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Famine Memory and Diasporic Identity in US Periodical Fiction, 1891–1918

ORIGIN MYTHS AND THE PARADOX OF SILENCE

While the problematic notion that the Famine engendered a deep-rooted silence in Irish literature is now seldom repeated in academic studies (cf. Morash 300–1), many scholars still underestimate the role of the Famine in Irish-American culture, and in particular continue to misinterpret the ways the Famine featured in Irish-American fiction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Thus, in a 2012 essay on “Irish-American nostalgia” Jason P. Byrne claims that there is “virtually no significant engagement in nineteenth-century Irish-American literature with the personal and communal sufferings caused by the Famine” (51). While Byrne’s statement is somewhat qualified by his use of “significant,” he does not further define his use of the word. If he means that few writers from the Irish-American canon engaged directly with the Famine past, he would be right (with the notable exception of Finley Peter Dunne), but if he is talking about quantity, reach and readership his observation would hold no water, as is shown in recent publications by Margu rite Corporaal, Lindsay Janssen, and myself. Similarly, in her recent *Ireland’s Great Famine in Irish-American History* (2013), the only book-length exploration of Irish-American Famine memory to date, Mary C. Kelly takes as her starting point what she perceives to be “the public silence that enveloped its name [the Famine] from the late 1800s,” even if she acknowledges that this purported silence “never entirely eradicated ethnic interest in its impact or meaning” (xx). Such statements neglect a sizable body of material, including literary fiction, which suggests a different scenario. The development of Famine memory in the United States is more complicated than such readings propose, and the notion that Famine memory faded from view from the late nineteenth century onwards only to be consciously recuperated decades later is an

oversimplification.

This article is concerned with one aspect of this question and aims to qualify the dominant view of Famine memory in the United States as being marked, as Kelly would have it, by a tension between sublimation and reappearance (xvi). Kelly's theory suggests that the memory of the Famine slowly disappeared as Irish immigrant communities went through what John Belchem has termed "ethnic fade," the notion that, as members of the Irish diaspora become more fully integrated or absorbed in their host culture, their ethnic background becomes less marked and loses significance (Belchem, "Freedom" 34–5; Belchem, "Nationalism" 103). Belchem, Don MacRaild, Roger Swift, Alan O'Day and others have taken issue with this notion; as MacRaild points out with regard to the Irish diaspora in Britain, even later generations of immigrants continued to self-identify in "hybrid Irish terms," partly because throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there was a continued influx of new Irish immigrants even in later-generation diasporic communities (MacRaild 3).

Similar conditions apply to the American case. Indeed, arguments regarding the disappearance (or suppression) of Famine memory in Irish-American culture appear paradoxical in light of the fact that the event has for a long time been considered central to mainstream Irish-American ethnic identity (Nash 30) – not just by Irish-Americans, but also by others writing about Irish immigrants in the US and their descendants. During the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, pieces on immigration in high-circulation popular journals such as *Atlantic Monthly* and *Century Magazine* all mentioned the influence of the Famine on the influx of Irish in America as a matter of course. Writing in 1896, the American journalist Henry Childs Merwin simply referred to "the Irish famine of 1846" to start his analysis of the Irish presence in the US (291); in 1900, Kate Holladay Claghorn, a frequent commentator on US immigration, considered it almost self-explanatory that Irish migration to the US started with the Famine (536); and in 1914 Wisconsin sociology professor Edward Alsworth Ross suggested that "the famine of 1846–48" brought the dregs of Ireland to American shores (while earlier and later waves of Irish emigration brought "a type that was superior to those who remained behind") (950). Further examples are not hard to find. During this period, US immigration was a political hot-button issue (leading to restrictions on immigration from particular countries and eventually resulting in a series of infamous immigration acts between 1917 and 1924), so there would have been significant interest in the topic. As the Irish were one of the largest and

most conspicuous recent immigrant groups and the Famine was widely known to have been a major catalyst of Irish emigration, it is not surprising that writers referred to the event but thought it unnecessary to discuss it in too much detail.

EXILE, DIASPORIC MEMORY AND IRISH ATLANTICISM

Historically, many Irish-Americans have tended to consider this causality self-evident too: the Famine is “the event that is popularly believed to have caused the Irish diaspora” (Byron 294–5). Regardless of whether or not such blanket claims are historically correct, the centrality of the Famine to Irish-American self-conceptions is axiomatic. In this sense, the focus on the Great Famine as the point of origin renders Irish emigration somewhat of a textbook example of a diaspora. In Kevin Kenny’s view, “the famine dispersal can usefully be described in diasporic terms: the single catastrophic event, the involuntary migration, the sustained migration to several destinations at once, the strong international sense of grievance and exile thereafter” (144). While this focus on the Famine downplays the impact of other factors, it facilitates the development of coherent narratives which mould a largely uniform diasporic identity. Particularly for second- or third-generation Irish-Americans who themselves did not emigrate during the Famine, the event and the resultant wave of emigration constitute an easily identifiable and assimilable foundation narrative; in J.J. Lee’s formulation, “the memory of the Famine became the focal point around which crystallized Irish America’s search for historical understanding of why they found themselves where they were” (22).

Central to this narrative of the Famine diaspora, as Kenny’s observation indicates, is the persistent sense that Irish migrants are in fact exiles, forced by circumstance and the machinations of a colonial government to leave their idyllic home. As Kerby Miller has shown, while the exile topos was used “sporadically and situationally” in individual discourse, it is much more prevalent in collective discourse, including literature, newspapers and songs (80). Indeed, the transgenerational proliferation of the exile topos and the way cultural identity is conceptualised and framed render much Irish-American writer key examples of diasporic memory. In the words of Andreas Huyssen, diasporic memory “is by definition cut off, hybrid, split” and thus shares many characteristics with memory per se, which is always “an act of *recherche* rather than recuperation” (152). After all, as William Safran observes, “the members of a diaspora may or may not have adjusted to life in the hostland, but they

have a spiritual, emotional, and/or cultural home that is outside of the hostland" (13). The belief that Irish emigrants are exiles from Ireland is one of the most conspicuous products of this dynamic.

In light of this interplay between memories of home and the realities of the new host country, it is useful to consider Famine memory in a transatlantic context. Irish memory studies in particular has recently become increasingly focused on transnational constructions of cultural memory. As Oona Frawley writes, "[m]emory becomes a conduit to a particular past, but, simultaneously, because it distorts and stretches, invents and alters, it constructs a new Ireland, one that never was, and passes it on to descendants for whom Ireland never was" (4). In this sense, she argues, "Irishness is inherited as narrative and not experienced directly in many cases, leading to a sense of Ireland that is preserved in the past" (6). Moreover, as Peter D. O'Neill and David Lloyd write, an Atlanticist approach enables scholars to move from an exclusive focus on "the trajectory of the Irish as one of emigration from Ireland and assimilation to the nation of arrival" to "[t]he notion that the Irish experience may have been defined as much by movement itself, and by processes of encounter, competition and solidarity" (xvi). The construction of diasporic identity in fiction is a key example of this double bind.

THE FAMINE IN IRISH-AMERICAN FICTION

As my examples show, the identification of the community with the famine past is firmly entrenched in written accounts. Still, it is true that for an event the scale of the Famine the amount and scope of reference in newspapers and fiction could plausibly be expected to have been higher. It is definitely the case that the Famine's presence in Irish-American popular novels became less pronounced from the late 1880s onwards, as the moral didacticism of Mary Ann Sadlier and similar authors fell out of fashion, to be superseded by the urban realism of authors like James W. Sullivan and "lace-curtain" fiction by writers such as Maurice Egan and Katherine Conway.¹ Yet this development did not in fact signify a disappearance of the theme. Rather, as is also demonstrated by the results of the Relocated Remembrance research project at Radboud University Nijmegen, The Netherlands, the spread of Famine fiction continued in mass-market periodicals. While the diminishing representation of the Famine in novels would suggest that literary interest in the event subsides or, as scholars such as Mary Kelly suggest, the memory becomes increasingly repressed as a shameful episode that could "undermine Irish-

American progress" (Kelly xviii), this alternative literary record demonstrates that it remained an significant element both of Irish-American self-imaginings and of American examinations of Irish-American diaspora culture in periodical fiction. While I do not want to overstate the importance of the Famine in Irish-American discourse, as in absolute numbers it was a relatively minor concern, this material demonstrates that Famine memory was neither merely an ethnic minority interest nor in any significantly demonstrable sense consciously repressed.

An important reason for the erroneous conviction that the memory of the Famine became entirely sublimated is the sheer amount of under-researched material. As Charles Fanning pointed out in 2000, "[u]ncollected early Irish-American stories are a rich hoard, yet to be fully examined" (183). Similarly, Robert M. Dowling has argued that "there exists an as-yet-undiscovered reservoir of ethnic and working-class writing from this period [the late nineteenth and early twentieth century] that deserves to be funneled into the larger U.S. literary tradition" (2). However, as more periodicals from the period are digitised and made available online, it becomes easier to access and use these sources, via such online repositories as the Library of Congress' *Chronicling America* database, the Internet Archive, the Open Library, UNZ.org and the HathiTrust digital library. This development will facilitate research on literary production in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century periodicals and newspapers and enable scholars to gain a fuller overview of Irish-American writing of this period.

Fascinatingly, while many Famine stories (both literary and journalistic) appeared in publications which catered primarily to the Irish ethnic community, such as the *Irish-American* and *Irish World* newspapers, and Catholic periodicals such as the *Rosary Magazine*, the *Catholic World* and the *Messenger*, there is also a number of texts in immensely popular periodicals such as *Harper's Weekly*, *Scribner's Magazine*, *Century* and *McClure's Magazine*, whose circulation was anywhere between 150,000–300,000 in the period under discussion (Nourie and Nourie). Moreover, some of these stories were written by authors without an Irish background, further demonstrating that the Famine, or at least a particular version of the event, had entered the American mainstream, likely as a result of the increasing assimilation of Irish immigrants.

In general, it is possible to distinguish several categories of short stories in US journals of this period, in terms of readership and/or themes. First of all, many journals reprinted Irish stories, such as Mrs J.H. Riddell's "The Pity of It," originally from 1894, which was reprinted in the January 1897 issue of *McClure's*. Thematically very similar but originally written

for a different audience are stories about Famine written by Irish-American authors, often for an Irish-American (or American Catholic) readership, such as John A. Foote's "The Honor of Shaun Malia," which appeared in the October 1900 issue of the *Catholic World*, and P.J. Coleman's "Outrooted," which appeared in *Rosary Magazine* in 1905. Also written for the US market, but for a less niche readership, are chapters from Alexander Irvine's well-known *My Lady of the Chimney Corner* (1913), which was first serialised in *McClure's* and became a bestseller and "virtually a perennial" in Ireland as well (Foster 26). The third category is somewhat debatable and concerns stories which are not directly about the Famine, but which consciously refer back to well-known representations of famine, transposing familiar Irish imagery to American contexts, particularly the tenement slums. This includes stories such as Kate McPhelim Cleary's "The Mission of Kitty Malone" (1901) and Harvey J. Higgins's "The Exiles" (1906), which use tropes familiar from earlier Irish and Irish-American fiction to depict Irish-American life in urban settings.

In what remains of this article I will discuss two stories from the fourth category, stories about the role of the Famine in Irish-American culture. Both published in *Scribner's Magazine*, Octave Thanet's "Tommy and Thomas" (1892) and Mary Synon's "My Grandmother and Myself" (1916) place the memory of the Famine in an American context and thematise acts of recall. In so doing, as I will argue, these stories call into question received notions of Irish-American identity and the role of Famine memory in its development, and by so doing also problematise later scholarly accounts of these issues.

As Ann Rigney has argued, fiction is an important medium for the development and transmission of cultural memory. In the case of the stories discussed here, the Famine functions as a node of diasporic memory, which can be critically interrogated. Such nodes can be considered "imaginative resources for generating new meanings and contesting old ones" (Rigney 19). Indeed, though often disregarded by scholars, popular fiction, including stories in high-circulation periodicals, is a highly useful source to gauge the popular interest in particular issues of memory. The stories discussed here were published in *Scribner's Magazine*, whose circulation during this period was between 150,000 and 215,000. These stories were moreover lavishly illustrated and republished in book form, suggesting that the publisher believed they would appeal to a wide audience. Thematically, these stories are particularly interesting because they are self-conscious critical explorations of the role of Famine memory in the development of Irish-American identities.

MEMORY AS A STIMULUS FOR SUCCESS: OCTAVE THANET,
 “TOMMY AND THOMAS” (1892)

Octave Thanet’s “Tommy and Thomas,” first published in *Scribner’s Magazine* in October 1892, traces the social ascent of an Irish-American character and the effect of his Irish heritage on his rise to success. Although Alice French, who published under the pseudonym Octave Thanet, was not of Irish descent herself, she had a marked interest in Irish-American affairs and the history of the Famine. This transpires most clearly in a genre-crossing tale she published in *Century Magazine* in January 1891, “An Irish Gentlewoman in the Famine Time,” a well-researched twelve-page meditation on the Famine, which gives a short overview of administrative and charitable responses to the crisis by focusing on letters (purportedly) written by a Cork upper-class woman, Miss Martha “C—”, who, according to Thanet, acted as a proxy for her US-based brother, the landlord of an estate in “D—”, Co. Cork, together with her sister Katherine.²

“Tommy and Thomas” is the third instalment of a six-part series of stories and vignettes by Thanet titled “Stories of a Western Town,” which were published in *Scribner’s* between August 1892 and February 1893 and later republished as a book by Charles Scribner’s and Sons, the publisher of *Scribner’s*, with the original illustrations by A.B. Frost. The individual stories of the sequence focus on a number of the city’s inhabitants, including immigrants from various ethnic backgrounds, such as German and Irish. “Tommy and Thomas” is primarily concerned with establishing which qualities give an immigrant – or, for that matter, any social climber – legitimacy in terms of class relations, such as a good education. However, the example of the protagonist, Tommy Fitzmaurice, a lower-class Irish-American boy who eventually becomes firmly established in the American upper-middle class, is striking both for its use of Irish history as, paradoxically, an adjuvant for the process of assimilation, and for its ultimate belief in a class-related essentialism that facilitates Tommy’s rise. A talented student and dutiful son, Tommy is the focus of his parents’ social ambitions; while his father, an honest saloonkeeper, and his mother have no express desire to improve their own situation, their son’s education and advance in the world is of the utmost importance to them. The high school valedictorian oration which inaugurates Tommy’s rise is particularly successful for its reference to his family’s Famine past and the benevolence of a landlord (not the family’s own) which saved his father’s life: “It was the story of the famine that really captured the audience; and Tommy told it well, with the

true Irish fire, in a beautiful voice" (452). It brings his audience to their feet and is "printed in both the city papers" (*ibid.*).

Significantly, however, Tommy only decides to include this story at the behest of an itinerant rich society lady, a certain Mrs Carriswood, who becomes interested in Tommy's progress after meeting him at the house of a wealthy classmate of Tommy's. The speech is titled "The Triumph of Democracy" and was originally a rather anodyne discussion of the American political ideal. However, explaining his own stance to Mrs Carriswood, Tommy introduces the Irish case to make his point:

Sure I guess it is the best government, ma'am, though, of course, I got to make it out that way, anyhow. But we come from Ireland, and there they got the other kind [a Democratic Party (the Whigs) as opposed to democracy as a political system], and me granny she starved in the famine time, she did that—with the fever. Me father walked twenty mile to the Sackville's place, where they gave him some meal, though he wasn't one of their tenants; yes, and the lady told him how he would be cooking it. I never will forget that lady! (452)

Both for Tommy and for his audience, this story is important. In Tommy's case, it is an example of what Marianne Hirsch calls postmemory, a second-generation memory which defines his identity even while he never experienced the Famine himself. He has never met Lady Sackville, nor has he been a direct beneficiary of her charity, but still he "never will forget" her. Even as he is clearly a new American, in many ways post-ethnic in his gradual adoption of a standardised Gilded Age gentility, he remains defined by his Irish heritage. By capitalising on his inherited Famine memory, he increases his chances of self-improvement. His audience is captivated by the pathos of this narrative, and its affective power outshines the political grandiloquence of his rehearsed speech, a "kind of spread-eagle thing" which in itself is not of surpassing interest (*ibid.*).

By facilitating the conditions for Tommy's political rise, Mrs Carriswood is cast as an American counterpart to Lady Sackville. She helps him reclaim his ethnic background, which enables him to develop his identity as an immigrant on the make. Towards the end of the story, when Tommy has become both financially and politically successful, the Famine scene he recounted in his speech is actualised when his new position in the upper-middle class brings him into contact with the Honourable Basil Sackville, a grandson of the Sackvilles who saved his family. He tells Basil of his family's Famine history, upon which Basil, of his own accord, validates the notion, originally dismissed as fanciful by Mrs

Carriswood, that the Fitzmaurices are descended from a Hiberno-Norman noble family – apparently, Tommy’s great-grandfather was a Viscount (461). This confirmation of ancestral glory completes Tommy’s assimilation into high society, and Mrs Corriswood now refers to him as “the Honorable Thomas Fitzmaurice” (462). His class ascendancy is thus also an effect of his Famine story.

As such, although the Famine is itself not represented in the story other than as an anecdote, the story’s chiasmic plot with regard to class and charity ultimately pivots on the memory of the Famine in two senses. The rhetorical adoption of his father’s Famine experiences inaugurates Tommy’s rise to success, and the later reiteration of the same story when Tommy meets Basil Sackville caps it. This dynamic between diasporic memory and successful integration is familiar from other American Famine narratives of the time, particularly John F. Brennan’s *Erin Mor* (1892), which combines a strong focus on American politics and the Irish-American role in the political development of the United States with a continuous awareness of the Irish past. Disingenuousness and blatant self-reinvention for political and material gain are punished severely in Brennan’s novel, as is suggested by the example of Famine immigrant Barney Devoy, who denies the influence of the Famine to suggest that free trade did not have a pernicious effect on Ireland and should therefore be implemented as a matter of policy in the US. While Devoy becomes a wealthy and influential publican, politician, and industrialist, he comes to a sordid end in a typical moral twist which harks back to earlier Irish-American didactic fiction (see Cusack and Janssen).

The trajectory of Thanet’s story is the inverse of that of *Erin Mor* and, unlike the novel, the story does not use a Manichean plot structure to exemplify its message – yet the underlying point is the same. Assimilation should not be at the expense of your allegiance to your ethnic background, even if successful integration will efface many distinctive features of your heritage: Tommy, for instance, loses his distinctive slangy way of speaking, which is already a fusion of the American English spoken in the neighbourhood where he lives and his parents’ Irish brogue. Thus, while the story advocates self-malleability, it also prescribes a form of ethnic essentialism. This is further underscored by the way Tommy is described: he has “the true Irish-Norman face” and “a genuine Irish orator’s mouth” (449).³ The story thus exemplifies what Kevin Kenny has argued with regard to processes of assimilation in the US: “The acquisition of an ethnic identity—based not just on pre-migration culture but also on the new conditions in the host land—was a precondition or means to assimilation, rather than an obstacle” (147). In Thanet’s view,

the Irish are an interesting but not entirely unique example of the processes of assimilation and ethnic identity formation; similar themes also lie at the heart of her other "Stories of a Western Town," suggesting that she sees this as an American and not merely as an Irish-American story. Nevertheless, the fact that she wrote an earlier essay on the Famine, and identifies the Irish immigrants and their descendants entirely with a single event in the history of their home country is significant, as it suggests that the Irish-American self-image as being exiles from a famishing land became epithetic even outside the ethnic community.

NATIONALISM, WAR AND MEMORY: MARY SYNON, "MY GRANDMOTHER AND MYSELF" (1916)

Like Thanet's "Tommy and Thomas," Mary Synon's "My Grandmother and Myself," is concerned with the role Famine memory plays as a constituent of ethnic and national identity in the United States and as a factor which influences Irish assimilation. The author of numerous stories and works of non-fiction whose work was often published by mass-market magazines, Synon was a committed Catholic writer, a staunch US patriot, and deeply involved with US politics; her writing usually mirrors these concerns. While little is known about her background, judging by her surname and her religion she was likely of Irish-American extraction. She was born in Chicago, and worked as a reporter for the *Chicago Journal* and the influential newspaper *New York World*, spending time in Ireland and London as a correspondent (Honey 338). During the First World War, she published a series of stories and essays to support the US war effort, many aimed at a young audience. "My Grandmother and Me" was first published in 1916 in *Scribner's Magazine* and republished in 1918 as the introduction to *My Country's Part*, a didactic work for a young audience on what it means to be 'American' during the war. Like John Brennan's *Erin Mor*, it responds directly to social and political developments, using the story of the Famine for leverage to influence current affairs.

While the Famine plays an important role in "My Grandmother and Myself," Irish history does not feature frequently in Synon's fictional oeuvre, and the story's main message features within other ethnic constellations in other stories, such as "The Fleet Goes By" (1914). Nevertheless, Synon's interest in the Famine is also reflected in her biography of the influential Irish-American nun Sr Emily Power, which contains several pages describing the crisis in language which betrays its author's affinity with John Mitchel's influential nationalist reading of

the event as what would now be defined an act of genocide:

Any child – even a child of the privileged landlord class – growing up in those years of misery bore through life in his memory the mark of what he saw and what he heard. Ellen Power was no mere observer. She was one of the millions of sufferers from a governmental policy of oppression of industry and suppression of population. The English government was destroying Ireland by decree; the men and women, boys and girls who huddled, homeless, on the roads, or crouched, starving, beside cold hearthstones testified to the extent of that ordered destruction. (Synon, *Mother* 11)

While this biography was published four decades after “My Grandmother and Myself,” the emphasis on memory in the description of the Famine is strongly reminiscent of the story, and some of the story’s events may have been based on Power’s life. Synon probably knew Power, who died in 1909, personally, and as such would already have known at least part of her biography when she wrote the story.

Like many other Famine stories, “My Grandmother and Myself” features multiple layers, placing the memory of the Famine at a remove from the reader. The first-person narrator, John or Shauneen, is a young Irish-American boy whose grandmother immigrated to the US immediately after the Famine. As transpires later in the story, the woman raised her son, also called John, fully by herself, after her Irish-American husband perished while fighting as a Union soldier in the Civil War (which suggests that he was devoted to his adopted country). Having never been to Ireland themselves, John Sr and Shauneen are more American than Irish, but while Shauneen self-identifies as an American (224), John is an ardent Irish nationalist who conspires with a number of acquaintances from different ethnic backgrounds to support the Germans, as their victory would spell the end of the British Empire; moreover, Germany had vowed to liberate Ireland should Kaiser Wilhelm’s forces be victorious.⁴ Having lost family members to nationalist violence and disapproving of any action that could compromise the United States, the grandmother is vehemently opposed to the men’s plot, and after finding out the location of their secret meetings she confronts them: “’Tis not England [...] that you fight with your plots. ’Tis America you strike when you strike here. And, as long as you stay here, be Americans and not traitors!” (229) While admitting that she misses Ireland, she ridicules John for his unquestioning devotion to a country he has never seen at the expense of the land where he was born, and which has enabled him to become an independent shop-owner rather than a landless labourer.

When the grandmother praises New York, her son's "native town," John replies "I wish I'd been born in Ireland." His mother dismisses his romantic yearning: "She laughed. 'And if I'd stayed in Ireland I'd have starved [...] and little chance you'd have had of being born anywhere'" (227). The grandmother possesses an oracular yet commonsensical wisdom about the benefits of liberty and the hazards of political extremism, countering her son's effusions about Ireland and empire with a degree of realism and pragmatism that is the result of the hardships she has suffered in her life. As such, despite her age and her blindness, she is positioned as the most perceptive member of her family.

While narrator Shauneen is ostensibly the story's main protagonist, his main function is to act as his grandmother's confidant, and in many ways the story is simply a vehicle for his grandmother's extensive peroration, which comprises a quarter of the story. After he has guided his grandmother to the house where John's secret meeting is taking place, she asks him to take her to the Battery, to the location of Castle Garden, New York's old Emigrant Landing Depot. On the site of her entry into the United States, the grandmother relates her life story to her grandson and explains why she disapproves of her son's typically diasporic brand of virulent nationalism. Here, she recounts how everything she has done in her life in the United States has been in the light of the Famine, beginning her story with a rhetorical question: "You've heard tell of the famine, Shauneen [...], the great famine that fell on Ireland, blighting even the potatoes in the ground?" (230) She left Ireland after her father and one of her sisters had died, and by dint of her industry saved enough to bring over her surviving siblings as well. America was the land of opportunity, proving to be everything Ireland under its colonial regime could not be: "'Twas here we found the freedom the Irish had been fighting for. 'Twas here, away from landlords and landholding, away from famine and persecution, that we found that life need not be a thing of sorrow" (231).

John is a textbook example of the Irish exile, as his longing for return to a prelapsarian Ireland takes precedence over his everyday concerns. As Edward Said suggests in "Reflections on Exile," a persistent devotion to the otherness of being an exile often "translates into an intransigence that is not easily ignored" (182). The story's reference to Castle Garden can be read as a way to counter John's pernicious sense of exile, as it functions as a symbol of the family's social acceptability. After the opening of Ellis Island in 1890, Castle Garden became associated with earlier waves of emigrants, who by the time of the story would largely have become assimilated and thus no (longer) perceived as social threats or outsiders. Given the widespread public debate on 'desirable'

and 'undesirable' immigrants at the time (which resulted in a series of xenophobic exclusion acts), the reference to this site of earlier European immigration is significant here. By conspiring with other (descendants of) immigrants to hinder the US war effort, John Sr suggests that immigrants may indeed be "traitors" (229), but the grandmother's insistence on the importance of gratitude and allegiance to the US aims to counter the notion that the Irish are undesirable immigrants.⁵

According to the logic of the story, it is important that the Famine be remembered, and its memory survives in transmission across generations, but Synon takes issue with the conviction that Irish-Americans are exiles and are under the influence of the Famine's moral imperative to oppose the British Empire by any means necessary. Instead, she uses the grandmother's Famine story to suggest that immigrants do not have to surrender their ethnic specificity – but their awareness of the hardships they have overcome should stimulate and not adulterate their dedication to the United States. For John Sr and Shauneen, this means that, like John's father during the Civil War, they should support the war effort and be US, rather than Irish, patriots first and foremost.

CONCLUSION

In a recent essay David Lloyd emphasises that diasporic identity, and its manifold counterpoints with cultural memories of the homeland and myths of return, is premised on a process of self-identification in response to the realities of the diasporic homeland, not on a fixed set of conditions or characteristics that together constitute a homogenous, inalienable core of identity: "The dialectics of diaspora is in a crucial sense a negative dialectics, arriving not at sublation into the nation-state but into a state of suspension that throws ideologies of belonging into question" (par. 7). As such, Lloyd argues, the notion of idealised homelands and the concomitant ascendancy of myths of return are "better understood as the utopian rearticulation of a dystopic dwelling in estrangement from either the ancestral or the new nation" (ibid.). Echoing Lloyd's observation, both Thanet and Synon's stories call into question the expediency of the Irish-American sense of exile – not by ignoring or denying it, but by giving a tally of the benefits of immigration rather than a litany of its ills. While each story countenances that the Irish were forced by economic necessity to emigrate to the United States, and nostalgia plays an important role in the diasporic memory of their characters, their sense of loss is transmuted into something more positive, an attitude to benefit optimally from the opportunities given by the United States and not

dwell on the apparent involuntariness of their transatlantic relocation.

This is also central to other texts from this period that consider the Famine in the light of transgenerational integration into the host society. John Brennan's *Erin Mor*, for example, is also very much a hyphenated text; its protagonists' Irishness is a function of their successful and sincere adoption of a particular US self-image (Cusack and Janssen 409–12). As such, while these texts all hark back to the Famine past, they eschew an unproductive fixation on the troubles of the past, instead employing cultural memory for current purposes of self-improvement or -definition. Thus, while they subscribe to mythic and familiar renditions of the Famine past and emphasise it is important the younger generation know about their roots, their ethnic historicism is future-oriented. While the Famine signals loss, it also marks a contrast with the positive aspects of life in the United States; emigration is scripted as relocation, not dislocation. Ireland remains a utopia of the mind – a no-place set outside time – or a memory. Because of its atemporal or mnemonic character, it checks progression. In the United States, the memory of Ireland must be cherished, but as a motivation to get ahead in life, not as a lost idyll that is to be recuperated. It is an origin but not a destination – the key to progress is a dynamic cultural self-identification, not a strategy of cultural ossification.

What Thanet and Synon's stories and several similar texts do is interrogate the orthodoxies and unreconstructed ideologies that had conglomerated around constructions of Irish-American identity, particularly with regard to the Famine. By so doing, such stories confront us with the need to also interrogate present-day scholarly orthodoxies about the development of Irish-American self-imaginings and the afterlife of the Famine. Furthermore, they remind us that there remain reams of newspaper, periodical, and archival sources that have yet to be studied in detail, and which may complicate academic narratives and lend new voice to diasporic histories. The examples and developments sketched in this article suggests that the memory of the Famine was not actively suppressed in response to a lingering cultural trauma, but rather that the event was so familiar as to require no extensive explanation. Unlike scholarship on the Irish afterlives of the Famine, studies of the transatlantic memory of the Famine are relatively few in number and often insufficiently self-critical (for notable exceptions see Mark-FitzGerald, McMahon, and Corporaal and King). We should continue interrogating our approaches to sources, lest we perpetuate a particular approach to the memory of the Famine in American and Irish-American culture which neglects a large amount of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century source

material from periodicals, both mainstream and niche, demonstrating the need for an alternative approach. Such a change will yield further options for new directions, including an exhaustive cultural survey of the transatlantic circulation of Famine memory, and a broader comparative exploration of the many afterlives of Irish history in Irish-American popular fiction.

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NOTES

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1. The “lace curtain” school of writing represented the rise of Irish immigrants to the middle classes and the achievement of Anglo-Saxon genteelness and respectability. The term was used semi-pejoratively from the 1890s onwards, and was reclaimed by Francis Walsh in 1979 as a label to describe this literary genre (see also Fanning 153–237).
2. Although neither the exact location nor the name of the “Misses C—” is given, the family in question is likely the Cox family, who owned several manor houses in the area of Dunmanway, west Cork. The sisters Martha and Katherine Cox were benevolent landlords and went to great lengths to help reduce suffering among their tenants (See Kinealy 152–3). I have not been able to locate the letters Thanet refers to; nor have I been able to find references to them in other works. The historical sources I have consulted do not reference a US-based brother; instead, they suggest that the Cox sisters were themselves the owners of the estate.
3. The description of Tommy as a “true Irish orator” who moreover lectures on the Famine echoes Thanet’s earlier essay on the Famine, where she suggests that “[y]our Irish orator will picture, with savage eloquence” the horrors of the Famine (Thanet, “Irish Gentlewoman,” 338).
4. As Thomas J. Rowland argues, many Irish-Americans were torn between grasping the opportunity to strike the British a blow by not supporting the Allied war effort and the moral imperative to support the US: “While it provided a unique opportunity to prove their loyalty to their adopted country, it challenged them to deal with long-term longings for Irish independence under new and different geo-political realities” (3). Irish Parliamentary Party leader John Redmond, however, supported the British campaign against Germany, which antagonised many Irish-American nationalists, particularly following the failure of the Easter Rising (Finnegan 96). As Synon’s story came out a few months after the Easter Rising, this issue would have carried extra significance.
5. I would like to thank Emily Mark-FitzGerald for suggesting this reading of Castle Garden in the story.

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