ceased. And with the fall of night, a dark shroud passed down from the heights into the valley's bed, as if returning this passing habitation of man to the womb of eternal death." (O'Flaherty, 1992, 343) The dog's howl echoes in Brian's soul. The novel ends with a return to the landscape, which has been progressively deprived of light, warmth, sound and action:

> Hoar frost had fallen in the night. It shone in the morning light upon the mountain-sides and all along the Valley's bed. It lay in a whitish crust upon the sagging thatch of the empty houses and on the blighted fields that were already falling back into the wilderness. The stone walls, the granite boulders, and the gorse bushes were white with it. It had formed a thin crust of ice on the surface of the Black Lake. The river was the only thing that moved here beneath the grey sky. ... Then Brian Kilmartin came from his house carrying a spade and followed by his dog. ... 'I'll make a hole for her in this place,' he muttered. (O'Flaherty, 1992, 447)

Brian falls and he is united with the earth. O'Flaherty's reliance on Joyce's description of snowfall in "The Dead," which metaphorically describes social paralysis, is worth noting.

Hope for O'Flaherty lies in emigration, and the 1930s saw it increase. Would-be emigrants can look to *Famine's* heroic couple. Yet emigration is hopeful only because those departing hold remembrance of the land precious, and will assist Ireland from America. Even with Irish independence, that need remained. O'Flaherty describes the departure of Martin and Mary:

> He (Martin) put his arm around her shoulder and made her look towards the receding land. Then she went on her knees and crossed herself. Martin also went on his knees. With tears in their eyes they watched the land receding, as the ship rose and fell with the waves. ... 'I'll try not to disgrace his name,' Martin whispered, as he looked at the morsel of clay, 'out there in the new world.' (O'Flaherty, 1992, 446)

On two other occasions, O'Flaherty shows the Irish on their knees over land: once to God, as the Kilmartins pray for deliverance from the blight, and once to Chadwick, as the peasants -- though not Martin -- petition for rent relief. The scene is strikingly reminiscent of one W.S.Trench describes in *Realities of Irish Life* (1868). Now, to Ireland itself do the young people kneel. For readers in 1937, and for decades afterwards, the

fictional link between the Kilmartins and their homeland would recall identical links.

***Emigration frames Healy's drama.*** In *The Black Stranger*, land is the central question: will the Corcorans and the McCarthys survive, and if so, will they remain? Healy employs the convention of the fool, who appears in many Famine texts, to underline the chilling truth of the Famine's approach. Sean, the village idiot, whose antics and mad laughter are macabre, given the audience's knowledge of their import, declares, "The stranger's walkin' all the roads, the big roads an' the boreens. ... Listen, will I tell you his name? ... His first name is Hunger." (Healy, 1950, 21) The land already is smitten. By Act III, set in the autumn of Black '47, the Famine is clearly evident. Sean cackles that the "black stranger" is called "the reaper now. The reaper, reapin' the biggest harvest ever known in all the land." (Healy, 1950, 43) Death is everywhere, thousands are emigrating and the clearing of the land is in process. "I'll be the only one left when they're all gone. I'll have the whole countryside to meself an' I'll walk all the land an' call it me own. There'll be nobody else." (Healy, 1950, 43) Even the rhetoric of revolution must acknowledge the importance of the land. Michael's activities will lead to his death, eliminate the heir and jeopardize the Corcorans' future on the land. His father cautions:

> 'I won't stop you goin' [to undertake action against the British] if you want to go, Michael. I'll give you me blessin'. But it's not wise. If you go an' Bart goes, there's only meself an' your mother left. We're neither of us young an' we'll die soon anyway, but who'll take over the land? There'll be nobody. If you go now you'll throw your life away to no purpose. If you stay, you'll have the land maybe, in spite of them. You'll have it for your childer an' your childer's childer ... leave the fightin' till another time when you'll have the chance to beat them. Would you not ... wait?' (Healy, 1950, 38)

Michael goes, however, and by Act III, the audience learns his death has achieved little.

So brutal have conditions become that Sean, virtually without recognizing its horror, recounts how a dog was seen playing with a "ball," the head of "Hetty [Burke] with the golden hair." (Healy, 1950, 43) Because the family succumbed to fever, the house was abandoned, and the bodies become prey to the dogs. Rural Ireland comes to echo the collapse of Troy in the *Iliad*, and cottages suffer the same fate as the palace of

Priam and Hecuba. Michael, Kate, old Peter, Mag and her son, killed by his father Danny after Mag's own death, are all dead, and the family considers its fate. Bart and Danny plan to leave for America, and try to convince Patrick McCarthy to accompany them. They even purchase extra tickets for him and Peter's daughter, Bridie. Determined to stay, even if he has to share the land with a fool, the old man refuses. To old Corcoran, what matters is not survival but survival on the land: "What does it matter about the famine if you can manage to live through it? What does it matter if the potatoes don't come up next year or the year after? They'll come up in a few years anyway, an' the famine'll be just a bad memory like an illness or a grief." (Healy, 1950, 49) Healy recognizes the competing realities -- attachment to the land and the need for emigration -- that dominated the Ireland of his audience. "There's thousands that can't stay, they're thrown off the land an' they've no choice to go, but that's not the way with you. You're my son, you're Patrick Corcoran's son, an' I held the land for you." (Healy, 1950, 49) Bart, on whom the future depends, hears his father tell him:

> 'It was poor land when we got it, but my father made it good an' I made it betther, an' d'ye think me father sweated himself into the grave an' I wore meself to the bone all these long years just to feed ourselves from day to day an' then see the land go to strangers at the end of all. No. We worked it for you and for your sons an' for their sons after them again, so that the Corcorans could always hold their heads high an' walk the roads beholden to nobody. ... I never told you it wasn't right to go, but I don't have to tell you. You know it yourself. You know it in your heart an' soul, an it's a poor thing to leave the land an' all it means ... just because you haven't a full stomach.' ( Healy, 1950, 49-50)

The land is inscribed with a national genealogy -- even if that genealogy is part of a rhetorical tautology: the son must stay on the land because the father stayed for the son. To stay becomes moral victory, armed resistance or emigration are folly. Bridie will stay with Patrick, yet he slumps in despair: no son, no heir, no land and, ultimately, death.

Healy ends the play, however, with Bart's surprise decision to return, his father's joyful embrace and, presumably, marriage to Bridie. Bart in his dogged determination resembles the rural farmers who made up the backbone of the Irish economy throughout Phase II. By staying, he repudiates Famine emigration and makes possible Ireland's

revival. Healy's treatment of land, then, amounts to a plea to countrymen and women to find alternatives to emigration and stop the national hemorrhage, not of the 1840s, but of their own time. In the 1930s, the dominant "fulfillment on the land" message of the de Valera government was contradicted by the departures of thousands of young Irish. Communicationally, Healy endeavors to promote a change in social cognition -- the rural knowledge that emigration was the solution to a stagnant economy -- by portraying the official discourse of happiness and prosperity in rural Ireland as workable even in the bleakest conditions. Healy repudiates emigration when it was not only desirable but vital. If Bart could turn his back on emigration in the 1840s, surely it was possible to reject it a century later. To alter a habitus requires a massive effort. From Van Dijk's perspective, the reassertion of the "Irish on the land" discourse failed; emigration continued. (Van Dijk, 1988-b, 99) Healy's failure to alter perceptions stems, in part, from a minuscule public sphere and virtually no time. If sustained government discourse does not alter a social phenomenon, several theatrical performances hardly can. Economic realities overwhelm most idealized discourses -- and create their own.

O'Flaherty inscribes the land with the Famine, then uses that land as part of his narrative strategy communicating the extent of victimization and its perpetrators, including mercantile profiteers. Likewise, O'Flaherty shows the land as both commodity, for Chadwick, and sacred trust, for the Kilmartins. For some readers, that same choice loomed for them, descendants of Famine survivors. For others, the only option was emigration -- but it need not mean a fatal separation from Ireland -- as he signals with the mortar and stone the Kilmartins carry to America. Following Hall's transmission theory, the land bears a deep semiotic structure, which Irish writers tap to transmit multiple messages. (Hall, 1973, 5) For Healy, emigration assumes a much more tragic face. Staying on the land is intimately bound up with Ireland's identity and future.

**2. National identity: Self-definition by locating the enemy**

For both O'Flaherty and Healy, Irish identity has a "natural" source in the peasantry, which has survived the Famine and controls the newly emergent Ireland. The "peasantry" of the 1930s and 1940s, of course, has become the big farmer class, not the

tenants-at-will of the 1840s, whose existence was always precarious. It is this new substantial class for whom their interrogation of national identity communicates both challenge and exhortation.

***O'Flaherty's questions for Gaelic, Catholic Ireland.*** O'Flaherty does not problematize Irish identity. Instead, he constructs an essentially Gaelic, Catholic vision of nationhood over which looms an Anglo-Irish aristocracy and a British administration, both Protestant and unionist. In the 1930s, there was no *apparent* need to weigh competing claims to Irishness. Despite different social agendas and recent conflict, both major political parties turned their attention to the majority. Protestant numbers were minuscule after partition, unionists had lost the struggle and the Anglo-Irish, as a politically significant class, had ceased to exist. What was needed, however, was an interrogation of the Gaelic, Catholic majority and the rise of its hegemonic institutions: ecclesial, political and social. O'Flaherty is particularly interested in the links between Famine survivors and the rising 19th century middle class. To what extent did the Irish prey on each other during the Famine? Who profited from the crisis? How were landlords and agents supported by their social inferiors in an oppressive regime? This represents a massive shift in Bourdieu's habitus, a change in "doxa," or the primordial, dominant view, for the majority of Irish readers, accustomed by education, culture and political rhetoric to think of themselves primarily in opposition to British and Anglo-Irish power. (Bourdieu, 1998, 57) Change in social and political circumstances exposed tensions within the majority. For O'Flaherty's novel, the dominant classes in the 1930s in Ireland might lay claim to the Famine, but their general silence suggests that at least some survived and even prospered on the backs of the less fortunate. Moreover, their failure to take up arms for Irish freedom may have enabled *them* to succeed commercially but it delayed *national* liberation. O'Flaherty consequently shows interest in issues of social hybridity, the semi-permeable social membrane in which one constituency was implicated in another, and his emphasis clearly is on its presence in "green" Ireland. Benedict Anderson suggests nations may be imagined into being, but ultimately the social complications and contradictions within that imaginary community must be confronted.

(Anderson, 1991, 4-7, 47) The Kilmartins are essentially Irish, some of their neighbors substantially more complex.

John Hynes, who represents the new professional and bourgeois class, is the son of the wolfish merchant. Educated with the offspring of gentry and British officials, the younger Hynes studied medicine in Dublin, where he came to despise his peasant origins. Both intimidated by and contemptuous of the common people, as his first visit to the Kilmartins demonstrates, Dr. Hynes eventually sides with the people. He becomes a walking interplay between Bourdieu's notion of habitus and the van Dijk's possibility of change in social cognition. (Bourdieu, 1998, 8; van Dijk, 1984, 155) Encounters with the desperate conditions of the peasants lead him to repudiate his friendship with the brutal agent Chadwick. Hynes, however, is without moral resolve. While sympathetic towards the starving, fever and plague panic him. He accepts an offer from his father and brother to take over a large medical practice in Clogher. Because they are grain profiteers, the doctor is complicit in their corruption. O'Flaherty's contempt of the middle class also appears in other works (O'Brien, 1973, 112; Cahalan, 1991, 39-40) While O'Flaherty's claim that part of Irish Catholic society not only survived but benefited from the Famine is more muted than Eoghan Harris's in *Souper Sullivan* half a century later, it still complicates Irish victimhood. (See Appendix II) His motives suspect, Dr. Hynes contracts the fever from peasants and dies. He is a classic example of the colonial condition:

> Ever since his childhood two mutually antagonistic influences had been working on his nature. One influence drew towards the people whose blood ran in his veins. On the other, he felt hostile towards the people, owing to their treatment of his grandfather and the way his father had suffered in his early struggles. ... Nowadays it is hard to imagine the degree of snobbery prevalent in those days, or the manner in which the painful feeling of belonging to a subject race affected the character of ambitious young Catholics who were struggling to improve their position in society. ... He had come to despise the masses of the Irish people, as an inferior race, a species of amiable buffoon, from whom he should do everything in his power to dissociate himself, in ideas, in manners, in language, in allegiance. (O'Flaherty, 1992, 121)

O'Flaherty's narrative affords Dr. Hynes, at the limit of education and position the Anglo-Irish system allowed Catholics, the possibility of a Gaelic re-education. Through "the

people," the doctor changes his jaundiced perspective and comes to care for them. The key is Mary (Gleeson) Kilmartin, whose beauty and dignity excite not only his desire but his capacity to see Irish peasants not with colonial but nationalist eyes. She affects him in precisely the same way, and in the same rhetoric, as Kathleen ni Houlihan might:

> The call of blood became stronger than the gibberish he had assimilated at school and in Dublin. His journey to Black Valley and his meeting with Mary Kilmartin had roused in him a feeling of shame. That beautiful creature, with the gracious dignity of a queen, had shown him the folly and emptiness of his ideas. Ever since then, the condition of the people horrified him and he even began to regard his own father as a kind of thief, who was striving to enrich himself at the people's expense. That is why he felt in some way responsible for the impending calamity. (O'Flaherty, 1992, 122)

Relationship to the land and the "call of blood," which, of course, generated such toxic consequences as Nazi ideology swept over Europe in the 1930s and 1940s, was shared in more pacific ways by many Irish nationalists. O'Flaherty's doctor represents that part of Irish society with an Anglocentric, mercantilist life at the expense of "genuine" Irishness.

While Chadwick clearly sees himself as a *British* subject, who, even in his fallen state, still attaches great importance to "Queen and Country," O'Flaherty allows readers to see him with some sympathy despite his brutality. In assessing national identity, Chadwick plays an important dual role; he both shows what Irish nationalists fought against and he warns them of what they could become. A former hussar officer, Chadwick is besotted by Mary Kilmartin's sister and distraught when she leaves his employ. His drinking and abuse of tenants worsens. Desperate to recoup his finances, he so angers tenants that they eventually kill him. Chadwick's behavior is entirely self-destructive, and in that, sympathetic -- but only to a degree, for he exhibits the worst aspects of colonialism. He craves Ellie Kilmartin, but despises the Irish, even those who befriend and serve him. He wants Ellie back, but sees the tenants as "a lot of howling savages," adding:

> 'Tyrant, am I? I'll show them what tyranny really means. I've been too kind to the dogs. Now I'm going to show my hand. ... They've asked for it and they're going to get it. There's still law in the land. Famine! I'm going to root them out like a nest of rats. You wait, Hynes. You're going to see some good hunting around

these bogs of yours, old boy.' (O'Flaherty, 1992, 171-172)

When the doctor reacts in shock that starving people should be abused for "fun," the agent shows how remote he is: "'What people?' said Chadwick in a surprised tone. 'What are you ... eh?'" (O'Flaherty, 1992, 172) The reader wonders whether Chadwick even knows about the Famine or sees his tenants as "people."

O'Flaherty provides contrasting images of national identity when tenants, including Martin, appeal for rent relief. Chadwick regards the action not as a desperate plea but as an assault on his rights, and is contemptuous, though fearful, of a *united* tenantry:

> 'Down on your knees, lads,' [called a big man in a stop-pipe hat] Let's ask him once more on our knees.'
>
> Gripping his stick with both hands, he got on one knee, but did not uncover [his head, as Chadwick had demanded]. First one, then another, then the whole crowd imitated his gesture. There they all knelt looking up towards Chadwick in silence, an expression of fierce hatred in their eyes. Chadwick was astonished and he drew back slightly. He had never seen anything like this. It enraged him still further. The big man, who had spoken before, now cried out:
>
> 'From our knees, we're asking you, in the name of God, not to take the rent till autumn.'
>
> 'Clear out,' bellowed Chadwick. 'Get out.' (O'Flaherty, 1992, 240)

O'Flaherty has his tenants employ the strategy described in Trench's *Realities of Irish Life.* By assuming the position of abject petitioners, the tenants' posture reveals to their British overlord how base the colonial system is, despite political union. With hatred flashing in their eyes, however, they reveal Irish alienation and resistance. The body becomes eloquent when the tongue is silenced. Moreover, an English visitor regards Chadwick as somewhat Irish, thus showing colonization's cross-cultural impact. Just as Chadwick has replaced the Thompsons in Crom House, so now the Irish middle class has superseded him -- and O'Flaherty asks how it will behave.

If Chadwick represents the villainy of colonialism and foreign occupation, the doctor's father and brother show how reprobate the Irish themselves can become. John

Hynes proposes a business deal to James Rabbit, and both seem as unconcerned by the human cost of the Famine as Chadwick. Hynes explains:

> 'There's a fortune in this, James,' he said. 'I heard of a shipload due shortly in Liverpool that can be bought for six pounds a ton. The meal'll fetch half a crown a stone shortly at retail over the counter. Maybe three shillings a stone. It just needs the ready money to buy big, before the market smells a good thing and dives for it. The early bird again, James. The government is going to put money in the people's fists and them that is ready can take every penny of it at an interest on their outlay that would frighten you, man. It would frighten you, I'm telling you straight. Good solid silver waiting for this meal ... .' (O'Flaherty, 1992, 188-189)

John Hynes, of course, already is marked as the son of an informer. The family motto could be *Commercium omnia vincit*, reflecting the republican critique of the Empire and Free State. At the novel's end, Mary tells two old women that Hynes is dead:

> 'The curse of Cromwell on him,' said the housekeeper; 'it's well I know he is gone. And it's myself that has a right to say it, for he is my second cousin. I went down to the big place his son Tony has on the quays ... . I saw Johnny, but he wouldn't know me. Nor would Tony. I thought they would surely give me something to do, now they have a big house to look after. Sorra bit of them. It's the price of him to have the doctor die on him, in spite of all the nursing they bought for him. Money can't buy everything. They have made enough of it on account of this famine. That ship that's taking people to America to-day brought him another load of corn from Philadelphia.' (O'Flaherty, 1992, 441)

Hostility toward profiteers, with their own "big house," is easily understood, but the housekeeper also reveals the ambivalence of Famine survivors. She declares, "Everyone is gone that had the passage money. It's the richest of the people that are gone and only the scum left. They will all die." (O'Flaherty, 1992, 442) She does not explain why those who remain are "scum," and its ambiguity permits the statement to attach itself to many possible targets: profiteers, informers, those who refuse to assist in armed struggle, the idle. Likewise, the statement suggests how O'Flaherty viewed the extent to which the Irish themselves have absorbed dominant colonial discourse on Irish identity -- and why the kind of re-education Dr. Hynes required is so urgent. An Aran Islander and native Irish-speaker who wrote in Irish, O'Flaherty critiqued government "Irish" policies, but never doubted that the sources of cultural life lay in the peasant class, particularly in the

West.

O'Flaherty's attraction to the physical force tradition finds its way into *Famine* not only in Martin's resistance to Chadwick and his escape and association with a band of rebels, but also in Mary's dreams and Thomsy's travels. In each, they see a heroic leader with "yellow hair" who will lead Ireland to freedom. This heroicizing draws on a tradition that ranges from ancient Celtic legends of Cuchulain, the ancient Ulster champion, to early medieval figures such as Brian Boru, who defeated the Vikings in 1014, to the Rising of 1798. Habitus, as Bourdieu understands it, is complex in Ireland, because the colonial situation complicates the "social space" of behavior and discourse. On one level, a British or Anglo-Irish mentality is constructed. On another, an Irish tradition is ready to refute it.

In the rhetoric of revolution, the Irish must fight, not talk, their way to freedom. Pacific means, espoused by O'Connell and the Repeal Movement, Parnell, John Redmond and the parliamentary movement, failed. Thomsy quotes the "man with yellow hair":

> 'He said talk was no good, and begob, I agree with him, for I always said the right thing to do was to strike a blow or die in the struggle. Oh! Don't be talking, but he had powerful talk.' ... 'Faith, it was fine talk,' said Thomsy, 'and it looked an easy job of work, the way he told it. He said there are millions of the poor and only a few of the rich and if the poor got together and made themselves into a proper army, with a proper plan, same as an army, and knew what they wanted to do and stuck together, same as an army, they'd make short work of the tyrants. There would be liberty all over the world and no hunger on anybody. Landlords, he said, would be shot down like rabbits ... .' (O'Flaherty, 1992, 385-386)

O'Flaherty ironically assigns speech to Thomsy, who hides from the rebels. Moreover, the story is part of Thomsy's rhetorical strategy to gain attention -- much like Christy Mahon's speech in J.M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907). Irony, however, does not entirely destroy O'Flaherty's admiration for armed struggle. As Mary prepares to emigrate with her son, she sees a virtual Famine specter rise up to denounce the redcoats guarding a food convoy for export. The man is clubbed with a carbine, the convoy rolls forward. "'Musha,' said the woman from Garrymore, 'the poor man only

spoke the truth. It would be fitter for the people to rise and fight than to die of hunger in the ditch. I wish I had a gun to shoot the thieving murderers that are taking the food of Ireland over the sea." (O'Flaherty, 1992, 443) O'Flaherty conforms to the nationalist Famine account, disparaged by revisionist historians but upheld by Bew, Kinealy, Ó Gráda and others, as cited in Appendix I. As Mary moves to board ship, one of the secret band aiding her husband, tells her, "'Them that strike a blow,' said the man, 'deserve to be looked after. Them that won't fight can die of the hunger and may the devil roast them. Hi up there. We'll follow after these soldiers with the carts. Here is the ticket that you have to show.'" (O'Flaherty, 1992, 444) Not only is she instructed to use violence, she hears of its promise. With tensions in Europe increasing in the 1930s, with Ireland and Britain deadlocked over partition, O'Flaherty still could find an audience for "physical force."

***Irish as a 'big farmer' in Healy.*** In *The Black Stranger*, Healy situates Irish national identity among farmers, who by Phase II dominate political and economic life. While O'Flaherty, at least in part, baptizes emigration and the desire to go, Healy blesses the decision to stay and become self-sufficient. Healy's audience could well understand Kate, Patrick's wife, who declares, "The only way people like us can live is to grow the food an' eat it. When you're as old as himself you'll know that if you can't work an' feed yourself an' be independent nobody else'll do it for you." (Healy, 1950, 16) The prevailing ethos, shared by Cumann na nGaedheal (reorganized as Fine Gael in 1933) and Fianna Fáil governments, was self-reliance. Given war-time and depression conditions, there was little choice. Healy acknowledges popular grievances in the 1840s and the tradition of resistance, but accents hard work and land as part of national identity. Despite fear of the approaching blight, Act I opens in August of 1846, when hope for a recovery from '45 and its localized crop failures was still strong. Ultimately, Michael's optimism proves false. Like old Peter, a survivor of the Rising of 1798, Michael has no inhibitions in facing down British authority. "If the potatoes do fail on us, there's plenty of bread an' meat an' other food in the country, an' if you think men like me'll sit by lookin' at it, you're mistaken," says Michael, confirming that he would steal when necessary and "they

can't put the whole nation in prison." (Healy, 1950, 16) Michael and Peter are soul-mates, willing to use violence to save the country, eager to pillory O'Connell and opponents of bloodshed.

When Act II opens, the Famine is in full fury, work is almost non-existent, there is no money left, thousands are on the roads and sleep is the only way "you forget about the potato blight an' the hunger an' the waitin'," according to Bart. Patrick endeavors to maintain hope, but his friend Peter bemoans the loss of dignity and pride. "They left us a bit of pride, a bit of dignity," says Peter, but now, "Death isn't sacred to us any more. There's death lyin' rotten in every ditch between here an' my place, an' there's mongrel dogs atin' the bodies." (Healy, 1950, 27) Public works schemes are meaningless, government aid has yet to arrive, even seedlings are being eaten, peasants sleep to push away hunger and cold. Even the sheep Michael suggests be stolen are gone. For Patrick, clinging to the land, at whatever cost, is essential; it is his identity. "It all came from the land, an' d'ye think I'm going to let the land go now for the sake of a few potatoes an' a handful of oats? You've no sense, I tell you. You're all childer." (Healy, 1950, 34) After Michael discovers Bridie's theft of food, he resolves to gather men to seize food. "There's pikes buried below in the field. We'll dig them up," he shouts. (Healy, 1950, 37) The pikes recall '98's failure, but also its promise. The play permits two distinct, though inter-related discourses, survival, espoused by Patrick, and resistance, advocated by Peter and Michael, to engage each other. Survival, however, may require the temporary suppression of violent resistance. Peter tries to goad Michael into action. Enthusiasm for rebellion also leads Peter to ridicule two of Ireland's most sacred 19th century icons, Father Matthew, temperance advocate, and Daniel O'Connell, architect of Catholic emancipation in 1829 and constitutional pacifist. Peter declares:

> 'What with Fr. Matthew on the one hand an' the Liberator on the other, we'll soon be the soberest, most religious lot of bloody slaves the Almighty God ever created. Shouldn't we be proud of ourselves, eh? ... Isn't there thousands of Irishmen with strong, willin' hands all over the country? But they're all like you -- they're all waitin; waitin' for the word that'll never come. ... An' who'll give it? Is it the bould Dan -- the man that said the freedom of the country isn't worth the sheddin' of one drop of human blood -- an' hundreds of men, women an' childer

> bein' thrown out to starve on the roadsides every week in the year? Is that the man you're waitin' on to give the word?' (Healy, 1950, 18)

In the end, among the Corcorans and McCarthys, only Michael chooses violence; the others find excuses. Michael declares:

> 'We're left to starve to death an' catch fever and swell an' stink an' burst with it. I seen it on the roads between here an' town, an' there's redcoats in every barracks, well-fed an' fat with good food, waitin' to help bury us. That's what we got for waitin'. ... But I'm not goin' to sit an' wait for it. I've strength in me yet -- strength enough to send a few of the redcoats ahead of me before I go. It'll be a pleasure worth a thousand bags of meal to plunge the pike into a few of those nice round bellies an' then die quick an' easy, instead of waitin' here to wither away in fear an' dread an' hunger.' (Healy, 1950, 39)

Michael's departure to take up arms introduces the notion of a blood sacrifice and its perpetual memorial in the face of Famine; his heroicized death contrasts with most, which were anonymous, squalid and forgotten. Michael relives '98, restores his youth and finds a "decent" death through the discourse of resistance. His mother, in contrast, is unwittingly ignored when she dies at the end of Act II. Remembering the few who resisted gives meaning to the multitudes who submitted.

Healy's play also confronts negative aspects of national identity. He suggests, for example, the foolishness of discrimination by which marriages beneath one's social and economic niche were discouraged. Bridie announces, "Me father says I can make up me own mind, so long as I don't disgrace him be marryin' a pauper." (Healy, 1950, 10) In the end, she marries Bart, the younger brother, amid circumstances that made the social pecking order meaningless. Ironically, those concerns grew steadily in post-Famine Ireland and were pronounced in Phase III period. Unlike Phase I and II texts, which primarily explore political violence, Healy shows that violence existed among peasants themselves. Patrick, determined to save potato seedlings for his own household, denies them to his daughter and son-in-law. Patrick tells Danny, "Take one step forward now an' I'll split your skull wide open. I'll smash your brains out as sure as God's in heaven." (Healy, 1950, 33) Peter, when not spouting incendiary rhetoric, is fatalistic and limited in vision. He argues against trying to keep oats for food. "Aye, but it's not for the likes of

you an' me. God only created the potato for us. Anything else wouldn't be good for us." (Healy, 1950, 35) Such violence has another dimension, again largely suppressed in Phase I and II writings, but present in Phase III. Danny admits,: "I found her [Mag] stone cold be the fire an' the baby still tryin' to suck milk from her breast. I told you the baby died too, but he didn't. I couldn't bear waitin' for that, an' I smothered him meself with me hand over his face. I buried the both of them together." (Healy, 1950, 50) Danny's infanticide may have the motives of euthanasia, but it destroys his link with his dead wife and his own heir.

Questions of *nationalism*, which dominated Phase I and II textual production, give way to issues of *national identity* in Phase II. Both O'Flaherty and Healy excavate the monocultural image of rural Ireland. These Famine survivors do not have pure claims to victimhood during the 1840s crisis; some have betrayed the cause of Irish freedom, others have profiteered. In Van Dijk's terms, the dominant discourse is challenged by proposing a change in social cognition -- the Irish were complicit in their own Famine. (Van Dijk, 1988-a, 188) O'Flaherty's readers face uncomfortable questions and awkward memories about past and present. Irish figures -- Dr. Hynes, his father and brother -- are as responsible for the Famine's toll as Chadwick and the British government. The novel vindicates use of physical force, which the Anglo-Irish Treaty and subsequent establishment of the Irish Free State seemed to have repudiated. A return to the Famine past not only reasserts the historical rationale for armed struggle but defends the use of force in the future. The issues of Northern Ireland continued to fester, and European tensions threatened to involve Ireland through Britain, with whom scores had not yet been settled. Healy's play also explores the internecine side of Irish violence. More important to the contemporary moment, the play addresses the connection between national survival and commitment to the land. Emigration was not simply an economic issue but a moral one, testing the core of Irish identity. In O'Flaherty, the Famine provides an opportunity to resist the dominant discourse of national identity and progress in the Irish Free State through an investigation of the origins of the middle class -- big farmers and merchants -- who controlled political and economic life in this new period of independence. In Healy's

play, the Famine offers a chance to reassert rural Ireland's idealized discourse in resistance to wide social practice, especially emigration..

**3. Religion: Missed opportunities, repressive attitudes**

Religious partisanship, so characteristic of Famine textual production during Phases I and II, is notably absent in Phase III. Instead, both O'Flaherty and Healy dispute the assumption that "Irish," "Catholic" and "nationalist" are interchangeable terms and that they comprise a necessary adjectival trinity. By exploring religion in the Famine era, they excavate the circumstances of their own time and offer alternatives to the dominance of the Church. Readers and theater-goers discover wedges placed between religious "reality" and the dominant Phase III political and religious discourses. Changing the message code can transform social cognition and challenge habitus.

***O'Flaherty's argument with Catholicism.*** O'Flaherty's strained attitude toward religion is evident throughout *Famine*. He interrogates the faith of peasants in divine presence during the catastrophe. He depicts the harm done to relief efforts by religious squabbles over proselytism. He points to the religious hypocrisy of the Church of Ireland receiving compulsory tithes from peasants at the same time its clergymen excoriated landlord and government for inaction and sought to organize relief. But it is for the Roman Catholic Church that O'Flaherty reserves his greatest firepower. While recognizing that individual priests worked tirelessly for the relief of the suffering, he indicts institutionalized religion for opposing violent resistance. Because O'Flaherty's primary concern is the Gaelic majority, it is Catholicism, the dominant faith among them, that incurs his wrath. By creating two priest-characters with opposing philosophies, O'Flaherty develops the discourse by which the competing constitutional and physical force traditions played themselves out in the clergy.

The local parish priest, Father Roche, is a kindly old man, who first debates Famine response over dinner, oblivious to the irony, but in time virtually starves as he shares his own meager resources. Roche, however, adheres to official ecclesiastical policy and forbids breaking the law or rousing the people. His curate, Father Tom Geelan, a "younger" man in his 60s, has lost ministerial preferment because of his politics. Violent

resistance to oppression and aggression is just when pleas and negotiation fail, he argues. For O'Flaherty, Geelan "was of the type of that gallant priest" who sided with patriots but was scorned by bishops. (O'Flaherty, 1992, 117) Geelan's enthusiasm for armed resistance increases as the Famine worsens. Despite his parish priest, the curate cautions Dr. Hynes:

> 'Take care, son. ... The tyrant ... has set us one against the other and made us helpless. So the weak among us try to escape by fawning on the tyrant, by clothing themselves in his raiment and imitating his speech. But they cannot change the blood in their veins. ... You can't change the blood in your veins. It will cry out in the darkness of night ... . The people are always right in the mass. For a moment they may be wrong or for a generation. A generation is only a moment ... . In the long run, they are right.' (O'Flaherty, 1992, 164)

Geelan's political theology is essentially *vox populi, vox Dei* and demonstrates profound faith in democracy. He also embodies Maurice Goldring's claim that the physical force tradition is legitimated by its avowed opponents, who either wink at it or threaten to invoke it. (Goldring, 1993, 138) Quite a different perspective is found in Father Roche. Roche is a realist. His people are rife with backsliding, idleness, drunkenness and potential violence, but he loves them. Moreover, he doubts their capacity to confront RIC and British military units. Roche's view is essentially that of the 19th century Irish hierarchy, which in the 1930s began its long political ascendancy.

O'Flaherty creates a touching encounter between both priests, who surprise each other at prayer in the woods around monastery ruins atop a hill. Father Roche seeks divine guidance after his sermon advocating rent payment backfires, and tenants accost Chadwick, then face a melee with armed police during which Martin is wounded and Mary's father arrested. Father Geelan admits that he plans to encourage revolt:

> 'There is no law of God or man,' cried the curate, 'that forbids the destitute to sustain life. Come what may, I have decided to call upon the people to fight for their rights.'
>
> 'With what, you fool?' cried Father Roche. 'With their fists against bayonets? You're mad. I forbid you to stir a hand, or foot, or to speak, or to speak a word. I'll have you unfrocked.' (O'Flaherty, 1992, 322)

Both men reach a fever pitch, but Geelan eventually turns philosophical. "'Maybe

you're right. But if you are, this is the beginning of the end for the Church. If the Church can't lead her flock to battle in the cause of justice and liberty, then she must make room for those who can, for those who look upon the sword as a sacred weapon in defence of justice.'" (O'Flaherty, 1992, 322) The curate's comments echo Thomas Francis Meagher (1823-1867), who defied O'Connell 1846 and helped inspire the Young Irelanders. O'Flaherty's account ends as badly as the Young Irelander's rising. The priests agree to help feed the people and together march with a crowd to the government grain depot, only to be met by police "with bayonets fixed to their carbines." (O'Flaherty, 1992, 324)

Father Geelan advances toward the police, rebukes the district inspector and calls upon the people to rush the police. The police, however, simply let Geelan through their ranks, then reform to separate him from the people. Father Roche is left stunned by the failure of moral force to win the day. He desperately tries to stop them, "threw out his arms, and called on them to halt. He was jumping off the ground and waving his arms, like an angry woman shooing trespassing hens from a garden patch." (O'Flaherty, 1992, 325) O'Flaherty renders both churchmen ridiculous, and his narrative strategy amounts to van Dijk's concept of social change through alterations in discursive construction. (Van Dijk, 1984, 32-33) When discourse complies with a given social cognition, the status quo is maintained; when discourse violates social cognition, the possibility for transformation of the status quo emerges. By presenting the idealized and idolized Catholic clergy to his readers in another perspective, O'Flaherty aims at detaching readers from the Church's hegemonic discourse. The police call on the parish priest to disperse the crowd, Roche meekly obeys, Geelan countermands his order, the two argue in public and the inspector orders his men to advance as the crowd melts away. For O'Flaherty's narrator, "Father Geelan was a voice crying in the wilderness; a revolutionary soldier disarmed by the soutane which he wore and by the mitred felons to whom he had vowed obedience." (O'Flaherty, 1992, 391) Father Roche, meanwhile, is left with the "impotent rage of defeat," and the knowledge that "the craven sin of pacifism," advocated by "the demagogue O'Connell" and his Repeal Association, had led not to bloodshed but national famine. (O'Flaherty, 1992, 328) He writes, "The bishops also preached peace and

obedience to the laws that gave them fat bellies and rich vestments and palaces. All those in command said that life must be spared and that no cause was worth the shedding of a single man's blood. Now that blood was going to rot in starved bodies." (O'Flaherty, 1992, 328) To thwart their episcopal successors, O'Flaherty would expose their origins.

The novel also probes the theological problem of innocent suffering, although *Famine* does not, in the end, abandon the theistic orientation of the Irish people. Nonetheless, O'Flaherty seems to blame God, at least in part, for the Famine. When the Kilmartins' feast is interrupted by a storm, "the destructive attitude of Divine Providence again manifested itself." (O'Flaherty, 1992, 296) The family kneels to pray the rosary, blesses the house with holy water and invokes the Trinity, but the blight appears anyway.

The kneeling Kilmartins seeking God's mercy are mirrored in the kneeling tenants seeking Chadwick's rent relief. For Mary Kilmartin, God becomes increasingly remote as the Famine unravels her life. Nearly delirious from hunger, Mary has a spiritual crisis sandwiched between police searching for her husband and dogs ravaging Thomsy's body: "For the first time she rebelled against her belief in Divine Providence. There was no God for her or the other poor people, who were starving to death. God belonged to the rich, among whom there was no hunger, no understanding of hunger." (O'Flaherty, 1992, 421) For a nation which officially prided itself on its faith amid crisis, O'Flaherty's language is incendiary. For a man with socialist, even communist sympathies, however, the elimination of God, the sidelining of the Church, which acted as a break on violence, and the popular recognition of class exploitation establishes precisely the scenario that can trigger change. Implicit in O'Flaherty is the accusation that the Church courts the rich and powerful.

***Healy repudiates religious intolerance.*** Religion is not a major feature of *The Black Stranger*, but Healy uses traditional Fenian rhetoric and hostility toward the official Church to target contemporary religious intolerance. When the Protestantism and suicide of Wolfe Tone, one of the leaders of the Rising of 1798 and a founder of the republican movement, are raised as obstacles to his entry into Heaven by Kate, old Peter snaps, "Aye, well in Heaven or hell, ma'am, wherever he is, I only hope I'll have the good

fortune to join him. I'm beginin' to think, the past few years, that maybe the company in Heaven wouldn't be to my taste at all." (Healy, 1950, 19) Here, the cognitive dissonance created between support for the *Catholic* Church and admiration for one of the *Protestant* icons of Irish republicanism forces a rethinking. Again, van Dijk's social cognition theory is useful in understanding how the play works communicationally. (Van Dijk, 1988, 1988-b, 30) The fundamental connection between the Church and the people, however, emerges in an exchange between Michael's mother and his would-be lover. Kate declares, "Even the priest is against Michael for goin' around tellin' the people they'd no call to pay dues when they were goin' hungry for food in the summer months." (Healy, 1950, 11) Her comment disturbs the assumption that all priests sacrificed themselves for Famine victims. Bridie responds, "... but I remember when we had the heavy snows last year, it was Michael the priest took with him on his sick calls in the mountains." (Healy, 1950, 11) Bridie both establishes the link between priest and people, and silences nascent clerical criticism -- except from Peter, whose vitriol isolates him.

For O'Flaherty, the issue of religion during the Famine provides a convenient opportunity to expose Catholic opposition to armed struggle, which republicans claimed caused fatal delays for independence. Such history may seem moot -- except for settling rhetorical scores -- in the Ireland of the 1930s. However, by portraying the "error" of the Church's position then, O'Flaherty is able to cast doubt about its contemporary social and political positions -- to which he had run afoul. Restrictions of creative work, opposition to divorce, marriage controls, religious intolerance, community dominance and intimidation were among complaints laid at the church door. O'Flaherty in *Famine*, unlike some of his other works, does not make his clerical figures -- Catholic or Anglican -- vicious, only sadly misguided and, occasionally, self-righteous. Bourdieu's notion of habitus carries a religious dimension, especially in a society such as Ireland during Phase III. Irish behavior and belief regarding "the priest" is a long-established aspect of their cultural habitus. When such attitudes are harmful, however, a change in belief may alter their behavior, as van Dijk's approach to social cognition as a means of reinforcement or alteration in discourse suggests. (Bourdieu, 1993, 161; van Dijk, 1988-b, 109-110) Healy,

on a more subdued level, introduces the same issues. The local priest may oppose Michael's rebellion, but he still needs him. Likewise, Protestant efforts for Irish freedom are reasserted. In the new state, both texts point to and resist dominance by the majority faith.

**4. Gender: The Famine as a space for social possibility**

The Famine had a devastating impact on family structure. While the post-Famine period saw a return to a rigid gender classification in Irish society, the Famine era itself experienced the emergence of fluid relationships. Women often found themselves in positions of control and dominance, while men sometimes found themselves called upon to provide nurture and care. For O'Flaherty and Healy, gender becomes a way of highlighting the severity of the Famine, and the heroism it called forth, but also of acknowledging Phase III marriage, celibacy and age problems.

***O'Flaherty's Kathleen ni Houlihan.*** Few Famine novels explore gender shifts more thoroughly than does O'Flaherty's. Mary Kilmartin quickly develops into the dominant character, exhibiting personality traits and leadership skills that, in other times, might have been repressed by the patriarchy of rural Ireland. Generally uninterested in or hostile toward female characterization, O'Flaherty's decision to catapult a woman to such prominence may be related to two factors. First, *Famine* is a novel decidedly more engaged with social structures and conditions than most of his other works. Second, the considerable number of Irish women who exercised, to some extent, the kind of dominant family position occupied by Mary Kilmartin may have influenced his narrative strategy. As Radway has shown, there are diverse readership communities, and O'Flaherty finds a useful fit between history, contemporary social conditions and book sales. (Radway, 1991, 469-470) The novel gradually strips away male family members. Mary is left to rally for the future, represented by her son, Michael. She does not simply fall into leadership due to male absence. She asserts her rights, and in time, her superiority is recognized.

When Mary shows her anger over the selfishness of the neighboring Hernon family, Brian supports her -- even though Kitty Hernon is his daughter:

> 'While they were eating [the sheep],' said Mary, 'they might ask us did we have a mouth.'
>
> 'True for you,' said the old man. 'Let you speak to him [Martin] though. He's your husband more than he is my son. Begob, I think it's you has my blood in you. You have fine sense for a woman.'
>
> Of late he always took sides with Mary ... . He liked the way she managed things and he was now as enthusiastically on her side as he had formerly been hostile. He found her thrifty and hard like a true peasant. She loved the earth. (O'Flaherty, 1992, 149)

Brian's support is critical, because he remains the validating authority in the family, yet he admits that her nuptial bond with Martin outranks his own paternal one.

Mary's authority extends to confrontations with the police and the rescue of neighbors. She sends Thomsy on a journey to locate her husband. She steals a side of bacon from Hynes's shop to support the family, and when challenged by Maggie, she asserts the moral rights of the desperately poor: "'I didn't steal it,' she said fiercely. 'I took it. A person has a right to take things to keep alive. I have to feed him that God sent me.'" (O'Flaherty, 1992, 336) When Maggie persists in her objections, Mary shoots back: "'Oh! Let ye be quiet' ... . Aren't ye all eating it? Ye can't have it both ways. And I'd do it again, too, if I got the chance. I'm not going to die of hunger, nor my child either, while I have a pair of hands. Eat up, quick, will ye, before anybody might come in.'" (O'Flaherty, 1992, 337) She successively squares off with each Kilmartin, not for self-gain but for the family group: Michael's draining effect, Maggie's depression, Brian's recklessness, Thomsy's laziness, Kitty's selfishness. Realist that she is, she muses, "'Isn't God cruel' Mary said. 'All these torments one after the other.' ... 'I'm so tired,' Mary said. 'I'm glad Michael is gone, God forgive me. He was like a worm eating us out of house and home. Now there isn't a pig, or a hen, or a duck left. And my baby coming.'" (O'Flaherty, 1992, 200) Her creed is simple, as she speaks to Thomsy: "'Get ready,' said Mary. 'There's one thing certain. We won't get anything sitting here on our backsides praying to God. God helps them that help themselves.'" (O'Flaherty, 1992, 311) Likewise, she shrewdly warns him of possible treachery: "'In a time of hunger like this,

no one is to be trusted and money to be earned for informing on a wanted man.'" (O'Flaherty, 1992, 358) Following a dream, she envisions a plan to emigrate and eventually reunite with Martin in America, and defends it against the fears of the old. With brutal logic, she tells Brian:

> 'You'd rather leave him on his keeping until they find him and hang him, I suppose,' cried Mary. 'Is that the kind of father you are? I want him to escape to America. What other chance is there for him? Tell me that. You only think of yourself, and you with only a few years to live. We are young. We have our lives before us.' (O'Flaherty, 1992, 387)

The extent of her authority is encapsulated when she forbids Brian entry into his own house with his faithful, but injured dog Oscar. "Mary stared at him coldly. 'My little Michael is in there,' He's more to me than a dog that has been eating ... [Thomsy's head quite possibly]. Take him away from this door. I'll let no plague in here.'" (O'Flaherty, 1992, 424) To preserve the future of the Kilmartins, Mary repudiates their past. She can be hard: "Now she looked quite a virago. The imminence of famine had wrought a marked change in her countenance." (O'Flaherty, 1992, 337) As she prepares to board ship, Mary is seen by two village women as "the approaching woman, who came slowly, very erect, tall, slender, with head thrown back. She carried something on her bosom wrapped in a cloak." (O'Flaherty, 1992, 439) Kathleen ni Houlihan has come to life again. Mary's impact can be seen not only in her success, but in her ability to transform Brian. Early in the novel, his attentiveness to Michael is at least partly a way of prolonging his life to prevent a transfer of power to Martin, who is prepared to succeed his father. By the end of the novel, however, Brian manifests genuine compassion. He offers his own portion of bread and milk to his grandson Michael. While O'Flaherty focuses on a strong, assertive woman, she does not transgress the fundamental boundaries of sexuality, marriage or maternity. Those she opposes, dominates or controls are alien from O'Flaherty's readers by reason of nationality, religion, class, age or mental condition. Martin, her husband, who might be expected to "control" his wife, is conveniently "on his keeping," after striking a blow for freedom. Consequently, O'Flaherty offers much to female readers, but avoids offending the gendered sensibilities

of male readers.

Masculine fascination with, and fear of, liminal women finds a place in *Famine.* Mary is clearly a mainstream Irish peasant woman, but Kate Hernon, the local "wise woman of the Valley," is different case altogether. Because she can heal through what appear to villagers as dark, magic arts, she represents feminine power -- in touch with the earth, with ancient Celtic tradition and uncontrolled by either political ideology or religious practice. Kate serves as both a midwife and a local oracle:

> Her kind was common enough in those days, a relic of old pagan times, when under Druidic law medicine had reached a high degree of perfection among us. ... She came after nightfall, wearing a black shawl ... head to foot. She was tall and thin, of a great age, with ragged white hair which streamed about her face. ... There lurked the phantom of a ravaged beauty when ... [her face] was in repose. But when she opened her lips to speak, her face became horrid like that of an evil witch; for the practice of her buffoonery had got her into the habit of speaking in an exaggerated manner, rolling her eyes and twisting her lips. There were only a few teeth left in her gums." (O'Flaherty, 1992, 140)

"Buffoonery" notwithstanding, she is seen early in Carleton and others as a sign of power.

Another important aspect of gender relations in *Famine* is O'Flaherty's emphasis on the female body to portray the impact of the catastrophe. If Mary represents strength and survival, the unraveling of Sally O'Hanlon, a neighbor, indicates despair and defeat. Sally, who shared food and encouragement with the Kilmartins, has seen her own family collapse. Her husband is dead. She has learned to steal. "'No, 'faith. I was always a good mother and a good mother I am still, looking after what God sent me. [To Mary] Come in, treasure, but don't make any noise for fear you might waken them." (O'Flaherty, 1992, 412) Her children all lie in a row "asleep," but, in fact, she has killed them:

> 'I had a right to put them out of their suffering,' Sally cried, 'and I'll bury them, too, when I have done my share of looking at their little faces. God gave them to me. I couldn't let them lie there screeching with the pain and nobody to help them. Is it with the meat of a dog I would go on filling their mouths ... ?' (O'Flaherty, 1992, 414)

From an essentialist perspective, Sally's murders reverse "maternal" and "feminine" nature; her response to Mary raises at least two possibilities. First, Sally is not the

originating cause of her children's death, only the proximate. Foreign occupation, the land tenure system, laissez-faire economics and minimal relief all played their part. Second, Sally's act is euthanasia in the face of untenable circumstances. O'Flaherty's interest in the "feminization of famine" helps confirm Kelleher's argument that Famine texts often turn to the female body to explore victimization, suffering, resistance, domination, survival, maternity and nurture. (Kelleher, 1997, 6-11)

Throughout this discussion of gender, the question of agency has been implicit. While the capacity to choose and act is progressively denied characters, Mary Kilmartin maintains her agency in survival strategies, in confrontations, in negotiations and in relationships. O'Flaherty's uncharacteristic move in ascribing agency to a female character owes much to the Famine's alternative social space. Radway's insistence of diverse readerships helps explain why *Famine* has enjoyed consistent popularity. (Radway, 1991, 475) Richly layered, the novel is historical fiction with multiple elements to attract readers from various interpretive communities. Its enthusiastic promotion of armed struggle, its attack on the institutional Church, its fundamental pieties of land, family and nation, and its gender portrayals are all open to competing readership strategies.

***Healy offers feminine influence, masculine rule.*** Healy's *The Black Stranger* manifests several features that relate to gender. Patriarchy is seen as the norm in Irish society; decisions on important matters are made by men, primarily Peter McCarthy and Patrick Corcoran. But women demonstrate influence in some decisive ways. When Michael returns from his travels, for example, the family discovers that people are dying in the streets, that soup kitchens are inadequate and that women have turned to prostitution. The news immobilizes the men, and it is Bridie who steals a sack of meal to feed Mag and her unborn child. This, in turn, rallies Michael to take up arms. His action may conform to the nationalist image of heroic masculinity, but it is precipitated by the act of a woman. Bridie's initial "hysteria," as described in the stage directions, emerges as a strategy to prevent the discovery of her theft. Once the family knows she has taken a sack of grain, however, she becomes defiant -- and compellingly lucid: "'I don't care, so I

don't. It was a harder thing to do than just sit be the fire. I don't care. The meal is there for you now, Mag. It'll make a cake or two an' you needn't be cryin' to yourself all the night because you've no food for the baby.'" (Healy, 1950, 37) Mag's response invokes a feminine domestic world, with typically maternal concerns -- but it is one that not only involves men, but runs parallel to a masculine political world. Mag replies: "'I won't forget it as along as I live, an' when the baby comes, I'll name it after you ... . There's nothin' to be sorry about. I'd do the same meself. What's a little thing like that, or the sins of the whole world, compared to the life of my baby, that's harmless an' helpless ... ?'" (Healy, 1950, 37) Prompted by such reasoning, Michael leaves to collect his weapons and strike. Even more important, given the circumstances, is Bridie's decision to remain with her father on the land. She and Patrick offer stark images of the Irish rural scene during both Famine times and the first half of the 20th century: increasing age and reluctant celibacy.

If Healy's play constructs a hierarchy of values in which staying on the land is paramount, then the gendered significance of male characters is obvious. Even more important than armed resistance is commitment to stay in Ireland, which is expressed not only by working the land but also by fathering children. Bridie's attitude toward the Corcoran brothers, one desired, the other accepted, is resolved in her anticipated son:

> 'They're sayin' ... [Michael's] mad because he ... [attacked the British] on his own -- ah, if he'd a few hundred men behind him they'd soon've known how mad he was, an' if I had a son of his that I could tell the story to an' rear him up to lead the men when the famine's past an' they're ready an' willin' again -- then they'd know how mad we all of us are. That's what I wanted Bart to stay for. He has Michael's blood in him an' a son be Bart could be taught to take the place of the son that Michael'll never have.' (Healy, 1950, 52)

A presumed son not only resolves Bridie's choice between the brothers, but embodies both discursive positions: commitment to the land and armed resistance. Unfortunately for the play, perhaps, Radway's interpretive communities also may help explain its failure to attract attention beyond its initial favorable reviews. (Radway, 1991, 475) By 1945, Ireland's attention was shifting from the rural ideal to the urban reality. Moreover, without sufficient employment, emigration remained a necessity. Healy's play was

preaching to people already out the door.

Gender for both O'Flaherty and Healy provides a space for social possibility. Certainly, the women in *Famine* and *The Black Stranger* conform to the gender expectations of their times -- and of Phase III -- but they also are "allowed" by the Famine to explore and develop areas off limits to traditional behavior. Mary Kilmartin, in *Famine*, offers a dangerously active Kathleen ni Houlihan; she does not simply *represent* Ireland, she *is* Ireland in action. In her, gender and agency are not mutually exclusive categories. Instead, one reinforces the other. While men continue to dominate the social structure on a macrostructural level, the Kilmartin microcostructure shows a female who freely chooses her way, shapes her social space and determines outcomes for others. *The Black Stranger* is more muted in approaching gender, and it reasserts traditional male dominance. Bridie might choose to stay on the land with Patrick, but there can be no hope of progeny between them. Only when Bart rejects emigration can the twofold promise of staying on the land and siring progeny become possible. What makes Healy's play stand out, however, is that men, by the tens of thousands, in consequence of post-Famine conditions, had been refusing that social and gendered role during Phase III.

## CONCLUSION: THE FAMINE'S ABSENCE AND ITS ELUSIVE PRESENCE

O'Flaherty and Healy offer Phase III readers a direct confrontation with the Famine and its relation to their own times. In James Joyce, Ireland's greatest fiction writer, and Patrick Kavanagh, one of her finest 20th century poets, the Famine's presence is muted, haunting and covert. The Famine looms as the remote cause of current conditions, as a repressed memory and as a fear of what might happen if independence were to collapse. Cheryl Herr observes that "*Ulysses* is a model of cultural processes" both internally and externally, and that even as Joyce targets institutions and their discourses, he and his work are, to some extent, shaped by those discourses. (Herr, 1986, 6-7) The Famine as part of nationalist rhetoric and its simultaneous censoring -- because of its difficult questions -- illustrate culture formation's recursive effects.

Consummate modernist and cosmopolitan, Joyce nonetheless is steeped in Irish history, politics and folklore, and so employs the Famine in two important works. "The

Dead," coda to *Dubliners* (1914), presents characters whose social and emotional paralysis may be linked to the consequences of the Famine, as well as a figure who is a virtual spectre from *an Gorta Mor*. All the themes explored in this dissertation, from land to agency, find a place in *Dubliners*. James Fairhall writes that the book's thematic explorations have roots in the social consequences of the Famine. (Fairhall, 1995, 75-79) In "The Dead," the cosmopolitan and smug Gabriel Conroy has cut himself off from the land, history and native culture, all represented by the West of Ireland. Stifled by Dublin's Victorian rigidity, he is challenged by a nationalist and cultural revivalist to use his holidays to visit his own country, not France. Even more powerfully, he discovers that his wife has harbored a passionate desire for a youth she knew years ago. Gabriel reveals the difficulty of Bourdieu's habitus in a colonial context. (Bourdieu, 1993, 59) When native experience is repressed, as was the Famine, the dominant, but alien, culture -- Britain and the Ascendancy -- sits restlessly, even dangerously for Gabriel and middle-class Ireland.

Michael Furey, Gretta Conroy's would-be lover, resembles a Famine spectre. Gretta recalls the "poor fellow at the end of the garden, shivering. ... He said he did not want to live. I can see his eyes as well! He was standing at the end of the wall ... .' (Joyce, 1994, 57) Michael Furey resembles the evicted Famine-era beggars on the roads. That he comes from the West and is buried in Oughterard, where Famine devastation was severe, helps reinforce the connection. (Woodham-Smith, 1991, 110) Fairhall writes:

> ... many petty-bourgeois Dubliners, the class depicted by Joyce, either were rural migrants themselves or were their children or grandchildren, and would have had relatives with first-hand memories of the great hunger of the 1840s. ... [Nora Barnacle, Joyce's wife, was born in Galway in 1884, and the story details an incident in her life] ... It seems ... remarkable that the characters of *Dubliners* reveal no awareness of what we might consider their predictable antecedents beyond the pale of Dublin. Perhaps, by portraying them without any past or future other than Dublin's, Joyce was evoking not simply the paralysis of a perpetually entrapped present, but the repression of something nightmarish in the intertwined history of city and country in Ireland. (Fairhall, 1995, 75)

Gabriel's decision to go to the West, and possible redemption, comes from his Famine-like encounter -- which Joyce suggests: "His soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead." (Joyce, 1994, 59) Whether he will escape his paralysis and

actually go is part of the tension. The imaginary space where Gabriel finds himself echoes the world of the Famine, and suggests the ways Joyce uses the national calamity to reference Irish characteristics and issues. Fairhall writes, "This notion of the West as a land of ghosts is not merely metaphorical. It has roots in the great famine of the 1840s .... Gabriel's epiphany, then, has a powerful historical component." (Fairhall, 1995, 251)

Likewise, the Famine plays a role in *Ulysses* (1922), the comic and richly-layered account of Leopold Bloom's odyssey through Dublin on 16 June 1904. In the Cyclops, or Citizen, section, Bloom encounters a cantankerous old Dubliner, who overwhelms him with his nationalist rantings. Joyce's nationalism has no time for flag-waving. (Ellmann, 1982, 258-259) Entering Barney Kiernan's pub at about 5 p.m., Bloom encounters the Citizen, a giant-sized, irascible Sinn Féin supporter and his surly, hydrophobic dog, Garryowen. Through two narrative voices, one satiric and cynical, the other parodic and inflated, the reader travels through history, and learns that with each sip, and each new arrival, the Citizen becomes more inebriated and animated. Joyce parodies the dominant nationalist discourse:

> 'We'll put force against force .... We have our greater Ireland beyond the sea. They were driven out of house and home in the black '47. Their mudcabins and their shielings by the roadside were laid low by the battering-ram ... But those that came to the land of the free remember the land of bondage. And they will come again with a vengeance, no cravens, the sons of Granuaile, the champions of Kathleen ni Houlihan.' (Joyce, 1997, 315)

The Famine haunts the speech of the Citizen and fuels his ramblings with the same elements found in nationalist discourse: eviction, exile and return for revenge, so that the land returns to its "rightful" heirs, united in their nationalistic goals by blood and soil. This very thinking found expression in the rhetoric of Padraic Pearse, leader of the Easter Rising of 1916, and was continued in political rhetoric of institutionalized republicanism. But the Citizen's credentials are tainted. He has profited from the eviction of a countryman -- thus linking him to the ascendant bourgeois class Joyce, O'Flaherty and Kavanagh critique. Richard Ellmann writes:

> The Citizen reflects the intensities of the first two [narrators] in that, as a chauvinist, everything Irish is good, everything unIrish is vile. The Citizen is a

> flagwaver and a xenophobe, but he is also sponger and braggart, and, as Theristes [the satiric narrator] attests, is not so Irish as he pretends, since he has broken the patriotic code by buying up the holding of an evicted tenant. (Ellman, 1972, 112)

Bloom endeavors to join the conversation but fails to stand his companions a drink, his "two mistakes." (Tindall, 1971, 188) Amid Joyce's "hilarious parodies" of histories, sagas and epics, Bloom ventures his opinions. (Tindall, 1971, 189) Bloom's third mistake, from van Dijk's perspective, is his attempt to disrupt the discourse and social schemata of his comrades in the pub. (Van Dijk, 1984, 33-34) Alternative perspectives expose their fallacies, enhancing the parody. Robert H. Bell writes that "any view is possible, and none is precluded." (Bell, 1991, 144)

Eventually, Bloom so infuriates the Citizen that he hurls a biscuit tin after him and it registers seismically and Bloom exits Elijah-like. (Gilbert, 1955, 258-277) Joyce shows the dark side of Irish nationalism through the figure of a Jew, another persecuted people, thus undermining Irish claims to blood, suffering, nation and religion, all intensified by the Famine. Vincent Cheng asserts that Joyce gives voice to those "silenced and exiled to the margins of dominant cultures" and so "explores the alternatives -- alternatives to the discursive and hegemonic constructions of dominant culture." (Cheng, 1995, 7) That the Famine thus floats, detached but present, through Joyce's work, should be no surprise; that Ireland's greatest calamity, which silenced the marginalized multitude, should remain so evanescent nonetheless remains as mysterious as the syntax of *Finnegan's Wake.*

Just as Joyce's fiction reveals and conceals the presence of hunger, so too the poetry of Patrick Kavanagh evokes the Famine. Kavanagh had little time for the cultural or political nationalists with an essentialist vision of Ireland. His *The Great Hunger* (1942), will be explored in Chapter IV with Tom MacIntyre's dramatic adaptation.

This chapter has examined the literary and dramatic construction of the Famine during its most repressed period. Phase III textual production from 1911 to 1950 was limited in the extreme. Attention had turned to pressing concerns: independence, civil war, two world wars, economic depression and nation-building. Discursively, the Famine seemed to offer little to the new Ireland. For some writers, however, the Famine

suggested models of social and political action that could speak to their readers. As O'Flaherty and Healy demonstrate, such meanings could be contentious and contradictory: emigration vindicated, emigration bemoaned, return to the land, beware the middle class, maintain the option of armed struggle and beware clerical domination. The socio-cultural history of Phase III shows that such messages were stimulated by and responded to high emigration, declining population, economic malaise, cultural stagnation and ecclesiastical excess. This documentary dimension of the texts in question helps explain why so few Famine narratives were produced, and why particular themes dominated the works that were.

At the microtextual level, analysis of LaCapra's worklike, or rhetorical, dimension of Phase III texts has demonstrated that traditional concerns about land, national identity, religion and gender took an inward turn. It became essential to interpret and critique from the inside for domestic readers: We Irish may own our land now, but why do so few of us remain on it? Our nationalism created an independent state, but why did we have a civil war? How are we now, and who was complicit in past oppression? Catholicism sustained the Irish people for centuries, but to what extent did it inhibit our liberation and why does it repress our aspirations? If our society is led naturally by men, why do so many single Irish women succeed at home and abroad? These very questions also help explain why so few Famine texts emerged. Divisions in the recent past were still too raw to explore the incendiary potential of the Famine. To question collective victimhood or national solutions since the Famine was, perhaps, more than the times could bear.

The communicational dimensions of O'Flaherty's *Famine,* Healy's *The Black Stranger* and Joyce's "The Dead" in *Dubliners* and "The Citizen" chapter in *Ulysses* include narrative and rhetorical strategies to subvert prevailing discourses through changes in social cognition. The blood myth, the middle class, the dismissal of armed struggle, emigration, the Church, the 'greater Ireland' diaspora, social paralysis all become microtextual targets for what van Dijk describes as the cognitive framework in social understanding. (Van Dijk, 1984, 40-41) Most Phase III Irish shared some part of dominant discourse because of their social homogeneity and historically-situated

"habitus," as Bourdieu suggests. (Bourdieu, 1998, 6) Only by undermining their world view could a change be anticipated. Macrotextually, limited Phase III production deprived the Irish public sphere, which Habermas sees as the place where social change occurs, of the "voices" required to sustain discussion and debate. (Habermas, 1989, 52) Likewise, as Hall's transmission model of communication shows, potential encoders and decoders saw their circumstances change and the symmetry of old codes shatter. (Hall, 1973, 6) After more than half a century with little change in fundamental issues, Phase III brought massive social, political and cultural upheaval. No longer would the old Phase I and II messages work. Famine experience was constructed along the polarities of nationalist-unionist, Irish-British, Catholic-Protestant, tenant-landlord. The codes -- landlord on horseback, tenants kneeling, evicted families, rotting potatoes and stinking fields, thatched cottages and Big Houses -- telegraphed features of an entire society. They were integrated easily into the pre-existing discursive structures and strategies of liberalism, nationalism, republicanism, imperialism and religious proselytism: peasants are exploited and need relief, the Irish are oppressed and ought to be liberated, armed struggle is the only answer to British force, the Catholic faith sustains the downtrodden, Britain has an obligation to control an improvident people and protect those who seek to improve the Irish and Protestantism encourages thrift and industry. In Phase III, conditions had changed. Independent Ireland had trouble locating and using a narrative *within* the community of survivor-descendants. Immediate demands made the rationale for discursive engagement with the Famine seem unclear or unnecessary. New conditions for message production, and new codes would come -- later.

Silence about the Famine pervaded Phase III. O'Flaherty unquestionably dominates the period's textual production of Famine narratives. Joyce and Kavanagh are allusional and elusive. Healy's play is direct but its short run denies it the same impact as O'Flaherty. But a single novel hardly suffices for four decades. Clearly, a different ethos -- nation-building and social harmony -- prevailed. To accomplish the former seemed to require an engagement with contemporary issues and concerns, not the remote conditions of the 1840s. To achieve the latter seemed to demand a silencing of difference and

discord. It is one of the ironies of Phase III that so many of the social and cultural circumstances in the new Irish Free State and later Republic of Ireland were rooted, at least in part, in the Famine. Such an exploration would have to wait until the next phase of Irish literary and dramatic production.

## CHAPTER IV

# *Feeding on Hunger: Texts 1951-1983*

After virtually sleeping through the Famine's centennial, Ireland underwent massive economic and social change for the next three and a half decades. Emigration's steady drain on talent and energy ended. Population inched upward. Industrialization took a tentative hold. A new confidence began to permeate Irish society, although the malaise of Phase III took years to relinquish its grip. In train, Irish writers began to turn to the Famine as an historical phenomenon that could communicate current needs and problems and explain the Irish to themselves. From 1951 to 1983, understood here as Phase IV, there emerged a steady stream of works engaging the Famine imaginatively and historically. This chapter will 1.) provide a synopsis of action for the two plays selected for detailed consideration; 2.) examine the social and cultural forces that helped trigger interest and engagement in Phase IV after widespread silence and textual absence in Phase III; 3.) assess the documentary dimensions of this production in the period's social and cultural features; and 4.) analyze the rhetorical elements of discourse according to tropes of land, national identity, religion, gender and agency.

By Phase IV, questions of land ownership, national identity and religious affiliation, while still important, began to give way to new concerns. During the more than 30-year time frame, agency and gender engaged writers, and they responded with new discursive and narrative strategies to exploit the Famine's deep historical memory. The two Phase IV works to be examined in detail are Tom Murphy's seminal drama *Famine*, first produced in 1968, and Tom MacIntyre's revolutionary play *The Great Hunger*, which debuted in 1983. The rationale for considering these particular works lies in their popularity, notoriety, innovative dramatic approach and discursive content. Murphy's play has been performed regularly since its premiere, and continues to attract significant audiences. MacIntyre's play, because of its experimental forms, generated

substantial controversy and press attention. Both playwrights have influenced Irish theater practice, and their work shows a shift from realism and naturalism to ritual and expressionism, with a focus on the body in its visual, aural, imagistic, physical and kinetic dimensions. Finally, Murphy and MacIntyre employ discourses concerning agency and gender.

Theoretical perspectives from Bourdieu and van Dijk will be particularly useful here, with additional reference to Hall, Radway, Habermas and Foucault. On a macrotextual level, Bourdieu's social habitus helps explain why writers such as Murphy and MacIntyre turn to the Famine. On a microtextual level, Van Dijk's emphasis on methods of maintaining and transforming discourse through social cognition helps excavate the rhetorical, imagistic and kinetic levels of drama. Meanwhile, Hall's encoding and decoding theory points to how new messages were transmitted in Famine drama even as traditional narratives were employed. Radway's notion of interpretive communities illustrates how the plays might appeal to new audiences. Finally, Habermas's claim that changes in media and social practice can enlarge the public sphere points to the plays' social impact. During Phase IV, the hungers in the Irish psyche, with remote origins in the Famine, finally were becoming food for the Irish imagination.

Textually, production of Famine materials during Phase IV included a new history of the catastrophe, titled *The Great Famine*, edited by R.D. Edwards and T.D. Williams and commissioned by the Irish government to mark the Famine's centennial. Although not published until 1956 by Browne and Nolan, Dublin, it triggered historiographical discussion, because of its revisionism, and increased public awareness. Cecil Woodham-Smith's history, *The Great Hunger*, was published in 1962 by Harper and Row, New York and London. A bestseller, often reprinted, it provoked historiographical criticism. Other literary and dramatic works, discussed in Appendix II, included Walter Macken's popular novel *The Silent People* (1962), Brendan Kennelly's poem, "My Dark Fathers" (1964), Beatrice Coogan's novel *The Big Wind* (1969), Elizabeth Byrd's novel *The Famished Land* in 1972 and Brian Friel's acclaimed drama *Translations* (1980).

## SECTION I: SYNOPSES FOR THE MURPHY AND MacINTYRE PLAYS

### 1. Murphy on the Famine 'then' and 'now': History and metaphor

When Murphy's *Famine* premiered at the Peacock Theatre, the Abbey's experimental arm, in Dublin, on 21 March 1968, it earned rave reviews. Critics praised not only the play's confrontation with lingering social issues stemming from the 1845-1850 trauma but also the stark form used to depict hunger on multiple metaphorical levels. Murphy structures his play according to patterns of ritual which he then successively destroys. In so doing, he invites his audience to experience something of the same emotional confusion, socio-political impotence and spiritual shock that so disabled Ireland in the long wake of the Famine. Murphy muses:

> Famine is a racial memory, it provides a debilitating history and that it has left its mark I have no doubt. ... Was I, in what I shall call my times, the mid-twentieth century, a student or a victim of the Famine? It was that thought/feeling, I believe, that made me want to write the play, the need to write about the moody self, and my times. (Murphy, 1997, xi)

Fintan O'Toole writes that while the play dramatizes "the central event in 19th century history in Ireland," it is "all the time a play about the 20th century, about the spiritual and emotional famine of Murphy's own times." (O'Toole, 1994, 112) Ritual, of course, functions in precisely such a way, connecting the quotidian "now" with the mythic "then," which, in turn, permeates "now." Morash claims *Famine's* power lies in staging:

> ... both the absence of those who are gone and the presence of those who remain, [such that] nothing is possible and anything is possible. That basic, irreducible element of the theatrical performance, the body of another human being, is thus revealed as the ultimate limitation on human freedom; at the same time, it is the only context in which such freedom makes any sense. (Morash, 1997, 84)

Victor Turner points out that in life, social drama is initiated by a *breach* of rules controlling key relationships. The ensuing *crisis* then calls for *redressive action*, usually in the form of ritualized behavior, in an attempt to limit, reconcile, repair or replace relations. (Turner, 1982, 92) When "untoward events," such as famine, disrupt a community, "rituals of affliction" draw upon a diverse repertoire, including role-taking, meal-sharing, stylized verbal behavior and dance. (Turner, 1982, 110) Murphy's play

clearly uses ritual on stage for those in the seats. Turner writes, "Human beings learn through experience, though all too often they repress painful experience, and perhaps the deepest experience is through drama; *not* through social drama, or stage drama (or its equivalent) *alone*, but in the circulatory or oscillatory process of their mutual and incessant modification." (Turner, 1982, 108) *Famine* concerns the struggle of John Connor, powerless leader of the village of Glanconor in the West, to cope with the starvation of his people. O'Connor resists violence, seeking instead legal and moral means of relief. Cultural rituals, he hopes, will prop up his collapsing world, but finally he explodes, killing his wife and son, violence that itself is permeated by ritual.

**2. MacIntyre's dramatic adaptation of poem reveals frustration, potential**

A collaborative work meant to evolve in each performance, *The Great Hunger* demanded that theater goers make leaps: from the famous Patrick Kavanagh poem to the stage and its heavy reliance on images and action to personal and communal thematic meanings. *The Great Hunger* offers a script, certainly, but it is a pared down, reorganized text of a poem that itself makes readers work. The play, adapted by MacIntyre, directed by Patrick Mason and starring Tom Hickey, is a fluid, expressionistic panoply of the body in performance through mime, ritual and movement. A hallmark in Irish theater history, the play unquestionably confronts the Famine. Yet, ironically, the play does not deal with the 1845-1852 catastrophe, ignores the word "famine," and omits any overt discussion. Its focus is Patrick Maguire, the hollow man from County Monaghan. Together with Murphy's *Famine*, however, *The Great Hunger* provides a critical step toward contemporary dramatic appropriation of the Famine. Murphy uses ritual to explore the Famine and its consequences, then point toward its metaphoric possibilities. MacIntyre, rooted in Kavanagh's poem, begins with the metaphors, using the performative body, often through ritual, to engage the folklore, mythology and history of the Famine. For MacIntyre, the Famine is as close as its psychic and cultural legacy.

**SECTION II: HISTORICAL CONTEXT: STAGNATION AND CHANGE**

The period between 1951 and 1983 marked a watershed. Emigration, though a continuing problem, had been slowed, and population began to rise. This increase was

directly related to increasing opportunities for employment and an improvement in living conditions. Moreover, Ireland was becoming increasingly more confident in its external relations, in its identity as an independent state and in its confrontation with its own history. Life in Northern Ireland continued to be difficult for the Catholic nationalist minority, but some tentative steps had been taken for a rapprochement between Stormont, seat of the Northern parliament outside Belfast, and Dublin. By the 1970s, however, violence had erupted and the familiar pattern of polarization had hardened.

For the Irish Republic, Phase IV was marked by a concentrated policy of industrialization and economic development under successive governments. After two coalition governments, Fianna Fáil returned to power in 1957 under de Valera. Seán Lemass succeeded de Valera as taoiseach in 1959 and served until 1966. Despite his efforts to modernize and stimulate the economy, and despite a series of organized economic programs, population decline and emigration continued. But his programs laid a foundation that eventually would pay dividends. De Valera, the heroic, if controversial, icon of independence, became president. Lemass had begun transforming Irish society under de Valera, and became his deputy, or tanaiste. In 1957, Bord Fáilte was organized, and Irish tourism grew from £46 million in 1962 to £80 million in 1967 (Lyons, 1973, 691) 1958, T.K. Whitaker, the government's chief of administration and planning, issued a report on economic planning on investment, wealth production and development, which would set in a motion more than a decade of efforts. Britain and Ireland agreed to a free-trade zone in 1965. Joseph Lee provides a "utilitarian assessment" of Lemass, observing that he and de Valera had "genuine mutual respect," if not shared priorities and styles:

> Lemass needed de Valera to deliver the votes. De Valera needed Lemass to deliver the goods. In many respects, in his combination of functional ruthlessness with ideological magnanimity, in his energy, efficiency, even impetuosity, Lemass was less the heir of de Valera than of Michael Collins. There was one vital difference, of course. He was absolutely loyal to Dev. (Lee, 1989, 372)

Fianna Fáil continued to maintain its grip on power. Jack Lynch succeeded Lemass as taoiseach late in 1966, the same year that free secondary education was introduced. By 1968, a civil rights movement, inspired by black Americans, was under way in the North,

but rioting, fatalities, political division at Stormont, and clashes with the Royal Ulster Constabulary -- successor to the RIC -- led to the introduction of British troops the following year. In 1970, the republican movement split, with the Provisional IRA taking to the streets. Shootings, internment and beatings, some in the South, others in Britain, worsened into an entrenched confrontation. "The Troubles," punctuated by Bloody Sunday in Derry, Bloody Friday in Belfast, bombings and assassinations, stretched into the '90s. Fianna Fáil's Charles Haughey became taoiseach in 1979, and met with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in 1980 on the North.

Internationally, Ireland, still one of the poorest nations in western Europe, achieved a measure of respect, particularly in the emergent Third World with which it shared post-colonial ties, when it joined the United Nations in 1955. Ireland's delegate F.H. Boland was elected chairman of the UN's General Assembly in 1960, the same year 10 Irish UN peacekeepers were killed in the Congo. Since joining the UN, the Irish Republic has been an active peacekeeping contributor. The grandson of a Famine emigrant, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, was elected president of the United States in 1960 and "came home" to Ireland in 1963, only months before his assassination. With the United Kingdom, Ireland entered the European Economic Community in 1973. The value of membership in what is now the European Union can be seen in the infusion of more than £14 billion between 1973 and 1991 for agricultural subsidies, with a corresponding rise in rural living standards, and infrastructure development. (Jackson, 1999, 385)

Transforming Ireland into a competitive European society was difficult. Partly due to the Famine, the country craved political and social stability and security. Lee writes:

> The arbitrariness of relations between landlord and farmer, and between farmer and labourer, fortified in the Irish the craving for security natural and normal in an uncertain world. This expressed itself most obviously in an obsessive attachment to land. ... Land was ... security. The idea of property rights in employment, no less than in land, the individual's right to fixity of occupational tenure, was also firmly rooted in public consciousness before the Famine. (Lee, 1989, 390-391)

This coincided with a conservative strain of Roman Catholicism, which frowned on any effort to liberalize family relations or sexual behavior. Even programs that might threaten

the family were attacked, notably the famous "Mother and Child" scheme of 1951. Noel Browne, minister for health, proposed implementing part of a 1947 act to assist expectant and recent mothers and their children up to age 16 from infectious diseases, and controversy erupted over claims of state intrusion into areas of ecclesiastical and family competence, as well as socialized medicine. (Jackson, 1999, 310-313) The controversy helped bring down a coalition government, and was resolved by a compromise only in 1953 after de Valera had returned to power.

The family ethos upheld conservative values. David Fitzpatrick writes:

> To a greater extent than in most countries, the institution of marriage continued to contain most sexual activity. Despite abnormally late and infrequent marriage for both sexes, illegitimate births, infanticide, and abortion remained rare. The illegality of abortion was given constitutional force in 1983, while the interdiction of remarriage after divorce contained in the 1937 constitution was confirmed by huge majorities in most constituencies at a referendum held in 1986. Within marriage, fertility remained relatively high despite long-term decline which accelerated in the 1960s. (Fitzpatrick, 1989, 221)

The Catholic clergy, whipping boys for writers but lionized in the countryside, retained a leading position in Irish society. Diocesan priests numbered 3,833, with 1,776 others in religious orders for a ratio of one to 585 in 1958, dropping to one to 553 in 1965, just as the Second Vatican Council ended its sessions in Rome. (Lyons, 1973, 689n) The council was among the most significant events to occur in Roman Catholicism during the 20th century, and began a process of liberalization and openness to the contemporary world in liturgy, mission, the role of the laity, politics, social policy and ecumenical affairs. Hopes that the council would lead to relaxed moral teaching on contraception, abortion, divorce and clerical celibacy were disappointed, however. In 1968, Pope Paul VI, for example, issued *Humanae Vitae*, his encyclical reiterating the traditional ban on artificial birth control. Ireland's hierarchy was not inclined to seek much reform anyway. John Charles McQuaid, archbishop of Dublin from 1940 to 1973, returned from Rome to tell his flock, "Allow me to reassure you. No change will worry the tranquility of your Christian lives." (Lyons, 1973, 691) Not only fellow bishops shared Dr. McQuaid's conservatism:

For the residual Catholic population, the moral code which governed the public

> expression of their private lives was closer to Victorian puritanism than to Gaelic licentiousness. Victorianism had its last and least predictable efflorescence in the country whose political rhetoric was most Anglophobic. (Fitzpatrick, 1989, 221)

But developments would change public attitudes. Ireland, like the rest of the Western Catholic world, saw vocations decline as men and women left the priesthood and religious communities. In 1972, the special position of the Church was removed from the 1937 constitution, with the hierarchy's tacit approval and as an olive branch to the North. Yet when John Paul II made the first papal visit to Ireland in 1979, he drew record crowds.

One of the most significant changes in Irish experience was increasing urbanization, with profound effects on social and family life:

> Urbanization and rapid expansion of public sector employment were achieved at the expense of simultaneously high rates of inflation and unemployment. The overall impact of economic expansion since 1958 has been to destroy the predominance of the rural economy and to destabilize ... social and family structures. (Fitzpatrick, 1989, 226)

Likewise, television's advance significantly affected Irish attitudes. Radio Telefís Éireann began broadcasting on New Year's Eve, 1961, and soon Irish audiences saw British programs outflanking the Church, as well as government's censorship. Lyons observes:

> By the late 1960s, it was reckoned that about 348,000 out of 680,000 homes in the country had television sets; the total impact of television, however, has to be measured not just by this figure, but by the estimated number of homes -- 137,000 -- which were able to receive the BBC and Independent Television programmes as well. The fact that such a considerable proportion of Irish families could see on their hearthrugs all the manifestations of the permissive society which British [TV] ... relays with such unflagging zeal, not only made nonsense of the censorship of books and films, but threw many stones, or rather bombshells, in the quiet waters of Irish domesticity. (Lyons, 1973, 692)

The old forces that had protected, or repressed, Irish society, were being shaken off.

Phase IV manifests distinctly different moments during the three decades. The years of the 1950s were particularly difficult despite the ongoing efforts at economic development. The 1960s raised hopes and offered promise, while the 1970s saw political

crisis in the North overshadow economic development. Emigration continued as a social problem and national stigma. "Four out of every five children born in Ireland between 1931 and 1941 emigrated in the 1950s, 57,000 of them in [the year before Lemass was returned to office]." (Lee, 1989, 379) In the face of this outflow, Lemass's efforts were vital and, gradually, they began to work:

> Average net emigration fell from 43,000 per annum between 1956 and 1961 to 16,000 between 1961 and 1966 and to 11,000 between 1966 to 1971, or from an annual rate of 14.8 percent to 3.7. Total population, which fell from 2.96 to 2.82 million between 1951 and 1961, then rose to 2.98 million by 1971. Lemass prated little about the sanctity of 'the family'. But 4 percent economic growth and a rise of about 50 percent in material living standards during the 1960s at last made it feasible for the number of families to increase. The number of 'families' ... rose by 48,000 between 1961 and 1971, compared with a rise of only 11,000 in the preceding fifteen years. (Lee, 1989, 359-360)

The Famine literature to be examined in this chapter connects contemporary experience with the realities of the 1840s crisis, communicating the suffocating stasis many Irish felt. When Lee describes the "emigration figures of the forties and fifties ... as a permanent commentary on the collective calibre of the possessing classes," he reflects the same anger writers such as Murphy and Friel, Kavanagh and MacIntyre flash. Lee describes "... the fetid atmosphere of the forties and fifties, the sense of pervasive, brooding hopelessness at home, the emptiness, the uncomprehending remorse, the heartbreak and heroism of many caught in the web of the 'experience of abandonment' as families were sundered and communities withered." (Lee, 1989, 384) Irish writers confronted this state of affairs, and the Famine offered possibilities and clues.

## SECTION III: AUTHORS AND READERS: A DARKER IRELAND

### 1. Emigration and other consequences of Famine

The writers examined in this chapter link the stagnation of their own times and the atrophy of the Famine and its aftermath. For them, the initiatives of the Lemass government were too late and too far removed to be of much use. While the famous John Hinde postcards might portray a traditional Ireland confidently moving into the future, a severe critique of the problems within society emerged. The production of literary and

dramatic texts would find in the Famine a metaphor for the Ireland of Phase IV. Tom Murphy, for example, traces the materialism and demoralization of the 1950s to emigration, itself a consequence of the patterns of economy with roots in the Famine. Although he jokes that an actor-friend once suggested that he write the libretto for a Broadway musical on the Famine, he does link his interest in the 1840s catastrophe with Woodham-Smith's *The Great Hunger*, which "was a major event in the publishing world ... and I expected it to inspire a half-dozen plays on the subject of the Irish Famine. I'm still surprised that they did not materialise." (Murphy, 1997, x) He observes that the loss and absence of food is not the only "poverty" during extreme hunger. He asks:

> What about the other 'poverties' that attend famine? A hungry and demoralised people becomes silent. People emigrate in great numbers and leave spaces that cannot be filled. Intelligence becomes cunning. There is a poverty of thought and expression. Womanhood becomes harsh. Love, tenderness, loyalty, generosity go out the door in the struggle for survival. Men fester in vicarious dreams of destruction. The natural exuberance and extravagance of youth is repressed. (Murphy, 1997, xi)

In distinct ways, the writers examined here enact this concern in their literary discourse. Murphy and MacIntyre, as well as Macken, Coogan, Friel and Kennelly (considered in Appendix II), explore these poverties and discursively bridge the gap between Famine *then* and hunger *now*. Ironically, feeding on hunger was nourishing.

**2. Exploring the dark side of Irish experience in Murphy's play**

Tom Murphy, born in 1935 in Tuam, County Galway, was seen as an *enfant terrible* in Irish theater during Phase IV. His work deals with the dark side of Irish experience as he explores violence, sexuality and betrayal, but he likewise manifests a strong interest in faith, religious identity, memory and imagination. Tensions between the group or the individual, on one hand, and the national and religious codes by which they are expected to behave, on the other, frequently erupt in violence in his drama. Educated by the Christian Brothers and at a technical school, he later taught metalworking and acted locally. Emigrating to Britain in 1961 to become a full-time writer, he returned to Ireland in 1970. The Abbey Theatre rejected his study of family violence in an Irish emigrant family in Coventry, *A Whistle in the Dark* (1960), but the play had a successful

premiere in London. His dramatic works include *On the Outside* (1959), *On the Inside* (1974), *A Crucial Week in the Life of a Grocer's Assistant* (1969), *Morning after Optimism* (1971), *The Sanctuary Lamp* (1975), *The Blue Macushla* (1980), *The Informer* (1981), *The Gigli Concert* (1983), *Conversations on a Homecoming* (1985), *Bailegangaire* (1985), *Too Late for Logic* (1989), *The Patriot Game* (1991), *The House* (2000) and his first novel, *The Seduction of Morality* (1994) and his second, *The Wake* (1998). His dramatic style ranges from naturalistic to expressionistic to ritualistic, and he explores the capacity and complexity of language. He lives in Dublin.

Directed by Tomas Mac Anna, *Famine* received accolades in *The Irish Times* and *The Sunday Independent* for dramatic innovation, poetic language and multi-layered meanings. Murphy was then 33. The play broke ground in Irish theater, igniting discussion. It straddles the tension between an individual's tragic undoing and a society's horrific dissolution. And through a ritualistic form, the audience not only witnesses this disintegration, but somehow shares it. (Kelly, 22 March 1968, 3; Smith, 24 March 1968, 24; Quidnunc, 26 March 1968, 11) Christopher Griffin writes that the Abbey moved the play upstairs to its main stage in June of 1968. *Famine* was televised on RTÉ and later was staged at the Royal Court Theatre, London, in November of 1969 and at the Lyric Theatre, Belfast, in June of 1973. Translated into Irish, the play was presented at the Taibhdhearc in Galway. Murphy himself directed *Famine* at the Project Arts Centre, Dublin, in 1978, and the play was revived in Ireland, America and elsewhere. (Griffin, 1983, 18) Murphy's collaboration with Druid Theatre Co., Galway, began with a new production of *Famine* in 1984. (Etherton, 1989, 132) Outgoing artistic director Garry Hynes's production of *Famine* opened at the Abbey on 6 Oct. 1993 to mixed reviews. (Carr, 1993, 13; Roche, 1993, 10; Peter, 1993, n.p.).

The earliest reviewers select several themes that much academic criticism of Murphy either ignores or underplays: the piece's "stylistic" features, their relation to *Famine's* central character, its poetic language and its ability to connect hunger in the 1840s to contemporary audiences. An appreciation of Murphy's use of ritual is central to this "style." Murphy's drama is rooted "in the disorder of rural Irish life," Declan Kiberd

writes, "yet it moves always to a moment when routine is elevated to the pitch of sacred ritual. ... [T]he ideal and the real never completely lose touch with one another: and in rare moments of benediction they overlap." (Kiberd, 1996, 612) Kiberd credits the play's success to experiments in *form*, and dexterity with ritual.

**3. Experiments with physical, verbal possibility in MacIntyre's play**

Tom MacIntyre, born in 1931 in Cavan, was educated at University College Dublin and later taught English at Clongowes Wood College, made famous by Joyce in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.* A short-story writer, poet and dramatist, many of his plays exhibit a strong interest in the power of imagistic and linguistic shifts and patterns that are surreal. Understanding stems from metaphoric, verbal and emotional cues linking seemingly disparate elements. His fiction includes *Dance the Dance* (short stories, 1969), *The Charollais* (novel, 1969), *Through the Bridewell Gate* (novel, 1971), while his drama includes *Eye-Winker, Tom Tinker* (1972) *Jack Be Nimble* (1976), *Find the Lady* (1977), *Dobally Back Way* (1979), *The Great Hunger* (1983), *The Bearded Lady* (1984), *Rise Up Lovely Sweeney* (1985), *Dance for Your Daddy* (1987), *Snow White* (1988), and *Kitty O'Shea* (1990), with many of his experimental works exploring image and language fractures and reflecting interest in film, dance and avant-garde Polish theater. The first and last plays listed employ a more naturalistic style. His short stories include *The Harper's Turn* (1982), *I Bailed Out* (1987), *The Word for Yes: New and Selected Stories* (1992), and his poetry includes *Blood Relations* (1972) and *Fleur-de-Lit* (1991).

*The Great Hunger*, which premiered at the Peacock on 9 May 1983, has had several controversial "beginnings" -- its Peacock opening, its reworked form in 1986 at the Abbey, and its international tour in 1988, when the Abbey visited the Soviet Union and the play again occasioned controversy. One early critic applauded its originality, but questioned its coherence, suggesting that it depended too much on prior familiarity with the Kavanagh poem. (Colgan, 10 May 1983, 10) Connections between Patrick Maguire, bachelor farmer in Monaghan, and the potato field, farm gate, statue of the "earth mother to whom Maguire renders despairing homage," and tabernacle certainly are strong.

Matriarchy, the Church and the constricted life of a farmer are introduced, while potato references in a play titled *The Great Hunger* immediately suggest the Famine. The play's metaphors and images speak deeply to Irish experience, but its elitism and accessibility are troubling. (Colgan, 10 May 1983, 10) The play, however, found its defenders, who argued that it was a self-sufficient text; its images and performances were powerful on their own. Moreover, MacIntyre's play uncovered rich comic resources untapped in the poem. (Nowlan, 27 May 1983, 10) Murphy allows comic elements to emerge in *Famine* only to snuff them out. MacIntyre, having followed Kavanagh in distancing his work from the historical Famine, exploits the poem's inherent comedy, counterpointing it with Paddy Maguire's self-imposed intellectual, emotional, social and sexual hungers.

When *The Great Hunger* was revived in 1986, the demand for cohesion persisted. MacIntyre told *The Irish Times:*

> The mode is essentially pictorial and movement-oriented, extremely physical, with a restricted verbal score and fragmented narrative, and it relies absolutely on the power of suggestion. The idiom has taken on more suppleness because of this cohesion and we've developed in confidence. (Comiskey, *The Irish Times,* 12 July 1986)

But not all critics agreed; one said the play remains "one of the most original works of the Irish theatre in several decades," and is "rich in comedy, extravagant in imagination," but the [new] production was "more elaborate, less cogent, and, in the end, less moving than the original." (Nowlan, 1986, 10) The Abbey's 1988 tour of the Soviet Union and the United States brought more controversy. Both *The Great Hunger* and J.B. Keane's *The Field*, "each complements the other," went on tour, but "there was some resistance to MacIntyre's play," including a comment by Clive Barnes [of *The New York Times*] as 'a nightmare of curious and intriguing resonances.'" (Murray, 1997, 233) In Russia, the Abbey encountered both foreign bewilderment and internal dissension over MacIntyre; Mason argued that it had taken five years to build an Irish audience. (Hosey, 1988, 15) Mason alludes to the play's departure from its origins in Kavanagh's poetic text.

Both Murphy's *Famine* and MacIntyre's *The Great Hunger* turn away from the traditional Irish realistic or naturalistic play -- the Abbey Theatre's redoubtable kitchen

comedies, for example -- to ritualistic and imagistic forms. Apart from Shiels' *Tenants at Will* in 1945 and Healy's *The Black Stranger*, Irish audiences had to wait until 1968 to see their most agonizing and socially disruptive national moment brought to the stage in any detail. But with *Famine* in 1968, Irish drama was put on a trajectory that would lead to increasing literary and dramatic exploration of the subject. With *The Great Hunger* in 1983, Irish audiences encountered one of the most startling challenges yet to the tradition of realism. Irish theater seemed ready to engage the imagistic world of the performative body -- yet, as with ritual, the theatrical form employed by MacIntyre demonstrates an intimate connection with the Famine. Due to the Famine's enormity, Phase IV's theatrical forms reflect film and television's rising influence and a desire to explore expressionistic styles such as ritual and the imagistic performative body, which traditionally seek order amid chaos and, when words fall silent, permit entry into the realm of death, eternal life and mystery.

## SECTION IV: THEMATIC ANALYSIS: AGENCY, GENDER DOUBLE HELIX

### 1. Situating agency and gender within a ritualized, performative frame

*Famine* and *The Great Hunger*, the two primary works in this chapter, differ in subject and form, but they share a common interest in agency and gender, two of the central analytical tropes. Both Murphy and MacIntyre ask theater goers to consider to what extent can one act responsibly, exert pressure and achieve objectives? What forces limit, deny or thwart agency? How does one situate personal agency amid communal trauma, oppression or repression? Such aspects of agency link the Famine era with Phase IV, when young writers found the Ireland of the aging de Valera and even of the emerging Lemass offered few opportunities and fewer rewards. Social stagnation and continuing emigration demoralized the generation just coming into adulthood, and the feeling no less than the causes could be related to the Famine of a century before. Likewise, gender became an important category, particularly in relationship to agency. A disproportionately high rate of single males and emigrating females threw courtship, marriage and child-bearing into question. What did identity, masculine or feminine, mean amid situations when its performativity was restricted? Such social patterns, reinforced by the discourse

and policies of government censorship and public morality, policed by the Church, enabled text producers to raise questions about the expectations and limits placed on men and women. The other categories heretofore considered -- land, national identity and religion -- drop out from detailed consideration *vis à vis* the Famine because social and cultural conditions have changed. Bourdieu's emphasis on the social space in which individuals and groups confront "something to be done" underlines why agency and gender should emerge as Phase IV questions. (Bourdieu, 1998, 12) The Famine acts as a crucible of thought and action, opening up questions of survival for inspection. Contested *contemporary* issues thus become ideal subjects for treatment within the context of the 1840s catastrophe. Its narrative and discursive paradigms are well understood, but sufficiently flexible to allow new concerns to be foregrounded. During Phase IV, with the Famine more than a century distant, yet with stagnation and emigration continuing to plague the country, what does history say about the Irish capacity to act and achieve? What does it say about Irish masculinity and femininity? Examination of the rhetorical dimensions of *Famine* and *The Great Hunger* will help answer those questions.

Agency, in the following discussion, will be considered in connection with ritual. Gender, too, may be situated under ritual, because for both Murphy and MacIntyre, gender is performative, enacted within social rituals which either are maintained or transgressed. Ritual permeates human societies and may be defined as the repetition of symbolic acts designed to negotiate and mediate social and supernatural forces. Specially designated individuals frequently conduct ritual activity, public or private, which proceeds according to predetermined procedures, known and accepted, thought to help change or preserve the status quo. (Greaves, 1996, 469-470) Both social and supernatural forces are presumed to hold a kind of collective or theistic agency, and the ritual occurs through individuals empowered to act on behalf of others. Even more important, ritual is intended to achieve change or maintain status. While ritual operates in a liminal space between the sacred and profane, and thus is privileged in organized religion, it also may function within the secular as a way to establish or maintain social order.

Life in the Catholic Ireland of the 1940s and 1950s introduced Murphy to ritual's

character, pervasive throughout Phase IV. The devotional revolution in post-Famine Ireland had established individual and family rituals, such as daily Rosary recitation, the wearing of scapulars and medals, as well as Sunday Mass attendance, and parish rituals, such as preached missions, frequent confessions, processions, guilds, sodalities and pietistic devotions. This was accompanied by an intense loyalty to the person of the pope, fueled by the ultramontanism of the 19th century. (Kerr, 1994, 319-323) On the secular level, a ritualistic quality characterized Irish sports, organized on the parish level by the Gaelic Athletic Association, as well as party politics, which continued to be dominated by the social split of the Irish Civil War. *Famine*, although it avoids the particularities of these period rituals, evinces a ritualized world both in the language and mind sets of its characters and in its *mise en scène*. If Yeats sought mythic ritual in *The Countess Cathleen*, Murphy employs social ritual. Ritual thus becomes not only a way of *doing* and *seeing*, but also way of *saying*; it is a kind of discourse. Van Dijk sees discourse as interpretive social processes, and suggests the role of schemata as a means to achieving understanding. (Van Dijk, 1988-b, 51-52) Every ritual is schematic, proceeding according to pre-ordained patterns of speech and gesture undertaken by designated individuals toward a goal. Consequently, it reflects the habitus of its actors, and does so in ways that not only involve their social circumstances but their bodies. Murphy's play both stages and destroys this recognition. Murray writes:

> For Tom Murphy this [alternative sacred] space is a battleground. ... Murphy is undoubtedly the greatest 'religious' playwright Ireland has ever produced. ...[Brian] Friel once wrote that Murphy's imagination was of a kind which 'inclines intuitively to the service of theatre -- or religion. Both seem to offer it passing release, public consolation, and the illusion of completion.' (Murray, 1997, 177)

The key aspect of this imaginative appropriation of "religious" content, however, lies not in the theological or spiritual domain, but in the liturgical ritual realm, which offers one the capacity to assume agency.

Ritual exists not simply to *show* but to *transform* and *accommodate*. Collective experience of the troubling is ritualized in order to move participants to new emotional

ground. T.J. Scheff observes that ritual provides a release that is "both a psychologically enabling and a socially acceptable occasion for repeated catharsis." (Scheff, 1979, 118) Rituals arise, he adds, "around recurring sources of collective distress," such as separations, encounters, death, injustice, betrayal, exile, marriage, etc. (Scheff, 1979, 119) The ability of participants to discharge repressed emotions in a socially acceptable manner is central. Consequently, ritual both *distances* and *discharges* emotion. Distancing occurs, Scheff contends, because the participant both believes and disbelieves the ritual; in other words, the emotional content may be real, but the ritual is, on one level, artificial. Because the ritual is a construct with appropriate means for emotional discharge, release becomes opportune. (Scheff, 1979, 119) *Famine* depicts how ritual confronts both the social and the unknown, mysterious and metaphysical, at once protecting and failing its practitioners. Murray writes, "... [This is] the nature of ... [Murphy's] habitual attempt: he takes two worlds of experience, metaphysically forced together in all discordancy, and out of this violent yoking together creates an unsettling, defamiliarized narrative." (Murray, 1987, 13) Drama itself is a setting for ritual behavior, a site where entertainment, social performance, art and "meaning" -- "truth" and "make believe" -- contend and embrace an audience. Distancing may occur through formulaic language, mythic representation, historicization, off-stage action, plot variation and interruption, audience awareness, gesture and similar techniques. (Scheff, 1979, 139-140) Emotional release may occur, though not all drama is cathartic. But drama such as Murphy's *Famine*, even as it provides ironic commentary, implicates contemporary circumstances and disrupts emotional stasis, clearly draws playgoers into its rituals.

The play's ritual dimension also illustrates what Claude Schumacher sees as drama's capacity "to bear witness." (Schumacher, 1998, 4) Writing about the emergence of Holocaust drama, he dismisses mere mimetic action, because of its inability to represent the Shoah adequately, the extermination of 6 million Jews and nearly 6 million others during World War II. Instead, traumatic memory, such as remembrance of the Famine, calls for the performance of a testimony with "true integrity" and "the highest artistic standards," but not a vain attempt "to create an illusion of reality." (Schumacher,

1998, 4) Peggy Phelan's discussion of drama, ritual and performance notes their "as if" function, and thus their accommodation of death, loss and trauma, which defy most symbolic representations. Ritual language and gesture, as well as the phantasmatic, help the psyche both distance and recall its pain and aid the body in touching the loss it mourns. (Phelan, 1997, 4-5; 16-17) Murray, calling *Famine* a "national epic," observes:

> ... Murphy took the catastrophe ... and showed how the seeds of violence, demoralisation and insecurity in modern Irish society had their origins in this national disaster. 'Consciously and unconsciously, [says Murphy] in the writing of the play, while aware of the public event that was ...the Famine ..., I was drawing on the private well and recreating moods and events, apprehensions of myself and my own times.' (Murray, 1997, 183)

Ritual and tragic drama are not interchangeable terms. Naomi Conn Liebler writes:

> Tragedy is not ritual; ritualistic elements in tragedy are not themselves actual rituals. In theater we are always in the realm of 'as if,' of semblance or resemblance. Ritual and theater do not share similar efficacies, they do share similar intents. In tragedy as in 'real life,' ritual action is an effort at containment; is controlled, dispassionate, ordered, and impersonal. It is the community's, not the subject's, well-being, its organizational pattern, that is at stake in the drama. (Liebler, 1995, 25-26)

But she observes that the nature and structure of one often elide into those of the other. She sees a homology in two types of play, *ludus* (play) and *theatrum* (display), and shows how ritual and play overlap because they are performative. Moreover, any distinction is unstable, the performances transcending their frames. (Liebler, 1995, 26) Sacrificial, seasonal and mythical rituals permeate drama, while the tension between drama's *tristia* (sorrow) and *gaudium* (joy) phases, and its use of *anagorisis* (proclamation) and *epiphanos* (revelation), suggest riches Murphy can manipulate. (Friedrich, 1983, 201) *Famine* is not a classic tragedy, but its contains tragic elements.

**2. The discursive power of social rituals in drama**

*Famine's* structure ritually enacts its discussion of agency and gender, and is the first major concern. What is recognizably ritualistic in the play's set-up? *Famine* is a sequence of 12 scenes in which Murphy discards acts and curtains in favor of action that

bears comparison with a religious procession with "stational" moments. Like medieval *tableaux vivants*, his scenes frequently freeze, characters caught in heightened awareness. Dramatically, Murphy's ritualization creates something more than mere naturalistic portrayal. Moreover, most scenes enact a social ritual, then *collapse* under the stress of the Famine. In each case, the audience shares some of the shock and frustration that so unravel the Glanconor villagers. Murphy employs the conventional rituals of communal life first, to give audience and characters the illusion of possibility; second, to destroy those rituals through the erosion of hope; and third, to suggest lingering contemporary effects. D.E.S. Maxwell observes that Murphy "has explored various theatrical shapes to express the collisions between savage actualities of failure and despair and the solace or defense offered by human faiths, rituals, fantasies -- most often their incapacities," and because he traverses an emotional landscape, his characters are "universally recognisable." (Maxwell, 1984, 162-163) For Murphy's theatergoers, the rituals of the 1950s and 1960s attempted to mask the erosion of agency but failed to contain stagnation or halt emigration. Meanwhile, Irish social rituals were under assault by the West's crises over authority, sex, belief and war, all brought into the homes by television. Famine discourse in the play's rhetorical features exposes these beleaguered rituals.

Scene 1 opens on an autumn afternoon in 1846 in Glanconor, ancestral seat of John Connor, who has lost a daughter to starvation. The setting, blighted and dark, mirrors collapsing social conditions. As chieftain, John is expected to provide the hospitality of a wake. The wake, a ritual for communal sympathy and support, includes keening, the traditional Irish wail of grief. This contributes to what O'Toole calls "a formal sense of distance," one that will be manipulated but maintained. (O'Toole, 1994, 118) Ironically, however, most characters focus only on their own survival. No one will depart without Connor generosity, yet a wake jeopardizes his family's survival. Bourdieu's sense of habitus is reflected in Connor's insistence on a wake, but the conflict between social expectations and family needs amid natural conditions creates a dilemma exploited in many Famine narratives. Connor emerges not as a Gaelic prince but an impotent tenant. Within the ritual wake frame, the opening scene involves speculation

about the potato crop, including an ironic debate over natural disasters. The debate collapses into a macabre free-for-all in which Mickeleen, an obnoxious but prescient hunchback, is pelted with rotten potatoes. Grotesque humor undercuts the wake, delays communal realization of impending doom and shocks the audience with the irony. The very cause of death becomes the source of revelry. Yet the prophetic scene ends with dawn; the coffin is closed, the keen renewed and the corpse removed. Ritual enables the family to cope with both the immediate death and an impending famine by taming its impact, distancing its prospects and organizing behavior. From van Dijk's social cognition perspective, the audience has received not only the standard signs of the Famine but also something different. Impotence, not anger; coupled with the subversion of ceremony; alerts theater goers that the traditional turn to agency in physical force or religion will be contested. Mickeleen speaks truth -- but he is a fool and deformed. Indeed, the play's ritualistic, rather than realistic, form encodes a different discourse.

In Scene 11, the climax, ritual is subverted again. Connor cannot help his family or his community, yet refuses to emigrate. Murphy's "ritual" is intimate and violent, comic and tragic, while agency is thwarted by external conditions and self-will. Balanced by macabre "dialogue" between old Dan O'Dea and his dead wife Cait, the scene develops into Connor's climactic murder of his wife and son, when speech yields to silence, struggle to peace and dilemma to solution. Action occurs on each side of the stage. A bed scene suggests intimacy, passion, sex, repose or argument, but here it becomes a place to display hunger, madness and failure. Dan, homeless, raving and starving, laughingly recalls his life and the disastrous Rising of 1798. His words echo the failed revolutionary discourses of the Irish past -- and remind the audience of a continuing emptiness. Intermittently, Dan mentions his wife's "tight black face" and "cold" body and extols the "noble Connors." (Murphy, 1997, 84-86) Meanwhile, Sinéad and Maeve fight for bread, which Sinéad wants for John, but which Maeve devours. Eventually, John joins Sinéad and Dan in a ritual keen for Cait. The keen, or *caoine*, was an important, ritualized folk custom performed by "professional" female singers, to weep, wail and express family and communal grief. (Lysaght, 1996, 50)

Feeling thwarted in her survival efforts, Sinéad turns on her husband. She flings his moral rhetoric back at him. Unable to respond, John reaches for a stick, and Mother pauses, afraid he may use it. Then, more intensely, she acknowledges his defiance of circumstances but that "it's not of my kind, nor can it ever be." (Murphy, 1997, 88) She pleads that those responsible for the Famine should not determine how and when she is to die. (Murphy, 1997, 88) She insists:

> Now they have me prone, and I can only attack your strength. But you will protect yourself. They gave me nothing but dependence: I've shed that lie. And in this moment of freedom you will look after my right and your children's right, *as you promised*, lest they choose the time and have the victory. (Murphy, 1997, 88)

Mother, Donaill and Maeve return inside the shelter and John soon joins them. Then, the stick thuds repeatedly as John Connor kills his wife and son. Only Maeve escapes. An Oedipal reversal, the murders exhibit a ritual character because Murphy sets them within a pattern of formal petition (Sinéad asks Connor to kill her), self-sacrifice (she realizes her death will enhance his survival) and higher purpose (she asserts her identity and subjectivity through a sacrificial death and a chance for life). Murphy, as Scheff points out, uses artifice to regulate emotion. Ritual distances the audience from the scene's brutality. For Murphy's characters, agency comes at a tremendous, and ironic, cost. The ultimate survival of the family remains a question; the worst of the Famine is yet to come. Moreover, the Famine has defeated every ritual used to contain it -- except one, which uses death to defeat death and offer the possibility of life. Both in structure and intention, Murphy's plot parallels the Catholic Mass, which believers see as a re-presentation of Christ's Last Supper and death on Calvary. In Christ, Christians believe the Lord's death and resurrection defeated sin and death; they were no longer the ultimate condition and destiny of humanity. For Murphy's audience, the Mass was the most ritualistic moment in their experience; by linking it to Sinéad's sacrifice, Murphy probes their own ability to act.

Mark Lane sees Murphy's use of ritual within a theatrical space as an effort to challenge the Irish ideal of "the West." *Famine* is set in the West, privileged in Irish theater as embodying national identity and ideal, yet its characters neither believe nor

enact the rituals of place and position, and thus undermine the value of the locale. In some respects, what Murphy does in *The Sanctuary Lamp*, *The Gigli Concert*, *Conversations* and *Bailegangaire* germinates in *Famine*. For this play too is a ritualized exploration of "... the West of Ireland as a haven for the pursuit of the possible, or, if you prefer ... the impossible.'" (Lane, 1991, 228) In *Famine*, "the panoramic, Brecht-like scale" and settings suit the ritualized form because ritual succeeds most as suggestion rather than replication. (Lane, 1991, 220) Again, Hall's emphasis on the mutability of a given code in transmitting a message applies here, for "these chains of meaning are never permanently secured, either in their internal systems of meanings, or in terms of the social classes and groups to which they 'belong.' (Hall, 1996, 40) The Irish West carries symbolic meaning, but the Famine and rituals of place reveal emptiness and stagnation "then" and "now."

**3. Relationship between characterization and ritual**

The second major concern is the character-ritual relationship. Just as ritual structures *Famine*, so too it shapes character interaction and development. Figures such as Captain Shine, the Agent and the Justice of the Peace expect social rituals to be enacted. Likewise, figures such as the two priests rely on social rituals to maintain authority. Much of *Famine's* humor and tension lies in these rituals, and Sinéad and John Connor are central to them. Murphy's character-ritual relationship exhibits an understanding of Bourdieu's habitus, for the rituals characters enact and the discourses they espouse derive from their social positioning and consequent contestations.

The Famine threatens Connor's identity precisely because it challenges his rituals. Even though his princely status is long gone, he insists upon hospitality, clan meeting and village leadership. They all enable him to assert masculine dominance, which, in turn, is how his agency is achieved. Emptied of meaning, it nonetheless invests him with at least the shell of authority and the illusion of power. Yet creeping hunger renders him immobile; the more he clings to social rituals, the more they ring hollow. O'Toole calls him "a beggar king." (O'Toole, 1994, 116) Moreover, Connor as tenant lies at the margins of the rituals of power, as Colm Tóibín has observed. (Tóibín, 1987, 25) Connor

is meant to be family provider, yet he can do nothing. Reduced to stuttering and silence, he clutches the land in hope of government aid because it is "right." Lear-like, he is a patriarch bereft of imagination, will and props. Such absence, of course, makes staying on the land lethal. In reaction to Mother's complaints, Connor rages:

> Jesus -- Stop -- Christ -- Woman! Isn't there enough trying to best me besides you! It won't get me. I don't understand it myself, but I have to live. Someone has to live. So don't keep on. Or that other strap rambling out there. Saying I'm doing nothing. Cause -- I -- will -- live! I'm doing what I'm doing. How else can I? That holding is mine. That holding -- *All* that land was Connors' once! And I'll not go. Not for landlord, devil, or the Almighty himself! I was born here, and I'll die here, and I'll rot here! ... there's food to be ... The road-making is to ... Cause there's ... Cause I'm right. (Murphy, 1997, 84)

His grim resolve echoes that of Bull McCabe in John B. Keane's play *The Field* (1965), which interestingly is a given a Famine-era motivation in the 1990 film version of the same name by Jim Sheridan. Vivian Mercier likens *Famine's* John Connor to Job, who employs formulaic, ritualized expressions of faith. But the Biblical Job has no choices, while Connor consistently refuses them. (Mercier, 1987, 22) Behind Connor's speech, one hears not only an ancient land ethos and Land War rhetoric but also the competing discourses of Phase IV emigration and commitment. Connor is unable to fill the *form* of ritual with the *content* of leadership; his people abandon him as he has failed them. Lee, commenting on the government of the 1940s and 1950s, notes: "In one respect only did they display true talent. So effectively did they master the techniques of indoctrination that many of the victims would continue to cherish the [traditional agrarian] values responsible for their own plight." (Lee, 1989, 385) Bourdieu's habitus and its combination with van Dijk's dominant discourse, enunciated by state, cultural and religious elites during Phase IV, help illuminate Murphy's construction of Connor's frustration and defiance.

Ritual is closely connected to the communal or mythological hero. Riana O'Dwyer's writes about Costello, champion of laughter in Murphy's *A Thief at Christmas*, but the transition to John Connor is easy:

Central to the process [of identity-making via games and contests] is the concept

> of hero, the investment by a community of its sense of itself in the person of somebody who is recognisably a champion. The origins of this kind of identification are not recent, but may extend back to modes of social organization in ancient Ireland. ... The power of a truly successful hero is maintained after his death by the stories told about him, which eventually achieve the status of myth. (O'Dwyer, 1987, 37-38)

Games and rituals are related -- and stories are unlikely to be told about John Connor. Murray offers an important perspective on Connor's murders in connection with their ritualistic frame. Connor may fail as hero, he may even kill, but he is not base; the real killers are hunger, politics and economics. Murray writes:

> The brutality is searing, obscene. The violence is a form of madness, induced by circumstances; ... now the killing stems from a despair too great for pity. Murphy forces the audience to accept that this is what starvation does to people. And in the next scene he shows the irony of bloodshed, since bread arrives at last. ... Yet the harrowing peculiarities of *Famine* provide also a sturdy sense of resilience, of man resolutely scrambling for survival. (Murray, 1987, 10-11)

By applying the perspective of ritual, one can distance the killing without eliminating the trauma, and one can make space for Murphy's concessions to hope.

John Connor may be right in his land claims legally and morally, but he is wrong existentially. The social contract is unraveling. No one is more aware of this than Sinéad, who becomes an opportunist when John is immobilized. She recommends coffin-making, subjecting ritual to her own needs. Agency becomes a matter of survival. At a time when Phase IV text producers saw disproportionately large numbers of women either emigrating and running farms, the possibility of violating social ritual and convention becomes apparent. Despite the conservative, patriarchal nature of Irish society, these violations of social convention and the accompanying rituals resonate with Famine dislocations. Gendered identity is performative, and performances occur in and through socially established rituals. When the Famine disrupts the social order, the stage is cleared and new performances can begin. Ritual hospitality incurs Sinéad's wrath when children go hungry. She steals turf from neighbors and sells it for bread, and thus jeopardizes another's life for her family. "I as good as killed him. I stole his turf for flour." (Murphy, 1997, 83) And, finally, subverting the ritualized nuptial vows, she asks John to kill her so

he can live. Sinéad spurns the rituals of a society imploding; survival requires alternatives. In this, however, her characterization betrays an essentialist perspective. Kelleher sees the play as cutting women out of the political sphere and enclosing the Famine within the domestic world as an event "definable only within the realm of women, children and 'nature.'" (Kelleher, 1995, 245) Essentialism thus makes Sinéad's death suspect from a gender perspective. Whatever else, Sinéad displays the maternal instinct; agency and gender coalesce. She saves some of her family -- John and Maeve. Ironically, Sinéad triggers Connor's one significant act -- death-dealing, ritual-violating yet potentially life-saving -- by resorting to ritual language and its ideology.

**4. Language at the service of ritualized discourse**

The third major concern is Murphy's use of ritualized dialogue. Language bears much of ritual's weight, "accomplishing" its ends, shaping its performers and frequently determining spatial and gestural relations. More important, language demonstrates and achieves agency and gender, critical in Murphy's use of Phase IV Famine discourse.

Scene 4 involves Liam and Maeve in the ritual of courtship. Murphy, however, subverts ritualized lovemaking. The audience knows that the corpses of a woman and two children are on stage, while nearby a man groans on the ground, when Liam Dougan enters unaware, and proceeds to root for nuts and apples he has stashed. Hearing Maeve's footsteps, he hides. She is like an old hag, harsh and fierce; Kathleen ni Houlihan is about to be subverted too. Liam toys with Maeve, masking his identity, yet proposing marriage for "We have nothing to lose." (Murphy, 1997, 43) She snarls, "Dougan! Sly, rotten, foxy breed!" (Murphy, 1997, 43) Murphy plunders ritual settting death behind courtship and marriage, mirroring Irish social conditions in the 1940s and 1950s. Amid hunger, the humor is black. Dougan admits that marriage to Maeve may be "a grave mistake" and observes that she is too "slender." Female sexual attraction usually depends upon a round fullness, emblematic of the ability to bear children. Here, she fails the ideal because she is starving. "You'd fatten me," she answers, shaking off his embrace. Feigning indifference, he gives her his apple, reversing Adam and Eve in Genesis. Likening Maeve to her dead sister, whose beauty was much praised, Maeve responds brutally. The girl is "well rotten

now," and Liam had abandoned her anyway. (Murphy, 1997, 45) But as Maeve eats the apple, she grows softer, sharing a tragicomic story about her father's effort to make peace between "the bailley and his gang [who] came for the cow" and "the rates man," who likewise wants the beast. (Murphy, 1997, 45) The story reveals Connor's perverse agency in mediating between representatives of the very system exploiting him and his people.

Although Liam laughs at the story, he tries to justify himself for leaving her sister and to explain his job with the Agent -- both treacherous acts. Maeve hardly listens, caught up envying "Peggy Quilty off [to America] in the morning." (Murphy, 1997, 46) Maeve's imagination -- unlike her father's -- enables her to envision future options. Like Irish emigrants, her agency is unimpaired. Meanwhile, she and Liam, pretending to be a lovelorn fox, play. Appropriating and reversing her insult, the fox-like Liam pounces, they kiss and he sings an old song rife with fertility references about the "fair Colleen Rua." (Murphy, 1997, 47) Maeve joins in but soon the courtship scene, with its pastoral conventions, is ripped open. The dying man groans, the moon -- itself a romantic symbol -- reveals corpses, and Maeve flees. T. Gerald FitzGibbon remarks:

> Few other Irish playwrights would dare to write ... 'The Love Scene' .... Here physical action, mime, music, stage-image are not seen as extensions for a disabled language, but as radical autonomous modes of perception and experience. On one level they more truly reflect ... dark, instinctive ... themes or characters, and, on another, they challenge the experimental formulations of language and answer a need that language cannot even define. (FitzGibbon, 1987, 47-48)

Language, like so many other aspects of ritual, collapses before the Famine. But *theatrum* derives from the Greek word "to see," and here visual and aural representations push beyond speech. Anthony Roche writes that Murphy's characters often find language inadequate, yet their utterances are full of an energy that seeks to capture Samuel Beckett's requisite notion of "fundamental sounds." (Roche, 1994, 130). The implosion of language gives witness to the Famine it attempts to convey.

In Scene 11, Sinéad switches from her usual frankness to the solemn, cadenced speech of the clan rituals to confront the bleak consequences of John's inability to act. For Young Irelanders and physical force advocates, John believes in law, morality and

government, which do nothing, and in Gaelic tradition, which he cannot enact. For the O'Connellite Repealers and the Church, however, John is behaving sensibly. Michel Foucault's notion of the archaeological layers of discourse and their relation to the body are clearly evident in Murphy. Foucault writes:

> The body -- and everything that touches it: diet, climate, and soil -- is the domain of the *Herkunft* [stock or descent]. The body manifests the stigmata of past experience and also gives rise to desires, failings, and errors. These elements may join in a body where they achieve a sudden expression, but as often their encounter is an engagement in which they efface each other, where the body becomes the pretext of their insurmountable conflict. ... The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration. (Foucault, 1991, 83)

John Connor struggles between levels of discourse; law, landlord, church, wife and family, culture and the rituals that hold them together all strive to dominate him. And the play and reaction to it likewise foster Famine discourse, partly because the audience knows what neither John nor the other Famine victims do. In any case, Sinéad spurns Connor's affectionate pastiche of Irish and English, whereby he seeks comfort in cozy sex. Instead, she turns ritualized language -- from both the Gaelic clan and prayer tradition -- against him, and finally spurs him to action. She declares:

> Come forward to view your handsome childre. The cruit on one, the twist to her every part, her eyes without notion of a tear. And the belly black and swole on your heir. Did ever the vicious Connors of yore foster their likes? The leaders and chieftains! (Murphy, 1997, 87)

Her mockery is brutal. She invokes, and subverts, what Connor treasures, the Gaelic code of bravery and custom of fosterage. But only through ritualized rhetoric -- addressed as a "prayer" -- can Sinéad pierce his dullness. "Jesus Christ, above ... What are we going through it for? Take us then! Take her -- Take him! It's nothing new to You to take them, and roast them in hell if that's what You want them for," Sinéad blasphemes, and Connor finally hears. (Murphy, 1997, 87) The mother, who traditionally steps back as her husband speaks ritual formulae, asserts her agency through gender by challenging his masculine identity. This dangerous ploy is deliberate, and achieves its effect. He grasps

the stick. She admits her collapse. She reminds him of his promise to provide, recalling his nuptial responsibilities, but situating his duty now in a merciful death. She speaks of "this moment of freedom" and "my right and your children's right" and insists that the old Gaelic order, not the landlords and their British props, control the action. Radway's notion of alternative feminist readings speaks to action outside a text, but Sinéad shows how it throws light on speech within a drama. Texts and discourses may have dominant, preferred meanings, but readers and listeners are free to interpret what they receive as they wish -- and "the *attitude* toward language" is critical. (Radway, 1991, 474) Social conditions and needs shape attitudes, and the Famine inevitably reshapes discourse. The cadenced, ritualized language of lineage and valor, typically masculine in usage, becomes her performative utterance of feminine agency. By taking such ritualized language as a kind of discourse, it is clear how Sinéad's rhetorical linkage with the brutal facts of the Famine illustrates van Dijk's point that social cognitions can change. (Van Dijk, 1984, 134) Stylized language and mockery might not have achieved its end, but coupled with descriptions of an heir's "belly black and swole" makes it irresistible. Connor's heir embodies his masculinity and his future, yet ironically, that is what he destroys. For Nicholas Grene, "That tragic action is portrayed as symptomatic not just of the famine but of its long-term consequences for generations to come." (Geene, 1999, 236)

Connor and Sinéad, as well as Mickeleen and Maeve, exemplify the linguistic range in *Famine* within the frame of ritual and its subversion. Gerald Stembridge writes that Murphy's plays use language not for literary effects but for theatrical empathy; they are "screams in the night," demanding emotional attention. (Stembridge, 1987, 61) Brian Friel likewise remarks, "What distinguishes Murphy ... is his theatrical language and [the] pure theatricality of that language. It is as close as anyone can get or should wish to get to poetry in drama." [Programme note for *The Blue Macushla* at the Abbey (6 March 1980)] (Griffin, 1987, 70) Murphy's understanding of ritual's linguistic effects plays no small part in foregrounding gender and agency.

*Famine* chronicles a food crisis, explores failed heroism, interrogates the roots of agency, examines gender reversals, investigates faith and folly, offers a tragic "epic"

about Ireland's single greatest calamity and traces the roots of historic fears and desires in the national psyche. But it also recognizes the human and social need for ritual, and exploits ritual to create structure, develop character and shape language. Moreover, through ritual's subversion, its audience experiences the horror of the Great Hunger, undergoes emotional release and yet steps back to contemplate its implications, "...the enduring 'famine' of the Irish experience." (Murray, 1987, 11) For Murphy's first audiences, this contemporary hunger was visible in continuing national stagnation and emigration. O'Toole calls the play "utterly theatrical," because the audience is always aware "that this horrible, extreme world of the past, full of starvation, murder and cruelty, is our world, the world of our present time." (O'Toole, 1994, 113) Paul Ricoeur describes storytelling, especially amid crisis, as revelation of the roots of communal identity: "In this way we become aware of our basic capacities and reasons for surviving, for being and continuing to be what we are." (O'Dwyer, 1987, 32) Murray, in starker territory, cites "what F.S.L. Lyons calls the 'ultimate psychological legacy' of the famine ... . No answers are found in Murphy's play; no neat Brechtian argument is advanced. Instead, *Famine* dramatises horror and survival, so that the central confused hero, John Connor, stands finally as victim and villain. The play becomes a process to be experienced traumatically." (Murray, 1997, 184) The play, then, is not only a dramatic work exploring ritual but becomes a quasi-ritual that allows audience members to appropriate the Famine and its meaning in their own experience. Thus the play and its reception also become Habermas's public square, where interrogation of the past may prompt change. Finally, Schumacher's concept of a theater that moves beyond the merely mimetic to confront memory and trauma helps explain ritual's role in the play, while Phelan's notion that trauma cuts through symbolic representations is reflected in the collapse of ritual here. As Phelan explains, the body's yearning to be touched, held and consoled pervades the play, and the Famine's hunger, disease, departure and death consistently deny that possibility.

Ritual distances trauma, and indeed *Famine* offers an ambiguous ending. Amid the horror, a fragile hope, characteristic of Murphy's dramatic vision, emerges. It is springtime. John Connor, alone and Moses-like on a hill, calls out to ships he sees

arriving with grain. But the scene is unsettling. Mickeleen, survivor, lies dead at Maeve's feet, and it is "Black '47," with the worst of the Famine yet to come. O'Dwyer writes:

> Rescue is not always possible, however, or the price of rescue itself may be too destructive. Tom Murphy found a powerful metaphor for disintegration in his play *Famine* .... Murphy said of the play: 'I wrote *Famine* in England. I couldn't have written it in Ireland. It's not about the history of the Irish Famine. Living in the 1960s, I found that I was a Famine victim, that it wasn't over .... *Famine* to me meant twisted mentalities, poverty of love, tenderness and affection; the natural extravagance of youth wanting to bloom -- to blossom -- but being stalemated by a 19th century mentality. [Murphy quoted in programme notes for the Druid production of *Famine*, 1984, 7] (O'Dwyer, 1987, 33)

In Scene 12, a hardened, bitter Maeve takes the proffered bread, then weeps, free to grieve. The ending, too, is ritualistic, a still and dark reflection of a sacrificial gift, a kind of Eucharist. Throughout *Famine*, Murphy relies on ritual behavior and ritualized mind-sets to shape action, character and language. Agency and gender serve as intertwined themes in and through which ritual unfolds. In so doing, they expose a powerful communicational matrix that brings together dramatic characterization, narrative content, linguistic structure and discursive shifts.

**5. Confronting the challenges of MacIntyre's play**

MacIntyre's play, *The Great Hunger,* is a watershed in Irish drama. Its subject is rooted in Irish history, folklore and social conditions, yet its form represents a sharp break with most Irish theatrical conventions. While the play illustrates Bourdieu's notion of habitus in the predicament of its central character, the play itself, and the Kavanagh poem on which it is based, represents an attempt to shift what van Dijk sees as the social cognitions that permeate dominant discourses of gender and agency and consistently reinscribe themselves in Irish social space. Murray observes, "... *The Great Hunger* as avant-garde drama reveals a significant paradox. While it explodes the naturalistic form and releases copious energy on stage the play simultaneously deals with traditional materials. Its surrealism was rooted in Irish soil." (Murray, 1997, 233) Consequently, reaction should have surprised few. Unlike America, Britain and Canada, where the new is accepted with relative ease, Ireland offers a

> ... complex response to MacIntyre's work. In Ireland the past is still acknowledged and yet furiously contended: debates over historical revisionism raged in the 1980s. At the same time, postmodernism is not congenial to Irish audiences, whose sense of history remains too strong for it to be shredded as *mise en scène.* Thus in Dublin it is at once both loved and hated. (Murray, 1997, 233)

At issue is learning a new way of decoding a "text." Audiences steeped in verbal/aural texts must enter an imagistic/physical movement zone. Hall's message transmission theory helps elucidate the difficulty here. When a "reciprocity of codes," the one by which a message is encoded and the one by which it is decoded, is deficient, comprehension is distorted. (Hall, 1973, 6) Untrained in imagistic/physical movement sphere, Irish audiences were puzzled. The codes had changed. However, the codes MacIntyre adopts originate in Irish experience, and theatergoers eventually made the transition. For Lynda Henderson, the play has found "alternative ways of working, ... saying, and ... understanding. The audiences were quiet at first, unconfident in their own ability to engage with the unfamiliar form. Then, increasingly, they began to respond -- to laugh, nod, gasp, to be stilled. They had learned new languages." (Henderson, 1983, 133)

***Intertwined issues of gender and agency.*** With 21 scenes, *The Great Hunger* flows from one into another continuously without an interval. At issue is the intertwined relationship of gender and agency. Kavanagh's poem becomes

> ... a piece of theatre where text is of less importance than mime, stage properties and use of space. The ... scenes ... comprise improvisations on the key motifs in the lonely life of the archetypal, middle-aged, unmarried farmer ....These scenes are often very funny, turning bored repetition into comic ritual. (Murray, 1997, 232)

Paddy Maguire's central features are retained, however. As Antoinette Quinn, writing about the poem, observes, "Patrick Maguire is an overworked slave, brutalised, vegetised even, by a life of unremitting drudgery, culturally deprived, compelled to be chaste, and forbidden to marry until impotent from age." (Quinn, 1991, 126) Moreover, unfulfilling relationships ensnare him:

> Maguire's predicament is exacerbated by a combination of filial obligations and maternal manipulation. He is trapped in a pernicious Irish rural system of belated male marriage which he himself, if he were not doomed to perish childless, would

> be condemned to perpetuate. ... [He] is slowly emasculated by matriarchy. He procrastinates, masturbates, sublimates. Maguire has fallen victim to the stereotypical Irish mother/son relationship that precludes all other relationships, a grotesque Oedipal parody in which she is 'wife and mother in one' and he upholds their marriage contract. (Quinn, 1991, 127)

This is the same Maguire who walks across the stage, and yet Kavanagh's poem is not MacIntyre's play. In the published 1988 version, three scenes that have remained consistently important illuminate its performative characteristics.

In Scene 2, Maguire is discovered with fellow workers Malone and Joe, while Packy, an impish friend, hangs off a gate, where he watches and chants. Each worker picks potatoes, and ignores girls laughing off stage. Maguire spots something in the next field, then exclaims, "Curse o' God, where's that dog? Never where he's wanted." (Kavanagh/MacIntyre, 1988, 36) Maguire is at his most loquacious here, yet the dialogue is minimalistic and formulaic. "Move forward that basket." "The wind's over Brannigan's --." "Pull down the shafts of that cart, Joe." (Kavanagh/MacIntyre, 1988, 36) No real exchange ensues, only tortured words and syntax. Maguire and his companions show neither emotion nor imagination. Then, suddenly, after a "burst of girlish laughter, ... one [girl] runs on, downstage right, 'Will-I-won't-I demeanour. [She] Runs downstage of the men to leapfrog over Joe, and -- full tilt -- exit upstage left." (Kavanagh/MacIntyre, 1988, 37) The men dive, heads between wide-apart legs, to see, but they are too late. They rise slowly to "*become scarecrows stirring lightly in the wind, scarecrows that swivel and stare vacantly into the audience.*" (Kavanagh/MacIntyre, 1988, 37) Meanwhile, Packy chants from the gate, "Ploughs and sows ... Eats fresh food. ... Loves fresh women. ... His own master -- can talk to God." While the script is sparse, the images are rich with commentary and irony. Litanic conversation mocks formal religious practice, meant to console, but which can stifle imaginative and sexual freedom. Similarly, it replicates masculine speech, concerned with mundane, unremitting farm work. Their language is English, Irish having been eroded steadily by the Famine and its aftermath. The colonizer's tongue remains, the Gaelic tradition repressed.

The fleeting feminine intrusion shocks the men into alertness, but their response is

too little, too late. Comically, their posture inhibits seeing the girls. Rather, it suggests how they have been turned inside out mentally and brought them face-to-face not only with their sexual organs but their sexual identity. Packy's chant lauds the farmer's freedom to be his own man, but he undercuts the assertion. Moreover, the chant echoes Joyce on Ireland as an old sow eating its young in *Portrait* and O'Casey on Irish aspirations in *The Plough and the Stars*, which are debased among farmyard sows. They become scarecrows -- sexless, hollow men -- unable to respond to women. Now, worse than before, the men resume potato-digging, emptying full buckets into a bath. Maguire's comment, "Never where he's wanted," adds further irony. The audience shifts the referent from the dog to Maguire himself. His agency is frozen. The scene ends with Mary Anne, Maguire's vituperative sister. (Kavanagh/MacIntyre, 1988, 37) The next scene includes Maguire's controversial masturbation, represented by a bellows, but this action depends entirely upon the sense of loss, frustration and dominance in Scene 2. Reduced to an angry child, Maguire bangs his feet repeatedly before a maternal effigy. He despises the dominant discourses surrounding him, but he cannot refute them. Like so many of his mid-century countrymen, Maguire can only vent his frustrations.

Scene 5 is one of the most intriguing. Exuberant yet sinister, it effectively highlights Maguire's missed opportunities. Malone and Packy enter with green branches for all except the priest. Maguire is ecstatic, Mary Anne severe, the school-girl rapt and Agnes highly sensual as she "lies down and, laughing, strokes the branches against thighs, breasts, face." (Kavanagh/MacIntyre, 1988, 42) Meanwhile, Malone tears off leaves and places them in his pocket, while Packy is both grotesque and delicate. A procession starts, and the schoolgirl has begun blessing each branch and player, as well as the audience. She repeats again and again, "Holy Spirit is the rising sap." (Kavanagh/MacIntyre, 1988, 42) MacIntyre here exploits the potential in Kavanagh's poem to link Celtic festivals with Christian ritual and belief. New growth, springtime, the earth mother goddess, fecundity, even mystical ecstasy all are suggested through performativity. Agency and gender are entwined again, yet forces within society will unravel the connection and stifle both. Murray observes, "Dublin audiences are well attuned to folklore and myth, and it is in

these areas that MacIntyre is archaeological. In digging into the past MacIntyre is revivifying myth and releasing its language of psychological power." (Murray, 1997, 233) The visual images come to life through the actors' movements, while the school-girl links the Holy Spirit and rising sap, suggesting new life, growth, even sexual ardor. The priest, however, arrests the festival; branches are dropped and the players kneel before the tabernacle. Packy becomes an altar boy, Agnes makes eyes at the priest, the maternal effigy rests stolidly in their midst, and soon "*an orchestrated din of coughing which turns to a chorale of farmyard noises, animal and fowl*" erupts. (Kavanagh/MacIntyre, 1988, 43) The priest asserts control, Packy rings a bell and eventually the din turns into a surreal, antiphonal and mundane exchange: "Is that Cassidy's ass out of my clover? The wind's over Brannigan's, that means rain. ... Kate, throw another sod on that fire." (Kavanagh / MacIntyre, 1988, 43) This, of course, replicates Mass on a Sunday, when the profound and profane mix. Moreover, the priest and the effigy represent religious and matriarchal control, attempting to enforce a kind of involuntary celibacy on Maguire and the others. The scene moves into silent veneration of the Eucharist in "*a small dingy chalice, tarnished, but it contains the mystery.*" (Kavanagh/MacIntyre, 1988, 44) Then, Maguire's great moment, passing the collection basket, begins. Each contribution is individualized. Mary Anne, for example, grudgingly surrenders a single coin -- not quite the widow's mite. Maguire returns to the potato bucket and "*dreamily spills all the coins into the water.*" (Kavanagh/MacIntyre, 1988, 44) The congregation is stunned, but the priest begins to laugh -- one can read exoneration or mockery -- and soon all the players laugh uproariously. Just as quickly, the priest silences them with a look. The scene concludes with Maguire rattling a coin in the collection box and then, in a daze, departing, Packy helping the priest, and Agnes, ever lusty, confronting Maguire with a stare, and pounding on a wall to vent her anger over his submission to the neutering effects of church and village. The priest, however, astonishes Packy with a card trick. "We must not want too much to know," he announces. (Kavanagh/MacIntyre, 1988, 45) The scene is replete with performative, and paradoxical, images: priest as policeman/conjurer; Maguire as subject/ master; villagers as oppressed/subversive.

Scene 7's performativity easily overshadows the script and moves far beyond the poem. Antics abound, actions elide and Maguire is involved in a restaging of the Resurrection, Packy obliging as Christ, as well as male rough-housing that leads to the dimly homoerotic Heifer Romp in which Maguire rides one of his friends. A scrum follows, terminating in a lunge for Packy. (Kavanagh/MacIntyre, 1988, 47, 50) Meanwhile, Mary Anne hunkers down beside the effigy of Mother and anoints herself with Pond's Cold Cream. The mystical chant that God, the Mystery, lies in a crumb becomes a taunt. A consuming male interest in athletics and cattle-raising is satirized, while feminine control and stagnation is depicted. The men refuse to pursue young women, instead spending themselves in a masculine parody that targets Packy. By thwarting the natural order, they underline communal distress. The farmers drift off stage, and Maguire struggling toward genuine consciousness, is left alone to study his hands.

***A sense of imagistic discourse.*** How might one understand this succession of images, speech and movement? Certainly, the play exposes a vitiated Irish life, oppressed by spiritual Jansenism, disordered society and relentless farm work. Vincent Hurley writes:

> *The Great Hunger* is a poem about stagnation, enervation and the slow, painful death of any hope of joy or fulfillment in the life of its central character, Patrick Maguire. ... Rooted in quotidian reality, the play remains true to the spirit of the poem, conveying both its earthiness and its essentially tragic vision of the peasant life. (Kavanagh/MacIntyre, 1988, 73, 77)

Sexual repression and an unhealthy obeisance to church and family emasculate Maguire. Likewise, one can see *The Great Hunger* as an important theatrical experiment to free the stage from dependence on speech at the expense of movement and image. Hurley sees MacIntyre's play as "cinematic" because of its "non-linear, non-discursive approach," adding that it is "a play in which the images presented on stage carry all the weight. It appeals more to the heart than to the mind, to feelings rather than intellect. To appreciate it fully as a piece of theatre, we must allow the images to work their magic on us." (Kavanagh/MacIntyre, 1988, 76) True, the poem is altogether reconfigured; much, indeed, makes the stage, but it is not where one expects it visually or linguistically.

MacIntyre jettisons Kavanagh's narrative structure, engages his characters creatively, and adopts a fluid attitude toward his language. Hurley's claim that the play is non-discursive, however, misses the importance images themselves play in establishing a discourse and in resisting it. While no single discourse predominates, the presence of competing discourses is at the heart of the play. Many of the scenes involving farm work, the priest, Maguire and his friends and, finally, the maternal effigy establish the prevailing social discourse of Phases III-IV, which processions, flirtations and ludic elements resist. In any case, MacIntyre's expressionism, recalling the Abbey's early Yeatsian ethos, goes "straight to the heart of the poem to extract the essential images which sustain it. ... His adaptation's intrinsic theatricality is rooted in image and movement rather than in speech." (Kavanagh / MacIntyre, 1988, 75) Even the dialogue, taken directly from the poem, is reconfigured to support image and movement. Dialogue, "if such a term can be used to describe the overlapping, often repetitive, sometimes distorted speech patterns of the characters, is poetic, heightened, rhythmical, imagistic and redolent of rural Ireland," Hurley writes. (Kavanagh/MacIntyre, 1988, 77) MacIntyre's imagistic theater looks to Vsevvolod Meyerhold, Edward Gordon Craig and Antonin Artaud, as well as Peter Brook and Polish directors Jerzy Grotowski and Kazimierz Braun. (Kavanagh/MacIntyre, 1988, 80)

Murray sees MacIntyre moving toward a ritualistic aesthetic, as did Artaud, Beckett, Ionesco and even O'Casey, where theater sought to "recover for the present day the energy and connectedness of natural, primitive man." (Murray, 1988, 56) Even more than this may be under way, however. Formal rituals abound in *The Great Hunger*: the procession, the worship of the Eucharist, even the passing of the collection plate. In addition, the potato planting and harvesting, the evening smoke, the men's horseplay all bespeak the rituals of rural Irish life. Murray challenges as simplistic the notion of "image" advanced by Hurley. MacIntyre's images

> ... arrest but remain in isolation, discrete and arbitrary; indeed, the credo of improvisation to which the production style is committed necessitates this arbitrariness. ... The critic ... demands coherence of form even where the subject in itself is fragmented. To date, MacIntyre flouts the fundamental law of unity (of

> impression, mood or action). ... He has yet to show that the parts are equal to the whole. For the critic, the wholeness is all. (Murray, 1988, 56)

As discussion of particular scenes suggests, *The Great Hunger* does maintain unifying connections among image, action and dialogue to achieve a fluid harmony, particularly when seen in connection with the Famine. Just as the consequences of the Famine helped lead Ireland into a social morass, Paddy Maguire lives out those consequences. By its decentered focus, the play endeavors to demonstrate alternatives to Maguire's malaise. These alternatives, moreover, lie at the core of Kavanagh's poem; they are what Maguire ought to pursue but will not. Maguire cannot escape the responsibility of agency any more than he can deny the existence of alternatives to his neutered identity. Una Agnew sees the "momentary brightness within the darkened narrative" of the poem as epiphanic, and, in performance, the bodies of actors foreground such light. (Agnew, 1998, 205-207) In any case, Murray's criticisms underline the challenge of achieving integrity in such a work and his attention to ritual link MacIntyre and Murphy.

***Role of the performative body as a text.*** At the heart of MacIntyre's work is the performative body, particularly the body of Tom Hickey, who played Maguire in both the 1983 and 1986 versions. He digs potatoes and sweats, hangs like a scarecrow, masturbates symbolically, nestles on the shoulder of a maternal effigy, vents rage and frustration by banging feet, cavorts with green branches, recoils from women, roughhouses with male friends and, finally, gives his body up to clay. Liz Heade observes, Hickey "... is one of the very few actors who can appear to alter bodily from one part to the next," and she quotes him as saying, "'I've always thought you're responsible for expressiveness in your body and your voice and your inner instrument. I still think the physical aspect of acting is important.'" (Heade, 1983, 126) Hickey's is not the only performative body on stage. Precisely because the play explodes Kavanagh's original narrative voice, dramatically *The Great Hunger* allows other bodies to contest the poem's bleak picture. Sexuality, for example, becomes a good. Murray observes that while Kavanagh was "merely bleakly critical" of repression at mid-century,

> MacIntyre builds into his version the joy and sexual release which in Kavanagh is

> everywhere suppressed. Therefore MacIntyre's play provides a critique of the culture by means of a balancing out of the poem's pessimism. The perspective is from the 1980s, when the plenitude of sex is a resource to be celebrated rather than a sin to be expunged. (Murray, 1997, 232)

As Quinn observes, "The narrator of *The Great Hunger* [the poem] renders the deprivation and limited consolations of Maguire's life from young manhood to old age with the familiarity of one who has foreknown and foresuffered all." (Quinn, 1991, 128) Yet this same narrator, through Kavanagh's ironic technique, blocks sympathy, casting a cold eye on Maguire's own responsibility. (Quinn, 1991, 129-130)

***Responsibility and repression.*** Kavanagh's stern attitude toward Maguire stems from his religious conception of the world. In the poem, God's transcendence does not deny divine immanence. Unfortunately, Maguire, his women, Church and rural world ignore this proximity:

> *The Great Hunger* may seem to be a reading from the Book of Death, yet its prophetic condemnation of rural Ireland as a wasteland is inspired by an intensely Christian interpretation of the holiness of human life. ... [The poem's] God is, above all, a creative God, rejoicing in human sensuality, sexuality, fertility; not a repressed puritanical deity, approving the closed lips, closed legs and closed minds ... . (Quinn, 1991, 124)

The play both advances what Kavanagh has constructed in his art, and proposes new models of life through the voices and movements of others on stage. In the poem, Kavanagh "draws attention to his own subversiveness by declaring that Maguire's case history demands ... revision of the tragic category. What *The Great Hunger* presents is a realist or 'true tragedy', neither heroic nor spectacular. It is a drama of non-event." (Quinn, 1991, 129) Nonetheless, on stage, Maguire's body remains the dominant focus. Postmodern theater and performance studies argue that the body is the subject of social discourse, and that, whatever its metaphysical possibilities, its materiality shows it to be understood differently in each historical and cultural era. Any possibility for "counterhegemonic artistic production" requires understanding the body's history of representation, according to Philip Auslander. (Auslander, 1997, 92-93) Against the image of the Irish peasant as hard-working, happy and pious, fulfilled on his own land,

with its apotheosis in de Valera's famous 1943 radio broadcast, rises the body of Maguire. (De Valera, 1999, 146-150) And *body* it must be, for Maguire is neither conscious nor fluent enough to articulate his predicament. While other bodies become voices resisting the discursive claims of Church and State, family and community, Maguire's physicality bears their full weight. They destroy his agency and neuter his gendered identity. Bourdieu claims there is a "class sense, hidden away deep in the body, a relation to the body which is a relation to class," which is not yet "consciousness and class consciousness." (Bourdieu, 1993, 166) The Famine's echo is strong.

Historically, the body's appalling condition during the Famine repudiated attempts to repress it -- and its latent political power -- through official discourse. Hungry, emaciated, diseased, roaming the countryside in desperate search for food, left skeletal in a hovel to die, crowded into a county poorhouse or tossed off a coffin ship, the human body provided its own defiant text. Mid-19th century political and economic discourse, statistical analysis, landlord relief protests -- none could make the "corporeal text" go away. Moreover, the Famine bequeathed Ireland a complex legacy. (Brown, 1985, 21-26) Quinn's study makes a strong case for the poem's Famine association. It is only a small leap from the poem to the Famine on stage -- with the body at the center. Quinn observes:

> Through title, timing, location, and the use of the potato as recurrent motif Kavanagh establishes a consistent analogy between the psychic and sexual deprivation that is depopulating and destroying rural Ireland in the twentieth century and the Famine that ravaged the country in the mid-19th century. *The Great Hunger* is almost a Famine centenary poem. (Quinn, 1991, 138)

None of this changes in MacIntyre's adaptation; indeed, the timing is intensified by contrast. The scenes of reverie, whereby the Celtic springtime rituals are re-enacted, stand out sharply from Maguire's routine. Potatoes and buckets, weather and crop success, absence of sexual expression and fear of women, whether dominatrix (the effigy) or seductress (Agnes and the schoolgirl) and failure of speech -- offer strong, consistent images pointing to the Famine in MacIntyre's drama.

Through *The Great Hunger's* reliance on the performative body, one is led to consider the body as understood in Ireland. The *corpus hibernicum* has a long history of

repression. Foreign invasion, tribal collapse, plantation, dispossession, penal laws, military conflict, sectarian hostility, religious distortion and cultural rigidity all played their part in shaping the Irish mind, which, in turn, has a profound impact on the Irish body. While cautioning against essentialism, Cheryl Herr claims most writers on Ireland see the Celtic consciousness fraught with a "fatal divisiveness" and "emotional oscillation," as well as a strong sense of place and an obsession with death, along with the current 'over-identity crisis.'" (Herr, 1990, 6-7) She adds that "Ireland has literally eroded, in ... representations that constitute social identity, a comfortable sense of the body .... [There is ] a reflexive and widespread resistance to *seeing* movement, to recognizing its necessity, and ultimately to sanctioning radical changes of posture. (Herr, 1990, 13) This "fear of the flesh" has been expressed in an excessive focus on celibacy, asceticism, tactile fears and sexual repression. For decades, Irish theater found its strength in the power of speech and story. MacIntyre explores the body's communicative possibility. Ironically, the play also exposes traditions that reduce Maguire to clay, Mother to effigy and Mary Anne to automaton.

"Famine is a potent, anti-heroic national myth, stirring atavistic fears, rousing racial memories of extreme indignity and humiliation as well as impoverishment, suffering and death," writes Quinn. MacIntyre's *The Great Hunger* is a theatrical milestone. MacIntyre seizes the Famine's metaphorical possibilities, and through ritual and the performative body, provides a major innovation and a critique of his times.

**CONCLUSION: RETURNING TO THE PAST TO EXPLAIN THE PRESENT**

Under the aegis of LaCapra's documentary and worklike distinctions in textual production, this chapter has examined the production of literary and dramatic works relating to the Famine during the 1951-1983 period. Textual production during Phase IV exhibits a strong interest in questions of agency and gender, areas where the historical trauma of the Famine was particularly rich. While issues of land, national identity and religion remain important, they recede as writers engage with issues confronting their readers and audiences. Mária Kurdi argues that *Famine*, for example, is a post-colonial attempt to respond to colonialist, or revisionist, versions of Irish history from the

perspective of the colonized "other." The play becomes a "discursive counter-text in refutation of orthodox and neo-orthodox readings of history." (Kurdi, 2000, 19) Murphy's play, as indeed most of Phase IV Famine literature and drama, may be less an academic or theoretical engagement than one with palpable social conditions. In consequence of the Famine, emigration rates rose to disturbingly high levels. Marriages were delayed. Rural Ireland gradually was being depopulated. Meanwhile, television brought modernity into Irish homes in ways that disturbed priests and politicians interested in promoting a vision of a traditional society of small, prosperous farms and big, devout families. Meanwhile, government and ecclesiastical efforts at social improvement, industrialization and international trade and tourism continued. Population began to stabilize and rise. Ireland's Catholic culture began to change in the wake of Vatican II. Ireland engaged continental Europe as an integral, if financially strapped, member. It watched as the North struggled with republican and unionist violence.

Issues of individual action and identity emerged amid growing social and cultural questions. On a macrotextual level, Irish readers and theatergoers could find these same concerns in the documentary dimensions of new works employing a Famine setting and frame of reference. On a microtextual level, they could encounter important shifts in the traditional telling of the Famine. Writers employed new rhetorical and discursive strategies; characters faced new choices and concerns. Phase IV texts confront responsibility and gendered identity in transforming Ireland. Murphy's *Famine* and MacIntyre's *The Great Hunger* move from realistic or naturalistic drama to ritual and expressionism, finding new, competing voices through physical performativity. Microtextually, rhetorical features have shown the importance of van Dijk's social cognition theory in discourse. Whether a discourse is maintained or changed, social understanding is critical. In turn, Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and social fields help make sense of the behavior of fictional characters and link internal textual features with external social and cultural conditions of production. When such macrotextual conditions change, or when change is desired, microtextual features of literary form, linguistic style, thematic emphasis, discursive strategy and narrative structure are invoked. During Phase

IV, Irish writers found that the Famine's legacy helped explain their own dilemmas and malaise. To that extent, they could experiment by feeding on hunger. They found it nourishing, and the taste would encourage others in Phase V.

## CHAPTER V

# *Cultural Food: Texts 1984-2000*

The last two decades in Ireland have produced a remarkable phenomenon in textual production. The Famine, relegated to silence and marginal interest in the long Phase III period, has returned as a major concern in national intellectual, cultural and political life. More fiction, drama, poetry, music, art, radio and television production and cinematic work has focused on the Famine than at any time since Phase II, the politically charged decades after 1852. To all this material, one may add a proliferation of interest in Irish communities around the world. Domestically and abroad, the Famine has become the subject of museum exhibitions, interpretive heritage centers, monuments and memorials. Historically, this rising tide of Famine interest was part of heavy cultural -- and commercial -- interest in Celtic heritage. For the Famine, public interest peaked during its 150th anniversary commemorations, although interest has remained fairly steady since then. This "turn to the Famine" enables artists, writers and designers not only to explore Ireland's most significant modern historical moment through creative expression, but also to approach it as a cultural resource that enables them to deploy its immense discursive power in aid of social and cultural aims. But if the 1840s catastrophe is a cultural resource, it is one that must be approached with care for it remains in the communal memory and the literary and historical record as a time of wrenching trauma. The Famine continues to resist an "easy" telling. It still generates a degree of passion. And conveying its multifaceted social, political and economic causes and consequences, while at the same time touching its human impact, remains difficult. This chapter will examine the most recent stage of Famine textual production, the years from 1984 to 2000, considered as Phase V. The first section will provide an overview of the latest textual production and a synopsis of the two works to be considered in detail. The second section will examine the social and cultural context of Phase V texts in what LaCapra calls their

documentary dimensions, their macrotextual relationship to their historical setting. The third section will treat the two writers in question and the circumstances of their readerships. Finally, the fourth section will present a microtextual examination of the two principal works, with reference to other selected texts. Again relying on the five tropes of land, national identity, religion, gender and agency, this chapter will explore the rhetorical ways texts create and manipulate a discourse. Major attention will be directed toward Frank McGuinness's drama *Mary and Lizzie* (1989) and Seán Kenny's novel, *The Hungry Earth* (1995). Bourdieu's theories of habitus and social space and van Dijk's attention to social cognition again will shape this argument's theoretical construction.

## SECTION I: SYNOPSES OF REPRESENTATIVE WORKS IN PHASE V

### 1. Overview of literary, dramatic and related material

Textually, Phase V saw the greatest surge in the production of literary and dramatic material since Phase II unionists and nationalists battled over the Famine's discursive construction. Likewise, the period saw a rise in historical scholarship, journalistic consideration and political rhetoric. The Famine's sesquicentennial commemoration generated much of the attention, but textual production nonetheless retained its discursive dimension. At least 13 novels were published, as well as two short stories, six plays and a half dozen significant poetical works. Novels include *The Hungry Land* (1986) and *The Darkest Years* (1996) by Michael Mullen, *The Hungry Earth* (1995) by Kenny, *Groundwork* (1997) by Robert Welch; *The Bitter Word* (1998) by Mike Allen; *Duggan's Destiny* (1998) by Séamus Martin; *Tales from the Poorhouse* (1999) by Eugene McCabe; and *The Whitest Flower* (1999) by Brendan Graham. For the first time, children's novels appeared. After Murhpy and MacIntyre in Phase IV, drama manifests a significant turn to the Famine, with varying degrees of theatrical succes. Famine plays ranged from full-scale Abbey Theatre productions to theater-in-education works to experimental pieces. Other literary works included a collection of poetry and prose for children and a collection of folklore. Famine poetry experienced a resurgence in individual pieces, thematic collections and even debuted on the World Wide Web, manifesting the Famine's discursive migration from the early 19th century to the

threshold of the 21st. Another significant moment was publication of Morash's *The Hungry Voice: The Poetry of the Irish Famine* (1989), an anthology of works written during the catastrophe and in its immediate aftermath. (Cf. Introduction) Historical works, some highly academic, others popular, proliferated. The Famine was examined politically, socially and economically. Its impact on Ireland, North and South, on particular regions and communities, was studied, as well as its consequences in America, Australia, Britain, Canada and elsewhere. Old arguments about the role of the Catholic Church were re-examined. Besides histories, textual production also included personal reflections, memoirs, literary studies and republication of travel accounts, journals and diaries. This surge is related to a burgeoning Irish studies movement throughout much of the English-speaking world. Numerous academic conferences, radio and television specials and press and magazine coverage also increased the Famine's prominence. News coverage often stemmed from establishment of Famine monuments, memorials and museum exhibits. Magazines aimed at an Irish or diaspora readership have increased, and focus on the Famine and its legacy. Charts in the Introduction provide specifics on Phase V production.

**2. Synopses of action in McGuinness and Kenny**

***McGuinness's 'Mary and Lizzie' on frontiers, voice.*** If Brian Friel, whom McGuinness considers a formative influence, explores the Famine and tensions between local culture, linguistic shift and universal values, McGuinness carries the Famine to Britain to examine its connections to imperialism, industrialization and worker exploitation. McGuinness's *Mary and Lizzie*, first performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company in the Pit at the Barbican Theatre, London, on 27 Sept. 1989, employs the Famine as a.) rural manifestation of colonial policy run amok, b.) Irish consequence of worldwide worker exploitation, and c.) symbolic depiction of the cost of cold rationalism over human emotion. The underworld, Famine specters, industrial sweat shops, drawing room tea-and-strawberry parties and the Soviet GULAG help McGuinness play with sexuality, time and identity. Characters fade in and out, and the lines between the historical and the mystical blur. The title characters, Mary and Lizzie Burns, are

Irishwomen largely lost to history but for their relationship with Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), the German socialist and communist theorist and collaborator with Karl Marx (1818-1883). Engels lived in Britain from 1842 to 1844, and took the two women under his roof. (Ilyichov, 1974, 34-47) In the play, they are depicted alternately as his whores, dominatrices, lovers, companions and servants, but McGuinness makes his play *their* search, not Engels'. From Bourdieu's perspective, McGuinness's origins and his homosexual orientation nourish sympathetic view of the emigre Irish working class in Britain, who lack a strong public voice. McGuinness recognizes the similarity of position between industrial workers and Irish émigrés; in Bourdieu's terms, both lack economic and cultural capital, and the latter provided fodder for the former. (Bourdieu, 1998, 6) The Famine gives Irish peasant and British factory-worker common ground. Eamonn Jordan sees *Mary and Lizzie* as one of the "most complicated and accomplished [McGuinness] plays," one in which "time is multiple and accumulative" and "the stability of space is dissolved by movements in time and is distorted by the devices of carnival." (Jordan, 1997, 124) He adds:

> By setting the play in an era prior to famine Ireland, McGuinness is provided not only with the possibility of anticipating the famine but also with the opportunity to deconstruct the specific 'mythology of deprivation which has grown up about the event,' targeting 'not some freak of nature' but 'something which was derived from the social and political dynamic of a [colonizing, capitalist and imperialist] nation.' (Jordan, 1997, 132)

Driven from their home by the Famine, the two sisters travel to burgeoning Manchester. Having lost their mother in childbirth, the sisters search for their father. Highly expressionistic, the play emphasizes image over narrative. The plot is relatively straightforward. In England, the girls discover their father's plight, meet Engels, show him about, take up with him and then spend an evening with Karl and Jenny Marx. While at the Marx home, financed by Engels, the girls engage in sex with Engels, while he and Marx try to discuss political economy. They argue with Jenny, who loathes them as lower-class. The scene then shifts to a Soviet work camp, where Mary and Lizzie hear a chorus of women speak of life's hardness and love's possibilities. Their mother, whom

the audience first encounters in a similar apparition rendered in the Irish language, reappears and the scene concludes with a paean to human love. Dramatic form is complex. Jordan writes that *Mary and Lizzie* finds its power in its "the ability of... [its] fantastic form to suggest a simultaneity of theme, whereby it appears as if each scene not only mirrors the other, but that there is a layering process that ensures that each scene is superimposed upon the other." (Jordan, 1997, 124) This, of course, is precisely how human beings experience time; it is not purely sequential. The past, remembered, repressed or constitutive, exists below the horizon of the present. For the Famine, a sense of time is significant. It pervades and complicates issues of land and national identity. Scene, action and phrase mirror, echo and restage each other, and reflect McGuinness's contribution to genre and practice.

***Kenny's 'timeslip' novel of the Famine's moral message.*** Seán Kenny's novel *The Hungry Earth* (1995) provides readers with a searing critique of the emergent Celtic Tiger, the Irish economic miracle of the 1990s, and its society. The Famine becomes a prism for the end of the 20th century as Kenny employs the thematic indices of land, national identity, religion, gender and agency. Like *Mary and Lizzie*, the novel plays with time, asking readers to keep two separate but historically connected worlds in view simultaneously. Whether it is too much drink, a knock on the head from a fall, a guilty conscience, a bit of madness, emotional upheaval or a mystical force, Turlough Walsh, 39, a modern Dublin accountant, finds himself in Erris, County Mayo, during the Famine. Walsh frequently slips from present to past to present, and realizes his urban, professional life is bankrupt. He is prompted to make meaningful sacrifices. Kenny fashions his contemporary Dublin to parallel events of the Famine. In place of rack-renting, exploitation, "me first" attitudes and absentee landlordism, he offers profit maximization, staff reductions, corporate and individual greed, remote management and globalization. As Walsh confronts 19th century brutality, he rethinks his own behavior and attitudes. Through Kenny's parallelisms, or "doubles," part of the Irish dramatic tradition, *The Hungry Earth* is more than an Irish version of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol.*

Turlough Walsh has just been made a partner in his firm, lives in the suburbs,

joins the yacht club, distrusts his colleagues, exploits junior members, has an affair with a younger woman and feels trapped in a loveless marriage. His children are crass materialists. When he inherits a West of Ireland cottage, he travels to Mayo in his BMW to inspect the property. After a fight at Moran's pub, Walsh returns to the cottage, gets drunk, hits his head in a fall -- and his visions begin. In the course of his Famine-world encounters, Walsh gives money to Mick-Og, a young emigrant; consoles Nan, a dying girl; attacks a Big House; and finds his friends, the Kernens, in a poorhouse. He meets his own "double," Lorcan MacCurran, a brutal thug who leads the Whiteboys as Captain Midnight. Walsh even kills Kincaid, the exploitive land agent for Sir Clyde Montenegrine, the local estate owner. Meanwhile, Walsh, now stimulated to investigate the 1840s catastrophe, discovers the Kernens' fate and their link to his own. Walsh's interest in the village and its past, despite initial local misgiving and hostility, revitalizes the community and leads to establishment of a Famine museum. Despite growing self-knowledge, self-sacrifice and moral responsibility, Walsh is institutionalized. Finally, he is "cured" by shock treatment. Kenny's novel, however, shows that Walsh's recovery depends upon exploration of land, national identity, religion, gender and agency in Famine and contemporary Ireland.

**SECTION II: HISTORY, SOCIETY AND CULTURE DURING PHASE V**

Were it not for the collapse of the Iron Curtain in 1989, and the subsequent fall of the Soviet Union, Ireland might well qualify as the European country experiencing the greatest change in the past two decades. From an island exporting its youth again and facing the spiral of violence in the North, Ireland emerged as an economic *wunderkind*, fueled by computer software, financial service, medical supply and similar industries. After decades of state-sponsorship of economic projects, Dublin stepped back, cut taxes and privatized sections of the economy. Prospects for a peaceful settlement in the North brightened. Socially, the country was liberalizing in startling ways. Culturally, Ireland rode the crest of wide interest in Celtic art, music, dance and spirituality.

**1. Political, economic developments in a 'Europeanized' Ireland**

Politically, the 1980s were marked by a turn to the right in both the United

Kingdom and the United States with the accession to power of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, a Conservative, in 1979 and President Ronald Reagan, a Republican, in 1981. In Ireland, Fine Gael (FG), under Dr. Garret Fitzgerald as taoiseach, lost its hold on government to Fianna Fáil (FF) in 1987. By 1989, however, FF, under Albert Reynolds as taoiseach, depended upon the Progressive Democrats to retain power in a coalition. In 1994, a new coalition of FG, Labour and the Democratic Left, with FG's John Bruton as prime minister, wono control. Bertie Ahern, FF leader, became taoiseach in a government with the Progressive Democrats in 1997, the same year that saw Tony Blair ride a Labour landslide in the British Parliament and become prime minister. Blair and Ahern, with a close working relationship on the North, repeatedly sought to advance or rescue negotiations. Blair's call for devolution in the U.K. would lead to restoration of a domestic parliament in Scotland and regional assemblies in Wales and Northern Ireland. In 1997, Blair issued an apology for British Famine-era policy.

***Economic miracles by Celtic Tiger.*** Economically, the opening of Knock International Airport in 1985 in a remote section of County Mayo occasioned more than a few wry smiles over Irish economic savvy. With major airports already in Shannon, Cork and Dublin, Knock was the brainchild of a well-connected parish priest who wanted convenient access for international pilgrims to a nearby Marian shrine. The airport was sold as a tool of regional development in the West and relied on European Union (EU) funding. In 1987, Irish voters approved joining a single European currency union -- the "euro" would replaced the venerable pound or *punt*. Although parity between British sterling and the Irish pound had been decoupled, participation in the "Eurozone" marked another sign of Irish economic independence from Britain, which has refused to join, but also caused some worry. When the 1991 Irish census discovered that the republic's population had fallen by 0.4 percent from the 1986 census, the first decline since the 1960s, it clearly indicated difficulties early in Phase V. (O'Toole, 1994, 12) O'Toole writes:

> The picture hidden by the statistics is a staggering one. The best estimates are than about 1 in every 12 people living in the Republic in 1982 (i.e. 289,000 people) had emigrated by 1989, when the outflows were temporarily staunched by

> recessions in Britain and the United States. Some of these people went and stayed gone. Some came back, left again, came back again. Some of those who went were themselves the children of emigrants who returned in the 1960s. Taken all in all, you get a profoundly unsettled society ... . (O'Toole, 1994, 12-13)

Irish government decisions in the late 1980s and early 1990s to lower taxes and achieve national consensus on wage increases and strikes, coupled with investment incentives and membership in the EU, led to economic expansion in the 1990s. Mark Carter and Ken O'Brien of PricewaterhouseCoopers, an international investment firm, write:

> In recent years, [Ireland has] become a formidable economic power within Europe and the world market. Over the past several years, the Republic of Ireland economy has experienced unparalleled economic growth of between eight and 10 percent per year, four times faster than the average EU country. ... The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita is £16,096 ($21,730 U.S.), up from £9,489 ($12,810 U.S.), while unemployment has fallen to 6.4 percent (August of 1999) from nearly twice that little more than three years earlier. Some observers, however, question how much of the increase actually stays in the pockets of the Irish, and how much, like Famine-era grain products, leaves ... . The 1.52 million members of the labor force are ... mostly in service and information industries at 62.1 percent, with 27 percent in manufacturing and construction, 10 percent in agriculture ... . (Carter and O'Brien, 2000, 1-2)

These economic figures stand in sharp contrast to the Ireland of Phases I to III, when most people worked on the farm. Corporate taxes, which for some businesses stand at 10 percent, are to be leveled to 12.5 percent by 2003, only a third of the EU average. "In July 1998, The Wall Street Journal named Ireland as the model economy for Europe, because of its business-friendly policies." (Carter and O'Brien, 2000, 2) Irish advantages include a young, highly educated, English-speaking work force, with many conversant in one or more other European languages; a time zone "that helps maximize working hours worldwide"; and ready access, without customs interference, to the EU's 368 million population. (Carter and O'Brien, 2000, 2) With 41 percent of its population under the age of 25 in 1996, Ireland had two choices: find a way to expand employment or see another wave of emigration. Ironically, the economic expansion, dubbed the "Celtic Tiger," has attracted immigrants, many expatriates, others from Africa, Asia and eastern Europe. In 1999 alone, 44,000 immigrants arrived. (Carter and O'Brien, 2000, 2) A shortage of

workers, both on the high and low ends of the economic spectrum, including teachers, nurses and doctors, rising housing costs, inflation and pressure for wage increases are among the challenges for the Celtic Tiger, which, remains vulnerable to global downturns.

***Deadly toll in the Troubles.*** Meanwhile, in the North, the sectarian violence of the Troubles seemed to worsen. A splinter group from the old IRA, the Provisional IRA, or "Provos," bombed a hotel in 1984 in Brighton, England, where Thatcher was meeting with her Conservative Party; five were killed. During Remembrance Day ceremonies in Enniskillen, County Fermanagh, a bomb killed 11 and left nearly 70 injured in 1987. The decade was marked by multiple killings between the Provos and security forces. When John Major replaced Thatcher as leader of the Conservatives in 1990, he became prime minister without sufficient parliamentary support to alter her hardened approach to policy in the North -- and an IRA mortar bomb attack on 10 Downing Street in 1991, even though ineffectual, did little to encourage change. In 1992, sectarian killings continued, with two of the worst incidents within weeks of each other: eight Protestants were killed in Teebane, County Tyrone, followed by five Catholics slain in the bombing of a Belfast bookmaker. By mid-decade, as prospects for peace improved, the Drumcree controversy erupted. At issue was a plan by the loyalist, unionist and Protestant Orange Order to march through a Catholic neighborhood on the Garavaghy Road in Portadown, County Armagh, following a service at a Drumcree church. Colorful parades replete with banners, orange sashes, black bowlers and drums, Orange Order summertime marches mark the victory of Protestant King William III over Catholic King James II in 1690 at the Battle of the Boyne. This victory is seen as definitive moment in securing the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland. Catholic nationalists often complain that the parades are not only triumphalistic anachronisms that reinforce religious division but thinly veiled efforts to intimidate the minority. In response to nationalist objections in 1987, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) blocked the route -- and triggered loyalist violence. The IRA ended its ceasefire in 1996 with the Canary Wharf bombing in London, and later in the year, faced with Orange intransigence, the RUC backed down and permitted the annual

march from Drumcree. The following year, however, violence broke out after nationalist protests over the Orange march. If 1998 saw political breakthroughs for peace in the North, it was also the year when terrorist violence shocked even those jaded by decades of the Troubles. First, three Catholic youngsters with parents in a religiously mixed marriage were killed when a fire bomb was hurled into their home. Later, the Loyalist Volunteer Force, a Protestant paramilitary group, said it too would join the ceasefire. But on Aug. 15, dissident republicans in the Real IRA exploded a car bomb in Omagh, County Tyronne, killing 29 and injuring many more. The Irish National Liberation Army and the Real IRA subsequently joined the ceasefire.

***Efforts to fashion a peaceful settlement.*** Despite the violence, and indeed partly because of it, Irish politicians on both sides of the border, renewed efforts to resolve the Troubles. As early as 1983, the New Ireland Forum, a broad-based group from both sides of the border, met in Dublin to consider possible strategies. The next year, a commission on policing began investigations under John Stalker, a respected British police official. For decades, the nationalist/Catholic community had complained of RUC bias, and few minority members would join it. Stalker, however, was removed in 1986, and the commission's recommendations met with little success. For nationalists, the election of the Rev. Ian Paisely -- one of the most incendiary unionists and widely seen as an anti-Catholic bigot -- in 1984 as one of the North's delegates to the European Parliament in Strasbourg was another sign of unionist intransigence. In 1985, the Hillsborough Agreement between the British and Irish governments created the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council, which was to provide a way for London and Dublin to discuss mutual Northern concerns. Several controversial jailings by British authorities of republican terrorists were reversed: The Guildford Four were released in 1989, while in 1991, the Birmingham Six were freed and the Maguire Seven cleared. Having begun talks as early as 1988, John Hume, leader of the largely Catholic and anti-violence Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), founded in 1970, and Gerry Adams, leader of the IRA's political wing, Sinn Féin, issued a joint statement in 1993 calling for a peaceful, consensual resolution to the Troubles. Not long after, Major and Albert Reynolds, the

Irish prime minister, issued a similar statement, pledging their willingness to work toward that end. Ceasefires by the Provos and the Combined Loyalist Military Command followed in 1994. Change seemed to be taking hold. The Irish and British governments issued *Frameworks for the Future,* a document designed to help map out steps toward a solution, in 1995, the same year David Trimble became leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, the largest unionist party. Both the British and Irish governments and the U.S. pushed for inter-party talks and for an international body to oversee paramilitary decommissioning.

Late in 1995, U.S. President Bill Clinton visited Ireland, North and South. The visit was indicative of a major change in American foreign policy, sponsored by the largely Democratic Irish-American delegation in Congress. Under Clinton, Dublin's voice on the North was regarded as important as London's. Progress continued, and elections were conducted in 1996 for the Northern Ireland Forum, with talks in Stormont, but the SDLP later quit the talks. To help defuse the Orange Order march issue, a parades commission was established in the North in 1997, and it was charged with determining ground rules for such activities and approving them. One measure of changing times, however, was the election of Alban Maginness of the SDLP as the first nationalist lord mayor of Belfast. Even more significant signs of progress emerged in a meeting between Sinn Féin leaders and Blair and establishment of a "commission on decommisioning," headed by Canadian Gen. Jean de Chastelain. In consequence of all-party talks, the North saw announcement of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 in Belfast, which laid out steps toward creation of a self-governing provincial assembly. Voters in the North ratified the accord by 71 percent, while it registered 94 percent support in the republic, where voters simultaneously approved constitutional changes that abandoned longstanding territorial claims to the whole island. Elections for a new Northern Ireland Assembly followed, which included election not only of delegates from the unionist parties and the SDLP, but also members of Sinn Féin. That same year, the Parades Commission announced the rerouting of the controversial Drumcree march. Perhaps the crowning achievement in the lengthy process was Oslo's announcement that Hume of the SDLP and David Trimble of

the UUP would receive the Nobel Prize for Peace. The award not only spotlighted Northern Ireland but increased the pressure on politicians to deliver results. After a fitful start, with unionists declaring they would not participate in the assembly and executive with Sinn Féin until decommissioning was under way, and Sinn Fein rejecting decommissioning as a prerequisite, the Northern legislature is now operative and inclusive.

***Increasing social liberalization.*** Socially, Irish voters seemed to confirm the image of the republic as conservative and religiously dominated when they enshrined a prohibition of abortion in the constitution in 1983. The Irish Catholic hierarchy strongly supported the prohibition. Three years later, voters defeated a referendum that would have allowed divorce, thus making Ireland one of the few European countries where neither abortion nor divorce was legal. As the Irish population continued to grow with one of the highest birth rates in western Europe, the need for educational expansion increased. In 1989, the University of Limerick opened, the same year Samuel Beckett, Dublin-born but a permanent resident of Paris since 1937, won the Nobel Prize for Literature. The election of Mary Robinson, a Trinity College Dublin law professor, as the first woman president in Irish history was a watershed in feminism. Robinson, while avoiding partisan politics as head of state, managed to increase the profile of the largely ceremonial office and invest it with a cerebral, dignified style. Poet Séamus Heaney, a Northerner who has taught in Dublin and at Oxford and Harvard, won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995, the same year Irish voters narrowly approved a second divorce referendum. Irish voters not only elected another woman as president in 1997, but one from the North, though she too was a Trinity law professor. Mary McAleese succeeded Robinson, who went on to become United Nations high commissioner for human rights. McAleese's election was, in part, indicative of the new interest in which voters in the Republic took in the North. Still other social changes include rising cohabitation and growing disaffection with the Church. (Jackson, 1999, 461-466; Moody, 1994, 478-481)

Clerical scandals, some involving bishops or prominent priests, have shaken the Irish Catholic Church over issues of pedophilia, physical abuse, alcoholism and sexual

affairs. While statistically limited and comparable to those in other countries and other professional categories, such cases have damaged the high esteem in which many Irish Catholics held the "official" Church. Moreover, the Irish hierarchy has found few of its members ready to champion the Church's cause in the face of hostile or suspicious media and a confused laity. Likewise, many young Irish, whose travels to the U.K., North America and the Continent have exposed them to permissive societies, have adopted a "cafeteria-style" approach to Catholic teachings. O'Toole observes:

> Catholicism in Ireland had long been a nationality as much as a religion. The words 'Irish Catholic' did not denote merely a person of a specific faith born in a specific country. They had also come to stand for some third thing born out of the fusion of the other two -- a country, a culture, a poltics. Catholicism in Ireland has been a matter of public identity more than of private faith. For most of its history, the Republic of Ireland was essentially a Catholic State, one in which the limits of law and of behaviour were set by Church orthodoxy and the beliefs of the Catholic bishops. (O'Toole, 1996, 15)

Famine literature during the first three phases clearly indicates this public badge, but, now, in Phase V, the Irish are self-critical. Despite the climate, the Church has emerged as a leading voice in critiquing the new Irish economy so that the poor and marginalized are not forgotten. The Church is not the only institution to be shaken. Several tribunals have targeted government corruption, implicating even former Taoiseach Charles Haughey.

***Where is Ireland, anyway?*** Amid its new-found prosperity, Ireland may become neither "here" nor "there." The three central indices of Irish identity given by Corkery are land, nationalism (adapted here as national identity) and religion. In each case, the contemporary Irish experience has changed dramatically. The vast majority no longer works the land for a living. A million Irish live in the Dublin metropolitan area, while most others are clustered in other urbanized communities. Travel abroad has come within the means of a large segment of the population, and many Irish secondary and university students have studied, traveled or worked abroad. Nationalism, in Corkery's "Gaelic Ireland" sense, has given way to an increasingly European perspective. More important, as the North inches toward a political solution, the Irish-as-not-British approach to

identity loses impetus. This change has been accelerated by rising contestations of "Britishness" in the U.K. Political devolution in Scotland and Wales, and calls for a purely English regional parliament, stand in marked contrast to the British imperial identity of only 50 years ago. For many Irish, the worldwide surge in Celticism and the growing heritage industry has more to do with commercial schlock and nostaliga. Finally, growing secularization and disaffection with official Catholicism and its institutions threatens to undermine the third leg of Corkery's traditional definition of Irish identity. O'Toole writes:

> Albert Reyonds, the Taoiseach, told *The Irish Times* in November 1992 that his ambition was 'to link the Americas with Europe and to make Ireland the bridgehead in that link from west to east.' A bridgehead is a fortified military position held on the enemy's side of a natural barrier. So Ireland becomes a piece of Europe captured by America, a piece of America captured by Europe. It ... [is an] embattled border zone. (O'Toole, 1994, 29)

But if Ireland feels uneasy over such changes, it is not alone. Much of the postmodern, developed world is questioning the construction of its identity. For the Irish, considerable resources, including its Famine legacy, exist from which to assess and, presumably, reconstruct identity. The Irish language, for example, though spoken by fewer than 50,000 as a mother tongue, has become a new identity badge. Language thus reinscribes and alters Corkery's tropes of belonging. Recent Irish literature and drama in English attests to the ability to probe what it means to be Irish.

## SECTION III: AUTHORS AND READERS

### 1. Frank McGuinness: From the margins to the center and back

Frank McGuinness, born in 1953, enjoys remarkable success in Irish theater, which he has challenged both in dramatic form and subject. A native of Buncrana, County Donegal, he was educated at Carndonagh College and University College Dublin. (Welch, 1996, 338) He has held appointments in linguistics and drama at the New University of Ulster, Coleraine (1977-1979); in Old and Middle English at UCD (1979-1980); and since 1984, in English at Saint Patrick's College, Maynooth. His early literary work -- poetry and short stories -- appeared in *Cyphers*, a literary and artistic magazine

for work in Irish and English, and *The Irish Press*, in its "New Irish Writing" page under David Marcus, literary editor. An open homosexual, McGuinness explores elements of Irish society marginalized by the dominant nationalist discourse. Nicholas Grene observes that this "green" discourse has tended to write out "the other":

> It is not, of course, that Irish society has been without variety or differentiation: everywhere there are and have been class conflicts, gaps between rich and poor, rural and urban, the inveterate rivalries of region with region. Still, in a state where more than 90 per cent of the people share and practise the same religion, a religion, what is more, which has tended to admit of very little variation; in a society where nationalist belief, active or inert, is so widely accepted, so little challenged -- ... imagination of anything other than being Catholic and nationalist becomes genuinely difficult. The strenuous effort at imagining the other has been under way in Ireland now for several years, driven in part by the troubled awareness of the continuing disastrous consequences of the polarised inability to imagine the other side in the northern political situation. (Grene, 1999, 242)

While the Northern unionist perspective looms large in Grene's analysis, one sees that McGuinness surveys many groups along the margins of Irish society and consciousness -- and discursively the Famine affords him entry to marginalization on several levels.

McGuinness shows sympathy for female labor in *Factory Girls* (1982), his first play for the stage. His focuses on death, loss and unstable sexual identity in *Friends*, later reworked as *Carthaginians* (1988), which confronts the psychic consequences 1972's Bloody Sunday in Derry. He probes the Northern Irish Protestant community, in *Borderlands* (1984), commissioned by TEAM, an educational theatrical touring company in Dublin. His acclaimed *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching toward the Somme* (1985), which includes a gay love story amid masculine bonding even as tensions surge in the 36th Ulster Division on the eve of the bloody Battle of the Somme in World War I, shows appreciation of unionist perspectives, if not politics. He examines those outside the hegemonic world of republican, Catholic Ireland in *The Gatherers* (1985), which splits dramatic time between the Eucharistic Congress of 1932 and the papal visit of 1979, two high points in Irish Catholic life, which was also done for TEAM. The life of the artist Caravaggio occupies *Innocence* (1986). He shows sympathy for victims of the 1987 Enniskillen bombings in *Feed the Money and Keep Them Coming* and for Alzheimer

patients in *Flesh and Blood*, both included with the farcical *The Brides of Ladybag* in *Times In It* (1988). Women and factory workers attract his attention in *Mary and Lizzie* (1989) and *The Breadman* (1990) and hostages in Beirut in *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* (1992). McGuinness also has provided innovative translations or adaptations of European plays such as *Rosmersholm* (1987), *Yerma* (1987), *Peer Gynt* (1988), *Three Sisters* (1990), and *The Threepenny Opera* (1991). He has written plays for the BBC, including *Scout* (1987) and *The Hen House* (1989). Other work includes *Bird Sanctuary* (1993), a comedy of manners, and *Booterstown* (1994), a collection of poetry. The Peacock, Abbey and Gate theaters in Dublin, the Barbican in London, as well as those in the U.S., Canada and elsewhere, have produced his works. (Welch, 1996, 338-339)

**2. Seán Kenny: Ethical implications for the 'New Ireland'**

Seán Kenny was born in 1956 in Dublin, the eldest of five children. His father was an engineer, businessman and a captain in the Irish Army, while his mother was a civil servant until her marriage and was active in the Legion of Mary, a Catholic organization originating in Ireland and dedicated to promoting devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. An engineer and writer, Kenny received a degree in mechanical engineering from University College Dublin in 1977, then worked in Ireland for multinational firms for six years until a promotion brought him to California in 1997. He has two children from his first marriage, and remarried in 2000. Since the 1995 publication of *The Hungry Earth*, he has concentrated on fiction-writing. He has three other novels: *Fast Wing*, *Celtic Fury* (1998) and *The Snake King*, due to be published next year. The HBO network has an option on *The Hungry Earth*. (Kenny, 2000, n.p.) He lives in San Jose, Calif. In his essay, "A Nightmare Revisited" in *Irish Hunger: Personal Reflections on the Legacy of the Famine* (1997), Kenny points out the importance of the triad formed by the Famine, Ireland and Irish-America (and the Irish Diaspora more generally), which takes its "myth of origin" from the 1840s catastrophe. He sees a "malignant shame," a term he credits to Dr. Garrett O'Connor, an Irish psychiatrist in Los Angeles, which shapes emotional constructs the Irish pass on by failing to address the Famine's implications. (Kenny, 1997, 182-183) If interrogated well, the Famine can help "today's vacuous and morally

bankrupt Irish society," at home and abroad, exorcise demons and serve humanity. (Kenny, 1997, 184)

**3. Examining readership for Famine material in Phase V**

Despite high emigration during the 1980s, the word "more" characterizes the Phase V readership. Irish readers were more numerous, more educated and more mobile than ever before, while they had more disposable income, especially during the 1990s, more leisure and more employment security than the country ever had known. Increasing numbers of university graduates or others with third-level education were available. Most Irish lived in metropolitan Dublin, Belfast, Cork, Galway or other large cities and towns. While some Irish long had been dubbed "West Brits" because of their attachment to British political thinking and social life, contemporary Ireland also faced growing Americanization and Europeanization, the former due to large American investment and the influence of the media, the latter due to Irish invovlement in the EU and the imposition of economic, agricultural, health, trade and other policies originating in Brussels. Moreover, young Irish travelers brought home new ideas, attitudes and styles. Reading as an activity, however, had to compete with a burgeoning media environment. Television choices proliferated with cable and satellite capacity, so that programming now spans Europe and, indeed, much of the world. The Irish Republic itself now has RTE 1 and 2, Channel 3, plus Telefis na Gaelige, while Northern Ireland has two channels. Virtually all viewers are able to receive these Irish offerings, as well as expaned British services. In addition, the rise of video and DVD capacity for games and films, the consumption of music CDs and tapes and the growth in leisure and entertainment centers have made further demands on the time of potential Irish readers. However, a rise in Irish publishers or in foreign publishers interested in Irish subjects, given the surge in Celtic interest, expanded opportunities for writers. With an Irish Diaspora population numbering in excess of 50 million, many of whom see the Famine as the "foundation myth," the commercial possibilities are significant. Finally, interest in the Shoah, or Holocaust, helped trigger a widespread focus in the traumatic aspects of other national and ethnic histories. For the Irish, this inevitably meant a "return to the Famine." With increasing

political and economic sophistication, Irish readers had new confidence with which to engage a troubling past.

## SECTION IV: THEMATIC ANALYSIS: OLD VOICES, NEW CHOICES

Phase V texts employ discourses that again return to the historic categories of land, national identity, religion, gender and agency, and a microtextual analysis of these worklike, or rhetorical, features shows both the historicity and contemporaneity of the "return to the Famine." In McGuinness's *Mary and Lizzie* and Kenny's *The Hungry Land*, all five categories play an important role. That Phase V should exhibit a wide range of thematic concerns is no surprise. As Irish society confronts the Famine more comprehensively than ever before, the principal categories of its social discourse become the very areas of debate. An Ireland that recognizes its predominant urban character, yet acknowledges its mythic attraction to the West as a symbolic source of nature, nation and culture, will consider anew its relationship to the land. An Ireland wrestling with political solutions in the North, the incorporation of increasing numbers of immigrants, and integration into Europe must address national identity. An Ireland in which Catholicism, shaken by secularization, consumerism and scandal, shifts its hold from cultural consensus to personal conviction, will consider the role of religious faith, affiliation and identity. An Ireland in which women have advanced substantially in education, political and economic power, but where liberalized social policies have been late to receive legal sanction, will question the origins and implications of gender construction and distinction. Finally, an Ireland where dominant ideologies, economic globalization and communicational mediation have altered social space dramatically will consider the question of agency.

### 1. Land: Inscribing history, discursive claims abroad and at home

***McGuinness's Famine confronts capitalism, communism.*** Of the five thematic categories considered here, land is perhaps the most difficult to associate with McGuinness. He is less interested in physical topography than in social circumstances. His play employs elements of carnival, parody, burlesque and satire to expose hypocrisy, ideological dogmatism and religious intolerance. Nevertheless, land plays a role in *Mary*

*and Lizzie.* First, the play moves from Famine Ireland to Industrial England, with excursions to the underworld and the Soviet GULAG. These basic zones of action indicate the play's thematic concerns, the unity of suffering humanity at the hands of the mind-sets that facilitated the Famine, that created the sweatshops of Manchester and Birmingham and that banished political prisoners to Siberia. The play also is very much about women and the loss of their stories to history. McGuinness relies on the Irish mythological connection between the land as earth goddess, and women, whose fecundity and domesticity make civilization possible. McGuinness depicts masculine dominance of civilization, which then exploits women and effaces their contribution. His approach to land, then, recognizes its intimate connection to social space, so important in Bourdieu, but shows how religious, mythological and phantasmatic dimensions can complicate a social setting and create opportunities for liberation.

Scene 1, "The City of Women," opens with Mary and Lizzie encountering a mythological female community living in the trees of a forest. Women, culturally tagged as natural, wild and unknown, despite their role in civilization-making, must be brought under male control. "They say long ago in this country there was a city of women who lived in the trees. [They were] ... weeping up in the trees like withered leaves in rain." (McGuinness, 1989, 1) To add to their woes, these women are lost to history. Two of them complain: "My name is gone." (McGuinness, 1989, 2) Later, one woman, commenting on the failure of her lover to return, declares, "How old is the earth. It must be ancient. Old as the hills. He never returned. Tell her our story. All the one story. Tell her. ... You, Lizzie Burns. Who still has a name. You'll lose it, like we lost ours, so to speak, before it's lost." (McGuinness, 1989, 4) Even in this forest, where women rule, their bodies bear the consequences of male oppression. Betrayed by soldiers whom they thought loved them, the women are exiled from society and are afflicted by fleas. One has cut off part of her tongue so that her last words would be of love for her man. Another cuts off her legs so that she would have to wait for her lover. A pregnant girl, abandoned by a British soldier, severs her hands to send them to him "so he could find his touch upon you." (McGuinness, 1989, 3) Likewise, one woman talks about having killed her

child -- "Wrung its neck with a cord." (McGuinness, 1989, 4) They see Mary plunge a bayonet, which the pregnant girl has held, into herself and remain apparently unscathed. On one level, McGuinness touches on Famine, infanticide committed for various motives. More generally, however, he constructs an analogy between women's bodies and Famine Ireland, which has suffered violation, abandonment and the loss of its Gaelic-era names.

Scene 2 is called "The Earth Opens," and here Mary and Lizzie meet the mother of a fallen priest. The scene begins with Lizzie singing about the purpose in life she and her sister have. They are to "wander through time, through place." The old woman tells them, "This land's mine. What's mine is yours." (McGuinness, 1989, 6) The line reverses the usual masculine approach to land, in which one's possession is another's dispossession. During the Famine, eviction and emigration were common. If women are "of" the land, then they enjoy a common possession. However, McGuinness again complicates action, for the old woman uses a key to open the earth itself, into which she leads Mary and Lizzie. The opening is both "grave" and "home" for the girls, drawn into a metaphorical matrix of earth, grave, female body, woman, birth, suffering and death. "I'm afraid of the grave," says Lizzie, "It's where I was born. Our mother died when she gave me birth. Mary, what did she look like?" (McGuinness, 1989, 8) Mary responds, "Come and see." (McGuinness, 1989, 8) Land is mystical/mythological, gendered and unstable for McGuinness -- which is precisely the discursive role it has long played in construction of the Famine. Because he gives the land to women, and invests them with agency, power to resist the discourse they encounter, "land" is a participant, not merely a stage for positioning in Bourdieu's social field.

***Kenny's communal history and its claims.*** From title to setting to discursive strategy, land plays a key role in *The Hungry Earth.* Turlough Walsh's life in the Dublin suburbs is depicted as sterile, life-denying, even claustrophobic, but the West occupies its traditional discursive place: fertile, life-affirming and full of imaginative possibility. That the West, still the poorest part of the country and locus of some of the Famine's worst ravages, should hold this position is not surprising. The Famine may have turned the

West into a massive charnel house, but the sources of this ruin lie to the east, in London's economic and political policies. Initially, Walsh is reluctant to travel to the West; he has no desire to drive to Killala for his uncle's funeral. Once enmeshed in the Famine, he finds the district alternately attractive and repellant. Kenny employs time shifts and the mythological Irish device of shape-shifting. Killala literally moves from present to past before his eyes: "Turlough peered ahead into the gloom and it seemed that the town of Killala itself was shape-shifting before his eyes, buildings melting away to be replaced by others, stone walls appearing alongside him where there had been none, and then the sky filled with bright winter stars." (Kenny, 1995, 206) Corpses are being removed from Killala's poorhouse.

The novel mythologizes not only the Irish West, but America too. Beyond the western horizon lies a tough but fruitful, promised land. Van Dijk sees discourse topics as "strategically derived subjective macropropositions," and the Irish construction of landscape functions in much the same way. (Van Dijk, 1988-b, 34) It announces an attitude and a set of expected behaviors inscribed by history and social situation. Here, Bourdieu's habitus again meets problems. While most of the material in the earlier phases clearly illustrates the habitus of Irish social classes, Turlough's resistance to the contemporary world that has formed him stems from claims the earlier Famine world, repressed by subsequent generations, makes through his visions, his unconscious or his spirituality. At one point, when Turlough imagines his own death, he realizes that the chosen spot has "a pagan burial mound atop a hill that gave forth holy water ... a river springing from the underworld, flowing with who knows what magic. A good place to die." (Kenny, 1995, 230) These are not the thoughts of a one-dimensional accountant. Tension, then, exists between what the land is and what it is meant to be, between the various moments in its past and its present. The idyllic paradise, one that both broods and beckons, has known "holocaust." (Kenny, 1995, 205) Eagleton makes a human-land link:

> Irish literary landscapes are often enough decipherable texts rather than aesthetic objects, places made precious or melancholic by the resonance of the human. It is the inscription of historical or contemporary meaning within their material appearance which tends to engage the poet's attention. (Eagleton, 1995, 6)

That process continues into Phase V textual production. Particular emphasis on the land occurs during action set around the cottage in Mayo, the burial of Nan atop a hill and the final chapter's sense of a restored, beneficent land in which Turlough rebuilds his life even as he reconstructs his uncle's flower and potato beds. Ironically, Mayo included many of the "congested districts," and in the 1840s, the West is as crowded as modern Dublin:

> In front of him, the land sloped gently away, levelling out after about a mile and giving way again to wild looking hills in the distance. But in between, and in every direction he could see, was a patchwork of walls and hedges, defining fields the size of Dublin gardens, and within each there were one or more small stone cottages. All of the land had been tilled and the soil arranged into neat brown ridges, dark in the troughs, dried and lightened by this fresh wind across their wide flat crests. ... And all these people! His accountant's mind began calculating, multiplying, but in the end, he gave up. The population of this wide valley was more than most Irish towns ... . (Kenny, 1995, 56-57)

The land becomes both a stimulus of memory and a barometer of feeling and commitment for Turlough. Back in the 20th century, having returned to Mayo, he seeks Nan's grave:

> Turlough walked out the back with a mug of tea in his hand to see the fields lightening in the valley, but they were empty fields, and it was hard, unbearably so, to know that every one of them had supported whole families, for generations, and to know how violently it had all ended. And yet the sight was reassuring too, as though he was always meant to be looking at this, that he should stay here and not leave at all. (Kenny, 1995, 170)

In many ways, Turlough Walsh's approach to the land is a romantic, mystical one, one associated in the 19th century Celtic revival with ancient Gaelic culture. Quite the opposite, however, is the economic approach adopted by landlords and their agents, such as the absentee Sir Clyde and the cruel Kincaid, whom Turlough eventually shoots, on the one hand, and the brutal Lorcan MacCurran, the Whiteboys and the Young Irelanders on the other. For both groups, land means economic power, which leads to control and political dominance. "'Whoever calls for us to rise up and stab these oppressors in the heart, that's who I'll follow,' said MacCurran. 'Land, Walsh, that's what this is about.'"

(Kenney, 1995, 211) In Turlough's world, stocks, bonds and bank accounts, as well as property investments, determine power, but the stakes are little different. If the thatched one-room cottage is the peasant's icon, the Big House, the country manor built on a grand scale, is the landlord's. Turlough has joined MacCurran's men in a raid on the Big House, encounters Kincaid, whom he blames for the deaths of his friends, the Kernens, and, after Kincaid shoots, fires back and kills the agent. A fire built around Kincaid's body crackles, and a mob loots and rampages inside the Big House, which Kenny describes in elegant detail. "'Do you smell him? ... His flesh is roasting. You don't know the taste of human meat, do you?'" MacCurran asks Turlough. (Kenny, 1995, 219-220) The Big House stands as the very antithesis of the natural land and peasantry. It writes, in miniature, the polarities between British and Irish, Protestant and Catholic, colonizer and colony, civilization/culture and nature, and yet history connects cottage and manor intimately.

The land also deepens Walsh spiritually. Neither genuine Dubliner nor rural Irishman, Walsh realizes that "every book or play he had ever read or seen was about a world he did not inhabit. But then, why should even the least of wordsmiths trouble himself to describe such an artless, ignorant, self-centered, myopic, mediocre, dishonest existence?" (Kenny, 1995, 182) Turlough's psychic healing is evidenced by his reconnection to the land and the community. (Kenny, 1995, 242) Just before Walsh is discovered in a psychiatric care center, readers go on a tour de force of the Western landscape. All parts of Turlough's life, both in the Famine era and in contemporary Dublin, blend with the mythological and catastrophic features of Irish history:

> Dark Roasaleen, the nurturing land, the island soil that would give and give, dark, rich, fecund, renewing, over and over, wanting him there in her loins, unmoved by all the centuries of carnage, but bitter beyond all telling at this new desertion. Do not fear. The French are on the ocean deep. Deep in her. On her. On Caitriona in Paris. But he had recoiled from her and now they were both drowning in that sterile water at the source of the river, her river, her spring. ... Nuala. Gaila. Anu. Dana. An island womb, spawning people beyond count, all slipping downriver ... . (Kenny, 1995, 254)

Kenny stands in a long Irish tradition, one van Dijk would recognize as clearly discurisve, which uses the land to express history and mythology and make claims on readers on

behalf of the dead.

**2. National identity: Finding the guilt under the old 'green' discourse**

***McGuinness: Beyond the Tricolor.*** The rise of colonial studies and post-colonial theory has given the Irish new tools with which to conceptualize their troubled past. Nationalist Ireland has never had much doubt about its occupation and oppression by Britain, but post-colonial theory, showing how the colonized and the colonizer relate to and mirror each other, provides new insights. This inevitably complicates Bourdieu's notion of habitus, because the colonized frequently find an alien set of behaviors and attitudes imposed upon them, then strive either to fulfill social expectations not their own or to escape them without the support of their own native social forms. For McGuinness, "national" identity can be explored imagistically through the Famine. McGuinness's enthusiasm for imagistic theater – pioneered in the work of Murphy and MacIntyre -- can be linked to Sean O'Casey (1880-1964), whose latter plays exhibit expressionism. McGuinness looks to both past and future as he moves beyond traditional realism.

The dancing pig in *Mary and Lizzie* illustrates the point: "In Ireland I am called the gentleman who pays the rent. And so I am well treated. I'm not for eating, I'm for exporting. Have you heard of landlords? Well, I line their pockets." (McGuinness, 1989, 18) Gentleman Pig composes his song about "the most distressing country that ever has been seen" and the fate of some Irish "we shall call the family Green." (McGuinness, 1989, 18) The ballad details how the family survives on potatoes, buttermilk and fish, while "the rest of what they grew made the landlord's dainty dish." (McGuinness, 1989, 18) The Greens overpopulated, "the Good Lord sent a plague" and "Died a lovely little family, they all had turned quite green." (McGuinness, 1989, 18) The final verses underscore both McGuinness's view of the Famine in the wider Western economic system and British disdain for the Irish "other." For his efforts, Gentleman Pig's throat is slit by the pregnant girl, but he manages to squeal and scamper off stage. Ironically, the pig's parody of capitalism and colonialism has its mirror in the attitude of Marx and Engels toward the Irish in Scene 8. "You're dangerous, a rotting mass, sitting there, passive, the lowest of the low," sneers Marx, "you might have your uses, you could be

swept into life, but in your condition you're part and parcel of the old regime." (McGuinness, 1989, 41) Engels, in fact, described the Irish as drunken, unstable and dissolute in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845). (Engels, 1892, 90-94) Mary tells Engels, "You fear us. So you'll remove us. The breastbeaters would save our souls for the sake of their own salvation. How will you save us? Change the world, eh? Change us. Change yourself first." (McGuinness, 1989, 42) Survival and happiness for Mary and Lizzie lies in the decision to love and the recognition that such a decision fashions the world. Indeed, "God didn't make the earth. We sung it. He heard us and joined in. We did it together, creation," declares Mother Burns, who then joins Mary and Lizzie in singing, "No rest have I, nor liberty, / For love is lord of all." (McGuinness, 1989, 48-49) For McGuinness, national identity is not confined to the old polarities of "green" Catholic nationalism and "orange" Protestant unionism, in which both sides became pawns for the economics of colonialism. National identity, McGuinness shows, also involves class, which employs colonial exploitation to advance its own status both in the colony, where Ascendancy landowners controlled the system, and in the mother country, where Irish muscle supplied Britain's burgeoning factories. The Famine provides a pivotal historical moment for rethinking national identity because it exposed class divisions on either side of the political and religious divide. Likewise, it left no class in Ireland immune. While cottiers among the peasants bore the brunt, small farmers, major landlords and aristocrats, merchants, professionals and clerics were caught up in its disruptions. In contrast to Marxist class conflict, however, McGuinness has his two working girls expose hypocrisy and prejudice among social theorists. Instead of revolution on behalf of the downtrodden, they suggest that even the social critics learn how to love the other and reconstruct their own attitudes of superiority. Mary and Lizzie introduce two new ways of thinking about the Famine, and thus undertake what van Dijk sees as shifts in social cognition. First, they show that the Famine can be understood in class terms, not simply ethnic or religious ones. Second, they show how that class consciousness itself carries baggage such as ethnic prejudice and hypocrisy. Van Dijk observes, "Discourse appears to be one of the most important media linking the

individual and the social, the cognitive and the interactional dimension of racism. It is the place where social cognitions become 'articulate.'" (Van Dijk, 1984, 53) The British government, the Ascendancy and Marxists theorists all relied on stereotypical views of the Irish. Mary and Lizzie change perspective, and so endeavor to shift the cognition by which discourse is sustained. For an Ireland trying to reinvent itself during Phase V, McGuinness offers an inclusive, pluralistic approach to the "nation."

***Kenny: We're all Famine exploiters now.*** *The Hungry Earth* straddles the great divide between a simple identification of Irishness with the Gaelic, Catholic majority and the contemporary, complex interrogation of national identity. When Turlough travels to the West and enters the past, it is easy to distinguish victims from perpetrators. Peasants such as the Kemens attract sympathy for their nobility and generosity. Their sufferings at the hands of British imperial and economic policy, Anglo-Irish landlord indifference and rapacious agent cruelty fit a consistent nationalist narrative of oppression. The "bad guys" are flat, static characters. But a closer reading reveals Kenny's efforts to expose a web of mutual implication in the Famine and its consequences. This interrogation, through Turlough, occurs in several ways. His boss, MacCarthy, espouses a simple nationalism of hurling, loyalty to Cork (Ireland's second largest city) and Fianna Fáil politics, and Walsh challenges him. Turlough shows his disgust for certain features of Celtic Tiger culture, even though he participates in it. Nuala's consumerism, his children's rampant greed, Caitriona's sexual desires (and his own), her friend Bronagh's clinical, dispassionate feminism and historical revisionism, even Fr. O'Connell's greed all trouble Walsh.

When Turlough arrives in the West, he encounters both the Kemens and 20th century Mayo villagers. He is impressed by their suffering, kindness and strong sense of community. The modern village is populated by figures such as Donal Cohan, the bartender; Morris Minor, a diminutive habitué of the pub; and Father Luke, the parish priest. After some initial suspicions, they offer Walsh their help. Cohan even gives him a salmon -- the mythological Irish symbol of wisdom. The villagers listen to Turlough on a radio show about the Famine, and although he thinks he has made a fool of himself, in fact, he has rallied the region to establish a museum. Even the local travelling community,

often derisively called "tinkers," contributes a Famine-era cauldron from a soup kitchen. As Walsh and reader deepen their analysis of the district, they discover the background of the "local hero" Captain Midnight, whom Turlough despises. Despite his image as a protector of peasants, MacCurran survives not only by stealing Turlough's horse and eating it, but by clandestine baby-snatching. One of the Kernen children may be among his victims. MacCurran and his band kidnap infants, kill and eat them. Indeed, in Walsh's final bargain with the cannibalistic Captain Midnight, Turlough agrees to be eaten. What in the McGuinness play is parody becomes here Turlough's sacrifical act, one with Eucharistic overtones echoing Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen*. The novel's shocking end -- that MacCurran is, in fact, Turlough's own great, great grandfather -- raises the spectre that all "surviving" Irish are implicated in the evils of Famine, as well as its power to elicit good. Irish peasants were not only dispossessed by British agents and landlords, but by their own emergent middle class. Kenny moves far beyond O'Flaherty's work in Phase III. Here, van Dijk's basic model of a dominant discourse is easily seen in the rural, Gaelic, Catholic image of the West, where Walsh goes to restore himself. But by introducing MacCurran, Kenny seeks to change social cognition. One of the "good guys," a physical force hero, is, in fact, a fiend and an ancestor. National identity not only is more than its stereotype, but the stereotype itself is multi-layered. When van Dijk writes that in written texts, "... shared meanings, knowledge of the language, knowledge of the world, and other beliefs must be taken into account in such a characterization of discourse meaning," he acknowledges a web of meaning outside but related to the actual text. (Van Dijk, 1988-a, 9) Through setting and character types, Kenny signals his discourse. Van Dijk adds:

> ... writers produce forms and meanings that are presumed to be understood to the readers, or that may explicitly address the readers, provoke reactions, and generally be recipient designed like conversations. In written communication, writers and readers are engaged in a form of sociocultural practice. (Van Dijk, 1988-a, 9)

MacCurran and his ties to Turlough complicate and shift stereotypical "national identity."

Unlike O'Flaherty's *Famine*, which makes the same anti-bourgeoisie point, *The*

*Hungry Earth* makes two narrative moves, first exposing a "hero" as a "villain," then connecting the villain to the novel's central, sympathetic character, whose own exploitive behavior has been revealed. Eoghan Harris develops this same point in *Souper Sullivan.* For Kenny, the 19th century middle class looks to London and its empire for its future, not to Ireland and its "dark, frightening hinterland, stubbornly clinging to the past, but dying away nonetheless." (Kenny, 1995, 151) The connection between land/place and national identity is obvious, for the *Irish* bourgeoisie turned its back on the *Irish* peasantry. Recognizing his own deep, personal connection to the Famine, Turlough emits a haunting, primal scream. The scream swallows starvation, pestilence, eviction, emigration, cannibalism, family abandonment, depopulation and death on a massive scale. Rarely in Famine discourse have such explicit features been explored, although Tom Murphy's *Famine* and Joe O'Byrne's *The Last Potato* come closest. National identity, of course, is a constructed "reality," and *The Hungry Earth* explores the failure of the old nationalist model of historical instruction. Turlough himself is unfamiliar with all but the broad outlines of Irish history, and is woefully ignorant of the Famine, which until recent years received minimal attention in most Irish classrooms. (Kenny, 1995, 63-65) "'Do they teach you kids anything about the famine in school?" Turlough asks, as his daughter shrugs, and Gearóid responds, "'Just that there was one ... because everyone lived on potatoes. They were too dependent on one source of food.'" (Kenny, 1995, 87)

Another aspect of constructing Irish national identity is the role of the Irish Diaspora, particularly in America, where an estimated 40 million claim some Irish ancestry. In his efforts to flesh out his own background, Walsh uses on-line, web-based computer links, as well as newspaper advertisements in the U.S. The proliferation of cultural, educational and economic programs between Ireland and the U.K., the U.S., Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand have reminded the Irish at home that "the Irish story" cannot be told from a single perspective, and that diaspora Irish seek neither permission nor authorization to assert their heritage. Walsh, having abandoned his life in Dublin, settles in Erris. He has reconciled with Caitriona. He has grown in self-knowledge, responsibility and commitment. Return to the West thus reinscribes a view of

national identity that relies on the matrix of rural life, Catholicism and Gaelic ethnicity. However, Turlough's knowledge, and his final scream, tells the reader just how deep Famine guilt runs. Kenny's discursive strategy invokes one understanding of national identity only to persuade readers to shift their cognitive structures to another.

**3. Religion: Competing demands of vampirism and morality**

***McGuinness on transgressive speech.*** McGuinness's origins in Donegal put him simultaneously in the Irish republic and in Ulster, the historic northern province. Since partition in 1921, however, "Ulster" frequently has been identified only as the six counties of Northern Ireland. With such dual attachments, McGuinness's work shows considerable interest in the Troubles. *Mary and Lizzie* exposes "vampirism" in Northern religion, and through transgressive speech, resists discourses that perpetuate the blood-sucking..

The Famine, with its controversies over souperism -- Famine relief for instruction and religious conversion, and the hostile Catholic reaction it induced -- provides a means to discuss contemporary problems. For example, the third scene depicts a Black Mass an apostate priest, whose mother seeks a whore to seduce him, thus triggering guilt, contrition and, finally, submission to Rome. Not the usual Saturday afternoon confession, the scene mocks the extent to which religious loyalty was policed in Ireland -- and still is in the North. Theological error and disobedience will be "cured" by moral profligacy, his mother thinks, because it will humble the errant son-priest, who will then ask forgiveness:

> I take it she has informed you of her mystical plan. She finds a nice girl, I fuck her, fall into despair over broken vows of chastity, return to the Catholics, abandon Protestantism, do my penance and forget my allegiance to the religion I've founded? Then all's well, yes? No, go, Mother, dear. (McGuinness, 1989, 10)

The priest's mother doubles as a figure of Mother Ireland, the Shan Van Vocht and Kathleen ni Houlihan, all of whom have a destructive character *vis à vis* their votaries, who are expected to sacrifice themselves for her. His submission at any price is her desire. Far more troubling, however, is the creed of the priest's "religion," which is a grotesque melange of Catholicism and Protestantism. The priest declares, "In this island I preach new religion. Where there is God, take his name in vain. Remember thou keep the

Sabbath savage. Kill the honour of father and mother. Steal neighbour's wife and neighbour's goods. Convert, convert and covet, covet." (McGuinness, 1989, 9) The combination of religion and economics, colonialism and capitalism with cannibalism, which sometimes occurred during the Famine, undermines normalcy in the North.

As part of the play's carnival atmosphere, Mary and Lizzie turn the tables on the priest and threaten to eat him. He initiates the cannibal trope in response to the mother's request that they love the son. The priest admits he likes Mary because "she has brains." (McGuinness, 1989, 10), but then opines, "They'll be delicious in a little fried butter. We eat them, the handmaidens who climb down here." (McGuinness, 1989, 10-11) Sectarianism in the North has consumed both men and women; women are expected to offer their sons, brothers, lovers, husbands and fathers on the altar of tribalism. Here, the women reverse course, explode in sexual energy and claim *they* will eat the priest, one of those who police the tribal sacrifice system in McGuinness's critique. The voracious metaphor moves rapidly from food to cannibalism to sex to religious conversion to tribal change to political sacrifice. In a litanic exchange over body parts, the priest clearly is put on the run. Mary and Lizzie alternately declare, "Yes, he is beautiful. Shall we marry him? Shall we eat him? His lungs and kidneys. His legs and arms. His feet. His hair. His heart. His eyes." (McGuinness, 1989, 11-12) The priest, increasingly desperate, but still fencing with his antagonists, pleads, "Mother, do something? They [his body parts] belong to God. I belong to God. God's terribly possessive." When the girls decide to eat his soul, they reason that he has already signed it away in a Faustian bargain quite different from the Countess Cathleen's. When the priest tells them that they will have to find his soul, Mary and Lizzie again sexualize the scene. "It's in my pocket. It's up my skirt. Between the two of us." (McGuinness, 1989, 12) Next, encouraged by his mother, they urge the priest to display the full extent of sectarian vampirism -- which will bring them into the region of the dead and give them the chance of meeting their deceased mother. They taunt him, "Bite us and draw blood. We're poor lost Catholics. We want to convert. Convert you, body and soul. Your sweet Protestant soul. Your strong Catholic body." (McGuinness, 1989, 12) To all this, the apostate, Satan-worshipping priest can

only gasp, "O Jesus." (McGuinness, 1989, 12) McGuinness employs a variation on van Dijk's notion of social cognition. He does not simply introduce an element designed to disturb a discourse, and through that disturbance promote a modification in the discourse. Instead, he radically reverses the discourse, as Judith Butler's transgressive speech theory shows:

> The question here is whether the improper use of the performative can succeed in producing the effects of authority where there is no recourse to a prior authorization; indeed, whether the misappropriation or expropriation of the performative might not be the very occasion for the exposure of prevailing forms of authority and the exclusions by which they proceed. (Butler, 1997, 158)

By hijacking the priest's speech, Mary and Lizzie acquire voice, overthrow his authority and expose his domineering systems. Religion, resistance and agency become entwined.

In attempting to seduce/eat/rape/convert the priest, Mary and Lizzie unmask not only the folly of sectarianism but also the human desire for love and unity -- in this case with their own deceased mother. But the carnivalesque atmosphere and the ribald language make the scene polyvalent as it lacerates priestly self-importance ("You've wasted your time coming here. I'm spoken for. It's time Mother Ireland accepted that. The amount of girls she's encouraged to climb through the earth -- astonishing, really."), self-consumption ("I'm married to myself") and religious dogmatism ("Turn from blind faith to a wise one. I have been Catholic, I have been Protestant, now I am both and wish you were too"). (McGuinness, 1989, 10-12) McGuinness's priest, of course, is a burlesque of Catholicism and Protestantism, but he makes his point. McGuinness even reverses and inverts the Oedipal myth, exploring a homosexual marriage between each of the girls and their deceased mother, conjured up by the girls, not the priest.

McGuinness's critique in *Mary and Lizzie* is less a refusal of religion than a condemnation of its disfigurement by sectarian, dogmatic and tribal claustrophobia. He certainly endorses the Christian call for universal love as the key to personal and social change, although he does not cast it as uniquely Christian. The Famine, from which the two girls are escaping, was a crucible in which the act of eating became an act of religious apostasy or affiliation. The irony, of course, is that behind the human consumption

imagery stands Christian Eucharistic imagery, in which the eating and drinking of Christ's body and blood provides a communion in spiritual life and unity with the Church, which is understood as both his body and his spouse. Moreover, the Eucharist encapsulates both a meal (the Last Supper) and a sacrificial death (Christ's crucifixion on Calvary). McGuinness's parody taps both the Famine and one of the most profound features of Christian faith to attack the twisted behavior and thinking of some modern adherents.

***Kenny: Famine guilt, contemporary choices.*** Catholicism is a major Irish identity marker. When Turlough, drunk, finds himself in the lobby of the yacht club, he glares at portraits of the club's founders and calls them "murdering Protestant bastards" and spits at them. (Kenny, 1995, 178) His friends who try to restrain him and remove his car keys become "apologist lackeys." (Kenny, 1995, 178) Walsh's language invokes the nationalist interpretation of the Famine, as well as British and Ascendancy invovlement in Irish history generally. Those Catholic Irish who cooperated with the British regime were dismissed as "Castle Catholics," after Dublin Castle, seat of the regime. Here, Turlough's behavior clearly conforms to the habitus of the nationalist Catholic middle class. In Bourdieu's sense, Walsh may be middle class, with a good income and education, but he must mouth nationalist prejudices. The same attitude, ironically, emerges in MacCurran's hatred for the landlords. MacCurran justifies his attack on the Montenegrine estate by asking, "Why should ... [the land] all be in the hands of those that descended from Cromwell's soldiers?" (Kenny, 1995, 218) Invoking Oliver Cromwell raises a red-flag for Irish Catholics, who see him as a scourge on nation and Church. But if Ireland's *Catholic* identity is materialistic and competitive, then the Church, too, is implicated.

Kenny's novel shows the consistent intrusion of materialism from the mid-19th century to the contemporary era. In a society such as Ireland's, when Bourdieu stipulates "state," the Church may be added as one of the key social forces constructing habitus. In turn, the Church is constituted by members who share the same habitus. This amounts to a recursive, and homogenizing, effect in social constitution. "The *state* molds mental structures and imposes common principles of vision and division," Bourdieu writes, and

it is endowed with "a sort of metacapital granting power over other species of capital and over their holders." (Bourdieu, 1998, 41, 45-46). After the Famine, Kenny tells his readers, the Church began to construct churches, presbyteries, convents, schools and other facilities to display its power and influence. (While this is historically true, the novel ignores numerous other reasons for the expansion, which Kenny acknowledges in his essay in Hayden's *Irish Hunger*.) Meanwhile, in modern Dublin, Walsh must deal with Fr. O'Connell's desire to build a new church, despite declining attendance. "'Oh, it's the most stupid thing I ever heard,'" Turlough tells his wife; "'What's the point. By the time it's finished no one will go near it.'" (Kenny, 1995, 89) Walsh's view notwithstanding, the Dublin priest wants the expansion because he thinks the parish is expanding -- and thus Fr. O'Connell "mistakes" national identity for religious practice. His assumption that "more Irish" means "more Catholics" is naive in contemporary Ireland. Invoking the Famine, he urges parishioners to tithe, to give a tenth of their incomes, the ancient bibilical standard:

> 'Two hundred years ago there were no Catholic churches! Have you forgotten that? ... The people risked their lives to hear Mass on a rock. And even in the time of famine ... even then, faced with starvation, the people gave what they could, and willingly. So once again, we will be calling on every home in the parish and leaving envelopes, and the rest is up to you! We desperately need a second church for our growing congregation, and only you, the parishioners of today, can give the priceless gift of a new church to your own children and all the faithful of tomorrow!' (Kenny, 1995, 88-89)

So intent is the priest on raising money for the new church that he makes "a significant offering, one that represents a real sacrifice for you" part of a penance imposed on Turlough after he confesses his adultery. (Kenny, 1995, 148) Kenny, however, uses Church contributions, and the unease it generates, to probe religious depth and self-understanding amid increasing Irish wealth.

The Walsh family "performs" its religion, rather than living and believing it. The contemporary habitus, even though under assault, includes Mass attendance. As they return, Turlough claims that attendance is only pretense: "'It would be bad politics for me not to go and you just want to be seen arriving in the big car by everyone, and it's an

excuse to dress up,'" he quips. (Kenny, 1995, 89) Nuala responds that one cannot get through life without religion, a view Turlough contradicts, "'Millions do!'" (Kenny, 1995, 89) Nuala's rejoinder is telling: "Not in Ireland they don't." (Kenny, 1995, 89) Religious practice as an index of Irishness takes on new meaning, however, when Walsh encounters the Famine. "Then it came to him that he had been given a glimpse, in a way and for a reason that he could not yet fathom, as to why her words were so ringingly accurate." (Kenny, 1995, 89) The more Turlough finds himself immersed in the Famine, the more his philosophical, metaphysical, spiritual and moral interests develop. How can the past shape the present? Why do some survive and some die? Who has a right to survive? What relationship exists between collective national dispossession and modern moral ambiguity? When a colleague urges he end his dissolute ways, a drunken Walsh responds:

> 'Get back on the fucking rails? Is that it? Don't you think I should know where the fucking train is going first? You're a religious man, Jim, you give your bit to the church! How do you think God feels about us? ... Why should we all mutter away here, telling lies about each other? What do you think God will say when you finally croak? ... You're going to have to tell God ... that you spent your whole life showing rich people how to pay less tax, how to keep and hoard ... ! And ... that will please him?' (Kenny, 1995, 161)

Unlike MacCurran, who blames God for the Famine -- "'What kind of a God would have let this come to pass? ... I hope I never lay eyes on that monster ..., I'll take my chances with the Devil. There might be more good in him'" -- Walsh questions human behavior. (Kenny, 1995, 218)

Turlough's friendship with Tomás Kernen is a moral catalyst. Tomás's family includes Sheila, his wife, and their children, Mick-Og, lost on a coffin ship, Brid, Seamus, Nan and Maura, snatched by MacCurran and his raiders. The family dominates the reader's consciousness, because they are Turlough's obsession. In fact, the Kernens occupy little narrative space. Moral space is another matter. Impoverished, generous and hardworking, Kernen refuses relief in favor of a man who needs it more:

> [Turlough] thought of Tomás Kernen refusing a day's work because they still had some food. Where did courage like that come from? How did some people find

> the strength to avoid doing wrong, while others pursued every temptation? Why had he chosen all his life to do whatever was to his own advantage? Had all morality perished here in the time of the famine? Were all the good people long dead and gone, as they say? Were they literally the dead and the gone? All emigrated or perished? (Kenny, 1995, 221)

Kenny's novel, despite its lacerating analysis of the Celtic Tiger, offers hope in Turlough's moral regeneration and in the contemporary Mayo villagers. Discursively, Kenny seeks to change the idea in secular discourse that religion is mere sham by showing the spiritual questions raised by the Famine, even as he critiques *pro-forma* Irish Catholicism.

**4. Gender: From reductive fecundity to empowering mutuality**

***Subversive Eucharistic language in McGuinness.*** McGuinness's interest in social perspectives from the margins of Irish society makes him particularly conscious of gender. Scene 4, "The Feast of Famine," is the most powerful in *Mary and Lizzie.* Already having depicted Mary and Lizzie's radical capacity to recontextualize gender relations, McGuinness now has them enter a world of women and their most personal concerns.

The itinerant Irish girls encounter their deceased mother in the underworld. For the millions of Famine victims on the road, in the workhouse or on the coffin ship, the underworld was only a step away from their present. Mary Burns, the girls' mother, is attended by six women in "*elaborate, jewelled costume* ... [and they are carrying ] *six covered gold platters*" -- they are women who died in childbirth. (McGuinness, 1989, 14) A tough-talking, clear-eyed realist whose maternal instincts dried up long ago. Mrs. Burns is tired of life's demands and pretense:

> 'It does funny things to a woman, birth. You choose your time to live and die. When you arrived, I chose to go. I let you live. I gave you my life. Don't bother thanking me. I wanted out of this world. Heaven's great, girls, best of everything. Are yous married yet?' (McGuinness, 1989, 14-15)

When they tell her they are not, she advises, "Don't. And don't have children. They kill you." (McGuinness, 1989, 15) She advises her daughters to leave Ireland, for her attendants -- "the girls are a bit on the gloomy side, [but] they know what they're talking

about" -- will provide a litany of future woes: famine, death, disease, exile, hunger and fever. (McGuinness, 1989, 15) This represents a radical departure in both Catholic and nationalist -- and Protestant and unionist -- discourse on motherhood and family life. The difficulties, burdens and dangers of maternity and child-rearing are exposed and set within the lethal circumstances of the Famine. In addition, however, maternal fecundity is closely associated with sectarian and political rivalries. Just below the surface of political discourse even today is the hope that one side will win victory by outbreeding the other. Fecundity, which produces the male sacrificial victims, thus becomes a badge of tribal and religious loyalty. Mrs. Burns rejects this discourse and shows her daughters a dark, alternative vision -- a vision of subjugation and exploitation of women. Bourdieu's concepts of the social field and habitus would profit from gender considerations, because as Mrs. Burns shows, a woman's view can differ from a man's. James Bohman observes:

> The possibility of innovation and transformation becomes improbable and dependent on external social conditions, such as the break down of social conditions due to forces outside of agents' control. Yet, Bourdieu does not deny that such innovative changes occur ..., and in doing so he introduces further ambiguities into his account of power and enculturation. (Bohman, 1999, 141)

Gender considerations situated in the Famine, when social breakdown did occur, provide an easy way to see how Bourdieu's theory can be enlarged. The masculinist discourse of fecundity for the national cause is exposed, for women, as a futile cycle of loss.

Mrs. Burns and her attendants proceed to describe a "feast of famine," which will engulf Ireland, through another ritualized, litanic presentation of symbolic objects on the platters: a stone, straw, book, rags, spoon and bone. Their chant is a chilling explication of the Famine and its effects, and provides the change in social cognition McGuinness needs to promote an alternative discourse. "This spoon wants a mouth to shout, / Throw me in the pot, throw me in the pot." (McGuinness, 1989, 16) Likewise, the litany's sing-song rhythm in iambic pentameter recontextualizes the horror of the Famine into the broader futility of life -- which only human love, consciously chosen, can resist. "When it's dead, boil its head / Make it into soup and bread. ... Bread of bone and bread of rags, / Eat the dead of starving hags." (McGuinness, 1989, 16) The women's incantation also

echoes the Catholic Mass and, perversely, the Black Mass: "Do this all of you in memory / Of the race hunger freed. / Do this all of you in memory / Of the race that ate its seed. / Do this all of you in memory / Of the race that died in need." (McGuinness, 1989, 16-17) Ironically, of course, the Famine triggered massive emigration, slashed marriage and childbirth rates, and renewed calls for the end of the Union. Famine-era peasants desperately ate their seed potatoes to survive, only to have nothing to plant for the next season. Likewise, the effects of the Famine caused Irish society to "eat its seed" amid social conditions that stifled subsequent generations. The litany also points to the question of infanticide and cannibalism. Yet at the same time, the Famine "freed" emigrant Irish to pursue their lives elsewhere, and simultaneously spread Catholicism, so that the very words parodied -- those of Jesus instituting the Eucharist at the Last Supper -- went around the English-speaking world. (Cf. Mt 26:26-29; Mk 14:22-25; Lk 22:1719)

That this Eucharistic parody/incantation occurs while a pregnant girl mixes a cauldron with a bayonet imagistically suggests phallic oppression by the British government and the Church, as well as the Fates, the three weird sisters of *Macbeth* and the lacerating wit of Jonathan Swift, whose *A Modest Proposal* (1729) suggests a tongue-in-cheek solution to Irish poverty and over-population: Irish children should be eaten. A polemical work, *A Modest Proposal* is thinly veiled attack on British policies in Ireland. The girl stirring the pot is pregnant by a British soldier, who abandoned her and whose comrades gave her the bayonet to kill herself or abort. The scene is echoed later in scenes in which Queen Victoria discusses the burdens of empire and Engels and Marx describe capitalism, socialism and class divisions. Irish muscle helped stoke British industrialization, even though the Irish were seen as uncouth but cheap. This connects the Famine past and the industrial and political future of *Mary and Lizzie.* The girl at the pot resembles Ireland, abandoned by Britain's *laissez-faire* policy, overburdened by calamity and possessed only of the tools to destroy herself or wage ineffectual war. By the scene's end, discourse about female fecudity for the cause has been riddled by an alternative view of its suffering, waste and loss -- as Van Dijk's theory of change in social discourse suggests.

***Accent on male characters in Kenny.*** Kenny's novel focuses on male characters, primarily Turlough Walsh. His Famine characters haunt Walsh's consciousness as images of what he fears, what he is and what he could be. Tomas Kernen is idealized as the noble peasant, although his son, Mick-Og ("Young Mike" or "Young Son" in Irish), who accepts money from Turlough, follows his instincts. This drive for self-preservation connects the Kernens with MacCurran and Turlough himself; it is their choices that differ. Female characters from the Famine era exhibit a sacrificial character, which the literary tradition frequenlty ascribes to Irish women. Sheila, Brid, even little Nan, whom Turlough buries atop a hill and who claims a special place in his understanding, deprive themselves for others. Famine women contrast markedly with contemporary Irish women, who embody the full range of social change. *The Hungry Earth* is hardly the first Irish novel to depict family tensions and dissolution, divorce and sexual infidelity, but it underlines their increasing social acceptance, even in County Mayo. Nuala Walsh is a social climber who needs Turlough's professional status and income to fuel her own materialistic desires. Her lust for status, however, does not prevent her from having an extra-marital affair with one of the couple's friends. Caitriona, who takes Turlough as her lover, is sexually uninhibited, and enjoys the dinners, trips to Paris and other material manifestations of Walsh's attention. For his part, Walsh sees her, initially, as little more than a sexual adventure as middle age nears. Although there initially seems to be little difference between the two women but age, Caitriona's reconciliation with Walsh in Mayo suggests she loves him more than his wife. Because attention is fixed on Turlough, female characters are underdeveloped. Caitriona, however, grows in moral awareness, which is essential for a future with Turlough, newly sensitized by his Famine voices and visions. Caitriona is shaken when she learns Turlough has been thrown out, and his marriage to Nuala is finished. "'Oh God, oh Turlough, I'm sorry.' She stared at the glistening black surface of the canal. 'Do you want me to write to her, or something? Tell her it was my fault? Oh my God, I never wanted anything like this to happen. Oh Jesus, what kind of bitch am I?'" (Kenny, 1995, 165) Caitriona's composure is shaken, she fights back tears, bites her lip and reveals another dimension. Turlough's view of her

changes:

> She was no longer the sassy young lady, sure she could have whatever she wanted in life. She was distraught at the consequences of what she had done. She was not a bitch at all, or a slut; he had misread her. No, that was giving himself credit for having made some attempt to understand her the way he had never done. He had simply interpreted her the way he wanted, and, for as long as she could, she had done the same. (Kenny, 1995, 165)

Indeed, Caitriona encourages Walsh to return to the West to face his obsessions. "'You have to go back there [to Mayo] again,' she said softly. 'There's no other way to find out what happened, and finally put a stop to this torment.'" (Kenny, 1995, 167) Initially, she avoided Mayo, fearful of "being drawn into some unknowable realm of dark terror and finding herself, like him, altered in some irredeemable way." (Kenny, 1995, 168)

Another female character who merits attention is Bronagh O'Herlihy, an historian with a book, *Victorian Feminism in Ireland.* Bronagh is not simply a feminist, she is an historical revisionist -- and to Kenny the latter is worse than the former. With Turlough on a radio show, Bronagh makes two claims. First, the Famine marks a major and necessary economic shift, and second, Queen Victoria, as a female ruler, contrary to her male advisers, displayed leadership in visiting Ireland in 1849, and thus helped spark the rise of a middle class and the expansion of women's rights. Bronagh entirely omits consideration of the Famine dead, claiming that most simply emigrated. Radway's emphasis on alternative reading strategies here becomes entangled in moral questions implied in the text. Reader agency, regardless of the moral evaluation one attaches to a particular interpretative strategy, provides such freedom. Radway points out the interest readers have in "ratifying the world in which ... [they] ordinarily live." (Radway, 1991, 475) Desire to assert an agenda can shape a reading strategy -- and resist even the discursive claims van Dijk discusses. Bronagh is a caricature of revisionists, though not by much. Turlough, enraged, insists that 40 percent of Mayo's population "perished," and insults Bronagh (Kenny, 1995, 1999) Kenny's novel adopts an anti-revisionist perspective, siding with Bradshaw's insistence on moral responsibility for the catastrophic dimension of history. That revisionism and feminism are linked is ironic,

because feminist historiography readily admits the important moral dimension of who speaks in the historical narrative. Just as Turlough endeavors to give voice to Famine figures, feminist historians seek the voices silenced by masculinist scholarship. (Cirksena and Cuklanz, 1992, 18-20; Robinson, 1996, 239-241) Turlough's decision to remain in the West is sealed in fevered lovemaking with Caitriona, and the belief that she will conceive a child and thus "turn back the tide of death here." (Kenny, 1995, 251) Kenny both restores traditional Irish Catholic family values and emphasizes mutuality and personal interaction, not dominance.

**5. Agency: Claiming the human ... and the pain and the loss**

***McGuinness: 'Singing the world into being'.*** Questions of agency pervade *Mary and Lizzie*. In many respects, the play is a journey, a search or even a pilgrimage from Famine Ireland, and thus a ancient and medieval frame of mind, to Industrial Britain, and presumably a modern, rational perspective. In fact, however, the girls discover their flight from one horror only leads them to another, which has helped cause the Famine at home, and reaches its own excess by the surfeit of Irish labor in Britain.

Scene 7 depicts the brutal struggle of the worker simply to survive. Half-naked, bronzed by grime and pummeled by industrial noise, Mary and Lizzie's father fights to control his shaking hands, the "tools of my trade" before they "lead me to the workhouse." (McGuinness, 1989, 30) With his daughters at his side, he laments the unending cycle of work:

> Press. Press. Watch the wheel, the rope's slackening. Press, girl, press. Watch the room. For warmth, for wet. If the thread snaps, the machine stops. Never let the machine stop. Never let the hand stop. Press, woman, press. ... Man's body's woman's work. Sore eyes, sore hand, sore work, sore body. I want to work, I want to die. (McGuinness, 1989, 31)

This scene looks at masculine exploitation by capitalism, Scene 4 at feminine oppression.

Scene 8 provides a satiric depiction of ideology's disinterest in the human subjects of its discourse, of sexism and of social hypocrisy. The scene, at once uproarious and crass, is set in the home of Marx and his wife, Jenny. Engels has been invited, and the two young Irish women who live with him, Mary and Lizzie, have insisted upon joining

him. While Marx and Engels discuss a materialist analysis of economics and history, Mary and Lizzie, ever their mother's daughters, engage in a ribald and parallel discussion of body parts. Marx endeavors to continue, Engels is gradually enticed into the women's conversation, admitting, "I don't mind a bit of leg myself, Lizzie." (McGuinness, 1989, 34) As with the priest, when Marx presses on with his theories, Mary and Lizzie reverse the terms, appropriate dialectical materialism and turn the discussion back on its head to expose the bourgeois pretensions and hypocrisies of both men, Marx for his desire for respectability, Engels for his exploitation of them. "You shame us, Frederick, you're a disgrace," declares Lizzie. (McGuinness, 1989, 34) When Marx eventually tells them they are not welcome, Mary observes that she and her sister, in fact, have paid for "dinner with Karl and Jenny" through the domestic and sexual services they provide Engels, who, in turn, subsidizes Marx and his wife. (McGuinness, 1989, 35) The exchange is instructive:

> Marx: I have frequently acknowledged my friend's financial assistance.
> Mary: Then why do you look at his women with poison in your face?
> Marx: You are not his women, you are his whores.
> Lizzie: So are you.
> Mary: So we're equal. All equal. All respectable. Tell your wife. (McGuinness, 1989, 35)

Not only do the Irish peasant girls confront ethnic and class prejudice among those who claim to have transcended it, but they also implicate Marxian philosophy in the same web of captialist exploitation that engendered the Famine and the excesses of industrialism. This they do through attention to *individuals* as responsible agents. Karl and Jenny Marx, through their disdain for Mary and Lizzie's social origins and circumstances, share the same pretense as the bourgeoisie they want to destroy. In relation to Engels, they are in the same economic niche as his trenchant concubines, and they see Mary and Lizzie not as persons but as economic ciphers.

The moral lesson turns into a roaring, if vulgar, farce as Mary and Lizzie perform fellatio, along with a little bondage and discipline, on Engels, who manages to enunciate various economic principles of class distinction between gasps and groans. The romp,

however, reveals less about the girls' sexual appetite and Engels' desirability than it does about the distance between abstract thought and human desire. Movingly, Jenny claims her husband depends not only on Engels' money but on her thinking, and reads a passage, in her handwriting: "All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober sense his real contradictions of life and his relations with his kind." (McGuinness, 1989, 39) To make the point, she then quotes from Engels' *The Condition of the Working Class*, with its contemptuous descriptions of the Famine Irish in Britain. (McGuinness, 1989, 40-41) Mary and Lizzie stand for the "other" whom pure ideology never encounters with empathy or love. "You don't know us. You fear us," Mary tells Engels:

> So you'll remove us. The breastbeaters would save us for the sake of their own salvation. How will you save us? Change the world, eh? Change us. Change yourself first. Mr. Engels is afraid of the dark. We're the dark. We're the night. Will I show you the dark? Will I lead you through the night to come? (McGuinness, 1989, 42)

The next scene shows this darkness by reintroducing the pregnant girl with the bayonet and a Russian-speaking boy in a Soviet GULAG. These, for McGuinness, are consequences of an ideological inability to recognize human need and agency. The Famine emerges as a grim reminder of the cost that abstract thought -- as in *laissez-faire* economics, agricultural rationalization and ethnic and religious prejudice -- have on real human beings. The play ends with a paean to human agency, despite the odds. Mrs. Burns returns and joins her daughters in a Northern lullaby, which ends, "No rest have I, nor liberty / For love is lord of all." (McGuinness, 1989, 49) The concluding lines, "so be it," are English for "Amen," and amount to an affirmation, not unlike Molly Bloom's "Yes" in Joyce's *Ulysses*. (McGuinness, 1989, 49) Singing is a fundamentally human behavior, one that declares agency. In the dramatic world of *Mary and Lizzie*, only the human -- not the ideological, dogmatic, tribal or sectarian -- can bring a benign world into being.

Thematically, structurally and discursively, the play struggles to establish final confidence in the victory of human love. Nonetheless, it asserts the fundamentally human in the face of the ideological and tribal. McGuinness yokes together the fantastic, the

feminine and the Famine to explore dimensions of reality silenced by dominant ideologies. Consequently, it is no surprise that he employs Butler's concept of transgressive speech to achieve the discursive changes van Dijk describes, nor is it unusual to find Bourdieu's social habitus deficient. McGuinness wants to broaden the sources from which a discourse can be heard. Mary and Lizzie meet their dead mother and their oppressed father, flee Ireland, encounter Queen Victoria and discover her diffidence about imperial burdens, and observe Marx and Engels cuddle in bed with their philosophies and fantasies despite the Soviet GULAG they spawn. Jordan writes:

> The introduction of darkness, death, the uncanny, anti-repressive and oppositional forces is the hallmark of fantasy, which escorts the spectator inside a dissolving, disintegrating, dilapidating and vague world. ... McGuinness deploys the fantastic form in order to make visible female desire and to undermine both the concepts of the real and of the historical. (Jordan, 1997, 126-127)

The use of the Famine as both a symbol of human greed and as a model for the interconnections of modern social forces -- imperialism, colonialism, capitalism, industrialism, sexism and socialism -- marks another important theatrical appropriation and recontextualization of Ireland's most significant historical catastrophe. McGuinness has used Famine drama to widen Habermas's public sphere, or better, to bring new voices into that space through the Famine's links to class and gender oppression. He excavates, in a Foucauldian sense, the discourse on its causes and effects. Finally, he recovers the repressed bodies and the silenced memories of women and workers, as Peggy Phelan and Claude Schumacher suggest, through "true" but "phantasmatic" performances, where imagistic and verbal patterns echo each other, where where the unrepresentable reality emerges through the stimulation and disturbance of the imagination, where the silent are able to speak and where the historically real becomes the mentally phantasmatic and the theatrically indicative. (Schumacher, 1998, 8) (Phelan, 1997, 16-17)

***Kenny: Freedom in facing the Famine's emptiness.*** In *The Hungry Grass,* during the radio interview, both Bronagh and the host ridicule Turlough for his zealous emphasis on the victims of the Famine and, particularly, for reports that he has "visited" the past. "'My point,' said Turlough, 'is that you people insist on looking at everything to

do with the past in whatever way makes you feel ... feel most comfortable ... and not the way it really was.'" (Kenny, 1995, 201) Herein lies the crux of the revisionist debate: to what extent is the "reality" of the past, including its pain and morality, accessible? There is little Walsh can do when he is asked snidely "'[H]ow was it really?'" (Kenny, 1995, 201) Yet he silences them when he likens Ireland to an abused child:

> 'To me,' he said, voice steady, resonant, 'this whole society we have today is like a person who has been horribly abused as a child, betrayed in every possible way. ... This child, brutally beaten, grows up and unwittingly becomes just like the parent. Without knowing it, we ourselves have become as bad as our old oppressors. And I see no other possibility for healing our society than to look back and remember the past, all of it, honestly, no matter how painful, and that's all we're trying to do ... . (Kenny, 1995, 202-203)

History provides agency, a way of telling truths about the past which constitutes the present, and thus frees individuals and societies to face contemporary reality aware and unimpeded by falsehood. This too expands the public sphere in Habermas's sense; totalitarian and dictatorial states frequently make journalists and historians among their first victims. When Habermas details the emergence of a public sphere from the shared, private world of the bourgeoisie, which then contests the proper domain of the public sphere, he could nearly be describing, in reverse, the Famine's effects. (Habermas, 1989, 29) Agricultural failures led to family crisis, isolation, death and departure. Communities collapsed, and social discussion was silenced. If communicational expansion changes the nature of public life, recovery of a communal past, even if traumatic, liberates a community in precisely the degree to which it has been been repressed.

*The Hungry Earth's* claims on behalf of Irish society mirror this acknowledgement and liberation process in Turlough's life. His Famine voices help him confront his own emptiness and sham and build a new life in the West with Caitriona. During his last visit to the Famine era, Turlough makes a dramatic bargain with Lorcan MacCurran. Walsh wants money to help the remaining Kernen children emigrate to America, but MacCurran wants something in return. Having nothing but his own body, Turlough knows that MacCurran and his raiders, desperate for food, will eat human flesh. (Kenny, 1995, 220) He makes a chilling, self-sacrificing bargain, because it is the only

way for him to aid the Kernen children. As relief works end and the disaster worsens, Walsh roars at the stars, "'It doesn't have to be like this!'" (Kenny, 1995, 222) The power of human choice -- which Malthusian philosophy, *laissez-faire* economics and religious and ethnic prejudice inhibit -- offers an alternative. Back in modern Ireland, Turlough worries about what he should tell his friends in the Famine era about what is to come. He sparks the idea for a Famine museum. He takes out personal ads seeking emigrant information to make a difference. This argument on behalf of individual and social agency rests in free will, which he had half-mocked, half-believed in his drunken uproar at a bar: "'You could have done anything you wanted with your life! You chose to live like this! Free will, remember! We all did!'" (Kenny, 1995, 162) This, of course, stands in sharp contrast to the fate of Famine victims, robbed of agency and subjectivity by starvation and disease. Poorhouse guards tell Turlough, "'Get away, man! There's two thousand dying in here, in a place meant for two hundred.' 'You've no name once you go through these gates!'" (Kenny, 1995, 209) Kenny's narrative upholds the thesis that the failure of so many to choose to help irrevocably marked Ireland. Echoing Joyce's sense of paralysis in *Dubliners*, his narrator observes Turlough's visit to a workhouse to find Tomás Kernen:

> The stench too clung to him, inescapable, a mind-dulling mixture of excrement and putrefaction, proof beyond words and images that he was in the very midst of the immolation of a whole people, experiencing an atrocity that would shape the destiny of all who survived it, leaving them scarred, to the point of psychic paralysis, by ... [the] immeasurable shame [of their actions and inactions] ... . (Kenny, 1995, 224-225)

The problem with Ireland's approach to the Famine for Kenny has been an overemphasis on the survivors and an historic suppression of the victims. The pattern is virtually part of Bourdieu's social habitus, the accepted way of dealing with a traumatic, shameful past. The toast that Turlough and MacCurran -- one of the survivors -- make amid the flames of the Montenegrine Big House is telling. "'To all those who died this year,'" says Turlough, to which MacCurran, puzzled, replies, "'To all those who lived.'" (Kenny, 1995, 216)

For Kenny, awakened memories hold power for good, even in the face of "the worst nightmare in their collective memories," as the Mayo community response to the Famine museum suggests. (Kenny, 1995, 194) When Turlough's children visit him, he speaks about memories and feelings, trying to explain why he has been unable to love:

> 'Because I was brought up in a very strange society, one in which you were just not free to express your feelings, and didn't know how, since you never saw anyone else do it either, and yet one where you were free to think the worst of everyone else, because they thought the worst they could of you. They were out to discover your weaknesses and use them against you. ... But listen carefully, nothing is predetermined! We all have free will, we all have the wherewithal to change ourselves, and our lives. No matter how you feel ... about how we brought you up, don't let it get in the way of your own spirit!' (Kenny, 1995, 243-244)

A different message from and about the Famine is passed along to a new generation.

## CONCLUSION: LIMITS OF THEORY, EVOLUTION OF DISCOURSE

Textual production focusing on the Famine saw the emergence of a substantial amount of fiction, drama and poetry during Phase V. These imaginative works comprise only a part of a large body of material that includes history, journalism, political rhetoric and other materials. Written material, in turn, is part of the wider "return to the Famine" that has dimensions in memorials, monuments, museums, television, radio, cinema, education, psychology, spirituality and government and social policy. Interest extends beyond Ireland to its global diaspora. This chapter has examined textual production with regard to literature and drama only, and has based its discussion primarily on Frank McGuinness's play *Mary and Lizzie* and Seán Kenny's novel *The Hungry Earth*. Writers have employed, manipulated and altered discourses to connect the Famine era with the end of the 20th century. Concerns proliferated over the conflict in the North, Ireland's place in Europe, its surging economy and accelerating social change, the rise in immigration and social and racial pluralism. Phase V readers were highly educated, and were marked by electronic media. Realism made space for expressionism, in both fiction and drama, replete with multiple images, corporeal display, movement and temporal manipulation. With rising disposable income, and an increase in the number of Irish publishers or international publishers for Irish work, readers saw their options expand.

The surge in Famine literature and drama, consequently, is related to many social, cultural and economic factors, not the least of which are a.) the historiographical debates over the "catastrophic dimension" of Irish history, b.) the commercial potential in widespread interest in things Irish; c.) the commemorations of the Famine's 150th anniversary; and d.) the pioneering drama in Phase IV by Murphy and MacIntyre.

By analyzing Famine texts through themes of land, national identity, religion, gender and agency, one sees important rhetorical shifts closely related to the Phase V readership and its socio-cultural circumstances. For McGuinness, rural Ireland is no longer sufficient to contain the Famine; its impact is felt in industrial Britain. For Kenny, the Irish West stands less for traditional, romantic Ireland than for communal and spiritual values lost in a crass contemporary society. In each writer, "land" is not simply soil or territory, it is the mystical bond between past, present and future. Land is inscribed with historical experience, and, as such, helps write those who live on it. National identity, so controversial in Phase II's unionist-nationalist debate, becomes a question again in an urbanized, secularized, globalized, Europeanized and equalized Ireland. McGuinness wants to recover voices silenced by the dominant nationalist discourse, while Kenny questions not only the influence of the Celtic Tiger but the historic silence about the Famine. Contemporary amorality has roots in the survival strategies of the Famine's "winners." Religious issues shift from sectarian affiliation to institutional critique and personal spirituality. McGuinness, who sees the vampire in sectarianism, emphasizes resistance through transgressive speech and reappropriation of discourse. Kenny, meanwhile, depicts consumerism and social expectation twisting the religious impulse, in contrast with the faith and compassion of many Famine victims.

Gender issues become important because the sexual revolution and the women's movement, having taken hold, have changed social behavior, political agendas and personal self-consciousness. McGuinness draws Mary and Lizzie from social groups -- women and emigrants -- whose voice and experience have been largely drowned out by masculinist discourses, such as Irish nationalism, British imperialism and capitalism and Soviet communism. Human interaction based on love is McGuinness's thematic thrust.

Kenny, his focus on male characters, exposes personal needs obscured by discourses of market competitiveness, masculine predation and social Darwinism, the very claims that helped cause the Famine. Agency, meanwhile, plays a major role in Phase V texts. Both McGuinness and Kenny show how unresolved, repressed Famine memories can haunt and poison discourse and social life. In both *Mary and Lizzie* and *The Hungry Earth*, remembrance is a moral act requiring committed action. Mary and Lizzie's decision to seek their mother in the underworld and their father in the factories of Manchester, to confront oppressive discourse whether from landlord, priest or theoretician and to "sing" the world into existence is an assertion that human choice and action matter. Likewise, Kenny asserts a free will and repeatedly shows how it changes circumstances for the Kernens, for MacCurran and for Turlough Walsh, whose final sacrifice proves psychically and spiritually redemptive. Agency is closely related to the body. Both the play and the novel rely on spectral figures, whose presence summons anew the Famine, a legacy that will return to haunt and disturb the present.

Discursively, Chapter V writers employed Bourdieu's habitus and van Dijk's emphasis on social cognition in discourse construction, maintenance and change. Because so much of Phase V Famine literature challenges accepted discourses, emphasis has fallen repeatedly on the means of changing a discourse through new understanding or resistance. For McGuinness, Mary and Lizzie's transgressive speech and behavior highlight the deficiency and hypocrisy of sexism, imperialism, landlordism, Catholicism, industrialism and socialism/communism. For Kenny, two kinds of cognitive change attempt to alter prevailing discourse. First, the Famine is used to reassert a communal, cooperative life as an alternative to the rapacious Celtic Tiger. Second, Turlough's relationship to MacCurran suggests all the Irish are implicated in the deaths of the Famine victims. Survival meant life, but life with guilt.

Bourdieu's habitus helps explain why and how a discourse may be maintained, but it needs expansion when confronted with efforts to resist or alter a discourse. McGuinness's personal situation makes him both interested in the margins of Irish society and in Northern Ireland's social and political problems. Habitus helps explain

why he is drawn to issues of silenced voices and sectarian violence, why he creates characters such as Mary and Lizzie, but it needs to develop space to account for his rejection of discourses which have sustained communities from which he draws his material. Part of the answer may lie in the failure of those discourses, such as hard-edged republican nationalism, sectarian triumphalism and doctrinaire socialism, to serve the groups to which they have been directed. Likewise, McGuinness is not a comfortable member of any of the groups challenged by his characters. For Kenny, a similar failure of discourse to satisfy his characters leads to alternative searches and the creation of a new, value-laden discourse of remembrance and moral commitment. Discourse, in Phase V of Famine textual production, is not simply about making meanings. Discourse is always about that. But in a society in which the old certitudes are breaking down, even as the old discourses continue to circulate, new strategies emerge in a search for what is meaningful. For Irish writers in the past two decades, then, the return to the Famine has offered a way to examine the discursive construction of society, challenge it and direct new discourse toward a widening range of social, cultural and political agendas -- ecology, immigration, economic justice, peace in the North, the Irish Diaspora, diversity, moral commitment. Virtually all of these concerns can be historically and metaphorically linked to the catastrophe of the 1840s. The Famine, which radically changed Ireland, and which brought death on an unprecedented scale, has become, after 150 years of struggle, a cultural resource for fiction, poetry and drama to help to imbue Irish society with new life.

## CONCLUSION

# *Memory, Manipulation and Morality*

When Mary Robinson became president of the Irish Republic in 1990, she made the Famine a consistent part of her political rhetoric. By so doing, she joined the discursive tradition outlined and analyzed in this dissertation. Robinson, the first woman to serve the nation as head of state, was concerned with public affairs, not literary or dramatic production. Her decision to employ the Famine, however, must be seen within the context of Irish discourse on the subject, and since 1968, when Murphy's *Famine* brought the 1840s catastrophe back into the public sphere, attention had been increasing. Textual production in Phases IV and V, coupled with the fierce historiographical debates of the 1980s, had thrust the Famine onto the national stage. As Ireland moved toward sesquicentennial commemorations, the "return to the Famine" became increasing powerful. Not only novels, poems and plays explored *an Gorta Mor*, but so did radio and television productions, rock songs, journalism, academic research, monuments, memorials and museums at home and abroad. Robinson's treatment of the Famine did not occur in a vacuum. In this conclusion, two diverse areas -- Robinson's speeches and children's literature -- illustrate how Famine discourse has grown in prominence, how it continues to embrace the five analytical tropes used here and how it manipulates these themes to achieve political, social and cultural goals directly related to contemporary circumstances. This discussion highlights: a.) contributions this dissertation makes to knowledge; b.) areas for further research and c.) possibilities for exploration of Famine discourse.

### SECTION I: THE RESPONSIBILITY OF REMEMBRANCE

#### 1. Mary Robinson finds moral agency in Famine for social goals

Remembrance as an empowering moral act undergirds much of Robinson's thought. The Famine deepens contemporary Irish self-understanding through an

encounter with a traumatic past and reconnects the diaspora to its cultural and ethnic origins. Certainly, Famine rhetoric holds obvious economic potential. By reminding the "foreign" Irish of home, Robinson could encourage sympathy for past suffering, gratitude for escape and pride in both the emergent Celtic Tiger and in the success of emigrant forebears. Investment may not have been immediate, but seeds could be planted. Robinson projects substantially more than an investment strategy -- even though the Irish abroad played an important role in the 1990s economic boom. At the root of the president's discussion is an insight into the Famine's lingering debilitating effects. Literary and dramatic texts of Phases III-IV certainly make clear the cost of repression. By confronting it, a moral stimulus emerges on the personal, communal and national levels. Moral responsibility, rooted in a shared past, thus links Ireland's past with its present at home and abroad.

Discursively, the Famine has not had such public influence since Phase II, when nationalists used it to promote Fenianism, the Land War, Home Rule and independence, and unionists to show native backwardness. Robinson's "debt to the Famine," calls upon listeners to react and respond. Descendants of Famine survivors owe the dead knowledge, remembrance and commitment to change conditions that cause new hungers.

Visiting Grosse Île, the old quarantine station in the Saint Lawrence, on 21 Aug. 1994, in anticipation of Black '47's 150th anniversary, Robinson declared, "We have the chance to choose today between being spectators or participants at the vast theatre of human suffering which unfolds throughout human history." (Gray, 1995, 182) To behave as spectators is to betray the memory of Famine victims, make their deaths count for nothing and imprison them in "a prison of statistics and memories, which can never challenge our conscience and compassion." (Gray, 1994, 182) To become participants means rejecting the idea that there are "inevitable victims" and refusing "the temptation to distance ourselves from the suffering around us." (Gray, 1994, 182) President Robinson, whose disdain for mere statistics recalls Lady Wilde, invokes specifics:

> [As] President of Ireland, and in memory of so many who died here, I think I can say that what is particularly Irish about this occasion is not simply the nationality of those who died here. It is also our sense, as a people who suffered and survived

> that, that our history does not entitle us to a merely private catalogue of memories. Instead it challenges us to consider, not just little Ellen Keane, the four-year-old child who was the first person to die here in 1847, but the reality that children are usually the first victims of famine and displacement. It challenges us, in her name, to consider with compassion and anger, those other children ... [we cannot name] dying today in Rwanda and ... in the camps in Somalia. (Gray, 1994, 182)

Memory becomes deliberate remembrance and carries a moral imperative. The Famine, ironically, empowers and confers agency. Discursively, Robinson introduces the same change in Famine discourse that van Dijk describes and so many Phase V writers have made. By enlarging the cognitive sphere of the Famine, she connects historical Irish pain to contemporary global suffering, and calls for action, not silence, self-pity or selfishness.

In the Famine Museum's commemorative book, Robinson asserts that "the past has constructed us in the actual and literal ways of generation and inheritance," and, consequently, if examined with care, the past "can construct and strengthen our understanding and our sympathy in the present." (Campbell, 1994, 7) Her fellow Irish have been "radically instructed" in "the profound dignity of human survival." (Campbell, 1994, 7) While most nations celebrate the victories and triumphs of the heroic and strong, Ireland's central achievement has been survival against overwhelming odds, she argues. Revisionist historians might argue that the Irish sense of suffering is inflated, but Robinson claims "a motif of powerlessness ... runs through our national consciousness." Certainly, the folk memory and much of the nationalist account confirms her view, while literary and dramatic texts offer examples of survival and defeat. In any case, Robinson tells her citizen-readers that the Famine's continuing lesson is "to strengthen and deepen our identity with those who are still suffering." Robinson, whose discourse reflects concerns typical of Phase V (1984-2000) and might be considered in light of Eavan Boland's poetry and Kenny's novel, attempts to change the discursive trajectory by altering social cognition. (See Appendix II.) Portraying the Irish as empowered survivors, not as victims, she seeks to mobilize fellow citizens to embrace her own liberal, egalitarian and global social and political priorities *vis à vis* the evaluation of restrictive social laws, accommodation of Northern unionists and Ireland's role on the world stage.

**2. Role of Famine remembrance in the education of children**

One way of using remembrance to develop agency -- the very thing *an Gorta Mor* denied its victims -- is education, and Famine discourse has emerged in children's literature and educational theater. John McArdle's play, *Two Houses* (1996), gives youngsters insight into the moral complexities of the Famine and the discursive role of narrative perspective. (See Appendix II.) Marita Conlon-McKenna's *Under the Hawthorn Tree* (1990), reprinted more than a dozen times, shows how children struggled to survive the Famine.

Conlon-McKenna introduces lessons in goal-setting, cooperation, grief, compassion, resistance and moral reasoning, all as part of a survival strategy for Eily, Michael and Peggy, whose parents disappear during the Famine. Their father, John O'Driscoll, has gone off to join a road works project, but they have no word from him. After some weeks, their mother, Margaret, who already has lost an infant daughter to fever, begins a search. The potato crop fails again and conditions worsen. Fever sweeps through the district, and the local estate agent, clears out tenants on the brink. The children are to go to the workhouse. The journey motif introduces numerous adventures for the children, who must fight a fever outbreak, forage for food, apply natural remedies, display persistence, seek alternatives, endure suffering and pain, fight off wild dogs and avoid hunger-mad crowds. For the young O'Driscolls, the journey through the West takes them to their mother's spinster aunts. Eily, the eldest child, emerges as a "little Mother," and provides not only emotional support but strategic vision. (Conlon-McKenna, 1990, 41) Michael takes a typically masculine role in fishing, making a fire, bleeding a cow and defending his sisters from dogs, but Eily is the trio's brain, and even Peggy steals fruit.

"'What eejits we are,' joked Eily. 'We're still alive. We're tired and hungry and on our own, but we have each other and we can still walk and forage. We'll get to Nano and Lena's even if it takes us a month.'" (Conlon-McKenna, 1990, 88) Their genders express different forms of agency, but Conlon-McKenna does not limit her youngsters.

The children receive virtually no help from adults. An estate agent tries to catch them, a nun rejects them, a priest ignores them, a British soldier rebuffs them, a landlord

walls them out and a shopkeeper expels them. Only old Mary Kate, a woman trained in folk medicine, and an old dying peasant offer assistance. Those who turn their backs on the O'Driscolls comprise a catalogue of "official Ireland," and the inclusion of the priest and nun reveals the extent to which criticism of the Church has grown and utilizes Famine discourse as a vehicle. Only when their great-aunts recognize them as "family" are they welcomed. While the children's survival has much to do with their own energy, courage and improvisation, remembrance plays a key role. Family stories their mother told, skills and strategies both parents taught are applied by the children in new circumstances. Remembrance gives power -- and permits them to make choices not only to survive but to enact justice, compassion and solidarity. Phase V Famine texts, as well as President Robinson's rhetoric, make precisely the same point.

**SECTION II: PERIODIZATION IN TEXT/CONTEXT RELATIONS**

This dissertation has charted the emergence and evolution of "Famine discourse" in novels, plays and poems for more than 150 years. It has examined the ways historical circumstances have enabled the Famine to be represented as divine punishment, social plague, stimulus for progress, economic inevitability, traumatic memory, social legacy, cultural metaphor and moral impetus. Following LaCapra on the documentary and worklike dimensions of texts, it sees Famine literature and drama as subject to the influence of three primary factors: authorial choice, historical circumstances and, finally, the creation of diverse readerships during the five periods under discussion..

During Phase I from 1845 to 1852, the years of the Famine's ravages, Irish novels and poems, represented by William Carleton's *The Black Prophet* and Lady Wilde's verse, plead for assistance, express outrage over British policy failures and call upon the Irish to remember their past glories and resist the lethal effects of foreign domination. Carleton shows attention to his British reading public, as well as the Irish elite, while Lady Wilde attempts to rally the small, educated circle reading nationalist newspapers. Through these limited but educated readerships, both could hope to see their opinions spread. Elizabeth Hely Walshe's *Golden Hills* and Margaret Brew's *Castle Cloyne* illustrate the discursive strategies of Phase II, from 1853 to 1910, when unionists and

nationalists recruited the Famine for their political and religious aspirations. For many Phase II writers, the Great Hunger was a crucible demanding religious conversion, unionist control or nationalist mobilization. During the second half of the 19th century, the Irish domestic readership grew in education and wealth, particularly on the nationalist side. Among unionists, the great Ascendancy estates were declining, but a new entrepreneurial and professional class was taking their place -- the same class that was growing among Catholic nationalists.

By Phase III, however, Irish socio-political concerns had shifted to the actual struggle of national independence and survival, and the Famine seemed to offer few relevant discursive resources. The period from 1911 to 1950 was largely silent, and textual production plummeted. Ironically, the period saw publication of the most famous Famine text, Liam O'Flaherty's *Famine.* That novel and Gerald Healy's play *The Black Stranger* take divergent approaches to the catastrophe's significance for readers. Amid continuing high emigration, O'Flaherty justifies departure through the heroism of a young couple, and probes the origins of the dominant Irish middle class. Healy, in contrast, exalts the courage of those who remain. After independence, the Irish unionist readership withered, as did the Protestant community in the south. But the old nationalist, Catholic readership was becoming increasingly less monolithic. Political tensions over the civil war lingered, emigration graphically exposed the "haves" and the "have-nots," and tension over censorship and cultural backwardness emerged. By Phase IV, 1951 to 1983, in reaction to Ireland's cultural doldrums, as well as the emergence of the Troubles in the North, playwrights Tom Murphy (*Famine*) and Tom MacIntyre (*The Great Hunger*) re-examined the Famine. They sought explanations and challenges for their audiences. Simultaneously, they renovated drama with expressionistic, ritualistic action to confront the Famine's physical and psychic realities, which were seen to have bequeathed contemporary manifestations. As the second half of the 20th century developed, Irish readers were buffeted by the sexual revolution, anti-authoritarianism, Cold War tensions, religious change. These developments may not have swept Ireland, but they were no further away than television and its polyvalent visual culture. Irish writers found in the

Famine an event that could speak to their readers.

Finally, Seán Kenny's novel *The Hungry Grass* and Frank McGuinness's drama *Mary and Lizzie* embody some of the dramatic changes in Irish society during Phase V, the years since 1984. Voices long silenced and marginalized, the communicative power of the body and the role of the phantasmatic and the moral implications of human choice, historically present in Famine discourse, gained new prominence as Irish self-confidence grew. The dominant "green" nationalism and conservative Catholicism declined. Irish readers, with growing numbers educated in university or technical college, with travel abroad increasing, with an expanding European perspective, with broadened media, computer and Internet savvy and with more economic opportunity than ever, were open to new applications of Famine discourse. Reconfigured, Famine tropes could accommodate feminism, globalization, environmentalism and cultural pluralism.

**SECTION III: VALUE IN THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES**

Analysis of these five phases has employed two frames of reference. On a theoretical level, communicational insights have helped explain the appearance of literary and dramatic works both macrotextually and microtextually. Hall's encoding and decoding model of communication helps explain the progressive change in textual forms, narrative strategies and themes relative to the Famine. As Irish readerships, and their concerns, moved from fear and need to political division to nation-building to domestic critique to new cultural appropriations, writers responded with poems, plays and novels with evolving concerns and messages even as the basic Famine frame remained. Hall's discussion of ethnicity as an anchor for identity in a mobile, pluralist, international society helps explain why the end of the 20th century saw a resurgence of interest in Ireland and its stereotypical image as a "traditional" society. A study of Famine discourse, however, shows the superficiality of such a view. Radway's discussion of diverse readerships, their needs and their objectives helps explain why the same devastating event was constructed so differently during each historical period. When nationalists seek to rally Irish anger against Britain for resistance or rebellion, callous landlords, heavy-handed military figures and noble, brave and virtuous peasants step to the foreground. For

unionist readers, fearful of Home Rule, writers represent beneficent, morally upright gentry. When conditions change in independent Ireland, socialist writers such as O'Flaherty question the Famine origins of the dominant middle class. Moreover, writers also may create texts that appeal to certain readers and thus create adherents to their points of view. The Habermas approach to change in the public sphere offers an effective way of seeing how literary and dramatic texts and the theatrical stage provide opportunities to enlarge public discussion and contribute to communal discourse. In Phase IV (1951-1983), for example, Murphy and MacIntyre, conscious of the limits of dramatic realism, appealed to new audiences through innovative techniques and exposed socio-cultural stagnation through the Famine.

Bourdieu and van Dijk have provided the primary theoretical insights. Bourdieu's theories of habitus and contestatory social planes connect the macrotextual and microtextual levels of analysis, illustrating both why authors respond to contemporary circumstances with particular elements of Famine discourse, and how their characters behave. Historic polarities in Irish society over class, religion, ethnicity and political aspiration, while neither universal nor absolute, repeatedly manifest themselves in Famine texts. Linguistic, cultural, social and religious features encode sedimented meanings within literary and dramatic works. For example, Chadwick, Dr. Hynes and Mary and Martin Kilmartin behave in ways related to their social habitus in O'Flaherty's *Famine*, but so does O'Flaherty himself. As a writer, his novel reflects his political and cultural nationalism, his peasant roots and even a long-standing belief in the physical force tradition. Lady Wilde, for all her revolutionary zeal, never betrays her Ascendancy class leadership. Kenny's social origins are reflected in the values he foregrounds in his Phase V (1984-2000) novel, *The Hungry Grass*. Van Dijk's attention to the rhetorical basis for dominant discourse and its maintenance, and resistance, through social cognition illustrates how Famine writers employ literary methods and dramatic techniques. Brew's *Castle Cloyne*, for example, is a nationalist Famine novel published in 1885, amid Land War and Home Rule agitation. The determination, devotion and dignity of Oonagh MacDermott, her peasant heroine, and the nobility, egalitarianism and industry of

Hyacinth Dillon, her aristocratic hero, become discursive elements. On one level, they help confirm nationalist discourse that the Irish are worthy and capable of self-rule; on another, they endeavor to overturn unionist views of a lazy, inept and unruly people needing control.

These theoretical perspectives have proved generally adaptable and, occasionally, inadequate. Bourdieu's habitus, for example, explains much of the behavior of Irish audiences and writers, as well as the reasons behind particular character portrayals. However, because Ireland has seen both its indigenous Gaelic culture repressed, but not extinguished, and its colonial society established and overthrown, social fields have been divergent and interstitial. Placement in one field affects status in another. As depicted in many Famine-related texts, to take one instance, the parish priest simultaneously functions in a global Roman Catholic world, an Irish peasant village and a colonial society. Van Dijk's treatment of social cognition focuses primarily on discourse creation and maintenance, but his approach also suggests its resistance, subversion and alteration -- a point Butler's notion of transgressive speech reiterates.

These theoretical perspectives have been integrated with five thematic ones, which illustrate specific elements of Famine discourse. Land, national identity and religion have been major issues throughout Irish experience, and Irish writing reflects these concerns. By framing Famine discourse historically, this study has shown how these tropes fluctuate.

The Famine was a failure of the *land* to produce. Peasants found themselves evicted from land under the control of absent, socially remote owners who saw it as an economic entity, not a sacred reality. During the ravages of the Famine, attention to land was dominated by its failure and evictions, while during Phase II (1853-1910), the focus was on estate reforms, tenant rights and peasant ownership. By Phase III (1911-1950), worries shifted to emigration and rural depopulation. During the most recent period, Irish alienation from the land through urbanization and economic policy has returned the trope to discursive consciousness, where it now represents nature, spirit and freedom. The British government and public during much of the 19th century generally regarded the

Gaelic Irish as culturally and intellectually backward, a people whose *national identity* had amusing charms but no claim to self-determination. Meanwhile, another important readership group, at least in Phases I-II, the unionist Ascendancy, whatever their enthusiasm for native culture, saw the U.K. as the key to their own political, economic and social hegemony. In Phases III-V (1911-2000), writers wrestled with national identity in terms of the North and the emergence of big farmers and merchants as a politically dominant middle class with ambiguous origins in the Famine. *Religion* was a pivotal marker of identity in Ireland and indicated far more than belief or affiliation. It suggested a way of life and manner of thinking. From narratives of divine election and divine penalty to evangelical souperism in Phase I (1845-1852) to expressionistic critiques of Catholic dominance in Phase IV (1951-1983) to pleas for moral responsibility in the Celtic Tiger in Phase V (1984-2000), religion has been constitutive of Famine discourse, fading in Phase III (1911-1950), when the critique turned primarily to class.

Given the social chaos occasioned by the Famine, *gender* plays an important role in Famine literature and drama. For decades afterwards, the 1840s catastrophe destabilized gender roles, altered the ways they were performed and triggered heavy emigration, delayed marriages and matriarchy, through female farm ownership. As Irish feminism grew, it provided new ways in which to interrogate the country's Famine legacy. Individual authors, both men and women, foreground female characters as responsible and capable, even as the Famine is inscribed as suffering on the female body, as Kelleher has suggested. (Kelleher, 1997, 69-70) Finally, *agency* offers an important analytical trope. Authors, in the discursive strategies of their works, and their character portrayals accommodate discussion of freedom, reflexivity, choice and moral responsibility. MacIntyre's searing critique of Paddy Maguire in *The Great Hunger* in Phase IV (1951-1983) shows the emergence of agency as a major contemporary thematic concern. However, as early as Lady Wilde's poetry more than a century earlier, agency was an issue. While these five tropes of land, national identity, religion, gender and agency do not exhaust considerations of Famine discourse, they offer a comprehensive, integrated analytical approach.

## SECTION IV: AN EVOLVING FIELD OF FAMINE DISCOURSE

By asserting and demonstrating the existence of a significant, evolving field, or flow, of "Famine discourse," this dissertation makes its most significant contribution to knowledge of the communicational process. The texts written since 1845 about the Famine are not simply *about* the Famine, they construct that tragic event in certain ways through distinct rhetorical and narrative features for particular purposes with specific readers and audiences in mind. Methodologically, this study has underlined the importance of contextual research. By seeing Famine discourse as situated historically and sedimented with meanings from its society and culture, and not simply as a monochromatic text of suffering, neglect and oppression, the rich variety of Famine discourse and the diversity of readerships and audiences become readily apparent. Walshe and Brew in the latter-19th century do not simply restate the early Carleton and Wilde, they contest, reconfigure and reposition their narratives and alter their discursive trajectories. In the same way, the contemporary work of McGuinness and Kenny treats the Famine in ways substantially different from the drama of Murphy and MacIntyre in Phase IV (1951-1983). Such historical analysis points to connections easily missed, such as the movement from Carleton's hostility toward profiteers such as Skinadre in 1847 to O'Flaherty's suspicion of the big farmer and merchant middle class in 1937 to Kenny's indictment of national greed in 1995. Famine novels, poems and plays simultaneously employ existing discourses, primarily the five analytical tropes, to manipulate Famine discourse to achieve various ends.

Literature and drama, like history, do not write themselves. Men and women implicated in social circumstances, intellectual movements, cultural forces, discursive flows, economic dynamics and, indeed, personal vision and insight, do. The Famine was a searing national event, but it had its uses. Famine discourse thus spans 150 years, and this study is believed to be the first comprehensive discussion of the important effects historical conditions, especially those of politics, social circumstances and culture, have on the writing, reading and performance of Famine literary and dramatic texts since its emergence. Likewise, this analysis engages the importance of a traumatic moment, and

charts its expression and repression, in both social activity and in textual discursivity, and so provides a model for similar studies in other historical situations.

Charting Famine texts reveals important relationships between discourse and genre, particularly the ways writers adapt and innovate to accommodate changing content and agendas. A communicational perspective on Famine texts thus exposes and interrogates their connections, impact and formative influences in a.) transmitting the memory of *an Gorta Mor* over space and time; and b.) establishing the textual dimension of that memory in Irish social, cultural and political behavior and thought. Not only has this examination of Famine discourse underlined the persistence of narrative strategies, themes and images, but it has also highlighted the emergence of new voices and paradigm shifts. Many of these discursive shifts have been occasioned by Ireland's increasing confidence in confronting its 19th century trauma and lingering guilt. Economic prosperity, international status and new frames of social understanding have begun to break down the country's rigid bi-polar divisions. As both Robinson's political discourse and Conlon-McKenna's novel demonstrate in different ways, Famine discourse has moved beyond framing the catastrophe as story of national sin or progress, with victims and villains, winners and losers, to mourning of the Famine dead in all their diversity, to probing hungers in the national psyche and to recognizing moral duty at home and abroad.

This dissertation also contributes to the evolving field of Irish studies. This is among the first attempts to understand the multiple discourses pervading works about the Famine in both an analytical and synthetic fashion. Morash's groundbreaking work on the literature of the Famine dealt with discourse during Phases I and II only, while Kelleher's studies provided important insights into the role of gender construction in Famine texts. The close connections between various tropes in Famine discourse points to the difficulty in unraveling Irish themes, which are mutually implicated. Likewise, this study has highlighted links, in terms of avoidance and confrontation, between the Famine and its legacy in key literary and dramatic texts. Joyce's "The Dead" in *Dubliners,* Kavanagh's *The Great Hunger,* Murphy's *Famine* and MacIntyre's *The Great Hunger* respectively

illustrate elusive, metaphorical, ritualistic and expressionistic encounters. Finally, for Irish studies this dissertation suggests the role of a communicational perspective in recognizing that literary and dramatic texts are not simply artistic creations but cultural products, in a dense web of social, cultural, political and economic relationships, engaged in meaning-making. One strand in this web is national memory, which discursive agendas, dominant and resistant, render simultaneously enduring and malleable.

This study also makes clear that ample space exists for further research. Relations between textual production, political discourse, friendship and business networks, political commitments and similar connections all affect literary and dramatic output and discursive analysis. Literary biographies often provide much of this information, but such works need to be seen diachronically to appreciate the evolution of a discursive flow. Information on 19th century publishing is limited, and further research into publishing choices, distribution, numbers of texts produced, readership buying habits and similar subjects can secure the documentary basis of discourse examination. One particularly interesting area of research lies in the relationships between the Famine, Irish school curricula and textual production. What differences exist among the folk memory of the Famine, the dominant nationalist discourse on the subject and actual school texts, which seem to have treated the subject briefly and generally and actual lesson plans? Likewise, the connection between texts and Irish radio, film and television production could offer communication researchers significant insights. In the same way, the Famine's presence in popular and formal religious exercises and textual production (sermons, prayers, devotional material, etc.) affords subject matter for a study of the development of public consciousness and the formation of potential readers. This study has concentrated on the Irish community and market and its own diverse readerships, but a detailed study of the relationship between Famine discourse at home and within the diaspora would interrogate both the transmission of folk and literary constructions of traumatic memory and its role in political discourse and ethnic consciousness, including relations with host societies. Famine texts might be probed for survivor guilt among emigrants, their descendants and the Irish at home.

Both by subject and methodology, this study also points to communicational research into the Famine's connection with Irish policies, public and private, on such issues as global hunger, immigration, human rights and refugee assistance. Current controversies over Ireland's reluctance to extend a *céad míle fáilte* to refugees and its lamentable record with regard to Jewish refugees in the 1930s suggest the importance of this dimension of Famine discourse. Similarly, the Famine's impact on the role of authority might be explored with profit, as the discursive shifts make clear. The failure of the British government and the collapse of the gentry shifted peasant attention to the clergy and an emerging middle class. This, in turn, generated not only hostility toward and from the physical force tradition, but a strong and widespread desire for security and consolation. The relationship between such a desire and Irish conservatism, and even fascism, offers interesting possibilities. This topic also suggests that research into the Famine's shadowy, repressed presence in literary and dramatic texts, in such areas as Irish Gothic novels during Phases II-III, might be worthwhile. Finally, this study offers an approach that might help explore how other historical traumas have been transmitted through literary and dramatic works. Slavery, national blood sacrifice and ethnic and religious prejudice are among topics which lend themselves to such research. The relationship between the discourse of the Shoah of the 1940s and the Famine of the 1840s, branded a "genocide" in its immediate aftermath, would be a particularly fascinating study. (Mitchel, n.d. [1868], 245) (Keogh, 1998, 7) Variously an elephant, a snake and a chameleon, discourse provides the means for ideas and ideologies to move through history.

The Famine has come to be recognized in Phase V as a pivotal, if not the defining, moment in Irish experience. Its immediate impact in mortality and social chaos was huge, its legacy in emigration, social dislocation and cultural repression was enduring. This dissertation has offered a communicational approach to understanding the Famine's impact on discourse in textual production. Why are some historical periods rich in novels, plays and poems relating to the Famine? Why are other periods virtually barren? What ideas and agendas circulate within these texts? How do writers manipulate the rhetorical

features of Famine texts to speak to a past event and a contemporary audience? What is the impact on the genre and on the discourse? The comprehensive historical approach employed here has examined the emergence, evolution and uses of textual discourse about the Famine. Like Québec's Grosse Île and Montréal's Black Rock, Famine discourse recalls a time of suffering and loss. Precisely because Famine literature and drama carry an evolving discourse, however, they display a persistent communicational dynamic. Hunger, it seems, has its uses.

**APPENDIX I**

# *Famine: Fatal Mix of Blight, Policy*

Irish writers and dramatists, as well as politicians and revolutionaries, have employed the Irish Famine for the past 150 years in discourse to advance socio-cultural and political goals. In so doing, they have drawn on pre-existing discourses of land, national identity, religion, gender and agency to create "Famine discourse," which in turn reshapes the discourses from which it has been derived. At the root of this manipulation of language and image, however, is the Famine, or *an Gorta Mor*, the Great Hunger, in the Irish language. The writing of history is itself subject to discursive tendencies, as the section on historiography shows. Increasingly, and despite competing ideologies, historians have agreed on the central facts of the Ireland's worst trauma in modern history -- and, proportionate to population, one of the West's most appalling natural and social upheavals. This history is meant as a provisional orientation for readers unfamiliar with the historical event and the context of the Famine which lie at the center of the discursive strategies in textual production throughout each of the five historical periods examined in this dissertation.

## SECTION I: AN OVERVIEW OF THE FAMINE AND ITS COST

### 1. Disaster begins as a mysterious blight on potato crop

By September of 1845, the fungus *Phytophthora infestans* had made its way to Ireland and was rotting potato fields quickly. Thought to have originated in South America, the fungus was a mystery to farmers and agricultural scientists of the time, and the potato blight was blamed on unseasonably wet, humid weather. The fungus, which hit Belgium as early as June of 1845, may have made its way to Europe in avian excrement imported as fertilizer. (Crawford, 1998, 228) Roughly a third of the Irish potato crop in 1845 was destroyed, and severe distress was felt in only some parts of the country. The following year, the fungus destroyed nearly three-quarters of the potato crop, and

conditions deteriorated markedly. So desperate were peasants for food that they consumed many seed potatoes ordinarily held for planting the 1847 crop. Cormac Ó Gráda writes:

> From late 1846 on, the classic famine symptoms of wandering beggars, roadside deaths, rising crime rates, poorly attended burials, widespread panic about contagion, and mass evictions were commonplace throughout most of the country. Evictions, by forcing more migration, exacerbated the problems. ... Survival strategies ranged from deception to emigration, from petty thieving to seeking public relief, from rioting to begging. Though larceny and agrarian unrest increased ..., [crime was] limited. (Ó Gráda, 1999, 39)

Ironically, for those who survived to harvest the 1847 crop, yields were about average -- but so few potatoes had been planted, that "Black '47" holds a special place in folk memory as the worst year of the Famine. Potato yields in 1848, were only two-thirds of the pre-Famine average. (Crawford, 1998, 228) The potato fed most Irish, particularly those on the lowest rungs of the economic and social ladder, cottiers and small tenant farmers. Before the Famine, the potato had been "capital, wages, subsistence and the means by which tenants diverted other resources to pay the rent. Potatoes had also been a social currency that resolved issues of land tenure and marriage settlements. Altogether, the tuber had granted a sense of security, however, fragile, that life would continue." (Zuckerman, 1998, 190) Faced with repeated failures, peasants gave up planting potatoes, so that from a pre-Famine tillage of 2 million acres, the 1847 sowing amounted to only a quarter million acres. (Crawford, 1998, 228) They had little else to plant -- and hope in government assistance would prove ill-founded.

**2. *Laissez-faire* economics and the response of the British government**

The initial British government response to distress in Ireland, an "integral" part of the U.K. since 1801, was slow but substantial. Ireland suffered from periodic, localized famines, and there had been major ones in 1740-1741 and 1821-1822. But this new blight occasioned genuine worry. The Conservative administration of Sir Robert Peel purchased Indian meal from the U.S. and made it available for sale at government depots. Likewise, the Tories began public works under local administrators and boards of works. Prices for meal were not to undercut local purveyors, and costs skyrocketed in the worsening

shortages. Moreover, Indian meal was unknown in Ireland, few peasants received cooking instructions, and, consequently, found the grain inedible. Public works were not to harm the local economy, and projects were often seen as foolish and aimless. Lord John Russell's Liberals came to power in June of 1846, and extended the public works scheme. However, as the Famine worsened, many peasants were too weak or ill to avail of such relief. Others, who had managed to husband resources, were judged to be too well off for public aid, and soon found themselves destitute. The Whigs maintained a doctrinaire *laissez-faire* view of political economy and resolutely refused to intervene in the Irish economy, which they judged excessively dependent on Britain already. At the center of this relief program was the much maligned Charles Edward Trevelyan, assistant secretary of the Treasury -- the permanent bureaucrat in charge. "Owing to his remarkable abilities and the structure of British administration, which results in a permanent, capable official exercising a high degree of power," he managed "to influence policy to a remarkable extent." (Woodham-Smith, 1991, 58) Despite a reputation for zeal and ethics, Trevelyan was an ideologue, who, once convinced of his policy's rectitude, was impervious to dissenting opinion and contrary evidence. Moreover, he regarded the Irish as improvident and imprudent. (Woodham-Smith, 1962, 59-61) While some government supplies were maintained, food was to be procured through private means, or charitable organizations. Austin Bourke provides a generous assessment of Trevelyan's role, acknowledging his initial relief efforts under Peel but his subsequent turn to the *laissez-faire* principles of the Russell administration. On 29 April 1846, Trevelyan wrote, "Our measures must proceed with as little disturbance as possible of the ordinary course of private trade, which must ever be the chief recourse for the subsistence of the people, but *coûte que coûte*, the people must not, under any circumstances, be allowed to starve." (Bourke, 1993, 173) Bourke argues that "certainly there is no sign here of heartless complacency about the 'iron laws of commerce.'" (Bourke, 1993, 173) Unfortunately, government policy turned away from prevention of starvation to prevention of economic disturbance. In regard to feeding the hungry, however, Quaker, Roman Catholic and Protestant representatives made outstanding contributions. But the scale of the catastrophe doomed the overall

effectiveness of such private relief. Prices continued to soar. Likewise, despite calls from Irish leaders that the ports be closed to food exports and the production of alcohol, which required grain, much food -- cattle, sheep, pigs, poultry and dairy produce -- continued to leave Ireland. By February of 1847, the Russell government planned a massive soup kitchen program. Three million persons were receiving meals daily at its peak that year. By September, London insisted that the kitchens be shut down in favor of a workhouse program underwritten by poor rates paid by Irish landlords, as called for by the Irish Poor Law of 1838. Workhouses, Dickensian in design, diet and discipline, forced families to split into sections for men, women and children. (Crossman, 1998, 600) During the Famine years, however, they were overwhelmed, and conditions were deadly as disease spread rapidly. By July 1849, more than 1 million jammed the poorhouses. (Ó Gráda, 1999, 42)

**3. Telling a horrific story through personal accounts**

Statistics can occlude the Famine's human toll. Journalists, as well as writers and essayists, provide graphic details. Elihu Burrit's account of a visit to Castlehaven, County Cork, on 22 February 1847, in *Journal of a Visit to Skibbereen and its Neighbourhood* (1847), hides nothing. He describes a starving child, alone in a derelict cabin, and staring vacantly at the door: "Never have I seen such bright, blue, clear eyes looking so steadfastly at nothing." (Carrey, 320-321) One of the most distressing features of the Famine was the combination of starvation with disease -- typhus, relapsing fever, cholera, scurvy, "Famine dropsy," or hunger edema, and "bloody flux," a virulent form of bacillary dysentery. (Green, 1994, 271) So contagious was "Famine fever" (typhus and/or relapsing fever) that the sick often were quarantined and left to fend for themselves. James Mahony, an artist for the *Illustrated London News*, provides this 13 Feb. 1847 extract of a report by Dr. D. Donovan from his visit to Skibbereen and its environs. Six fevered members of the Barrett family are huddled in a charnel house and surrounded by bones and rotting flesh: "The mother of the family begged in the most earnest manner that I would have them removed, or else that they would rot together; and they all implored that we would give them drink ... that what they wanted was *water*." (Killen, 1995, 113)

The doctor arranged to have the family removed to a local fever hospital, where they appeared to improve.

A final report from County Sligo in northwestern Ireland in *The Vindicator* of Belfast on 20 Jan. 1847 told of a medical examination of a body:

> This wretched creature was observed by a man lying in a muddy ditch; he was raised up, and the man went to two or three houses in the neighbourhood, and asked the people to admit deceased, but they refused, alleging that he had typhus fever. He then carried deceased to a haggard and placed him upon some straw, where he was found dead on the following morning, and dreadfully mutilated. We copy the evidence of Thomas Burrows, Esq., M.D. -- 'Examined the body of Thomas M'Manus; both the legs, as far as the buttocks, appeared to have been eaten off by a pig; is of opinion his death was caused by hunger and cold.' There was not a particle of food found in deceased's stomach or intestines. Those who saw the body were of opinion, from the agonized expression of M'Manus's countenance, that he was *alive* when the pig attacked him. (Killen, 1995, 99)

Such material pervades many Famine reports, and would enter the discursive tradition.

**4. An underwhelming British response in the 'United' Kingdom**

Conceding that massive public assistance was not yet enshrined in public policy, London's response to the Famine remains underwhelming -- less than 10 percent of what was expended on the Crimean War in the next decade. Ó Gráda writes that

> ... public spending on relief went nowhere near the cost of plugging the gap left by the failure of the potato. [There was] ... a shortfall worth about £50 million ($240 million) in money. ... But in the circumstances, the political arithmetic never even came close to adding up: exchequer spending on famine relief between 1846 and 1852 totaled less than £10 million ($48 million). (Ó Gráda, 1999, 83)

Christine Kinealy writes that adequate food supplies existed in Ireland to compensate for loss of the potato, and had Whitehall so desired, diversions could have prevented mass starvation. Instead the government's policy, pursued "systematically and deliberately," restricted access to relief and even food in favor of "economic, social and agrarian reform." (Kinealy, 1995, 359) The transfer of relief after 1847 to Irish Poor Law commissioners, thus relying on local landlords for assistance assured disaster, and given its pursuit of a specific agenda, deviated from *laissez-faire* economics. (Kinealy, 1995, 358)

Blaming the Famine on *Phytophthora infestans*, or the potato, is the equivalent of blaming American slavery on cotton; it mistakes the proximate cause for a matrix of causal conditions. At the root of the Irish crisis was a land tenure system intimately bound up with Britain's 700-year-old colonial exploitation. At the time of the Famine, the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy owned most arable land. Many members of the gentry, however, were absentee landowners, who found Britain more congenial. Land was leased to minor landowners, who in turn sublet tracts to Gaelic Irish Catholics, who, in the face of a rapidly rising population, carved up their own small holdings to accommodate their grown children. The potato proved to be the easiest, most nutritious, most productive crop under the circumstances. Roy Foster has observed:

> How far 'the landlord system' exacerbated the situation is arguable: the fundamental fact of a backward agrarian system, linked to a largely unindustrialized economy, and supplying the market created by British industrialization, was strained to breaking point by an uncontrollably expanding population (of over eight million by the early 1840s). Though there is disagreement about the responsibility of the potato economy for bringing the situation about, it certainly enabled the fragile equilibrium to be sustained. Tiny, subdivided holdings could easily feed a family on potatoes (and feed them well, when combined with buttermilk and occasional bacon); early and fecund marriages were the rural norm, if we are to believe the evidence constantly reiterated by observers. Economic historians have demurred, postulating an altering picture by the 1830s -- later marriages, mounting emigration, less automatic *resort* to subdivision, and a levelling off of population growth. (Foster, 1992, 166)

One measure of distress, and impending disaster, can be seen in the records of Strokestown Park House, now the site of the National Famine Museum. Located in County Roscommon, the estate was comprised of more than 11,000 acres and had been the seat of the Mahon family for 300 years. By the 1840s, nearly 12,000 people lived on the estate, which carried debts in excess of £30,000. Emigration schemes, and reports that two ships with 1,000 tenants had failed to reach port (they were blown off course and delayed), led to the 2 Nov. 1847 murder of Major Denis Mahon, the landlord, in one of the most celebrated crimes of the Famine era. (Hood, 1995, 111; Campbell, 1994, 48)) Strokestown was only one of many estates teetering on the brink.

**5. A question of national sin and competing offenses**

In attempting to come to grips with the catastrophe surrounding them, some Protestant religious leaders embraced a millenarian approach. The Famine certainly had apocalyptic features; and the biblical Book of Revelation depicts famine as one of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. Ever since the fall of the French monarchy and the Napoleonic upheavals, the orderly march of time in Europe had been questioned. Morash writes that publication in 1701 of *Discourses Upon Several Subjects* by the Rev. Robert Fleming, a Scot, had been largely vindicated by the fall of the French *ancien régime.* (Morash, 1995, 86) The same book predicted the fall of the Papacy in 1848, and Fleming's text was reprinted in London, Edinburgh, Liverpool and Dublin as *The Extraordinary Exposition of the Prophecies in the Apocalypse Relative to the Downfall of the French Monarchy and the Papacy in 1848.* (Morash, 1995, 87) Coinciding with Fleming's work was a surge in interest in prophecy and the coming thousand-year reign of Christ, the Millennium, within the Church of Ireland in the 1820-1840 period. The coming millennium, however, was to be preceded by a time of tribulation and wrath, and the Famine seemed an obvious indication of divine displeasure. Given the European revolutions of 1848 and political distress for Pope Pius IX, a prophetic interpretation of the Famine seemed plausible. The Rev. Hugh McNeile's sermon, *The Famine a Rod of God* (1847), generated the concept of "national sin," to be punished here and now, not hereafter, where "... contradictory narratives of progress and apocalypse meet and achieve an unstable resolution." (Morash, 1995, 91) What was the sin, and who the sinner? Catholic Emancipation? Tenant laziness? Absentee landlordism? Agrarian violence? Peasant exploitation? British colonialism? Irish quiescence? Phase I texts would debate the answers.

Meanwhile, some landlords were exemplary in efforts to relieve suffering or assist emigration. Folk memories depict landlords as ogres, but literary discourse has a somewhat more balanced view. (McHugh, 1994, 428-429) Still, Kirby Miller argues that the gradual incorporation of Irish agriculture in an industrialized, money economy had dangerous consequences:

> What most altered landlord-tenant relations after 1750 was that many proprietors abandoned paternalism for the lure of greater profits. ... By the early nineteenth century it was common for landlords to raise rents by breaking leases through legal chicanery and by 'canting' farms at auction to the highest bidders. ... [Even advocates of progressive, market-oriented agriculture] had to admit that many tenants still wanted a 'master' or 'protector' rather than a 'progressive' landlord whose 'improvements' included higher rents, shorter leases, consolidation of small holdings, and prohibitions against subletting. Eventually, and especially after 1814, most farmers realized that the price they paid for deeper involvement in the marketplace was the loss of the security they had formerly known under their old 'reckless' landlords. (Miller, 1988, 45)

Estimating national income in 1840 at £80 million, Ó Gráda claims that the bottom 40 percent of the population received only 10 to 15 percent of the national income, while Ireland's 10,000 landlords took in £12 million in annual rents. (Ó Gráda, 1989, 113) In any case, when the blight arrived scales were tipped. Foster notes that "... when the potato crops of 1845 were ravaged by a new and fatal fungus disease, the situation had reached a point where the removal of that one means of sustenance meant a sentence of death for those trapped in the subsistence economy of the west and south-west, and great suffering elsewhere." (Foster, 1992, 166)

**6. Calculating the statistical toll: Death and emigration**

The Famine as death sentence has been the subject of considerable research, and the figures seem to diminish or increase according to the historiographical frame. But no one disputes its vast toll. Canon John O'Rourke's openly nationalist history from 1874 uses arithmetic like a judicial hammer to make the case against Britain. O'Rourke writes:

> The census of 1841 shows the population of Ireland to have been in that year 8,175,124. Taking the usual ratio of births over deaths, it should have increased to 1851 to 9,018,799, instead of which it fell to 6,552,385; thus, being nearly 2,500,000 less than it should have been. These 2,500,000 disappeared in the Famine. They disappeared by death and emigration. The emigration during the ten years from 1842 to 1851, both inclusive, was 1,436,862. Subtracting this from the amount of decrease in the population, namely, 2,476,414, the remainder will be 1,039,552; which number of persons must have died of starvation and its concomitant epidemics; but even this number, great as it is, must be supplemented by the deaths which occurred among Famine emigrants, in excess of the percentage of deaths among ordinary emigrants. (O'Rourke, 1989, 252)

Kinealy is circumspect about the death toll, saying that an exact tally is not known, but estimating mortality between 500,000 and 1.5 million, and the "correct number probably lies in between," with 1 million as the "more generally accepted" figure. (Kinealy, 1995, 168) Jackson likewise puts the figure at 1 million. (Jackson, 1999, 81) Ó Gráda's figures, informed by sophisticated econometric models a century and a half later, are, essentially, the same. He writes: "By mid-1851, about one million had died who would not have died otherwise, not counting averted births as deaths. Another million or so had emigrated." (Ó Gráda, 1999, 41) Of these deaths, the vast majority were mostly poor, mostly Catholic, mostly Gaelic Irish and largely from the west and south. As Famine-related diseases raged, however, others died as well, and those working with the lowest orders -- landlords, agents, doctors, priests, ministers, nuns and relief workers -- were particularly vulnerable. (Ó Gráda, 1999, 94) Overwhelmed by death, traditional Irish customs, such as a wake and its attendant hospitality, as well as religious services, were swept up in mass graves, trap-bottom coffins, roadside burials and eroding social decorum.

Death was not the Famine's only legacy; so was massive emigration. While the practice of seeking opportunity in Britain or America began before the Famine, it lacked the character of a national response. Emigration is another site of historiographical dispute, though it is generally conceded that the Famine accelerated the process and established it as an Irish solution to poverty. Ó Gráda estimates that emigration to North America did not peak until 1851, when it reached almost 250,000, having risen from about 100,000 in 1846 to 200,000 in 1847; it would exceed one percent of the population annually until 1858. (Ó Gráda, 1999, 44) During the Famine years, most Irish emigrants went to Canada, the U.S. having restricted its ports due the threat of disease and a tide of pauperism. (Keneally, 1998, 136-140) The British government, meanwhile, wanted to keep an increasingly hostile Irish diaspora under control, which might better occur in British North America than in the U.S. In addition, if the Irish could be removed from their impractical holdings in Ireland, a new, rationalized agriculture might develop there and Canada's population would increase. The century-long story of emigration, which dominates Irish literary discourse to an extent far greater than Famine discourse, places

particular emphasis on the dangerous "coffin ships," which carried the early emigrants. Their tragedy lies in escaping starvation in Ireland only to be stalked by its diseases; thousands died on Grosse Île, and in Québec, Montréal and Kingston. O'Rourke claims an estimated 17 percent of [Famine] emigrants died within a year of departure. (O'Rourke, 1989, 254) For many Irish, emigration, despite its benefits, was a profound loss of family and motherland, a national hemorrhage. Jackson observes: :

> Originating in an ecological disaster, the Famine brought starvation and disease which claimed 1 million lives and stimulated a mass emigration which, in the ten years after 1845, totalled one and a half millions. The death toll, taken as a proportion of the Irish population, gives the Great Famine the grim distinction of being perhaps the most costly [modern] natural disaster ... . (Jackson, 1999, 69)

Still another legacy of the Famine was its impact on the collective memory. Not only in literary and dramatic discourse but in political rhetoric, religious practice, educational policy, folk music, and in the repressed consciousness of generations of Irish at home and abroad, the Famine lurked as an inchoate but potentially volatile anger for what a foreign power had done, or let happen, and shame over the insufficiency of domestic resistance. F.S. Lyons writes:

> [The Famine's] most profound impact on Irish history lay in its ultimate psychological legacy. Expressed in its simplest terms, this legacy was that the long-standing and deep-rooted hatred of the English connection was given not only a new intensity, but also a new dimension. It was not just that within the shores of Ireland the old bitterness of a depressed peasantry against an alien and often ruthless landlord class was reinforced by resentment towards a government which (though it had made more effort than a starving people was likely to give it credit for) had shown itself manifestly inadequate, at the levels both of administration and of policy, to contain the crisis unrolling before the eyes of its horrified and harassed officials. It was rather that this hatred, this bitterness, this resentment were carried overseas, and especially to America, by nearly four million Irish men, women and children, who left their homeland decade by decade and year by year in the half-century after the Famine. (Lyons, 1973, 16)

As this psychological impact suggests, telling the "facts" of the Famine, however, never occurs outside a historiographical frame, and that frame has been highly contentious.

## SECTION II: FRAMING DILEMMAS, DIFFICULT DETAILS

### 1. Ferment in Irish historiography over the Famine

For the past decade, Irish historiography has been in ferment, and the Famine has been at the center of controversy. Like many events in Irish history, the Famine is emotionally charged; it "weighs heavily on the contemporary conscience." (Jackson, 1999, 69) As Jackson observes:

> The Famine victims have become pawns in political and academic debates which, at root, have little to do with the Ireland of the mid-1840s. In truth, the Great Famine remains a source of pain and guilt and confusion and anger for the contemporary Irish, just as other natural or human-made disasters have created similar responses elsewhere in Europe. The Famine dead pose questions which Irish liberalism and conservative nationalism are as yet unable to answer. The Famine dead bequeath a guilt which both the British and the Irish have difficulty in facing. (Jackson, 1999, 70)

The Famine is the subject of communal memory, which both constructs and is constructed by discourses circulating in society. The question of responsibility has been a central issue.

Since 1845, nationalist discourse has blamed a heartless and inept British government, feckless landlords and greedy agents. Political rhetoric from John Mitchel, Isaac Butt and others fueled hostility and promoted separation. As Kinealy writes, "To a large extent, the popular understanding of the Famine in Ireland still follows a traditional, nationalist paradigm. Within this model, 'blame' is generally attributed to key grouping, either within the British government or within the landlord class." (Kinealy, 1995-a, 29) She adds that "in many Irish schools, a heroic but simplistic view of Irish history emerged, a morality story replete with heroes and villains." (Kinealy, 1995-a, 29) Unionist discourse, conversely, saw the hand of God in natural disaster. Principles of modern, rational agricultural development required the clearing out of a backward population. Their removal would lead to a prosperous and industrious society ready to contribute to the great imperial adventure. Unionist discourse, however, faded as Ireland moved toward independence, and the nationalist view prevailed in the 26 counties. In the northern six counties, Irish history as a whole was elided into a greater British narrative.

By the 1930s, however, a revisionist approach developed in British and Irish historiography. Centered in Cambridge and London's Institute of Historical Research, the revisionist school called for "value-free" history by demythologizing historical events through a "scientific" method of research and writing. In Ireland, this meant an attack on the received wisdom of "faith and motherland" of nationalist myth, promoted and exploited by the dominant political party, Fianna Fáil, as well as by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and its political wing, Sinn Féin. When historians launched *Irish Historical Studies* in 1938, the journal's editors wrote of the need to "replace 'interpretive distortions' with 'value-free history'." (Kinealy, 1995-a, 29) Perhaps the most obvious example of this revisionist approach was the centenary of *an Gorta Mor*. According to Mary Daly:

> The key revisionist contribution, *The Great Famine,* edited by R.D. Edwards and T.D. Williams [published in 1951], has been described by Ó Gráda as a work 'which reads more like an *administrative* history of the period.' Originally intended to mark the centenary of the Great Famine, and to have been edited by the founding fathers of *Irish Historical Studies,* Edwards, [T.W.] Moody and [David] Quinn (Quinn and Moody subsequently dropped out), the book epitomised that journal's commitment to writing 'value-free' history while also reflecting the primarily political focus of that school. (Daly, 1997, 75)

Government and Ascendancy responsibility, characteristic in any nationalist telling of the Famine, is eclipsed by an emphasis on relief difficulties, complexities of land administration and Irish and British behavioral ambiguities. Foster, while acknowledging that the term "revisionism" has been debased, defends the effort to eliminate a *post hoc, propter hoc* history, saying, "The best history arouses argument without end; and Ireland has ... an almost embarrassing quantity of the very best historians." (Foster, 1986, 2, 4)

Ironically, a scholar trained in revisionism fired the first salvo in an effort to restore value-laden historical consciousness. D. George Boyce and Alan O'Day write:

> The 'anti-revisionist' campaign has been orchestrated and given a (much-needed) intellectual underpinning in Brendan Bradshaw's article 'Nationalism and Historical Scholarship in Modern Ireland' first published in *Irish Historical Studies* (1989). ... Bradshaw urges the historian to empathise with the past, and thus to reconstruct ...history, but to reconstruct it with empathy, which he sometimes equates with sympathy, and the abandonment of a critical dimension. (Boyce and O'Day, 1997, 10)

Bradshaw is not hostile to critical distance, but he maintains that historical reality ought not be ignored. He challenges a historiographical approach that is cold, clinical, clubbish and cynical, so much so it amounts to a "conventional consensus." (Bradshaw, 1993, 55) The human element is missing in favor of political documentation and emphasized minutiae, while conceptual concerns are ignored. (Bradshaw, 1993, 54) In his *Irish Historical Studies* article, Bradshaw writes:

> In short, confronted by the catastrophic dimension of Irish history, the discomfiture of the modern school of value-free historians is apparent. So is the source of their discomfiture: a conception of professionalism which denies the historian recourse to value-judgements and, therefore, access to the kind of moral and emotional register necessary to respond to ... tragedy. (Bradshaw, 1989, 341)

Such an approach marginalizes key moments in Irish experience, he argues, and distorts the historical record, rings hollow with the public, which has a different communal memory, and occasions distrust of the historical project. Bradshaw, who notes that one Dublin pub denizen accused revisionists of attributing Famine mortality to a "case of mass-anorexia," claims revisionism's "... result was the de-bunking not only of the history ... written up to then, in its distortions, but the debunking of the reality behind it. (Bradshaw, 1993, 53-54) L. Perry Curtis writes that anti-revisionists saw revisionist work as dull, turgid and out-of-step with popular needs. Moreover, "they lacked the imagination and sensitivity needed to appreciate the catastrophic nature of English colonization. In short, the revisionists had '*normalised*' the violence of colonial subjugation by treating the 'abnormality' as though it were a normal process." (Curtis, 1994, 10) Politics complicated historiography. As the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland in the 1960s turned into sectarian violence in the 1970s and 1980s, the danger of mythological shibboleths helped fuel the terrorism of both the "new" IRA and its splinter groups and their Protestant paramilitary counterparts. Kinealy observes that "in the battle for Irish hearts and minds, and challenging nationalist mythology became an important ideological preoccupation for a new generation of historians." (Kinealy, 1995-a, 30) But this approach had its own dangers and was fueled by its own ideological concerns; "objectivity" was elusive.

As yet another generation of historians arose, and began paying close attention to economic data, local history and folk traditions, it became clear that certain elements of nationalist discourse could not be whitewashed. Foster argues that "we are all revisionists now" because "revisionism itself was a recurrent and cyclical thing, that the newest commentators ... were in fact now revising the revisionists." (Foster, 1993, 10) Indeed, he points out that "Ó Gráda, [Joel] Mokyr and others have given us a view of famine administration which is closer to Cecil Woodham-Smith than to ... *The Great Famine.*" (Foster, 1993, 10) Kinealy observes:

> The revisionist approach contained a number of inherent contradictions and limitations. From its origins, although revisionist history claimed to be value-free and objective, it had its own agenda, or set of values, which varied over time and in degrees of intensity. A key objective of Irish revisionism was to exorcise the ghost of nationalism from historical discourse and to replace it with historical narratives that persistently played down the separateness and the trauma, and derided the heroes and villains ... . (Kinealy, 1995, 30)

Revisionist excess elsewhere, not least in regard to the Holocaust, encouraged Irish critics to return to the Famine. Kinealy adds:

> For many decades, the tragedy and significance of the Famine have been minimised, sanitised and marginalised by leading revisionist historians (and their supporters in the media). A declared purpose of Irish revisionism has been to 'demythologise' all Irish history, but in relation to the Famine, its target has been almost exclusively Irish nationalist history, and occasionally a mere caricature of it. (Kinealy, 1995, 34)

The turn away from a comprehensive approach to the Famine has been fueled, in part, by fears of igniting the North and by a desire to dislodge the prevailing nationalist myths in the South, where, until the rapid economic changes of the 1990s, they helped maintain the status quo. Reluctance to "return to the Famine" amounted to a self-imposed policing of Irish history, and, as Kinealy notes, it raises questions about Famine interpretations and reinterpretations. (Kinealy, 1995, 29)

**2. North American historians: a brake on Irish revisionism**

The interest of North American historians in the Famine, however, has helped restrain revisionism -- and confirmed 19th century British fears that Irish America would

be hostile. James Donnelly acknowledges the connection between ethnic identity and professional historical interests: "Perhaps the Great Famine is *the* primary example. It has been said by others that Irish-American historians of the Famine have brought to that topic a distinctive view, particularly with respect to the question of British responsibility, which has always been among Irish-Americans an especially emotive issue." (Donnelly, 1999, 13) One of the most puzzling features in *The Great Hunger* was a concluding chapter by Roger McHugh, who examined the folk memory of the Famine in the oral tradition of poems, ballads and stories. That material, in fact, ran directly counter to revisionist tendencies limiting blame and dismissing nationalist discourse, yet nowhere else in the text did anyone grapple with the obvious contradiction. (Donnelly, 1993, 29) Revisionist historians, Donnelly argues, must not only explode myths but also seek to explain how well or poorly the nationalist-populist version of the Famine "corresponded to reality or illuminated it, and they cannot allow the political concerns of our own day to deflect them from this task." (Donnelly, 1993, 33) Likewise, they must address the "construction of the memory of the Famine." (Donnelly, 1999, 14)

After a decade of debate, Irish historians may be reaching a more balanced and nuanced approach. Foster's claim to a universal revisionism is meant not only to "question the received truths and pieties of the old '800-years-of-uninterrupted-struggle' view of Irish history" but also to probe the new orthodoxies as well. (Foster, 1993, 10) He argues for attention to "ambiguities, paradoxes and complications in social and historical developments," although one might caution that marginal developments in society, however rightful their inclusion, do not constitute central and dominant activities. (Foster, 1993, 10) The sesquicentennial celebrations demonstrated the hunger for Famine research, including its links to Irish and diaspora identity. Daly writes:

> Many key facts are clear: the Irish Famine was real, not artificial, food was extremely scarce; it could not have been solved by closing the ports; charges of genocide cannot be sustained. However it is undoubtedly the case that the British response was inadequate and was unduly influenced both by domestic political concerns such as repeal of the corn laws and by Providentialism. ... The Irish political response was ... dictated by ... Repeal ... and the power struggle between [Daniel] O'Connell and Young Ireland. (Daly, 1997, 85)

Irish historians must maneuver between the Scylla of political rhetoric and the Charybdis of historical interpretation. Paul Bew writes, "In Ireland there is a rhetorical connection between political debate and history which is more marked than in most other countries. Within the nationalist project there is remarkably little in the way of a positive vision." (Bew, 1994, 12) But he believes a "scientific history book does not settle a question for all time but opens up debates and initiates new discussions." (Bew, 1994, 12) The Boyce-O'Day survey of Irish historiography demonstrates that new interpretive traditions are developing and new topics and approaches are expanding and deepening insights:

> ... that historical interpretation has been more subtle and complex but also increasingly fragmented. Some of the certainty of an Irish history organised around the polarity of nationalism and opposition to it is removed, not infrequently to the discomfiture of those who prefer the older model. Contrary to common belief that political topics have been at the forefront of 'revisionism', it has had as large or greater impact on social and economic questions. Analysis of home rule, a defining objective for nationalists ..., demonstrates the relative stagnation in writings on the Irish section of the story. Similarly, the historiography of the diaspora reveals the parallel development of non-Irish scholarship working outside a political and polemical environment. (Boyce and O'Day, 1997, 13)

Meanwhile, Curtis suggests, "Besides posing some profound questions about history and mythology, both disputes [German and Irish debates on revisionism] highlight the ambiguous nature of empathy and force historians to consider more carefully which individuals, groups, classes deserve the benefits of its deployment." (Curtis, 1994, 17) While the violence of the English occupation must be acknowledged, he cautions against any return to the metanarratives of the Irish past, nationalist or unionist, because they risk "a mythopoetic, impressionistic, folkloristic and amateurish history." (Curtis, 1994, 26) One response to metanarratives is proliferation of local Famine studies, including Kinealy's own *The Hidden Famine: Hunger, Poverty and Sectarianism in Belfast* (2000), written with Gerard MacAtasney. Local history, as well as feminist, quotitidian and other histories, can be "as ideological and value-laden as any other, but it has stronger links also to local culture." (Dunne, 1992, 11)

The value of this extended discussion of Famine history and historiography is twofold. First, it outlines the central events and developments which writers exploit and manipulate in their texts. The result will be both more and less than pure history. The text will tell a story of the Famine, if not *the* story, and it will bear a discourse with origins in and consequences for the society and culture to which it is addressed. Second, this discussion exposes the changing conceptual, or historiographical, frames through which the Famine has been understood by the professional elite. Literary and dramatic texts emerging during any of the five phases of production consequently may support or resist these prevailing historiographical views.

**APPENDIX II**

# *Widening Discourse in Famine Texts*

Material in this section is meant to supplement the discussion of particular texts and writers in each of the five historical phases of Famine literature and drama. While this appendix is hardly exhaustive, it provides brief illustrations of the ways various writers have recruited the Famine for their discursive strategies according to the analytical tropes of land, national identity, religion, gender and agency. In addition, it applies communicational insights drawn from Pierre Bourdieu, Teun van Dijk and others.

## SECTION I: SEEKING RELIEF, RALLYING RESISTANCE IN PHASE I

### 1. Inscribing death into the poetic landscape: Mangan and others

During Phase I, Lady Wilde was only one of many nationalist poets seeking to construct the Famine in ways that would foreground British misrule and stimulate Irish reaction, resistance and rebellion. James Clarence Mangan (1803-1849), one of the principal nationalist poets in the early 19th century, died a victim of hunger and cholera as the Famine was beginning to loosen its grip on the country. Mangan uses funeral processions, ubiquitous during the Famine era, to illustrate the pervasive blanket of death covering the island in "The Funerals" (1849). Ireland's ancient provinces become a frightening roster of the Famine's progress. "Towards the West at first they marched, / Then towards the South / -- Those endless FUNERALS, till the sky o'erhead, / As one vast pall, seemed over-arched / With blackness, and methought the mouth / Of Hades had cast up its Dead! (31-36) (Morash, 1989, 133) As do many of the novels, the poem depicts an aspect of Irish funerary customs and makes it grotesque by incessant repetition and erosion of dignity. One of the most shocking features of the Famine for the Irish was the way it consumed their ability to pay honor to the dead. Wakes and funeral processions soon became too expensive and too demanding, and eventually, even burial in a coffin was a luxury. Mass graves and incineration became common for those lucky enough to

avoid marauding animals. The Famine's geographic extent and cultural devastation establish a discourse that compels response.

**2. Hoping for a phoenix: Nationalism amid dying embers**

The death of Daniel O'Connell in 1847 at the height of the Famine dealt a crushing blow to constitutional nationalists. Just as he had spearheaded Catholic Emancipation in 1829, O'Connell was the nation's most powerful political figure -- and his voice for Repeal of the union and Famine relief were considered prophetic. Mangan captures something of the national confidence, then desolation, in "A Vision: A.D. 1848." He writes first of "A Man among men, / With a soul stern and warm, / And a voice like the storm," whose words of freedom emboldened millions "And the powers in high places / Looked on; and some trembled." (45-48; 56-57) (Morash, 1989, 147-149) The hopeful vision of O'Connell, who frequently made use of "monster meetings" to demonstrate nascent Irish power both to the British and the Irish themselves, then fades into the Famine, which kills one in seven, and devastates the country. "Therefore Famine first came / And then Pestilence came, And careered through the Land / Like twin giants of Flame." (71-74) (Morash, 1989, 148) But this vision fades, in turn, as the poet sees a third vision of the Apocalypse of John. Van Dijk's stress on changing social cognition through discourse is employed here. Mangan transforms the conventional description of the "Famine as Apocalypse" into "Revolution as Liberation," for the poet awakens: "As I started up, woken, / A noise like fierce cheers, / Blent with clashings of swords, / and the roar of the sea!" (113-116) (Morash, 1989, 149) The poem's date is significant, for 1848 marks the year of liberal revolutions against the Continental *ancien regime.* In Ireland, the Young Irelanders' insurrection failed in July, but they also communicated "a romantic sense of nationality into subsequent generations of Irish nationalists." (Kee, 1989, 290; Gray, 1998, 603)

Political sentiment was not directed simply against British authorities and Irish unionists; nationalists frequently clashed. An anonymously written spoof of Mangan's famous "A Vision of Connaught in the Thirteenth Century" updates the vision by six centuries and ridicules both Mangan's 1846 poem and Famine relief. Celebratory and

ghastly, the Mangan poem opens with a vision of the "golden time" "the days / Of Cahal Mor of the Wine-red Hand." (18, 23-24) (Deane, 1991, III-29-30). But once in the royal hall, the poet sees terror and death. In "A Vision of Connaught in the Nineteenth Century," the anonymous writer -- ironically, it could be Mangan himself -- targets the pervasive toll of the Famine, the sterile polemics of the nationalist *Freeman's Journal*, and the relief policies of Sir Randolph Routh, chairman of the Relief Commission. (Morash, 1989, 281) Satire alters social cognition by inflating and deflating what it scorns, thus inhibiting the effectiveness and image of its target.

In the face of a nationalist outpouring, the unionist response to the Famine in terms of national identity seems weak. Irish loyalist hope in a common Crown, expressed in the anonymous "Lines Written the Day before the Queen's Arrival in Dublin," underline the need for British assistance. The poet writes, "As some fair vision, radiant o'er with light, / Breaks with bright glories on the bloom of night, / Distant tho' yet, but still whose coming ray, / Sends forth the twilight, heralding the day -- / She comes, to cheer with hope that 'nighted shore." (1-5) (Morash, 1989, 244) Queen Victoria visited Ireland in 1849, when the Famine still held the country in thrall. The poet continues, "Be thine the hand to cheer the fainting heart, / To act the mother's, as the Monarch's part, / O'er the sad scene to shed thy cheering light, / and from thy well loved isle to chase the night; / To bid the din of civil discord cease, / And hush each cry of party into peace / To drive contending factions from the land, / And join the people in one heart and hand." (15-22) (Morash, 1989, 244) "Arise thee, oh Erin, look up from thy tears / the Queen of the Isles in thy cities appears," declared the official anthem for the visit, which was completed successfully. (Percival, 1995, 166-167) Victoria added another £200 to the £2,000 she already had contributed to the British Association for Irish Famine relief. Popular mythology holds that the queen gave £5. (Percival, 1995, 167) But the starving continued, and government policy was unchanged.

**3. Religion and the question of national sin and collective guilt**

The pseudonymous Miro, though nationalist, is more circumspect in ascribing moral blame than Speranza. In "Pro and Con," Miro sees the cause as "from ourselves;

'tis murderous strife, / Fostered among us seven hundred years, / That slays the brother, father, sister, wife -- / Grows fat on misery -- quaffs down blood and tears; / That poisons and betrays, bullies, lies / And cares for nought but human sacrifice." (43-48) (Morash, 1989, 203) Amid lingering memories of the Rebellion of 1798, when 30,000 were killed, Whiteboy and other forms of agrarian violence flared during the Famine. Although it was modest, given the scale of social disruption under way, it raised fears. For Miro, violent divisions in Irish society are fratricidal, despite the differing goals and origins of social groups. The use of the term "fostered" points to the ancient and medieval Irish custom of placing a princely member of one clan in the hands of a rival, allied or subordinate group as a kind of hostage-cum-son, thereby keeping peace and developing personal ties of harmony and affection. It created a "lifelong contract" and "intimate bonds." (Ní Chonaill, 1997, 28) But instead of such harmony, Ireland has fostered only evil, and now pays the price in a punishing Famine. Faced with agrarian violence, in which landlords and their agents were attacked and killed on one hand, and the devastation of the Famine, exacerbated by "ruthless fiends, in human shape disguised," Miro condemns internecine Irish violence, and points to a greater struggle ahead. (53) (Morash, 1989, 203) Only repentance and reconciliation will lead to relief and freedom.

Famine poetry does not limit itself to the ideological and theological highlands. The gritty details of "souperism," for example, become part of the discourse. The religious insult becomes yet another reason to embrace the national cause, as "Proselytizing" by Elizabeth Willoughby Varian (1830-1903), shows. Varian wrote for *The Nation* under the name "Finola." (Morash, 1989, 289n) A starving mother encounters a "souper," that is, a Protestant proselytizer who offers food for religious instruction or conversion, though the term could be applied derisively to a fellow Catholic who had accepted such an offer. Though desperate, the woman spurns the help: "And he was answered by the flashing eye, / The quivering lip, and burning cheek and brow: / The drooping head was proudly raised, and scorn / And stern defiance gave those lips a voice: -- 'Keep thou thy proffered help, we will not crave / A pittance at thy door, we will not stain / Our souls with poisoned food -- for what is death / that we should fear him? Death!

Our only friend, / The messenger which bids us hasten home." (28-36) (Morash, 1989, 217) Few aspects of the Famine underline Bourdieu's concept of habitus better than the reaction against souperism, and nationalist writers would maintain hostility virtually until Phase V. Bourdieu uses the term "doxa" to identity primordial political, and one might add cultural, beliefs derived from the opinions of many. He writes, "Doxa is a particular point of view, the point of view of the dominant, which presents and imposes itself as a universal point of view -- the point of view of those who dominate by dominating the state and who have constituted their point of view as universal by constituting the state." (Bourdieu, 1998, 57) When the state is an alien construct to many of its subjects, however, other social realities, such as religion, may assume the same function. In Ireland, most peasants saw the Roman Catholic Church as the legitimating authority, and defection was tantamount to treason. Unionists, too, had religious resources in the polemics. In the pseudonymous A Southern's "On the Death of the Rev. Robert Traill, D.D.," the sacrifice of a heroic Church of Ireland minister is celebrated -- and Catholic claims that Protestant clergy escaped Famine suffering refuted. Traill, grandfather of the celebrated J.M. Synge, shares the lot of his flock and neighbors -- unto death. (Stephens, 1974, 15) "Closer upon the weary man sick, starving creatures press, / Who with their parch'd and burning tongues the generous giver bless! / Does he not shun infection's touch, and shrink from scenes so dread? -- / No! Tho' 'tis death their forms to see, those spectres must be fed." (57-60) (Morash, 1989, 247) Here, the unionist cause appropriates the "nationalist" martyr's image. In nationalist religious poetry, however, the martyrs are the suffering millions, whose death and distress somehow will facilitate Ireland's liberation. Another of Southern's poems, "The Summer of 1847 in Ireland: The Second Famine Year" expresses Protestant confidence in Providence. "Still bow we obedient to God's behest, / Who ordereth all things for the best, / And who from evil can bring forth good / And change despair into gratitude -- / Tho' the heart be heavy, and dim the eye, / On Him, on Him we will still rely." (49-54) (Morash, 1989, 251) Here, neither God nor Britain is responsible.

Samuel Ferguson (1810-1886) acknowledges the tensions in Irish society and uses

a religious perspective to look toward a harmonious future. His *Inheritor and Economist* provides an alternately chilling and amusing dialogue between an overwhelmed Inheritor, a struggling Ascendancy landlord, and an Economist, whose pro-British free trade theories undercut Ireland. When landlords sought London's help, they were met with the Irish Poor Law, which was meant to force Irish gentry to pay for Irish poverty -- despite the fact that many estates teetered on the brink of financial collapse. The Economist speaks, "'What! Who support the land's neglected poor? / The land that breeds the beggars, to be sure!'" (248-249) (Morash, 1989, 112) Ferguson, from the landlord class himself, was particularly sensitive to the relationship between owner and tenant. The Economist tells the Inheritor, "You occupy the place, and can't refuse / The front-rank dangers, and the front-rank dues.'" (278-279) (Morash, 1989, 113) Ferguson sees an intimate connection between land, landowner and tenant -- and cannot understand British demands that Irish landlords repay their loans and thus be forced to export foodstuffs. The poem continues, "But why despair? Although the blighted plant / Was lost past help, the people need not want, / At least as much as life demands to eat, / For still the land had store of beef and wheat." (333-337) (Morash, 1989, 114) Ferguson exonerates the landlords, blames British economic policy and hopes in divine relief, for "dry Jerusalem grew in an hour / A nursing mother by God's timely power." (541-542) (Morash, 1989, 120) Vindication will come, as Constantine's vision of the Cross suggests: "That day prefixed in God's eternal doom, / May long be longed for; but the day will come / When heaven shall also give its sign to thee, / Thy Diocletians fallen, thy people free." (550-552) (Morash, 1989, 120)

**4. Gender and agency in Mangan: The power of martyrdom**

Given their political and social objectives, Phase I producers of poetic Famine texts could ill afford to deny agency, though they acknowledge its temporary defeat by hunger and disease. Mangan recognizes the pernicious effects of the denial of agency in "A Voice of Encouragement: A New Year's Lay," when he writes, "Still there is a deeper woe!" for the O'Connellite leaders who had so recently anticipated the victory of Home Rule had "ceased even to feel" the nation's "abasement." (27, 32) (Morash, 1989, 151)

Consequently, the author's agency becomes identical with that of political leaders, who must engender hope, not "lie down despairing." (33) (Morash, 1989, 151) His masculine addressees -- "Youths! Compatriots! Friends! Men for the time that is nearing!" -- must "Follow your destiny up! Work! Write! Preach to arouse and / Warn, and watch, and encourage! Dangers, no doubt, surround you -- " (1, 41-42) (Morash, 1989, 150-151) Continued acceptance of oppression is deadly for Mangan, and he reveals why so many 19th century Irish poets excavated Celtic history for examples of courage and nobility. After 700 years of occupation, Mangan writes, "Slavery debases the soul; yea! reverses its primal nature; / Long were our fathers bowed to the earth with fetters of iron -- / And, alas! We inherit the failings and ills that environ / Slaves like a dungeon wall and dwarf their original stature." (49-52) (Morash, 1989, 151) In "The Warning Voice," Mangan reveals how close his vision of Famine agency is to martyrdom, in which "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." Mangan tells his readers that their death will mean a new Ireland. He writes, "Before such a marvel shall burst on their sight! / On *you* its beams glow not -- / For *you* its flowers blow not, / You cannot rejoice in its light, / But in darkness and suffering instead, / You go down to the place of the Dead / To *this* generation / The sore tribulation, / The stormy commotion, / And foam of the Popular Ocean, / The struggle of class against class, / The Dearth and the Sadness, / The Sword and the War-vest; / To the *next*, the Repose and the Gladness, / 'The Sea of clear glass', / And the rich Golden Harvest." (60-75) (Morash, 1989, 154) Mangan, whose father was a failed Dublin shopkeeper, includes class difference, while Elgee omits it. Those who fight for Ireland now likewise share another religious characteristic. Action makes them a kind of chosen band of the elect, the faithful remnant. Mangan tells them, "Know then, your True lot, / Ye faithful, though few! / Understand your position, / Remember your mission." (76-79) (Morash, 1989, 154)

**SECTION II: DISCURSIVE BATTLES FOR THE FUTURE IN PHASE II**

The same discursive tropes that Walshe and Brew use to construct the Famine in their novels play pivotal roles in other Phase II novels, plays and poems. Tensions over land ownership, national identity, religion, gender and agency become ways to represent

Famine causes and effects, and, in turn, become elements in arguments for Irish independence or continued union.

**1. Novels and the importance of discursive positioning**

***O'Brien's ultramontanist enthusiasm.*** The Rev. Richard Baptist O'Brien's *The D'Altons of Crag,* land and national identity are combined in references to the long heritage of tenants, a fact counterpoised to their evictions. Set on the slopes of Slievenamon, the mystical mountain dominating south Tipperary, the 1886 novel, published by James Duffy & Co., Ltd., Dublin, shows the moral conversion of a tight-fisted landlord, redeemed from his vices by reconciliation with his son and grand-daughter. O'Brien virtually equates Gaelic ethnicity and Irish identity, and likewise approves of the infiltrating influence of Roman Catholic Gaels on Anglo-Irish identity. Despite some Judas-like figures among the native Irish, they are poetic and spiritual, a feature of nationalist discourse that unionists decoded as impracticality and fantasy, evidence of the Irish inability to govern, work, develop or control themselves. (O'Brien, 1886, 29) Yet Irish expressiveness, especially in relationship to the land, was a major characteristic of Celtic literature and would likewise shape English letters, according to Matthew Arnold's *The Study of Celtic Literature* (1867). (Kiberd, 1996, 116-117) O'Brien, Catholic dean of Limerick, writes an ultramontanist novel, one that celebrates the ascendant power of his church. Even more than Walshe, O'Brien's novel relies on a religious key. *The D'Altons of Crag* is less concerned with Famine hunger *then* than with political violence *now.* His interests lie in maintaining and strengthening the link between the Irish and their Roman Catholic clergy, whose admonitions against violence prove wise. Both the saintly Fr. Aylmer, who gives all to the poor and risks his life for the sick, and his young assistant, Fr. Power, a romantic patriot, show clear sympathy for Irish national aspirations, even to smuggling the Young Ireland rebel leader Thomas Francis Meagher out of the country. The emphasis falls on the moral perfectability of landlords, in its stress on counsel, timing and prudence over violence, O'Brien underlines the Catholic hierarchy's position against the agrarian upheavals of the 1880s and the rising Irish Republican Brotherhood. Yet in the clerical wink and nod, O'Brien leaves no doubt

where their hearts lies. Again the fictional world of Famine Ireland speaks a contemporary message. The discursive power of Meagher is significant. Known as "Meagher of the Sword," he repudiated O'Connellite pacifism and was a physical force hero. Yet O'Brien's Meagher declares, "Well, sir, the time will come [for action]. We *have* made a mistake. Ireland's clergy must always be the real power and --." (O'Brien, 1886, 174) In terms of gender, O'Brien, despite his clerical focus, creates fascinating characters in Shivawn and her witch-like daughter, Bridheen. Their knowledge of ancient Gaelic lore connects them to a mysterious realm of feminine power and authority in the Bridget cult and the life of the *sidhe,* or fairies. (O'Brien, 1886, 194-195) Likewise, these women know Irish and English, and thus wield linguistic power. Agency in O'Brien's *The D'Altons of Crag* primarily rests with the priests, whose decisions are well-considered, in contrast to many of the contrived plot resolutions. Like Carleton, O'Brien raises authorial agency; recounting the Famine is difficult "for even the highest courage must quail, and the most facile pen hesitate, before the awful memory of Ireland in the famine year" amid "the very carnival time of death." (O'Brien, 1886, 29)

***Conyngham's pitch to Irish-Americans.*** D.P. Conyngham's *The O'Donnells of Glen Cottage: A Tale of the Famine Years in Ireland*, published by Excelsior Catholic Publishing House in New York in 1903, was intended primarily for an Irish-American audience. Originally published by P.J. Kenedy, New York, as *Frank O'Donnell*, in 1861, the novel reminds readers of "that most fearful period of Irish history and Irish suffering, the famine years ... [when] the London *Times*, in a fit of jubilation, cried out -- 'The Irish are gone, gone with a vengeance, the Lord be praised.'" (Conyngham, 1903, iv-v) The novel centers on an evil agent's effort to evict the virtuous, hardworking O'Donnells once their lease expires. Though nationalist in point of view, *The O'Donnells* recognizes virtues and vices on both sides. Based on an actual trial, the novel celebrates the Celt as impulsive and passionate, valuable attributes in nationalist rhetoric. The impetuous James Cormack, quick to avenge wrong, is a case in point. (Conyngham, 1903, 211) Such character construction lays a discursive base for physical force in the national struggle. Like O'Brien, Conyngham sees the Catholic clergy as defenders of the peasants. Father

O'Donnell, protector of young lovers, stands in sharp contrast to the Rev. Mr. Robert Sly, an evangelical preacher whose soup kitchens hide his lechery, opportunism and proselytism. The Church of Ireland rector, however, is seen as compassionate and loyal. (Conyngham, 1903, 355-357) The novel shows that, like the O'Donnells, those with means must relieve the poor and suffering. Amid horrific suffering, characters engage in theological self-policing when faced with doubt or anger. Nelly Sullivan declares that "'I often think is there a God at all to allow the poor to be trampled on?'" and Frank O'Donnell cautions, "'Don't say that, don't say that. See all the Lord Himself suffered, and did not murmur.'" (Conyngham, 1903, 454) Conyngham, in gender, offers heroic men who woo and win beautiful women. Frank O'Donnell, after making his fortune in America, wins Alice Maher; Willie O'Shea, now a doctor in the United States, weds Kate O'Donnell. The virtuous Cormack brothers, framed for the murder of an agent, appear as "two noble-looking specimens of the peasant class" as they await execution. (Conyngham, 1903, 476) For Conyngham, the loss of land and a corrupt judicial system confound agency; submission, rebellion and emigration are the only options. For some, however, emigration was only temporary. America provided agency through opportunity for wealth and freedom. Emigrants could return to change Irish circumstances, as Frank does. (Conyngham, 1903, 435-436) The Church, too, offers agency. The priest becomes a totem of power and resistance. Despite rising Fenianism, the novel rejects romantic violence.

***Field's sense of moral balance.*** In *Denis: A Study in Black and White*, Louise Frances (Mrs. E.M.) Field provides a self-conscious effort to balance landlord and peasant by exploring the moral implications of events during the Famine. Her novel, first published in 1896 and then reissued in 1902 by Macmillan and Co., Ltd., London, includes a prefatory note to "my kinsfolk and friends, among the landowners of Ireland," and purports to be an "unvarnished tale," told with truth and frankness. (Field, 1902, I) Denis is an intelligent peasant whose perceptions, questions and dilemmas expose the ambiguities and contradictions in Irish society. Captain Mervyn, the new landlord of Castlemoyne, says to him, "Probably you see clear, Denis. It is to babes that the great

mysteries are revealed." (Field, 1902, 249) Field's perceptive novel offers 40 shades of gray when polemicists saw only black and white. Neither narratives of progress nor romantic Ireland succeed in *Denis*, and Field's hero becomes an Irish Lear, lamenting his losses and finding succor only in dreams of his beloved. "It was long since Denis had slept, and with the tears still undried ... he was walking hand in hand with Mary Cassidy, whose name now was Dark Rosaleen, in the sunny Land of Dreams." (Field, 1902, 290) Land, love and Ireland merge with his lost beloved, Mary Cassidy. Field shows contradictions in national identity in *Denis*. Darcy O'Hara, for example, copes with ancestry, family life, political activities, loves and friendships overlapping, conflicting and eliding in a polarized society. Major O'Hara of the Ascendancy describes his adopted son, fostered among the peasants, as running through their cabins and, "'as for the tales of the fairies, and leprechauns, and heroes, and the songs he learnt, there was no end to them.'" (Field, 1902, 121-122) The novel shows ambiguity in religion by contrasting two priests -- one educated, urbane and tolerant, the other narrow and consistent with 19th century Catholic isolationism -- and two ministers -- one well meaning but inept, the other an Orange bigot. (Field, 1902, 103-104) Field uses gender to contrast two representative women. Averil Mervyn is English and cut directly from a bolt of Victorian femininity, while Margaret O'Hara is a wild Irish rebel who routinely transgresses gender roles. Nonetheless, she succumbs to the charms of an English landlord, Captain Mervyn, and his plans for "improving" Ireland. She both rejects an Irish lover, an informer, and saves Mervyn's life. (Field, 1902, 240) Margaret may be charmed, but Field also depicts masculine dominance and duplicity in Mervyn's exploitation of Mary Cassidy. Field portrays her characters as responsible agents. Mervyn's demise, for example, comes in consequence of the grief and rage he causes Denis by exploiting his beloved. Darcy's infatuation with Mervyn's sister triggers his call for a pro-Mervyn, anti-Repeal vote at a rally, and this change is a freely chosen, if dramatic, departure from nationalist politics. Field carefully constructs the discursive fields in which her characters live; ideology is never far from personality and character. The priests and ministers, for example, behave differently, but each pattern is related to their class and sectarian interests.

***Canon Sheehan and a changed Ireland.*** Patrick Augustine Sheehan's *Glenanaar*, published in 1905 by Phoenix Publishing Co., Ltd., Dublin, uses the Famine as a prism in which to examine the moral questions of land reform and nationalism, as well as to call for emigrants to return home. The novel includes a nationalist attack on those who promote emigration to America. *Glenanaar* has no trouble connecting the Famine with continuing emigration. When Casey, a "returned Yank," complains, "All is desolation and loneliness and ruin. [Ireland] ... is a land of the past -- no present, no future," he meets a sharp rebuke from young Kathleen that "you, Irish-Americans, who fly from your country and then try to make everyone else fly also" have become "recruiting-sergeants of England," Ireland without the Irish thus being Britain's dream. (Sheehan, n.d., 269) Sheehan addresses the issue of reconciliation in national identity in *Glenanaar*. As the grandson of an informer, Terrence Casey wrestles with the issue of tainted blood, a strong Irish cultural bias. Sheehan's narrator insists the new Ireland at the dawn of the 20th century has shed such thinking as much as it has forgotten its Famine past, but then blames the Famine for continuing social tensions and emigration. (Sheehan, n.d., 254) Formal religion has little place in *Glenanaar*, though the priest is still a key figure in Famine relief. (Sheehan, n.d., 199) Religion and nationalism elide, when the priest-narrator declares that a rebel, denied the last rites, was already "consecrated with blood shed for Ireland." (Sheehan, n.d., 216) Most characters in *Glenanaar* have traditional Irish gender roles: devotion to the mother, the son living at home, delayed marriage. (As late as 1939, 74 percent of the males and 55 percent of the females aged 25-34 years were single. (Inglis, 1998, 167-168)) But gender shifts and developments occur, even in Sheehan. Nora, Casey's youthful beloved, endured a dissolute husband, but raises her daughters and maintains herself as a single mother -- and safeguards her own freedom. Kathleen, her feisty, politicized daughter, is the novel's most interesting figure from a gender perspective. The first two decades of the 20th century saw increasing political activism by nationalist and unionist women in Ireland. (Daly, 1997, 107). Casey notes, "If that's the class of young girls that are being reared in Ireland now, you'll have another Rising before twenty years." (Sheehan, n.d., 271) The Easter Rising was not far

away -- and women played a key role. Sympathetic treatment of Kathleen -- the name is significant -- disturbs authorial claims that physical force has been repudiated. Nodlag, the central character for the first half of the novel, likewise pushes at the margins of gender. She is a tomboy and, like her mother, survives despite the odds. In her son, Terrence, Irish masculinity takes a dangerous turn. Riddled with essentialist thinking and nationalist political rhetoric, he is ripe for violence. Even his Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) hurling games manifest a warlike cast. (Sheehan, n.d., 227) While *Glenanaar* manifests the power of discursive construction on villagers, who persecute the offspring of informers, the novel also portrays resistance and personal accountability: acceptance of the orphan Nodlag, defiance of Whiteboy threats, breaking social taboos and spurning the "tainted blood" ideology. For Sheehan, authorial agency lies in promoting reconciliation, return from abroad and the end of emigration. As Catherine Candy observes, Sheehan offers "a conservative reminder of a traditional Catholic Ireland under serious threat of extinction by the soulless modern. It was vital to Sheehan's world view that the nationalist flame be kept burning as a symbol of the subjection and the resistance of the 'race.'" (Candy, 1995, 91)

**2. Drama, the Famine and the redemption of place**

***O'Grady's tentative melodramatic exploration.*** The dramatic confrontation with the Famine was weak during Phase II, but two works merit consideration. *The Famine*, by Hubert O'Grady, was the first serious theatrical engagement. O'Grady's pot-boilers are melodramatic, awash in contrived plots, overwrought emotions and moralistic battles. Yet for all his devotion to generic popular 19th century theater, O'Grady displays a recurring interest in Irish historical experience. (Day, 1999, 66) Though *The Famine* is simplistic, it approaches a measure of realism. Steven Watt puts O'Grady on the level of Dion Boucicault's success, and notes that Peter Kavanagh called him "'the most popular dramatic author in Ireland during the last decade of the [19th] century.'" (Watt, 1991, 57) O'Grady's *Famine* was written in the spring of 1886, licensed on 9 April 1886 for the Theatre Royal, Leicester, and opened in Dublin on 26 April at the Queen's Royal Theatre. (Watt, 1991, 25) The play is set in the wake of an 1878 famine, a more limited crisis than

the 1840s catastrophe, but one which triggered old fears and renewed land reform agitation. In fact, a public outcry followed a significant potato crop failure a year later. Heavy rains and the blight slashed the national output by two-thirds and would affect half a million. (O'Neill, 1995, 209-210) O'Grady may have had these circumstances in mind despite his reference to the previous year. Local famines occurred in 1858-1864, 1879-1880, 1890-1891, 1894-1895, 1897-1898, 1904 and 1912 (O'Neill, 1995, 210-217) Government relief had improved, but distress maintained memories of *an Gorta Mor* and fueled land agitation. In the play a virtuous peasant-soldier rescues his sister from a wicked land agent, who hates the family for its land agitation support. O'Grady examines landlord abuses, hunger and government relief failure, still concerns in the 1880s, and marshals Famine memories for contemporary campaigns for land reform. Emigration, high rents, evictions, agrarian disturbance and military and police intervention all continued to trouble Irish society. (Jackson, 1999, 120-122) Problems, however, are *personalized* as the result of moral fault, not political and economic policies. (Day, 1999, 68) O'Grady thus offers a hopeful conclusion; there is an "... implicit promise that the tensions of class conflict will dissipate, that the landowning and tenants will reach a new understanding of each other as a result of truths revealed in the plays' last scenes." (Watt, 1985, 6) This promise is muted by O'Grady's melodramatic reliance on stock figures: the virtuous, innocent peasant, Catholic and Gaelic, in the grip of wicked agents and profligate absentee landlords, which suits nationalist political rhetoric. *The Famine* does not problematize religion. It assumes the Catholicity of peasants, the Protestantism of landlords and agents, thus coding ideological assumptions. The Irish stage of O'Grady's era offered a generally traditional, Victorian presentation of gender. *The Famine* relies on heroes and villains, who alternately represent conventional features of masculinity and femininity. Vincent O'Connor joins the "No Rent" campaign for land reform, while his son John, like thousands of Irishmen, joins the British army to advance socially. Females are vulnerable, in need of male protection. Mrs. O'Connor dies in the Famine, then Nell is ensnared by the land agent and must be rescued. For 19th century melodrama, agency is a given, even if contrived. Heroes must be free to save damsels in distress.

***Yeats's controversial allegorical interpretation.*** Yeats offers an allegorized psychological character interrogation. *The Countess Cathleen* is rarely seen as a Famine play despite explicit references. Wrapped in an aura of historical mysticism, the 1892 play eschews realism to become a kind of medieval Book of Hours. Yeats constantly reworked *The Countess Cathleen*, his first play, which premiered 8 May 1899 in the Antient Concert Rooms, Dublin, to help inaugurate the new Irish Literary Theatre. (Jeffares and Knowland, 1975, 2; Murray, 1997, 2) A noblewoman sacrifices her wealth and, ultimately, her life to save her people first from hunger and then from demons seducing them into bartering their souls for food. To spare her peasants, she bargains away her own soul, but wins entry to heaven because of her pure motives. The countess is an exemplary land owner, concerned and sacrificial. The landscape, meanwhile, is mystical and allegorized, set "in Ireland and in old times" amid the "trees of a wood" with a "gold or diapered sky" such that the "scene should have the effect of a missal painting." (Yeats, 1966, 3) The play's mystical, expressionistic style distance it from the Famine, without abandoning it. The play is set "not in history ... but in one's own heart," Yeats wrote in the Irish arts magazine *Bealtaine* in May of 1899. (Flanagan, 1976, 124) Maybe so, but the Famine's echo is strong. Yeats's view of social structure is complex, but his sense of national identity simplistic. An audience anywhere could see the play without incident, its allegorical accent is so strong. Yet that was not the case in Dublin -- precisely because some audience members had clear ideas about nationality. Labeled blasphemous, heretical and unpatriotic, the play provoked the opposition of a nationalist newspaper; politician Frank Hugh O'Donnell, who wrote a pamphlet titled *Souls for Gold! Pseudo-Celtic Drama in Dublin;* Dublin's Catholic archbishop and students at University College Dublin. (Jeffares and Knowland, 1975, 4; Ure, 1963, 10) Police had to be summoned to maintain order. Christopher Murray asserts that Yeats offers:

> ... a play about famine; it confronts the greatest catastrophe in modern Irish history. Yet it coolly indicates that Catholics have a price in crisis time, and are willing to sell their souls to save their skins. Further, Yeats shows how the lady of the manor, the good Countess and Lady Bountiful herself, redeems the souls of all her tenants by selling her own (infinitely more valuable) soul and yet, ... gets off scot-free. (Murray, 1997, 18-19)

Wherever Yeats might have thought he was setting his play, his first audiences located it in or near the Famine, when the gentry was Anglo-Irish Protestant, the peasantry Gaelic Catholic. Yeats's play renders religion ambiguous. By portraying tenants willing to sell their souls for food, Yeats injected "souperism" into the play. Likewise, Yeats disdained the Catholic bourgeoisie of his day, whose ancestors can be seen in Shemus Rua and his son Teigue. Still another aspect of religion is faith amid suffering. Providence has deserted Yeats's peasants, whom an audience would read as Catholic, while the countess, coded as Ascendancy Protestant, remains prayerful and mystical. "God and the Mother of God have dropped asleep. / What do they care, he says, though the whole land / Squeal like a rabbit under a weasel's tooth," says Teigue. (Yeats, 1966, 3-4) The countess, meanwhile, is steadfast in faith and charity, the antithesis of the brutal, callous and faithless Shemus and Teigue. For many in Yeats's audience, however, the countess represented the religion and class to whom those morally-laden adjectives properly belong. *The Countess Cathleen* complicates gender. Male figures are problematic. Shemus Rua and Teigue are despots, and are neither reflexive nor humane. Aleel the bard, however, has a poetic soul, but cannot move beyond art into the real world of sacrificial love. The demons, genderless spirits, assume both avian and human forms. As men, the demons are pedlars out to swindle helpless peasants -- Yeats's view of the bourgeoisie. The countess, however, manifests ethereal beauty, spiritual essence and *noblesse oblige*. Loosely, she is connected to the traditions of the earth goddess, the sovereignty myth, the Saint Bridget cult and Irish nationalism in Kathleen ni Houlihan. The countess commands easily, makes decisions with care and displays courage and self-sacrifice. Less noticed is Mary, wife of Shemus Rua, who also sacrifices herself and is spiritually wise. (Yeats, 1966, 38) Maude Gonne, who rejected Yeats's love, turned down his entreaties to play the countess in the play dedicated to her in favor of her political work. (Brown, 1999, 123)

In *The Countess Cathleen*, Yeats situates agency in class, not gender. Cathleen herself exercises the power to resist hunger and the demons. Indeed, she challenges the

moral order in a wrongful act -- the sale of her soul -- for the morally good, the redemption of her tenants. Yet the freedom to undertake these acts is related to her class, which gives her wealth, education and status. For starving peasants, agency is circumscribed, and in their desperation they bargain their eternity. Mary, however, shows power by resisting -- and dying. Aleel and the nurse Oona, representing ancient Ireland, pagan and Celtic, and domestic warmth and love, also show power, but it is insufficient to resist the countess's Christic self-sacrifice. "Her 'sin' is an excess of charity, which is no sin at all but virtue of the highest order. She is the Ascendancy as, perhaps, it would like to have seen itself." (Day, 1999, 77) Morash claims that Yeats engages in a "strategic intervention in a potentially radical discourse which was both theological and political," by attempting to reclaim millenariansim from the Evangelical tradition and from history. (Morash, 1997, 82) Soupers looked a lot like demons to Irish peasants, but Yeats vindicates the countess by showing the importance of motive. Meanwhile, he also seeks to reclaim "history as metaphysics, [in] a narrative in which the supernatural completely displaces the material forces of history. (Morash, 1997, 82) By dehistoricizing and spiritualizing the Famine, Yeats lets his own class off the hook, and projects his audience into an ethereal realm, where he can promote his own cultural, and political, agenda. That Yeats creates a dramatic allegory set within a famine is highly ironic. The "nationalist" Famine "was understood 'allegorically' as the work of twin demons, an evil, oppressive landlord class and ... a foreign, imperialist government." (Day, 1999, 77) Yeats upends that allegory, questioning the individual, psychological and spiritual response of victims -- even while contributing to Irish cultural revival. Likewise, he shows sympathy for elite leadership. *The Countess Cathleen* also demonstrates Yeats's adaptation of genre. Through poetic language, hierarchical order and ritualistic action, the stage would be infused with "passion" for a cultural nationalism. (Brown, 1999, 125) His aesthetic discourse had agency at its core, but it collided with competing discourses of egalitarianism and commercialism.

**3. Poetry's attempt to plant seeds of hope and rebellion**

Poetry in Phase II continued to use the land as an important trope in Famine discourse, and "The Famine in the Land" by Thomas D'Arcy McGee (1825-1868) is a case in point. He focuses on topographical and agricultural features to chart the Famine's march. He writes, "Death reapeth in the fields of Life, and we cannot count the corpses; / Black and fast before our eyes march the busy biers and hearses; / in the laneways, and in highways, stark skeletons are lying," (1-3) (Morash, 1989, 195) So pervasive is death and emigration that Ireland seems to become a desert, even to disappear. For McGee, an ardent Fenian who fled to Canada, national survival cannot be envisioned without territorial control, and control means rebellion. A stirring catalogue of place names in the poem is meant to rally his countrymen (48-49) (Morash, 1989, 195) In McGee's "The Three Dreams," three visions of Ireland emerge: a land oppressed and cursed; a land whose warriors marched into battle for freedom; and a land silent and empty. (19-26) (Morash, 1989, 198) National identity was a central area of Phase II polemics in poetry. Nationalists are busy targeting British and Ascendancy culpability and rousing their fellow citizens to political action, even outright rebellion. Unionists are desperate to identify the Famine with a natural blight, divine displeasure and alleged Irish laziness and imprudence. Nationalist rhetoric is by far the more intense and the more prolific. However, these polar perspectives are positioned on a spectrum of differing views. McGee, for example, relies on the image of ancient and courageous Gaelic Ireland to stimulate his contemporaries into anti-British resistance. In "The Living and the Dead," he writes, "Oh! For the time, dear Erin -- the fierce time long ago, / When your men felt, sad Erin, and their hands could strike a blow! / When your Gaelic Chiefs were ready to stand in pass or breach -- / Danger but made them steady -- they struck and saved their speech. / But where are the men to head ye, and lead you face to face -- / To trample the powers that tread ye, men of the fallen race? (6-12) (Morash, 1989, 197) McGee wants his warriors virtuous -- and Gaelic. Phase II Famine poets tend to turn to essentialist gender identity and performance, but on occasion this is valorized in striking ways. Aubrey de Vere's spiritualism employs conventional images of the weak, forlorn widow

in "Widowhood: 1848." A nation of literal and metaphoric widows has arisen. But, for de Vere, this widowhood is only temporary. Famine Ireland and the Church he elides into John's vision of the New Jerusalem in Rev 21:9-27. "The Bride of Brides, a maid and widow here, / Invokes her Lord, and finds -- Comfort: -- / Her loftiest fame is but a visible perch / To sealed Creation's omnipresent Church." (22-25) (Morash, 1989, 91) De Vere contrasts fickle feminine vulnerability with a steadfast, masculine Lord.

**SECTION III: NEW AND OLD PERSPECTIVES IN PHASE IV TEXTS**

After the general silence and absence of the Famine in Phase III textual production, Phase IV manifests innovative confrontations in the drama of Murphy and MacIntyre. However, traditional literary and dramatic texts likewise addressed the Famine, although they expanded the consideration of gender and agency. Walter Macken's historical novel *The Silent People* is a broad sweeping Famine story of peasants, while Beatrice Coogan's historical/romantic novel *The Big Wind* focuses primarily on landowners. Brendan Kennelly's acclaimed poem, "My Dark Fathers," and Brian Friel's play *Translations* also focus on gender and agency. The poem engages both the reality of the Famine and its psychological legacy, while the drama uses the Famine as metaphor and model of linguistic and social disjunction.

Questions of land, national identity and religion certainly pervade these works, but they do so in relatively traditional ways. Land possesses a sacred character to the Gaelic Irish, a commercial or imperial one to the British and Anglo-Irish landlord class. If it is ravaged by Famine and foreign occupation, it also beckons sons and daughters to rally to Ireland's cause. Emigration is seen only as a last resort, the inevitable consequence of intolerable conditions. National identity is largely polarized between the Gaelic Irish tradition and the British and Anglo-Irish classes, although there is considerable interpenetration between the two groups. In both novels, for example, readers encounter members of the Catholic upper class, who engage the Protestant Ascendancy. Likewise, the emergence of an Irish Catholic middle class is chronicled -- not without negative comment. Religion maintains its polar divide. While kindly Protestant ministers exist, the issues of proselytism, "souperism," tithes and discrimination continue. Religion in Phase

IV novels is not problematized as in the previous period, however. Division exists between members of the Catholic faithful and even the clergy themselves over support for physical force. However, neither Macken nor Coogan makes support for violent republicanism a test for Irish national identity. What emerges as a central concern in both novels is the same double helix of agency and gender which dominates the two plays discussed earlier.

**1. Seeking to understand, develop agency**

***Macken: Agency's moral dimension.*** Macken's novel *The Silent People* (1962) tells the story of Dualta O Duane, a County Galway youth who loses a family in one famine only to survive, raise another and face a new hunger. Central to the narrative structure in *The Silent People* is a pattern of heroic individual confrontation with evil, as well as a pairing of characters to highlight moral difference. A systematic revolutionary ethos is avoided in favor of a moral consideration of its wrongs and dangers. The novel eschews physical force in favor of the Church's negotiated approach, except in one case. Macken puts particular emphasis on agency and gender. By investing acts with *moral* content and consequences, he asserts the importance of individual choice not only for the character in question but for those around him or her. Thus, Macken's sense of agency is traditional heroism, but he generously distributes opportunities to exercise it among numerous characters. Dualta is the hero, but the gentrified Una, whom he marries, is given wide scope to develop in the Gaelic tradition. While Macken's attention is predominately on male characters, Una's ability to make radical decisions and her willingness to endure their consequences, creates a significant feminine role. While within conventional gender roles, Una violates social and cultural mores that confined most women -- and men. That she does so in ways that reinscribe traditional gender roles and Irish national identity as Catholic and peasant-based is no surprise given Macken's audience and times. If Una crosses social frontiers, Dualta crosses those of gender. Irish masculinity is constructed in proximity to the physical force tradition. When Dualta rejects both violence and sympathy for it, he becomes potentially deficient. Macken delivers him from gender expectation failure first by encapsulating physical force in the

brutal, mindless Cuan and second by demonstrating Dualta's personal courage. Agency and gender come together in numerous cases, but the novel's ending is particularly forceful. With the anti-Catholic vituperations of an Evangelical preacher ringing in his ears, Dualta rejects emigration and takes his family home. Meanwhile, "I am going back to my own hills. I am going back to see my uncle Marcus [who reared him]. We will go there. We will survive there. We will resist death. ... We cannot all be gone." (Macken, 1964, 367) His statements become illocutionary utterances; the declaration fixes the will power necessary to achieve the end. Amid the continuing hemorrhage of emigration, Macken's novel suggests the power to remain and transform Ireland is not confined to the Famine era.

***Kennelly: Unauthorized speech reclaims Famine past.*** Brendan Kennelly's "My Dark Fathers" (1964), one of the most anthologized contemporary Irish poems, directly addresses the Famine's psychological legacy. Kennelly broke ground examining what the Famine did in its own time, what it bequeathed survivors and how an individual ought to confront that legacy. Again, agency and gender are at issue. The poem begins in a remembrance of "my dark fathers," who endured the "intolerable day" but were committed always to the "night of wrong," suggesting a genealogy that is unknowable and mysterious on one level, and acquainted with evil on another. (Kennelly, 1990, 18) Tenant farmers and cottiers, at the mercy of disease, weather, landlord agent, also held the power to strike back. Yet the first stanza already guts any resistance from such peasants, who are "stiffened at the hearthstone" and whose feet are "perished ... nailed to her man's breastbone." (Kennelly, 1990, 18) The warm inviting cottages of Munster are wrapped in "gloom" and even children are shackled by hunger, disease and death, "Fettered ... within the pit of doom." (Kennelly, 1990, 18) The house itself has become a grave, and everywhere there is "a going down of life." (Kennelly, 1990, 18) For those familiar with social conditions in Phase III-IV in rural Ireland, the even grimmer circumstances Kennelly describes are not hard to imagine. In contrast, the second stanza depicts an earlier time when dancing, music-making and the sense of human dignity were robust -- a woman dances on a Kerry beach. Rural Ireland dies, however, as the "green plant

withered" and "winds of hunger howled at every door." (Kennelly, 1990, 19) Again, the silencing pattern occurs; the dancer "heard the music dwindle and forgot the dance." (Kennelly, 1990, 19) This forgetting is twofold. Irish *joie de vivre* turns cold and pale in the face of Famine, but so does the Irish psyche, which represses memory of the event even as it wrestles with the consequences. By the fourth stanza, for example, "my dark fathers," though "skeletoned in darkness" are unable to "understand / The giant grief that trampled night and day, / The awful absence moping through the land." (Kennelly, 1990, 19) So desperate have conditions become that lovemaking becomes a "crime" engendering death, and an "innocent appalling cry." (Kennelly, 1990, 19) That victimization in the poem is primarily located in a female subject is significant, even though "my dark fathers" are also part of the long historical toll. Ireland is inscribed as female, and the expression of Irish oppression draws upon feminine tropes: here a love crime, thwarted birth and abandonment. The stanzas elide time, and the Famine love crime becomes indistinguishable from failure in a contemporary, censorious, repressed Ireland, where sand was "hardened," when "No dancing feet disturbed its symmetry / And those who loved good music ceased to sing." (Kennelly, 1990, 19) Throughout the poem, agency is slowly, relentlessly repressed by the Famine and its effects on Church and State. But the poet reasserts his own power and authority, and breaks free of silence. Acknowledging "every moment of the clock," and claiming a place, "Since I am come of Kerry clay and rock," the narrator, the "I" of the poem declares, "I celebrate the darkness and the shame." (Kennelly, 1990, 19) Again, an illocutionary utterance reclaims agency, achieving what it declares -- even though the object and the subject of that celebration is a man who has turned his face "from light so strong" and who finds himself "spancelled in a place / Of unapplauding hands and broken song." (Kennelly, 1990, 19) Kennelly's speaker enacts what Judith Butler sees as the possibility of transformation within Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Butler describes a performative utterance which appropriates to itself, one of the "deauthorized sites on the social map," the authority to assert and establish. (Butler, 1999, 124) Here, the speaker and his Famine legacy assume agency through redressive speech that explores history, and shifts the burdens of habitus.

(Butler, 1999, 125) Within the Famine, Kennelly finds a cause for social silence and repression and a way to overturn their stifling effects.

***Coogan: Female agency, remaining on the land.*** Beatrice Coogan's novel, *The Big Wind* (1969), provides a skillful, entertaining blend of history and romance, with the Famine at the center of events. The novel demonstrates how a "good" landlord and his family, "one of our own," behave. Set at Kilsheelin Castle near Slievenamon in County Tipperary, in the region of the 1848 Young Ireland rebellion and noted for Fenian activity, the novel focuses on the O'Carrolls, always aristocratic, occasionally arrogant but one with their tenants: Catholic, Gaelic and persecuted. Coogan knocks down class barriers impeding Sterrin and Thomas, her would-be lover. "Young Thomas," a Kilsheelin servant, is revealed to have not only a brain and a body, but also a collateral O'Carroll pedigree. Issues of land ownership, the rising role of the middle class, rape, emigration and physical force pervade the novel, which emphasizes Sterrin's efforts in saving her family estate and their tenants. She is part saint, part earth goddess/Hibernia and partly Kathleen ni Houlihan, the romanticized vision of the nation. (Coogan, 1969, 630, 641) Gender and agency are central, but in the end, Thomas's masculine agency resolves the crisis through marriage to Sterrin and estate redemption. Coogan stakes out a zone for female agency and offers reasons to return or remain in a changing Ireland, as do Thomas and Sterrin.

**2. Friel: Hidden resources and the limits of language**

Brian Friel's play *Translations* (1980) uses the Famine as a shadowy, apocalyptic future toward which Gaelic civilization is moving. The very cultural dislocation represented by a British mapping project, the subject of the play, received its most powerful impetus from the linguistic disaster occasioned by the Famine. *Translations*, which draws upon George Steiner's *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (1975), allows an audience to "hear" in English and Irish, though the script is entirely in English. (Pine, 1999, 7) *Translations* employs Famine imagery and references to depict the cultural trauma caused by the coming of English to Donegal, and, again, the central thematic concerns are gender and, in particular, agency. Here, agency is understood

through language. Richard Pine writes:

> *Translations*, like [Friel's 1964 play] *Philadelphia [Here I Come]*, was both a hybrid and a defining moment in Irish theatre. ... [It] occupies a place of similar importance in the development of Irish drama to that of *Philadelphia*, to the extent that it was a play which spoke publicly to Irish people about an experience which, in the case of the later play, was still resonant within the acoustic of racial memory. (Pine, 1999, 182)

The play examines the limits of language, and it interrogates the way language constructs personal and communal memory and identity. A Famine perspective sharpens the universal importance Friel attaches to language. In Act I, Owen declares, "It's only a name. It's the same me, isn't it? Well, isn't it?" (Friel, 1996, 408) A glib "yes" gives way to uncertainty.

In *Translations*, Irish speakers in Ballybeg -- the mythical community appears in almost all Friel's works -- confront a British decision to standardize place names. Villagers are at odds over the opportunities and dangers of the project. How is *Translations* a "Famine play"? What discourses does it advance? Friel links the mapping project to the potato blight. Although the play is set in August of 1831, 14 years *before* the Great Famine, smaller, local crop failures had plagued Ireland. Just as the audience knows the Famine awaits Ballybeg, so it realizes that upheaval awaits society in consequence of imperial policy. Indeed, a fatal conjunction of that policy and the blight caused Ireland's cultural trauma. Friel teases out references that deliberately echo the Famine. Maire, one of the villagers, sniffs the air, and just over Cnoc na Mona, "the sweet smell [of blight] was everywhere" ... "They say that's the way it snakes in, don't they? First the smell; and then one morning the stalks are all black and limp." (Friel, 1996, 395) The infiltration of English, national schools, compulsory attendance, English-only instruction, a ban on Irish -- all these are as deadly as *Phytophthora infestans*. Later, when the British seek Lt. Yolland, Capt. Lancey threatens shooting livestock, evictions, cottage tumbling and, finally, complete clearance -- a proleptic catalogue of the Famine. Like a death sentence, the roll of villages, first in English, then Irish, underlines change. When the British camp erupts in flames, Bridget exclaims, "The sweet smell! Smell it! It's the

sweet smell! Jesus, it's the potato blight!" (Friel, 1996, 441) Burning tents mimic coming linguistic disaster.

Linguistic shifts are dangerous because they can deny agency subtly, affecting both what can be achieved and imagined. For Friel, writing amid the Troubles, the problem is no longer who is leaving Ireland, but rather who is staying and for what purpose. Bourdieu, expanding on habitus, argues that domination can be "the indirect effect of a complex set of actions engendered within the network of intersecting constraints." (Bourdieu, 1998, 34) Language encodes gender and agency biases, and given Ireland's duality of traditional culture and colonial intrusion, Bourdieu's concept of dominance is complexified. *Translations* is particularly rich in the dualities in Irish experience and their relationship to language. Yolland recognizes the "hermetic" core of culture, but Owen claims that he can learn to "decode us." (Friel, 1996, 416) Hugh, the schoolmaster, declares, "We [Irish] like to think we endure around truths immemorially posited." (Friel, 1996, 418) Friel interrogates such "truths," and for Hugh, they can only be transmitted in language, which both conceals and reveals:

> Yes, it [Irish] is a rich language, Lieutenant, full of mythologies of fantasy and hope and self-deception -- syntax opulent with tomorrows. It is our response to mud cabins and a diet of potatoes; our only method of replying to ... inevitabilities. ... But remember that words are signals, counters. They are not immortal. And it can happen -- to use an image you'll understand -- it can happen that a civilization can be imprisoned in a linguistic contour which no longer matches the landscape of ... fact. (Friel, 1996, 418-419)

This is one of Friel's major concerns, the disjunction between language and the world, emotional and social, which language constructs and by which it is constructed. The Famine, which wrenched Irish-speaking society, becomes an apt metaphor. When language and its world diverge, agency and deeply embedded constructions such as gender identity erode and become fluid.

Van Dijk's perspectives show that language use not only exhibits and establishes power relations, but it may cling to antiquated, alien or antagonistic usages to support or destroy agendas of power and status. Even myth and fantasy can maintain a dream of agency. Van Dijk shows that discourse is "... embedded in cognitive representations of

the conditions of domination, social and economic interests and privileges, power and exploitation, or institutional formulation and enactments." (Van Dijk, 1988-b, 109-110) These representations can help the subject resist domination, or they can contribute to his or her repression. Likewise, for colonial subjects, two competing discourses of "domination" -- the colonizer's and the native culture's -- conflict. Agency and gender were at stake amid the Troubles, the sexual revolution and the first waves of globalization and technocratization, and *Translations* finds a model of social and linguistic disjunction in Famine Ireland. Moreover, its balance between anger and sorrow over cultural loss won the play support from Irish republicans and British audiences and reviewers, perhaps for its "politically quietist strain." (Grene, 1999, 44.) Hugh cautions, "It is not the literal past, the 'facts' of history, that shape us, but images of the past embodied in language. ... We must never cease renewing those images; because once we do, we fossilize. ... To remember everything is a form of madness." (Friel, 1996, 445) In late 20th century Ulster, where no wrong was ever forgotten, where history and violence were entwined, Hugh's words were apposite.

## SECTION IV: DISCURSIVE THEMES, THEORETICAL FRAMES IN PHASE V

Textual production during Phase V has been substantial, outdistancing every other period since Phase II more than a century earlier. This section will highlight some of the central discursive themes in representative Famine works, as well as their connection to the principal communicational perspectives already outlined. If McGuinness and Kenny show the depth of discursive manipulation in Phase V works, this brief overview is intended to suggest the extent to which the Famine has become a cultural resource for Irish writers.

### 1. Drama employs old tropes to address new concerns

***Harris goes behind mythology of 'souperism'.*** In Phase V's exploration of Irish identity, Eoghan Harris offers a rare journey through religion and its role in the Famine. He deconstructs a nationalist, Catholic interpretation of the Famine in West Cork in *Souper Sullivan* (1984). Dominant Famine discourse, he argues, has helped fuel religious bigotry for 150 years in the region -- the same prejudice that has ensnared the North.

(Harris, 1984, 2) Harris, a controversial producer with RTÉ and journalist, is now a columnist in Ireland for *The Times* of London. His play has been criticized for historical inaccuracy, particularly in his representation of Catholic clergymen, but Declan Kiberd argues that it continues "a Shavian tradition of playwriting." (Deane, 1991, 372) Directed by Tomas Mac Anna, the play opened 26 Sept. 1985 as the Abbey's principal offering during the Dublin Theatre Festival. Reviewers saw more spectacle than drama, and Harris attacked critics for trying to stifle a dissenting view of history. (*Variety*, 16 Oct. 1985, 54; Brennan, 1985, n.p.; Nowlan, 27 Sept. 1985, n.p.) *Souper Sullivan* recounts the story of some 600 "soupers," poor Catholics from the Mizen Head in West Cork who converted to Protestantism during the winter of "Black '47." Villagers constructed Teampall na mBocht, "the Church of the Poor," by hand to win relief offered by English Quakers. This change is depicted as a popular response, led by Matthew Sullivan, after Catholic leaders, clerical and lay, abandoned the community. The play treats an exploitive, rapacious Catholic bourgeoisie, Catholic clerical opportunism and the compassion and evangelical zeal of the Rev. William A. Fisher, Church of Ireland rector, who inspired the project:

> ... *Souper Sullivan* is a play but it is also a polemic: against bigotry, tribalism, and racialism. The author, from a Catholic and Republican background, has sought to transcend his own traditions and reach understanding of these historical events by the use of the only artefact that moves the heart to pity and terror: dramatic art. ... And this account of what happened at Tooremoore, West Cork in 1847 is inescapably an allegory on the sad history of Protestant and Catholic in Northern Ireland today. (Harris, 1984, 2)

Again, a Phase V drama challenges dominant discourse by offering van Dijk's change in social cognition. As Ireland's social fabric was being rewoven in Phase V, audiences were more open than ever before to such changes.

***O'Byrne probes ecological crisis***. Rarely has the Famine been discussed in ecological terms, but they certainly apply in Joe O'Byrne's play *The Last Potato* (1994), which critiques Ireland's current ecological situation. By investigating a famine that bears striking resemblance to *an Gorta Mor*, the play challenges its audience to break out of its own habitus of cavalier concern for the environment and exercise agency in new, responsible ways. The play premiered during an environmental festival, "Songs of the

Reaper," produced by The Passion Machine, a Dublin theater company, at the Project Arts Centre in March of 1994. O'Byrne, artistic director of Co-Motion Theatre Co., offers a two-act drama that is partly medieval morality tale, Swiftian satire and futuristic apocalypse where human beings, not potatoes, are consumed.

***Banville and the failure to see.*** John Banville's comic drama *The Broken Jug* (1994) provides characters who seem blissfully unaware of the Famine cataclysm. Banville transposed a blank verse comedy, *Der Zerbrochene Krug* (1807) by Heinrich von Kleist (1777-1811) from its original setting in Holland to the village of Ballybog in the West of Ireland in August of 1846, thus juxtaposing a Restoration-style comedy and the tragedy of the Famine. *The Broken Jug*, which opened on 1 June 1994 at the Peacock, under the direction of Ben Barnes, received wide critical acclaim. Kleist appeals, said Banville, because he foregrounds

> ... the absolute hysteria of his character and his time. The kind of hectic quality and the frenzy of *The Broken Jug* seemed to me to suit the Ireland of that particular time when a catastrophe was taking place, probably the biggest catastrophe of modern Irish history, certainly bigger than 1798 and 1916 in ordinary human terms. (Clarke, 1994, B10)

Early on, Judge Adam, the main character and a consummate hypocrite, asks, "Who starved? We have no hunger around here. / Our folk are fit as fiddles, and well-fed. / We have no hunger here." (Banville, 1994, 19) Maggie and Ball, two servants, see what the upper class cannot. "No hunger! Jesus!" cries Maggie in an aside, while Ball adds, "I must have been imagining it then; / I swore I saw them dying in the streets." (Banville, 1994, 19) Banville finds, "The Famine is the most important event in modern Irish history. I like the idea of having [almost] everyone in the play busy ignoring the fact that there's a famine going on." (Battersby, 1994, 10) He does not denounce the Ascendancy, but examines the human capacity, largely induced by Bourdieu's notion of social habitus, to exalt the trivial and ignore the essential. Through Banville's emphasis on the body, Famine victims emerge as spectres, thus invoking the concept of silent, ghostly presences Claude Schumacher and Peggy Phelan, as described in Chapter V, use to describe victims in McGuinness's *Mary and Lizzie*. Starving peasants silently pass by doors and windows,

significant liminal spaces in theater, to condemn the human folly inside.

***Minogue, Grosse Île and immigration.*** Jim Minogue's play *Flight to Grosse Île* (1996) crosses the Atlantic with young Catherine Kennedy and her family. The title comes for the infamous immigrant quarantine station in the Saint Lawrence near Québec. (MacKay, 1992, 134ff) The 1998 winner of the All-Ireland Amateur Drama Festival, the play also received acclaim when performed in April 1999 by prisoners in the annual Mountjoy Drama Project in Dublin. Minogue, a secondary teacher in Nenagh, County Tipperary, crafts a play that is much more than a pastiche of emotional scenes and tableaux. While the work flirts with melodrama, it provides a concise picture of the Famine's impact on peasants, as well as the heroic struggle to save victims. Key historical figures are depicted: Dr. George Mellis Douglas, a Scots Presbyterian in control of the medical station, and Fr. Bernard McGauran, a Sligo man in charge of the religious mission. (Hogan E., 1997, n.p.; O'Meara, 1999, 20; Slevin, 1997, n.p.) *Flight to Grosse Île*, through its Canadian frame, pleads for an inclusive Ireland. Debate arose in the late 1990s over Ireland's responsibility in accepting immigrants and refugees. Having seen its own emigrants leave for the same political and economic reasons, Ireland found the turn-around a new and awkward phenomenon. A story of doomed love between Catherine and Eoin McAogain, master of the village hedge school, the play recalls the kindness of the Québecois who adopted Irish orphans. Catherine recalls their admonition, "*N'oubliez jamais votre passé irlandais. N'oubliez jamais que vous êtes irlandais.*" (Minogue, 1996, 2) Her memories and Eoin's diaries transform the past. Physical suffering becomes a witness to spiritual strength for the future. But that future must include a payment on Ireland's historical debt; Irish society must welcome refugees and immigrants. Director Lulu Reynolds cast Tola Mohmoh, a black prisoner at Mountjoy, as Father Cazeau, the French Canadian priest who urges his parishioners to adopt Irish orphans. Audiences were shocked, but Mary Holland, writing in *The Irish Times*, hailed the Mountjoy production as "the most important play, politically, which Dublin has seen in a long time." (Holland, 1999, 16) Famine Ireland speaks to the Celtic Tiger, seeking to alter anti-immigrant discourse through a pointed history lesson.

***McArdle and the power of discursive frames.*** John McArdle's *Two Houses* (1996) invites viewers to step inside contending "frames" by which one can view the Famine. TEAM Educational Theatre Company, Dublin, has taken the play on several national tours. (Ryan, 1999, n.p.) Through a disturbing repositioning, students confront two conflicting discourses. While the play clearly sides with peasant victims, it refuses an easy nationalist telling. Audience members are asked to consider the moral implications of economic and social behavior. Two perspectives emerge, those of Vanessa Grey, mistress of the Drumleer estate, and of Alan and Una McBride, her tenants. Replete with mime, music, improvisation and audience interaction, the play leads students into the murky waters of "the half-wrongs and the half-rights," where "the love of what is good and beautiful can bring hardship and misery and death." (McArdle, 1996, 25) An *Irish Times* reviewer questioned whether the play's economic rationality "... arguably loads the deck for the landlord." (Browne, 1996, n.p.) By probing the ambiguity of "facts" -- how they are constructed and who employs them -- McArdle points to both van Dijk's notion of social cognition in maintaining a dominant discourse and Bourdieu's habitus. McArdle's alternative narrative frames echo Hall on semiotic symmetry in encoding and decoding.

**2. Contemporary poetry: Remembrance as a moral act**

Irish poetry, both in Irish and in English, consistently links land and agency. Phase I poets, for example, use the Famine as a catalyst for national resistance. By Phase V, with the Famine several generations removed and a new interest in confronting both the catastrophe and its repression, the relationship between land and memory as a key to agency has grown in importance from its Phase IV return in Brendan Kennelly's "My Dark Fathers" and Seamus Heaney's "Digging." In Phase V, Eavan Boland (b. 1944) and Desmond Egan (b. 1936) merit attention.

Boland's concern with the Famine is seen first in "The Famine Road," published in *The War Horse* (1975). The poem provides a lyrical, but chilling description of a pointless relief project and the suffering of relief workers, introduces the longing of a feminine voice and frames it with a bureaucratic report to Trevelyan, the official in charge

of Britain's Famine policy. In Boland's 1994 collection, *In a Time of Violence,* two poems with specific Famine connections seek to recover agency. In "That the Science of Cartography is Limited," the speaker recalls a time she and her lover wandered in the West of Ireland and came upon a Famine road. "Where they died, the road ended / and ends still ... ." (16-17) (Boland, 1994, 5) Reverie leads the speaker to consider that all maps are incomplete fictional realities, for they do not simply distort, "the masterful, the apt rendering of / the spherical as flat, nor / an ingenious design which persuades a curve / into a plane ...," but they also deceive and deny by omitting the faded but observable details of landscape. (21-24) (Boland, 1994, 5) The speaker must "tell myself again" that "the line which says woodland and cries hunger / and gives out among sweet pine and cypress / and finds no horizon / will not be there." (25-29) (Boland, 1994, 5) The remembered incident lies in the speaker's past, yet that incident included a recollection of the past. The past and the landscape are interwoven, and remembrance changes the present. This change has the capacity to restore and renew agency. Neither fixed images of reality, such as maps, nor historical and ideological claims, can be taken as absolute. Like the Famine road and graves, much lies below the surface and is inscribed in the land itself. Only by recovering the denied, the silenced and the omitted can the wounds be healed.

In "March 1 1847: By the First Post," Boland creates the letter of an upper-class girl to her sister in London. The writer-speaker reveals how remote the Ascendancy is from Famine hunger and death. She is unaware that the Famine, ultimately, will undo the entire political and economic system supporting her. She writes, "I go nowhere -- / not from door to carriage -- but a cloth / sprinkled with bay rum & rose attar / is pressed against my mouth." (10-13) (Boland, 1994, 7) Her very gentility exposes the brutality of the sight "on Friday, / driving with Mama, a woman lying / along the Kells Road with her baby -- / in full view." The line's abrupt pause and its enjambment emphasize the offense -- not the death, but its visibility, which disturbs the Ascendancy *weltanschauung*. These two contrasting poems from "Writing in a Time of Violence" suggest that remembrance is insufficient. Only a comprehensive, pluralistic recovery of the past, ordered to a

legitimate objective, can give agency genuine moral content. This approach obtained a public stage in former Irish President Mary Robinson's Famine rhetoric.

This same elegiac quality laces its way through Egan's poem sequence in *Famine* (1997). Egan treats the trauma that the 1840s crisis still represents for the Irish at home and abroad, "for so much grief cannot be buried down the fields / or under tumbled cabins those common / monuments to a great race that never learned to beg / which saved Europe." (II, 28-32) (Egan, 1997, 18) For the speaker, "the stink of famine / hangs in the bushes still / ... / it is only a field away / has made us all immigrants / guilty for having survived." (I, 1-2, 10-12) (Egan, 1997, 15) He traces the loss of language, the scarring of landscape, music and social relations and the repression of memory, "no one wanting to say *famine.*" (II, 23) (Egan, 1997, 18) The "*kenosis*," or emptying of Ireland and the Irish by the Famine, created "a legacy / to carry across time and the world" such that the "black disease is active still" in sectarian hatred in the North and in "sad Dublin." (IX, 12-13; Epilogue, 1-2) (Egan, 1997, 35, 39)

Finally, John Hewitt (1907-1987), Northern regionalist and socialist, provides in "The Scar" a rare Northern perspective on the Famine's importance for Irish Protestant self-understanding. Hewitt's speaker claims the Famine's pain -- and thus a right to its discourses -- by recounting how his great grandmother contracted fever by assisting a beggar from the West. The woman, ignoring "the spores from black potato stalks, the spittle / mottled with poison in his rattling chest" rises quickly to attend the visitor, "accepting in turn the famine fever." (7-10) (Gray, 1995, 176) As a result, "that brief confrontation / conscribed me of the Irishry forever." (11-12) (Gray, 1995, 176) Hewitt's speaker asserts that the woman's death makes Ireland "my nation," "[t]hough much I cherish lies outside their vision / and much they prize I have no claim to share." (13-15) (Gray, 1995, 176)

**3. Fiction explores contending voices, positioned bodies**

Eugene McCabe's novel *Tales from the Poorhouse.*(1999), published by The Gallery Press in Loughcrew, Oldcastle, County Meath, is taken from four monologues for an RTÉ television series, and clearly shows the influence of its origins in performance.

Rich in shifts in time, perspective and mood, the novel creates four distinct Famine voices that echo, reinforce and subvert each other. Each voice is necessary in order to understand the others, and no single voice sufficient to tell the full story. As such, *Tales from the Poorhouse* interrogates the difficulties in communication, yet argues for the necessity of a search for mutual understanding and forgiveness. While McCabe engages all five analytical themes, gender and agency dominate. Each voice exposes an aspect of gender construction shaped or revealed by the stresses and uncertainties of the Famine. The fact that the voices of Roisin Brady, a Catholic "orphan," the eldest of the three Brady children, and Josephine Brady, her mother, frame the text and have equal standing with the voices of Lord Clonroy, the estate owner, and Lonan Reginald Murphy, the local poorhouse master, already establishes a shift in gender relations. During Famine times, the voices of peasant women were not heard on the same level, if at all, with those of the gentry and a poorhouse superintendent, whose favor could mean life or death. In Phase V Ireland, new voices -- women, immigrants, gays, political and religious dissidents -- were being heard. Van Dijk argues that a dominant discourse suppresses realities and silences voices that fail to advance its power agenda. Here, McCabe recovers such voices. Once, after Roisin has been taken sexually by the poorhouse master, she mutters, "'You don't own me.'" (McCabe, 1999, 45) McCabe's novel is very much a discussion of ownership, domination and exploitation. Murphy claims he has "no wish to own or dominate," yet that is precisely what he repeatedly does. He asks, "Who in God's name, or the Devil's, would want to own them?" (McCabe, 1999, 45) In that, he mirrors gentry and British complaints about the burden of "owning" Ireland, while clinging to control. The play also focuses on the body, and how it is used to dominate or resist to preserve autonomy.

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