

The Irish in the New World

Representation of the Diaspora in Irish Children's Famine Fiction



Written by Esther Rensen

s4159616

Supervisor: Dr. Margu rite Corporaal

ENGELSE TAAL EN CULTUUR

Teacher who will receive this document: Dr. Margu rite Corporaal

Title of document: "The Irish in the New World: Representation of the Diaspora in Irish
Children's Famine Fiction"

Name of course: Bachelor Werkstuk Engelse Letterkunde

Date of submission: 15-06-2017

The work submitted here is the sole responsibility of the undersigned, who has
neither committed plagiarism nor colluded in its production.

Signed

Name of student: Esther Rensen

Student number: s4159616

Keywords: Famine, Diaspora, Children's Literature

Abstract

This thesis analyses and discusses the representation of the Famine exodus and Irish diaspora in America in Irish children's literature published around the time of the 150th commemoration of the Irish Famine in 1995. The 1990s exhibited a surge in Famine scholarship and a renewed interest in the Famine narrative, which was inspired by the upcoming commemoration. The thesis researches whether a move away from the perspective of the classic Famine narrative published in the aftermath of the Famine can be determined. It will do this by analysing the children's novels *Nory Ryan's Song* by Patricia Giff (2000), *Mary Anne's Famine* by Colette McCormack (1994), and *Wildflower Girl* by Marita Conlon-McKenna (1991).

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction | 2 |
| Chapter 1: Theory and its Application | 6 |
| Chapter 2: <i>Nory Ryan's Song</i> by Patricia Giff | 13 |
| Chapter 3: <i>Wildflower Girl</i> by Marita Conlon-McKenna | 17 |
| Chapter 4: <i>Mary Anne's Famine</i> by Colette McCormack | 24 |
| Discussion & Conclusion | 32 |
| Bibliography | 34 |

Introduction

In the early 1990s a shift in the outlook on the Irish diaspora was apparent. When the president of Ireland, Mary Robinson, gave her inaugural speech on December 3rd 1990, she underlined that she was not only president of the Irish people living in Ireland, but that the Irish state encompasses much more than just the island itself. Robinson stated that “there is a vast community of Irish emigrants extending not only across our neighbouring island – which has provided a home away from home for several Irish generations – but also throughout the continents of North America, Australia and of course Europe itself. There are over 70 million people living on this globe who claim Irish descent” (Robinson, “Inaugural Speech”). It was important to her to see the people of the diaspora as a part of the Irish people, even though they or their ancestors had decided to leave the country. This transnational Irish community emerged particularly during the Great Famine.

The memory of the Famine is deeply rooted within Irish history because of the disastrous effect it had on its population. The Irish people are historically known as farmers, and “[d]uring the second half of the eighteenth century, [farmers] were gradually converting from grazing to tillage agriculture” (Harris 4). This trend continued during the period before the Great Famine, after the English market was opened for Irish crops. It soon became apparent that farmers preferred potatoes over other crop, since it did not need any further processing and “food production per acre of potatoes was approximately four times greater than that of grain crops” (Harris 4). Because the potato was profitable, it soon became the only crop that farmers would cultivate. The potato also became increasingly important in the diets of Irish farmers; it was even “the sole article of diet for one third of the population” (Harris 2). This meant that a large part of the farmers had no or barely any food at the time of the potato blight, resulting in the death or emigration of millions of people. Historiographer Kerby Miller noted in his essay that approximately 1.1 to 1.5 million people died of starvation or famine-related diseases, at least 500.000 were evicted from their homes by landlords, some three million were on some sort of relief, over a million were crammed into poorhouses, and over 2.1 million people emigrated overseas – nearly 1.9 million of them to North America – of whom as many as 40.000 people died on the 'coffin ships' or in quarantine hospitals (181).

The year 1995 marked the 150th commemoration of the Famine. On that occasion, President Robinson gave another public speech. She addressed her experiences regarding the diaspora during the first years of her presidency, and proclaimed that “[t]he men and women of our diaspora represent not simply a series of departures and losses. They remain, even while absent, a precious reflection of our own growth and change, a precious reminder of the many strands of identity which

compose our story” (Robinson, “Cherishing the Irish Diaspora: An Address”). Public addresses like this one highlight the fact that the people of the diaspora have identified with a global transnational Irish community. Additionally, President Robinson's attention for the diaspora was a contribution to the surge in Famine related scholarship in the early '90s, which was going through certain changes. There was an apparent change in the manner in which the diaspora was regarded in Famine commemorations. Robinson contributed to this by asking that the Famine commemoration “resist traditional ideological bias that had previously led to physical and psychological violence in Ireland,” which was caused by tensions in the relationship between the landlords and tenants. (Schultz 3). She questioned the oversimplification of the Famine narrative and tried to make the Irish move beyond “simply re-imagining the Irish past for some political gain towards finding a meaning for that past in the present” (Schultz 3). Robinson also asked “artists to engage with the Famine narrative in new ways that do not fall back upon tired generalisations, 'angry rhetoric' or 'traumatised muteness” (Eagleton qtd. in Schultz 3). She stressed the importance that authors do not focus solely on the story of the Irish farmer who suffered during the Famine, but also recognize the positive effects of the emigration that took place. “After all, emigration is not just a chronicle of sorrow and regret. It is also a powerful story of contribution and adaptation,” she observed (Robinson, “Cherishing the Irish Diaspora: An Address”). Robinson's speech suggested authors “embrace dispossession as empowering, rather than traumatic” (Schultz 6).

The Irish people have a shared history regarding the effects of the Famine, and this trauma has contributed to their cultural identity. These shared experiences have inspired a great number of writings. Traditionally, Famine narratives support one of two possible perspectives: “the Irish nationalist argument that British mismanagement of the potato blight caused the Famine, and the British loyalist argument that Ireland’s underdeveloped social and economic structures simply collapsed when one-third of the population’s only food source was destroyed by disease” (Schultz 1). However, Matthew Schultz, an Irish studies scholar, has observed that around the turn of the twenty-first century “a number of recent novelists [...] have shown a renewed interest in depictions of the Famine, and have begun to blur the distinctions between its historical and aesthetic representation” (1). Additionally, Famine scholar Christine Kinealy observes in her essay “The Great Irish Famine – A Dangerous Memory” that a surge in Famine related scholarship can be noticed around the 150th anniversary of the Famine (250). The commemoration thus may have initiated a shift within Famine literature and academics from a binary opposition to a more ambiguous and fluid representation of the Great Famine.

While most studies on the Famine have focused on history, art, and literature for adults, very little research has been done on the topic of children's literature. This thesis is innovative in the

sense that it will build upon the small amount of research that has been done in the field of children's literature about the Famine, and it will focus on the representation of the Irish diaspora in these narratives. One scholar that has written about this subject is Celia Keenan. In the essay “The Great Irish Famine in Stories for Children in the Closing Decades of the Twentieth Century” Keenan notes that around the end of the twentieth century children's writers began to set their stories in the Famine period, and she discusses the difficulties of writing about the Famine in a children's novel. She says that one device that writers resort to, to make the topic more accessible for children, is “to abandon the Famine quite early in the novel, so that the narrative becomes an emigration story, usually to North America” (Keenan 190). In this way the story becomes more of an adventure, as opposed to it providing a focus on the suffering that was caused by the Famine. She also describes other difficulties that authors have to deal with, like religion, language, and politics, and concludes that “it is not surprising that a process of revision should continue” about the manner in which authors write about these subjects (Keenan 195). Authors are very aware of the influence their writings could have on children, and therefore are careful in dealing with these subjects and sometimes bend the truth slightly.

Another scholar who wrote about the significance of children's literature of the Famine is Karen Hill McNamara. She makes the point that since children can identify with a protagonist in a children's novel they will learn to understand the crisis of the Famine. Like Keenan, she recognises the difficulties that authors face when writing for children. However, Hill McNamara feels that “[r]eading about the Great Famine in historical fiction encourages children, both in Ireland and globally, to construct new definitions of Irishness, which result in a richer cultural identity and a deeper historical understanding of their ancestral homeland” (298). Neither Keenan nor Hill McNamara go into the effects of President Robinson's speech, nor do they go into the possible change towards a more positive view on emigration around the time of her call for it. This thesis will try to see if that move to positivity can be seen in the works that will be analysed.

At first glance, children's literature does not seem to be the most appropriate platform to deal with trauma, because trauma is difficult to face, especially for children. Kenneth Kidd, a children's literature studies scholar, writes in his study *Freud in Oz* that “[t]he acknowledgment of traumatic experience within children's and young adult literature [...] remains a complicated affair, especially given an ongoing conviction that such literature should be happy and uplifting, or at least not too disturbing” (183). Since the Famine is a story of mass suffering, it is not that simple to turn it into an engaging children's story. However, Kidd does describe a development in children's literature, concerning the presence of atrocity in children's fiction. He says that since the late 1980s and early 1990s children's texts about trauma have proliferated, but what is new is the presence of

atrocities, “as well as the emphasis on experiences of pain and suffering on the part of principal characters. Older children’s literature tends to be about the management of trauma, whereas the children’s literature of atrocity makes clear the profound emotional and psychological effects of trauma – even the impossibility of recovery” (Kidd 182). These profound emotional and psychological results of trauma are present in this new approach to Famine fiction in children’s literature.

Not all children's literature of the Famine demonstrate the full process of emigration and settlement. It might be wondered whether this is because Ireland is the homeland and the connection to the homeland will always be central in cultural memory and identity formation for the Irish. *Nory Ryan's Song* by Patricia Giff (2000) is one of these narratives that focus on the Famine and Famine exodus in Ireland, but not on settlement in the New World. While examining *Nory Ryan's Song*, *Mary Anne's Famine* by Colette McCormack (1994), and *Wildflower Girl* by Marita Conlon-McKenna (1991), this thesis will engage with important scholarship about emigration, diaspora, identity formation, and memory research. All three novels that will be analysed focus on the situation in Ireland at the time of the Famine. The latter two novels do display the complete process of emigration and settlement, and therefore chapter three and four will also analyse the protagonists' journey to America, as part of the Irish diaspora. Through a close reading analysis this thesis will answer the following research question: in what way is the Irish Diaspora represented in children's Famine fiction written around the 150th commemoration of the Famine? Additionally, it will research whether these three novels indeed present a positive view of emigration, in line with President Robinson's expectation of a turn in Famine memory. The research will look at the reasons why the characters are leaving Ireland, in what way they look back on their home country, and in what way they look at the new world. After a chapter in which the theoretical concepts are discussed, three chapters will follow that will each analyse a novel. The final chapter of the thesis will conclude whether a change in Famine narratives about emigration is present.

Chapter 1

Theory and its Application

There are several theoretical works which are useful when analysing Famine literature. These writings originate from a number of broader academic contexts such as colonial studies, diaspora studies, cultural memory studies, and previous research on Famine literature. This chapter will divide the scholarship into two categories. The first sheds light on the Irish diaspora, the second category concerns theories about identity formation. The discussion of scholarship in these two fields will feature concepts and theories written by William Safran, Kevin Kenny, Stuart Hall, Jan Assman, and Andreas Huyssen. This scholarship will be used to create a better understanding of the issues that come into play when writing about the Famine, and will illuminate in how many ways identity formation can be influenced.

Diaspora

The reason why the massive emigration of the Irish can even be regarded as a diaspora needs to be explained in more detail, since the original definition of this concept is the exile of the Jews from their homeland. This is where William Safran enters the discussion. He is a scholar who has written about the diaspora in modern society in his essay “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return”. In this text he discusses the theory that the concept of a traditional diaspora can be applied to modern day situations as well, by moving away from the original definition, but narrowing it down from regarding every “segment of a people living outside the homeland” as a diaspora (Connor qtd. in Safran 83). He lists six characteristics that he argues can be applied to the modern diaspora. According to him, members of communities that share several of these characteristics can be regarded as diasporic. The Irish Famine exodus can be recognised in some of these traits.

The first two characteristics that Safran lists are that diasporic communities were “dispersed from a specific original 'center' to two or more 'peripheral', or foreign, regions” (Safran 83). When the Irish population suffered through the Famine, many of them decided to build a life elsewhere, in Great-Britain, Australia, continental Europe, South America, and North America, but they have also retained “a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland” (Safran 83). Most of the Irish who decided to leave their homeland have settled within Irish communities, since a large portion of them were traditionalist farmers, who often only spoke Irish, and huddled together for protection from native prejudices, as Kerby Miller explains in *Emigrants and Exiles* (326). The

emergence of organisations like the Fenian Brotherhood, “a transatlantic revolutionary organisation which eventually united most emigrants in support of Irish independence,” showed that there still was a collective vision of the homeland amongst the Irish-Americans (Miller 335-6). This collective vision would keep Irish-Americans from actively engaging with American society, since their minds would be consumed with the homeland.

The third characteristic of diasporic communities that Safran mentions is that “they believe that they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partially alienated and insulated from it” (83). This was certainly the case for the Irish in America, who were subjected to racism and not immediately accepted into American society. The majority of the American people were Protestant, and were prejudiced about the Irish Catholics who settled in their country. This became apparent with nativist movements such as the American Protestant Society, the Know-Nothing party, and the Republican Party. This nativism inspired “brutal mob violence and [...] legislation designed to curb Catholicism and discourage Irish immigration” (Miller 323). The prejudices affected most Irish-American Catholics, and many workers encountered the notice 'No Irish Need Apply', when searching for a job. American nativism reinforced social inferiority, and therefore many Irish Catholics would try to appear less Irish by “changing their accents, their names, even their religion,” in an attempt to erase the stigma (Miller 325).

The last three traits that Safran enumerates all concern the relationship between the immigrant and their homeland. The fourth characteristic is that diasporic groups regard “their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return – when conditions are appropriate” (83). The fifth characteristic is that “they believe they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity” (Safran 84). The last trait that Safran lists is that diasporic societies “continue to relate [...] to that homeland [...], and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship” (84). Most emigrants who left for America had the intention of coming back to their homeland one day. This rarely happened, but because “their failure was regretted on both sides of the Atlantic [it] served to keep Irish-Americans emotionally oriented to their childhood homes” (Miller 568). The guilt that followed from this unfulfilled promise was something that Irish-American nationalists could build upon, by asking that the emigrants keep fighting for their homeland. The next chapters will analyse the connection between the protagonists and Ireland, and will test whether there is a development in that relation which influences their identity. A move away from Safran's characteristics of diaspora in the narratives that will be analysed would display a shift from the

classic Famine narrative to a renewed representation of the Famine exodus.

Kevin Kenny's essay "Diaspora and Comparison: The Global Irish As a Case Study" specifically addresses the Irish diaspora. Kenny has looked at the different ways in which the Irish exodus is regarded by scholars, and has studied where the Irish have settled and how this has affected their community. He is more critical about using the term diaspora in relation to the Famine generation than Safran is. While Safran sees the diaspora as something that can give a community a sense of belonging, Kenny instead regards it as a trap that the Irish can get stuck in. Kenny writes that one of the ways that the Irish exodus is regarded, is as a "victim diaspora," because many regard the Irish as victims of the Famine (142). He argues that this victimisation is intertwined with a tendency to blame the British for the catastrophe in which the potato blight resulted, which "can serve – inadvertently or otherwise – to support a view of the famine as genocide" (144). Therefore, he says, it might be better not to talk about the Irish as diasporic or as an exodus, although the idea of "deliberate extermination" did lead to popular historical memory, which has been especially prominent among the American Irish (144). This notion is still present among the Irish-Americans today, and can, for instance, be seen in Tim Pat Coogan's popular historiography *The Famine Plot: England's Role in Ireland's Greatest Tragedy* (2011). In this book he argues that the Famine is one of the first acts of genocide and the book was very well received in the US, even though many – mostly European – reviewers said that the book was not well researched and made many sweeping statements. The popularity of Coogan's study shows that the subject is still very much alive among Americans who identify with Irish ancestry.

The feeling of being the victim of the Famine was something that never really left the lives of the Irish. They were forced to leave their home and when they finally reached America many settled in the cities, because that is where they would be able to find work. "The Irish provided a cheap, expendable labor force for the construction of an emerging industrial and urban infrastructure," but in most cities, like Boston, they were seen as intruders into a hierarchical society and were therefore subject to racism (Kenny 151). The Irish, it is argued, "arrived in the United States without a sense of being white and were depicted and treated as racial inferiors before eventually embracing whiteness as the central ingredient of their new American identity" (Kenny 155). When the Irish first settled in America they were compared to African-Americans, since they were regarded as being part of a different race than the Americans were. Eventually race became a means of assimilation for the Irish, since the colour of their skin made it less challenging to become a part of American society once they had settled in the country. It did mean that they had to show their loyalty to the US during the Civil War, where the Irish-Americans could refocus their nationalist feelings on to their new homeland, and "politicians often hailed Irish participation in the

Civil War as a harbinger of ultimate acceptance” (Miller 343). As explained above, the notions of nationalism and race are notable characteristics of a diasporic community.

These theories of diaspora, with emphasis on Safran's characteristics, will be applied to examine how the protagonists of the three case studies in chapters three, four, and five have become part of the diaspora after they travel to America. The theories will aid in examining the development of the characters and in what way their status as immigrants evolves when they become part of the Irish diaspora.

Identity

Andreas Huyssen is a scholar who has studied identity regarding conditions of diaspora. Huyssen discusses the development in identity formation that follows after a society experiences the diaspora that Safran describes, supported by his characteristics. The main argument Huyssen makes in his essay “Diaspora and Nation: Migration into Other Pasts” is that when a group of people are excluded from a society, they will idealise their homeland and will keep looking back to it. He says that “it is precisely the national mechanism of exclusion by a majority culture that generates and strengthens [a] diasporic counter-nationalism” (Huyssen 150). This concept can be applied to the Irish in America. They were excluded by the Americans, as explained above, and therefore had a backward, and idealised view of their homeland. There was a sense of nostalgia amongst the Irish in America. Diaspora creates foreignness in a country through exclusion, and according to Huyssen this is rooted in the idea that national memory is something that is “national, authentic, coherent and homogeneous,” but diasporic memory is “cut off, hybrid, displaced, split” because it is based on migration (152). He concludes that as long as public memory discourse remains rooted in national memory, a diasporic group will stay excluded from society. It is important to keep this in mind when examining the possibility of the protagonists' changing notion of identity in the narratives that will be studied.

Stuart Hall wrote about identity in his essay “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.” His theory is important when looking at identity change in a diasporic society. In his essay Hall makes an important point when he differentiates between two ways of thinking about cultural identity. The first is a “‘cultural identity’ in terms of one, shared culture [...] which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (Hall 223). This form of identity is strongly based on ethnicity, and is something that one is born with, or not. The second is slightly more difficult to define, but is described by Hall as something that undergoes constant transformation. He says that “identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past” (Hall 225). This form of identity is something that can be fluid and change

overtime, by influences from someone's surroundings. This changing identity, rather than a sense of static identity, is important in the analysis of the protagonists in the following chapters.

For this analysis Jan Assman's "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," will be used as well. In his text he discusses how the effects of an aspect in collective memory, like trauma, can influence cultural identity. Even though cultural memory is a concept that seems far removed from day-to-day life, it is always based on the same events in history, and the basis of it is part of the identity of a community. Assman stresses some characteristics of cultural memory that are important. One of the characteristics is "the concretion of identity," or the way a group constructs identity out of a collective pool of past events, by fusing them together (Assman 130). This is usually defined by saying what is 'us', and what is not 'us', creating processes of in- and exclusion. Assman says that these comparisons happen because people have a need for a concrete identity. Another important characteristic is the "capacity to reconstruct," since no memory can preserve the past (Assman 130). Cultural memory exists in an archive, where there are collected texts and other documents that represent history, but also in the ability to reconstruct a past within its contemporary frame of reference, by putting something into perspective and relating it to a contemporary situation, and with that giving it its own relevance. Assman also notes "formation," or creation as a characteristic of cultural memory. He points out the importance of the creation of artifacts or mediums that will memorialise collective pasts (131). Cultural memory can become more stabilised when culture is objectified – into a painting, for instance – because it adds another aspect of history that a community can refer back to. The concept of cultural memory includes this collection of artifacts and mediums, and is used to stabilise a society's self-image. With this collective recollection of a past that has been passed on, a group can create a sense of community. What this cultural memory is comprised of varies from culture to culture, and so does the perspective of a community when looking back on its history. Assman concludes that "[w]hich past becomes evident in that heritage and which values emerge in its identificatory appropriation tells us much about the constitution and tendencies of a society" (133).

All three theories discuss ways in which identity formation takes place, and they all note that cultural memory is regarded as the basis for cultural identity. Huyssen and Assman both describe the difficulties that memory bring to the fluidity of identity. A collective past is something that creates a sense of community for a diasporic group, and even nostalgia towards the homeland, but also excludes them from the majority culture. Stuart Hall describes a second manner of identity formation, in which identity is a more fluid concept. He states that identity is constantly influenced by the way one looks back on their cultural memory. The next chapters will use these theories and see which forms of identity formation are apparent in the novels.

Method

The following chapters will analyse the novels *Nory Ryan's Song* by Patricia Giff (2000), *Wildflower Girl* by Marita Conlon-McKenna (1991), and *Mary Anne's Famine* by Colette McCormack (1994), while engaging with the scholarship that has been discussed above. It will mainly look at how Safran's characteristics of the diaspora are represented in the novels, and in what way these characteristics influence the protagonists' identities.

The next three chapters address the representation of the Famine and the Famine exodus and will look at whether these recent texts move away from the nationalist or British loyalist perspective that was traditionally applied. Additionally, in chapter three and four, about *Wildflower Girl* and *Mary Anne's Famine*, the following subquestions will be discussed: Do the protagonists identify as Irish, Irish-American, or American when they have settled in America? And in what way do changes in identity help the protagonists with processing their trauma? These last two chapters will discuss the same aspects of the protagonists' journey. First, the chapters will look at why the protagonists decide to leave their home, what their situation at home is like, and how is it represented in the text. After that, the chapters will discuss the passage to America, and the situation on the coffin ship. Then, they will look at how the protagonists cope soon after their arrival in America. Finally, the chapters will look at their settlement. Do they stay in America or do they return to their homeland, and why do they make this decision? The chapters are structured in this way because according to McNamara “[h]istorical novels portraying the Great Famine [...] tend to follow predictable plot patterns. The first is a quest, which is to survive the Famine, and the second is the initiation into adulthood, demonstrated by emigrating from Ireland” (292). This thesis will assume that the case studies that will be discussed are structured in the same way.

The hypothesis of this thesis is that a move away from the traditional perspectives in Famine narratives can be determined. Since there was a call for more positivity regarding the diaspora and a surge in Famine related scholarship in the 1990s, it would be likely that this has inspired a shift in the remembrance of the Famine. Additionally, the expectation is that there will be many instances in the novels where we see that the Irish who have moved away from their homeland are struggling with their identities. They are living in an Irish community in a foreign country, because the Americans do not accept them into the American society, since they are seen as the outsiders. However, it is likely that when the emigrant characters start to be accepted into the American society, they will feel less Irish and may be able to see their trauma as a part of their past, instead of as part of their present. This is in line with the theories that were discussed in this chapter, that say that identity is constantly influenced by its surroundings and therefore identity will keep developing. In addition, the idea of development of identity suggests that one may expect a

representation of the Famine in children's literature that is in line with the changes that have been identified in the years leading up to the 150th commemoration of the Famine. The following chapters will test these assumptions.

Chapter 2

Nory Ryan's Song by Patricia Giff

Nory Ryan's Song was published in 2000, and tells the narrative of Nory Ryan and her family who live on a farm in Maidin Bay, on the west coast of Ireland. They are struggling to feed themselves, because the potatoes from last year's harvest are almost gone. Their cottage is owned by an English landlord, which means that they have to spend most of the money they earn on rent. The novel is written from a first person perspective, in which the the protagonist Nory tells her story as it is happening. Consideration of the narrative voice is important, since “early Famine fiction [...] expresses a sense of unspeakability: the horrors of starvation and death are often diegetically evaded, in that the narrative voice consciously distances itself from the severest distress,” as Corporaal describes (25). The novel reflects this unspeakability by omitting harrowing descriptions of the large number of deaths and homeless farmers living on the side of the road, but still managing to illustrate an accurate picture of the suffering that the family and their friends go through during the hardship of the Famine. This chapter will examine the representation of the Famine and the Famine exodus, and will consider whether the narrative distances itself from the nationalist or British loyalist perspective that was traditionally applied to Famine narratives.

At the start of the novel the traditional Irish nationalist perspective of British mismanagement as the cause of the Irish poverty is already present. When Nory wants to go fishing to catch some extra food, her sister Celia warns her not to go fishing in Lord Cunningham's stream, since that is considered stealing. Her grandfather tells the girls what his opinion on that is. “Poaching?’ Granda raised his hand to rake his fingers through his white hair. ‘That is our land, Irish land. Our stream and our fish. Cunningham, a man who comes once a year, has it all by the terrible might of the English.’ He turned back to the fire, muttering. ‘We are paying rent on land that truly belongs to us’” (14). The colonial rule that he describes had inspired a nationalist movement, and people hoped that they could free themselves from the English, like the Americans had done. Miller describes that “nationalist spokesmen conceptualized an Ireland free from ‘English’ influences as well as from English political domination” (246). Sadly, Nory says, “all their courage hadn't been enough. The English had an army, and souls of vinegar, and they had killed and killed, and we were still not free” (28). Many Irish decided to leave the country rather than staying in a “now even more intolerable poverty and subordination” after they had failed to free Ireland from the English (Miller 249). The same instance takes place in the novel, when Nory's sister Maggie decides to leave for America with her new husband, since he no longer wants to stay “in this land

where the English are so cruel” (20).

Not only did the English government oppose Irish nationalists, they also actively tried to clear the Irish from their land, so that they could demolish their houses and use the land for grazing sheep. Miller explains that “[f]or thirty years prior to the Famine, Irish landlords had striven against popular opposition to rationalize their estates by consolidating farms and evicting insolvent or 'superfluous' tenants; the potato blight now provided unique opportunities and added incentives to carry out their designs” (287). The narrative reflects on this historical development by depicting these evictions. In one scene at the beginning of the novel, Nory and her friend Sean see bailiffs with a battering ram heading toward another neighbour's farm. When Nory runs down to the farm, their entire house has been demolished. There were “only stone walls standing, dust still rising where the thatched roof had been” (9). As Nory states, when people are evicted from their houses, the houses would be demolished because the English “want our land for their sheep, they want it for themselves” (72). She had even overheard a conversation between Devlin, the agent, and Cunningham, where the latter said to Devlin that he would “like to get rid of all of them. Filthy hovels, filthy people. I would tear down the houses and let the sheep roam among the rocks” (15).

When families were not able to pay their rent in the time of the Famine, because they had to eat the food that they would normally sell at market to earn money for rent, they would be evicted. The agent would not even let people who were evicted stay with another family, because “‘Lord Cunningham wants to clear his land,’ he'd say, 'not add more faces to each house’” (6). Miller describes in his historiography that some evicted farmers would move on to another area and start anew there, some would stay on their grounds until they were chased away, others would live on the roadside, in huts made out of what they could find there, where “thousands died of fever, hunger, and exposure” (288). The novel depicts this by describing that there are many people begging in the streets of the town:

They stood in front of the bakery, waiting, coughing, holding each other up. Others were at the hotel, hands out, swaying a little. Their eyes were huge in their bony faces. And even though the day was cold, some of them wore almost no clothing, just pieces of rags. One woman only had on her petticoat. *They must have sold whatever they could, I thought, to buy a bit of food.* (110)

It is clear that these are people who are left with nothing, and with the help of this scene the novel shows that the Irish resort to desperate measures to find some food to keep themselves alive.

Even though the Irish peasants are left without sustenance, a considerable amount of food is shipped out of the country by the English. The novel goes into this when the Ryan's rent is due. Their father provides for his family by fishing out on sea and he leaves for long periods of time to

be back with the rent when it is due. But this year their father is not back on time, and when Devlin, comes to the house for their money they cannot pay him what is owed. For now, he takes one of the chickens and the pig and tells the family to “[b]ring them to the dock. They’ll have a sea trip to England” (98). When they arrive there, they see that “[i]t was a ship filled with food that was going away from us forever” (101). This situation often led to turmoil, since the Irish were desperate for nourishment. Miller describes that “[i]n 1845-46 food riots were common: crowds descended on towns and poorhouses demanding food or work; when disappointed, they sacked bread shops, provision stores, grain mills, and carts and ships laden with food for export” (290). Such a scene is also presented in this novel, when the Ryan Family walk into town. While they are at the post office they see a crowd of people gathered at the bakery: “They were begging, yelling for food. Someone threw a rock through the window, and the people climbed in over the broken glass. The baker, a cut on his cheek, slipped out his door. Then he was outside, running down the street, away from his rolls, and his bread, and his penny buns” (78). The people are desperate for food, and will do anything to get some. They tried to forage for nourishment at the strand, searching for mussels and lumpets, which were called the “poor peoples food” and the “last hope” (70). After these were all gone as well, people would even start eating the grass. This describes the desperate situation in Ireland and shows why many decided to try and make a new start in America.

Safran's characteristics of a diaspora can be recognised in the Famine emigration that is described in this narrative, the first trait being the dispersion from the homeland. The Irish feel like the British mismanagement of the Famine has forced them out of their homeland, and into a society where they do not belong. “Catholic clerics and nationalists of all persuasions were beginning to question, then attack British actions toward Ireland, and to stigmatize Famine emigration as forced exile,” Miller describes (306). Another trait that Safran describes is the collective vision for the homeland – in this case freeing Ireland from the English – has been described in this narrative when Nory's grandfather says that the Americans “had freed themselves of the English just twenty years earlier. Why not us? Why not?” (28). The farmers know that the landlord is doing all that he can to evict them and to take the “Irish land” for his own profit.

Through all of this hardship the family knows that there is always America, that will save them from the hunger in Ireland. The family do not really know what it is like in America, but Nory has heard from Sean, that his sister, who lives in Brooklyn, wrote that “[h]orses clopped down the road [...] bringing milk in huge cans. And no one was ever hungry” (2). They have the feeling that they can be “free in Brooklyn,” free from the oppression of the English, since the Americans had succeeded to become independent (2). The struggle for independence, and the trauma of the Famine is part of the identity of the Irish, and will continue to play a role in the settlement in America and

their identity formation in the new world. Overall, this novel is told from the traditional Irish nationalist perspective, which is interesting since, previously, Robinson has asked to move away from this perspective and to try and write about the Famine exodus in a more positive light.

Chapter 3

Wildflower Girl by Marita Conlon-McKenna

Conlon-McKenna's *Wildflower Girl* was published in 1991 as the second instalment of the bestselling trilogy *Children of the Famine*. The novel that this thesis examines tells the story of the thirteen-year-old Peggy O'Driscoll, who leaves the town of Castletaggart to find a better life in America. The novel was awarded the Bisto Book of the Year award in the category Historical Novel in 1992. It is different from most narratives since it is a post-Famine emigration narrative and therefore does not focus on the Famine exodus itself. "Novels and short stories frequently recollect the Great Famine through a plotline that focuses on characters who leave Famine-stricken Ireland in order to seek their fortunes elsewhere," but this book is set almost a decade after the height of the Famine (Corporaal 181). Another detail to take into account is that although this novel is part of a trend of renewed interest in the Famine, it was published before President Robinson's speech and therefore it cannot have been influenced by it. This chapter will analyse and discuss in which way the Famine exodus and settlement in America are represented, and will look at whether the text moves away from the nationalist perspective that was traditionally applied in Famine narratives, and was present in the novel that was discussed in the previous chapter.

Ireland

The start of the novel is set in the town of Castletaggart in the year 1854, seven years after the height of the famine. The town has been abandoned, with many of the cottages empty and most shops left vacant: "The town was no longer the busy place Peggy and Michael and Eily had arrived at, starving and homeless, nearly seven years ago in the middle of the Great Famine" (13). The picture of the town's surroundings that is described in the novel, is a very idyllic one:

She leant over the low stone bridge. Beneath it the water flowed strongly, dragging the riverweed forwards. She stared into the river, blocking out the town from her sight and mind. [...] In the distance she could hear a cuckoo. A forest of oaks and beech trees ran along the far side of the river, the fast flowing water providing protection for the birds and animals against the people of the town. This was a special place, a place where town and country met. (11)

The nature of the town is one of the few things that stayed the same since Peggy arrived there. This is interesting, because Celia Keenan pointed out in her essay that most Famine narratives reverse the normal tendency to prefer the "romantic rural ideal" over urban life, since the cities are the place

where most protagonists find their happy ending (195). Nature is the thing that has failed the Irish people, by leaving them without sustenance. Even though nature has regenerated after the Famine, the town has not and therefore a shift to the urban is apparent in most Famine narratives. Keenan points out that Conlon-McKenna's first novel in this trilogy does not follow this trend, and the first chapter of this book presents the same move away from it. This narrative demonstrates the conventional pastoral beauties of Irish nature, because the pastoral is essential to Irish identity. Oona Frawley explains in her work *Irish Pastoral: Nostalgia and Twentieth-century Irish Literature* that Irish literature displays a preoccupation with nature as the site for nostalgia, and the study argues that this preoccupation becomes increasingly linked with the fact of the British colonial presence in Ireland. This nostalgia is an aspect that is part of Irish cultural memory, and therefore a component of their identity, as explained by Assman's theory in chapter one. The idyllic image of nature is used in *Wildflower Girl* so that further on in the narrative, when she reaches urban America, Peggy will feel the nostalgia and will have something to long for.

Identity is not only related to nationality and nostalgia, but also to other dimensions like religion. The Catholic church is important for many Irish peasants, since their community is often built around the church. On the night before Peggy leaves, her sister gives her a bible that used to belong to her great-aunt Lena and in it she had written the entire family tree. "It was her history – the keeping of a tradition," which was very important for Peggy (33). She is going to America to help her family, not to run away from them, and the traditions of her family are the only thing that the young girl knows. The family tree is part of her memory and is a segment of her identity, and having that illustrated in an object that symbolises community for the Irish, means that Peggy can take it with her to America. In this way identity can be transferred to the New World.

Historically, during the Famine years many peasants left their homeland reluctantly, needing to survive. The British colonial presence in Ireland made many Irish peasants feel like they were forced off their land and out of the country, as explained in the previous chapter. In the years after the Famine, hunger had decreased, but because of depopulation many "disheartened inhabitants often felt little desire to remain in what was now but a sorrowing echo of a once vibrant society," and were therefore more willing, and sometimes even excited, to leave (Miller 300). The owner of the building in which Peggy's great-aunt Nano has a bakery has decided to leave the town as well, and is selling his properties so that he can move to Dublin. Nano's shop is one of the few that is still there, since most people have abandoned the town. The owner says that he is "not the only landlord forced to do this. A group of us are trying our best to look after our tenants, so letters of application for a ship's voucher have been delivered to many in this part of town" (19). The family are not able to buy the building from their landlord, so they are forced to leave. Peggy decides that this is the

moment for her to emigrate, because she knows that “there are no jobs here. They say there's plenty of jobs across the ocean” (21). She decides to leave for America with her brother Michael, and they plan to find work and send money home to help cover the costs. Peggy is excited to leave for America, which reflects the historical development. “I don't believe it! I just don't believe it! We got a notice about going to America too. A few in school told me their families had got them. The whole town's talking about it.' She was bursting with excitement” (9). Eventually Michael finds a job as a stable boy at a Castletaggart House so he decides not to go with Peggy, and she travels to America on her own. This narrative is set several years after the height of the Famine, so the traditional narrative of not being able to pay rent and being forced out of the house is not the one that is told in this novel. Instead, there is the narrative of an abandoned town where there are no opportunities for the people who live in it, which means that they, including Peggy, will leave willingly to find opportunities elsewhere.

The Passage

During the Famine exodus many of the people who were traveling to America were weakened by hunger and illness, so at least nine per cent of the Irish sailing to America – and even thirty percent of the Irish who left for Canada – perished on the 'coffin ships' (Miller 292). Peggy's voyage does not differ much from this description, even though it takes place when Ireland is no longer at the height of the Famine. The excitement that she feels when she leaves her hometown is soon replaced by fear and insecurity when she starts her journey to America. When she finally stepped on board of the ship with her neighbour Nell and Nell's children, it was not at all what she was expecting:

It was just terrible. Not what they expected at all. They stepped down into a dark gloomy area where small, narrow bunks were crowded together. No one would fit in them surely, thought Peggy. They had raised wooden edges along the sides. Everybody was pushing and shoving, trying to get into steerage. It was cramped already beyond imagination and yet more and more passengers kept filing down. (46)

The bunks have to be shared between two or three people. Luckily Peggy can share a bunk with Nell's family, but there are many people who have to “share such closeness with total strangers” (47). At the start of the journey “nearly three-quarters of the passengers were ill,” because they are suffering from sea-sickness. There is not enough food on the vessel, so the passengers are weaker than they were when they embarked. Nearing the end of the voyage, several people fall ill with cabin fever because of the unsanitary conditions and the lack of fresh air below deck. At this time Peggy feels deceived by the promise of a new start in America: “Thirty-five days on this festering bit of wood they called a ship. Find your fortune – start a new life – go to a land of promise! It felt

as if a joke was being played on them” (60). The setting that is described is like a less radical description of the situation on a slave ship, where slaves were locked below deck. The same was the case for the passengers on *The Fortunata*, since “[t]he hatch remained firmly closed. They felt like animals on the way to market to be sold” (69). Corporaal and Cusack describe in their study that “[b]y drawing a parallel between Irish suffering and slavery, the novel transforms the coffin ship into a site of transition” (348). Like this narrative, many fictional narratives of the Famine published in its aftermath explored the conditions of the voyage to America, which is in line with McNamara's statement that these narratives are all structured in a similar manner. “In Irish and Irish American literature written between 1855 and 1885,” as Corporaal and Cusack have noted, “the voyage assumes a symbolic function, featuring as a rite of passage for the characters and their sense of ethnic identity” (344). They argue that the storms that the characters experience during their voyage, are symbolic for the hardships that they will face in America. The collective trauma of the voyage to America becomes part of the collective memory of the Irish emigrants on the ship. This is conforming to the theories concerning identity formation and cultural memory explained in the first chapter, suggesting that national or cultural memory is used to construct identity or a sense of Irishness. This sense of Irishness will influence whether the Irish emigrants will be able to become part of the majority culture in America.

Arrival

When Peggy disembarks, there are many young boys there to take people to certain boarding houses. These houses would be led by someone who would find work for them, in exchange for part of their wages. Peggy and Sarah board with Mrs. Halligan, who takes care of the girls and owns a broken-down house. She herself had immigrated to America from Ireland twenty-five years ago. She says that she knows “what it's like to arrive in a strange country, worn out and hungry. I'll feed ye and keep ye for a few days to get ye started” (79). As soon as they have recovered a little from the journey, they are scrubbed and the nits are taken out of their hair, to rid them of the traces that the voyage had left behind on their bodies. Peggy's stay with Mrs Halligan is the first time that Peggy finds a piece of Ireland in her new homeland, and is part an Irish community in America. The aspect of an Irish micro-community recurs in this narrative, and displays the theory of chapter one which explained that immigrants often feel alienated from the majority culture and find a sense of belonging with the people that share their cultural memory.

The landlady of the boarding house where she stays is not the only connection to home that she encounters in the New World. When Peggy starts her first job as a maid at a boarding house for men, most of the boarders “were Irish, but a few were from strange-sounding places” (84).

Interestingly, the landlady that she works for is English – from Liverpool originally. This is intriguing since Peggy had just left her homeland where the British had control over the Irish. The landlady turns out to be a drunk who sleeps half the day and makes Peggy sleep in a storage room next to the kitchen. She physically abuses her when she does not do the work to her liking, and treats her as if she is an animal. Peggy struggles to find her place in the house, because “[w]ith every day things got worse. Mrs Cavendish, who would chat and be friendly one minute, was liable to be like a devil the next, and Peggy's arm was already bruised from the pinches her new mistress inflicted on her” (85). She has no rights, like time off from work, and does not get paid because she decides to run away from the house after an instance where she was beaten to the floor. It is interesting that Mrs Cavendish is English, since the Irish and English historically were at conflict. The Famine exodus was often seen as forced by the English upon the Irish, due to colonial mismanagement, while the English had seen the poorest of the famine exodus settle in the working-class slums of their cities, including the settlement in Liverpool. As Miller writes, “[a]ccording to frightened middle-class Britons, the migration consisted largely of 'men, women, and children with scarcely as much clothing on them as was necessary for the purposes of decency, unable to speak a single word of the English language, and steeped, to all appearances in as hopeless barbarism as the aboriginal inhabitants of Australia” (295). Mrs Cavendish seems to treat Peggy according to this biased English point of view, but, ironically, she herself is the person who displays uncivilised conduct. The text thus subverts ethnic stereotypes.

After the debacle at Mrs Cavendish's boarding house, Mrs. Halligan finds new work for Peggy and this is where things start to turn around for her. Peggy is brought to Rushton, a house outside Boston, where she is employed as a maid. The housekeeper Mrs Madden, an Irish woman, treats her well and the family – except for the daughter – seem to not mind her presence. It is still hard work, but Peggy has a bed in a room which she shares with the other Irish maid, Kitty, and gets wages and days off from work. It is perceivable that Peggy establishes another Irish micro-community in America, and does not become part of the majority culture in America. She is starting to feel at home with her new Irish 'family'.

Instances of racism in North America would often encourage new settlers to stay within their own immigrant community. The same is true for Peggy who has to cope with racism towards the Irish as well. It is not clear what the instances of racism that occur at Rushton are rooted in, since the nationality or religion of the Rowan family are not mentioned. The daughter of the house, Miss Roxanne Rowan, is one of the characters who comments about “those Irish” (115). She most likely has negative feelings towards the Irish because she has grown up in an America where the Irish were viewed as a minority culture, and she has only known Irish people to be servants.

The new housekeeper Mrs Lewis, who replaces Mrs Madden, shows some racist tendencies as well. She is related to the family, regards herself as of similar social standing, and is not Irish. The situation she creates in the house has many similarities with the situation in Ireland during the time of the Famine. For the short period that she runs the household, she takes away all pleasantries from the employees' life. She puts a ban on reading in the kitchen and she “ordered that only basic simple food should be provided downstairs. As far as Peggy and Mrs O'Connor could see, this meant cuts of the worst meat and offal” (159). There is enough food in the house to feed everyone, but Irish the staff is not allowed to eat this, which is not unlike the time of the Famine when there was usually extra food on the landlord's land that would feed the starving families – like fish or game – but the tenants were not allowed to touch this food, since it was owned by the landlord and not part of the land that they were renting, as explained in the previous chapter. Like at the time of the Famine, Peggy would now find “that she was often hungry” (158). Mrs Lewis is also threatening to kick Kitty, who is terribly ill, out on the street because she can no longer do her work. This can be compared to the situation of the farmers who were evicted from their houses, because they could no longer manage to pay their rent. The farmers went through some failed risings, as discussed in chapter two, but could not do much else against the landlords and the British government. In this narrative, the staff revolts as well. Mrs Lewis exclaims that they “are deliberately trying to fight my authority and I will not have it,” and threatens to fire them (162). In contrast to the revolts during the Famine, this revolt turns out successfully with Mrs Lewis fired and forced to leave. In the end Mrs Lewis “was defeated. Mrs O'Connor reigned supreme” (169). This victory can be regarded as compensation for the inability to stand up to the British government in Ireland.

Settlement

At the end of the novel Peggy is taking her first steps towards integrating into the majority culture by climbing the social ladder. Even though social mobility for the Irish was very limited – the Irish were regarded society's outcast, and only good for menial work – Peggy is doing quite well for an Irish girl in America. When compared to Sarah, who is working eleven hours per day and cooking and cleaning for her and her brothers, who are working as builders, it can be seen that she is still at the bottom of the social hierarchy, where most Irish immigrants are. Peggy has managed to rise above her on the social ladder, even though the society she has moved into makes that virtually impossible because of the prejudices towards the Irish that were explained in chapter one. Right before Mrs. Madden leaves, she tells Peggy that “you're very bright. Not that many in service can read and write, and obviously you're good with numbers too. I've spotted you scanning my rows of

figures. Things are tough at the moment, but hard work, so they say, never killed anyone. Keep on working and you'll go places. You've got brains and spirit and good nature" (146). The combination of Peggy's abilities, hard work, and a bit of luck, helped her to find a better job and will eventually help with integration into the majority culture and makes it more likely that she will eventually not only identify with Irish culture, but with American culture as well.

The Irish micro-communities which Peggy establishes are not the only elements in the novel that make her identify with Irish culture. Boston strongly reminds her of Ireland and evokes memories of home, in that its parks are reminiscent of the Irish countryside. The plotline where the pastoral returns in the new homeland is often used in Famine fiction. Corporaal says in her study that "the natural spaces in North American cities [...] are conceptualized as pastoral sites where Irish emigrants may establish new Erins as alternatives to the stricken homeland" (148). The nature that is described in the first chapters of the novel are comparable to a scene in chapter sixteen, in which Peggy goes for a walk with her Irish colleague Kitty, when they find a field where "[a] feeling of pure pleasure ran through her as her feet felt the once familiar sensation of grass and soil" (121). In this scene, nature stimulates a sense of nostalgia, and this memory of Irishness which the American scenery evokes gives her a sense of belonging.

Although this narrative does show the excitement of leaving Ireland after the Famine exodus, there is still the sentiment of having to leave the homeland because the Irish were victimised, conforming to the classic Famine narrative. Ireland is constantly seen as the true homeland and the novel foregrounds a reconstruction of an Irish micro-community in America, since the Irish are not fully accepted by the host society, and a change in this is not described in the narrative. All these aspects are in line with Safran's characteristics of the diaspora. Ultimately, this novel does not depict a representation of the Famine that moves away from the classic nationalist perspective, but it does show hope for integration – especially when the next instalment of this trilogy is taken into account, in which Peggy moves to the west of the country to discover new opportunities – which is a positive variation of the classic Famine narrative.

Chapter 4

Mary-Anne's Famine by Colette McCormack

McCormack's novel *Mary-Anne's Famine* was published in 1994, and tells the story of the fourteen-year-old Mary-Anne Joyce who has to move to New York, because her family's farm was hit by the potato blight and the family has no way to survive in Ireland. The largest part of the book is comprised of a correspondence between Mary-Anne and her teacher Seán Thornton, who stays behind in Ireland when she leaves for America. Because the novel is structured in epistolary form, it is narrated from both the perspective of an Irish immigrant in America and that of an Irish person in Ireland at the time of the Famine. This chapter will look at the way in which identity formation and the Famine are represented, and whether the novel shows a move away from the classic Famine narrative in which the Irish, and the Irish Famine exodus, are portrayed as suffering, victimised, and traumatised people.

Ireland

The novel starts in 1845 in Galway, where Mary-Anne lives in a cottage with her parents and her grandmother. Master Thornton, Mary-Anne's teacher, tells her “not to worry about the potato trouble, that God is good and there is always America where so many of our people have gone before” (9). The family are aware of the history of emigration to America, and know that emigrating is an option for them if they cannot manage the plight. They have to work hard “as there has to be rent money for the man in the Big House,” and after that is payed there is nothing left to buy food (5). In this first chapter, and throughout the narrative, the strain that is put on families by their landlords is consistently displayed. The family is struggling to feed themselves while they are waiting to harvest their crops, and in June of 1846 the blight reaches the family's farm and leaves them without sustenance. The family “hear stories of workhouses, of disease, and of many people dying from hunger,” as almost everyone in town struggles to survive (14). The Irish have a long history of emigration to America, and the option of relocation is presented at the start of the narrative. It is not presented as something positive or negative, it is just stated as a fact.

The novel includes many images of the plight that can also be found in Famine literature that was published in the aftermath of the Famine. One example of this is the desperation to find food. Nourishment was scarce for the farmers and McNamara writes in her work that it has often been implied that the Irish were themselves responsible for that, because they did not try to cultivate and consume food other than their potatoes, but “children's literature of the Irish Famine [...] sheds

new light on complicated issues and educates children by weaving historical information through the narrative” (294). This novel is no exception, explaining that the family has sold everything to sustain itself: “There is not much to eat, for we have used up what was stored away. All our hens are gone, so we have no eggs to eat or sell. We sold our sheep for very little, and our cow and our wee donkey” (16). Mary-Anne's father, Jamesy Joyce, tries to obtain extra food by setting snares for rabbits, which had to be set “at night so the man in the Big House does not find out” (15). The tenants are not allowed to set snares, because the rabbits were owned by their landlord and not a part of the land they were renting, so that would be regarded as theft. This is an element that was explored in the previous two chapters as well. Another image that can be found in classic Famine literature is that of the abandoned cottage. In classic Famine narratives written in, or right after, the Famine period, “the abandoned leveled cottage became one of the iconic images in representations of the Great Famine” (Corporaal 158). Farmers had to find a way to make money for their landlords, after they had eaten everything that would have provided them with money for rent. Mary-Anne describes how many neighbours were evicted because they could no longer pay their landlord: “The law came and smashed the doors in with the *reithe cogaidg* [battering ram] and broke the windows and thrun all the beds and chairs out in the yard. Some of the poor people went to the workhouse in Galway, and some made shelters in the hedges and ditches” (17). Often the entire cottage would be broken down, so that the landlord could make use of the land, as was explained in chapter two. The iconic image of the leveled cottage is employed in this narrative as well, when Seán Thornton returns to his parental home in Galway before he leaves for America:

Seán climbed into the loft and the tears finally came when he found the fiddle which his grandfather had passed on to him when his rheumatically fingers could no longer ply the bow or finger the strings. He stood in the kitchen and sobbed out loud, crying for the happy times of his boyhood in this house, for his parents and sister, for the terrible waste of life in his land. (81)

Seán's childhood home is described in this way to align “the wrecked cottages with the devastations of a people ruined by the potato blight,” and is a trope that is commonly used in classic Famine narratives (Corporaal 158). The images that this paragraph describes are both images of the strict British rule, that could also be seen in *Nory Ryan's Song*, which often encouraged nationalist sentiments that would stay with the emigrants when they travelled to America. This led to a vision of freeing to homeland from the British government, in line with Safran's theory.

In contrast with *Wildflower Girl*, but as in *Nory Ryan's Song*, the government's mismanagement of the Famine is examined in this narrative. This does not present a move away from the generalisations of anger and trauma, and which featured in a number of classic Famine

narratives. Right after the blight, the government tells the people how to “get some good out of the bad praties,” and eat them anyway by mashing them with oatmeal or flour and bake them into a cake (12). They also send grain to families, to provide them with some extra nourishment, but they still ship great amounts of food out of the country to sell somewhere else. This leads to unrest in the country:

Do you know that food is being shipped out of this country every day? Every day of the week sheep, cows, lambs, pigs, wheat, barley flour – all this food – goes to feed other people in other countries. It is very hard to lay blame on those who attack these shipments and the men who help to export this food away from a dying nation. The law should understand the actions of desperate people and be lenient in its sentencing, but not so, I fear. (38)

The unrest that is caused by this practice leads to rebellion amongst the Irish. One of the rebel groups that was founded was the Young Irelanders, of which Seán becomes a member in 1848. Miller describes that “[i]n 1848 one faction, the group of intellectuals and professionals known as Young Ireland, attempted a futile revolt against British rule which ended quickly and ingloriously in a Tipperary cabbage patch” (280). Seán ascribes the failure of this revolt to the fact that they were not successful in finding a large group of followers, because “hunger clouds vision, and food to fill an empty belly is the most important thing to a hungry man” (66). He feels as if the people do not think about who has blame for the Famine, since they are too occupied with feeding themselves and their family. This fits in with Miller's historiographical study, in which he writes: “[i]ndeed, although letters written during the Famine by ordinary Irish countrymen often complained of individual injustices by landlords, farmers, and relief administrators, they rarely indicted the political *system* as responsible for the holocaust” (301). Stories of the rebellion did travel across the Atlantic and created a vision of the homeland amongst the Irish in America, in line with Safran's theory about diaspora communities in chapter one. In the novel, Mary-Anne writes: “[t]here are many people here who hate the Government and the landlords for having to leave their homes and come to this country, in which, though we eat well and get by on what we earn, we will never feel at home” (47). In the novel, the Irish in America have a feeling of dispersion and forced exile, that they blame the British government for.

In this narrative, as in *Wildflower Girl*, there is the presence of the dichotomy of rural versus urban Ireland. In the previous chapter it was explained that classic Famine narratives usually favour the urban over rural Ireland, since nature is what has failed the Irish. *Wildflower Girl* did not follow this pattern, but this narrative does. When there is nothing left for Seán in Galway, he decides to move to the east of the country. On his way to Dublin he sees a lot suffering in the countryside. There are “dead bodies, half-naked wandering people, the hovels, some smashed down by the

infamous battering-ram, the makeshift hedge and ditch homes inhabited by gaunt, yellow-faced, despair-ridden people” (23). When he arrives in Dublin he describes that “there was no sign of distress, starvation or other horrors [...] at least there was no obvious sign of need for 'saving' or 'rescuing'. He felt bitter and angry, remembering the desperation and agony of the poor of the West and those on the roads to Dublin” (22). The contrast between the people in the country and the city affirms the idea that people find their new start and happy ending in the city, as is traditional in Famine narratives. The failure of nature is also described in this narrative. In the first chapter nature is described as the provider for almost everything. The family makes things out of materials they find around the farm, like rushes, to trade at the market, and let the animals they own provide for their food. Nature is presented as the thing that keeps them alive. But by the time the family leaves for America a completely different picture is described when Mary-Anne goes for a walk:

Today I walk up to the hill and look down on the village. There is no smoke rising, no sign of life. The fields are empty – there are no sheep or cattle, no hens – the land is bare of everything. The green is coming between the rocks, and the wee flowers won't see me this year. Will flowers grow in the places we are going to? My hunger pains and my sadness pains are all mixed up in me. We are going away from Moneen. Will I ever see this spot again? (19)

Nature is described as having failed the people of Ireland, since they can no longer let the land provide for them. This is similar to the situation that was described in *Wildflower Girl*. Although the nature is slowly regenerating, Mary-Anne and her family have to move away. There is a shift to urban America, which again presents the dichotomy between the rural and the urban. The memory of the Famine is taken with the family as they sail to the New World, because, as Corporaal explains, the recurring image of the ship stands for “the transportability of the Famine past” (221). This past cannot be left behind, but will stay with them as part of their identity. As was explained in chapter one, the collective memory of the Famine is important for the identity of the emigrants, and this memory will influence their ability to assimilate in the New World.

The Passage

Interestingly, this novel does not give a very detailed account of the voyage to America. There are rumours in Ireland about the journey which say that “the months on board ship in primitive conditions caused many premature deaths and rendered those who survived unable for the rough-and-tumble of competition for work in the land across the Atlantic” (21). Therefore Seán asks Mary-Anne to write about life on the boat. The description of the voyage is nearly identical to the experience that Peggy has in *Wildflower Girl*. Like Peggy, Mary-Anne experiences the lack of

personal space, unhygienic surroundings, seasickness, and cabin fever:

Dad and Mam and me share a bunk in the steerage section. There is not much space for us and our *bagáiste*, but we are lucky as we have more space than most, as the bunk space is supposed to be for four people. [...] There is no place for 'sanitation', and a lot of people complain about this. There are chamber pots like at home, but there is no private place to use them. [...] There is a bad smell below deck. It makes your eyes watery and your throat sore. There is not much air down here. (30)

Even though Mary-Anne does travel to America at the height of the Famine, in contrast to Peggy in the previous chapter, not many people die during the voyage across the Atlantic. Mary-Anne mentions the death of a baby, but that is the only death that is described. It is likely that because this is a children's novel, the truth of the hardships on board of the vessel has been bent a little to be more suitable for young readers, as explained in the introduction of this thesis. According to Miller's historiography, about nine percent of the people travelling to America died aboard the emigrant ships (292). While in *Wildflower Girl*, the journey to America was a crucial part of identity building for Peggy, this narrative only dedicates four pages of the novel to the crossing. This suggests that in this narrative the voyage is not regarded as a rite of passage, and a transition to a new identity, but an attempt to hold onto the homeland. The lack of attention to the passage in the narrative represents a move away from transforming “the coffin ship into a site of transition,” as explained in the previous chapter.

Another difference between the narratives is the feelings the protagonists have when land is finally in sight. Peggy was anxious to get to America, and excited to finally be there, but Mary-Anne experiences very different sensations which she describes in her letter to Seán:

I cannot say how I feel just now. Everyone is glad that the long journey is almost over. I think that everyone has forgotten the people at home. This makes me very contrary, and I want to sit down on the ground and say, 'No, no, I don't want to be here in this new land, I want to go home.' I want to scream and shout, and I feel frightened that I will never see my village and my friends ever again, and I can't bear the sadness... (33)

This passage shows the different situations in which the protagonists of the novels left their homeland. Peggy left an abandoned country, years after the height of the Famine, to try to build a new life in America because there was nothing left for her in Ireland. But Mary-Anne left Ireland because her family had no way to survive if they had stayed. She had to make a choice between death or emigration, and she chose the latter. She has a feeling of dispersion, while Peggy feels like she has made a conscious decision to leave. Mary-Anne's situation therefore matches Safran's description of the modern diaspora more than Peggy's situation does.

Arrival

Marry-Anne's arrival in New York displays many of the arguments that have been discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, the first being that Ireland is regarded as the true, ideal home. The Irish immigrants feel anger about the manner in which they had to leave Ireland behind. She writes to Seán that “[t]here are many people here who hate the Government and the landlords for having to leave their homes and come to this country, in which, though we eat well and get by on what we earn, we will never feel at home. Many long to return to Ireland, as I do. It is a constant thought in my head” (47). This anger led to nationalist sentiments amongst the Irish in America. Even though Young Ireland failed to have success in Ireland, their vision for the homeland did resonate in the New World. Miller writes that “Young Ireland's greatest influence was on the Irish in America, particularly on the Famine emigrants and their children” (311). Mary-Anne writes to Seán, after she has read his letter saying he has joined the Young Irelanders:

We have had the news here about the failure of the rebellion, and the fact that in the end not enough people gave their complete support. [...] You might like to know that Mam and Dad and myself have been to meetings here and have listened to men like Micheál Doheny, Thomas Darcy McGee and Richard Gorman. [...] All of us Irish love and admire and respect these men, and we will aid them in whatever more they plan to do for the freedom of Ireland. (57-58)

This fragment displays Safran's characteristic that diasporic groups are dedicated to restoring their original homeland. In another letter Mary-Anne asks Seán whether there is “any sign of a better living for those who stayed behind? Is there any way we over here can help those at home? If you know any way in which we can be of help, tell us when you write again” (61). The diasporic society continues to relate to their homeland, and this solidarity to Ireland influences “their ethnocommunal consciousness” (Safran 84).

Mary-Anne struggles to integrate into American society, because she holds on to her Irish identity. She and her family live in a room in a house that is filled with Irish immigrants. She writes to Seán that her family is “doing fine over here, thanks be to God, but as lonely as ever. The Irish here cling close to each other. We speak our language together, dance our dances together, and pray together. It is hard to break away from the old ways, and it is a great consolation to be with our own in a strange land; it keeps us going, and the memories of home are forever fresh in our minds” (58). This passage demonstrates that cultural memory is indeed a large component in formation of identity, and isolates the Irish immigrants from the majority culture in America, as discussed in the first chapter.

Settlement

After a year in New York, Mary-Anne has become a lady's maid in a "fine house", so like Peggy in the last novel, she has started to climb the social ladder, which implies that there is some social mobility for the Irish. Seán has decided to emigrate to America as well, since there was no more work for him in Ireland because all of his students had either died or left for the US. Seán has always been part of a feeling of home for Mary-Anne, since he was the last person in Ireland that she knows, and could hold on to. She has stated since she arrived in America that she wants to go home someday. She says that "[i]t is the dearest wish of my life to go back home again, to see our little village, to walk to fields and hills. I don't want to die in this land, good and all it is to us. I want to be buried with my kin in Moneen. Nothing else will do for me" (107). But now Seán has come to America, which means that the last person that she knows in Ireland has left the homeland as well. After Seán's arrival in New York "[t]he persistent ache which she had carried around inside her for the past three years had dulled somewhat [...] It was as though going home to Ireland did not seem as impossible as it once had – her return was just a matter of time, that was all" (119). Seán can be seen as a representation of the homeland in New York, and the ability to establish an Irish community there.

Mary-Anne's failure to assimilate to a new culture is also reflected in her choice of love interest. Tim, an Irish immigrant who arrived in New York a couple years before Mary-Anne did, can be seen as a representation of the Irish integration of the new homeland. He is a police officer in the neighbourhood where Mary-Anne works, and he is very well known and liked by the people there. He has successfully moved up on the social ladder, and is now studying criminology at night classes. Tim is an example of an Irish immigrant who, because he is not living in an Irish micro-culture, is becoming part of the majority culture in America. He is known by the people in the city, because he works for the police force, and "[m]ost of the passers-by greeted Tim as they passed them on the way to the park. It made Mary-Anne proud to think that he was so popular" (126). When Mary-Anne and Tim meet, he starts to win her affections. At first Mary-Anne is interested in Tim as well, and they go on a couple of dates. But eventually Mary-Anne realises that her connection to Seán, and their shared history, is more important than her connection to Tim. This is where the novel ends, so we do not learn whether she actually does something with this realisation, but it would be in line with the rest of the narrative that Mary-Anne eventually chooses her connection to the homeland over a chance to become part of the majority culture.

Again, this novel does not distance itself from the traditional narrative template of early Famine fiction. This novel shows even more aspects of the Famine narrative from the 1850s-1900s that the first novel did not touch upon, like the government's mismanagement of the blight, and the

protagonist's desire to eventually return to the homeland. The representation of the diaspora in this novel corresponds to all six characteristics that Safran lists. The only positive representation of the diaspora that can be found in this narrative is in the character of Tim. Through his character the novel shows that social mobility is possible for an immigrant from Ireland, and that the Irish can become part of the majority culture in America. Interestingly, the protagonist of this narrative does not choose to follow in his footsteps, but makes the decision to hold on to her connection to the homeland.

Discussion & Conclusion

The research in this thesis has shown that the children's literature that was analysed does not move away from the structure of the Famine narratives that were published in the aftermath of the Irish Famine. The analysed works all display the classic Irish nationalist perspective that mismanagement by the British government caused the Famine and the Famine exodus. They also represent emigration as forced exile. They describe an Irish culture that has been dispersed from the homeland, with a vision to make it better when they get the chance. This was an unexpected result after the renewed interest and a surge in Famine related scholarship in the 90s, and Robinson's call for a move away from the classic perspectives of the Famine narrative.

The expectation was to see that America would be depicted as a land of opportunity, where Irish immigrants could make a new start in life. This is not the case, since both novels that include the journey and settlement to America show that there is little social mobility for the Irish immigrant and they are forced to live in Irish communities, for they are not accepted into the majority culture in America. The positive note is that in both of these novels, the protagonists do not stay at the bottom of the social ladder and they both find work that is described as “as good as you'll get” (Conlon-McKenna 110). *Mary-Anne's Famine* shows more social mobility than *Wildflower Girl*, since the secondary characters in that narrative are able to find work on their educational level – Tim works as a police officer and becomes part of the majority culture, and Seán is still able to teach in America – but interestingly the protagonist Mary-Anne does not seem to want to become part of the majority culture, since her ultimate goal is to go back to the homeland. *Wildflower Girl* illustrates that the protagonist continually searches for an Irish community in America, but eventually does hint at the possibility for assimilation, since she does not strive to return to the homeland and instead wants to move west to find new opportunities, which displays that she regards America as her new home. The protagonist who emigrated several years after the Famine has a considerable prospect of assimilation, so it can be argued that distance from the horrors of the plight influence the fluidity of identity.

An interesting note is that the protagonists in all three novels that were analysed are female. Margaret Kelleher is a scholar who has studied this common phenomenon in her work *The Feminization of Famine: Expressions of the Inexpressible*. In this study she demonstrates that “famine is figured in the feminine: [...] famine's most frequent image is that of a gaunt mother struggling and failing to feed her dying child. This image suggests domestic and social catastrophe” (Fiamengo 77). With the help of this image, the embodiment of the woman symbolises the suffering

country. C.L. Innes confirms that “in Irish literature there is a[n] [...] overloading of central women characters so that they become in some sense signifiers of the nation [...] representing the race as a whole in its suffering and in its yearning for redemption” (11). Taking this tendency into consideration, it is not unusual that all these novels revolve around female protagonists.

This thesis can conclude that the diaspora in children's Famine fiction written around the 150th commemoration of the Famine is represented in a similar way as it was represented in Famine fiction published in the aftermath of the Famine, and the novels do not present a positive view of emigration. The protagonists that emigrate to the US still identify as Irish at the end of the narratives, since the trauma of the Famine and their love of Irishness are large components of their identity and they cannot let go of that. This is in contrast with what was expected at the start of this research. It is likely that the authors of the novels that were discussed in this thesis were inspired by the classic writings about the Famine.

A critical note on this thesis would be that not all the narratives that were analysed tell the same story. The comparisons between these novels are therefore more difficult to make. The first novel only depicted the situation in Ireland, the second was set almost a decade after the height of the famine, and the third was more in line with the predictable plot patterns that McNamara describes. The similarity between these novels is that they all portray a protagonist who struggles in Ireland and hopes to one day find a better life in America, and those were the criteria for choosing these narratives. It is rather difficult to find similar novels, since authors want to be original and tend to write a slightly different narrative every time. Also, the canon of children's Famine narratives published after 1990 is not that extensive, therefore one has to be less critical about the similarities between the novels.

Further research could be done into what inspires current authors to write Famine narratives. Researched could be done on whether they are indeed inspired by these classic writings that were published in the aftermath of the Famine, and if so, why they do not move away from these traditional perspectives. Another aspect that could be researched is whether a move away from the predictable plot patterns that McNamara describes is demonstrated in Famine narratives published after 1990. This thesis was only able to find and discuss two narratives that adhere to this description, so a shift away from this could be confirmed in further research. A study that can be connected to this is James Wertsch's study of “narrative templates” as a tool to shape collective remembering. They are “abstract forms of narrative representation and typically shape several specific narratives” (Wertsch 120). It could be researched whether there is a narrative template that is applied to writings about the Famine, to shape collective memory.

Bibliography

- Assmann, Jan. "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity." *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 125-33.
- Behan, John. *Coffin Ship*. 1997. Bronze Sculpture. The National Famine Monument, Murrisk.
- Behrens, Peter. "It's About Immigrants, Not Irishness." *The New York Times*, 16 March 2012.
- Conlon-Mckenna, Marita. *Wildflower Girl*. Dublin: O'Brian Press, 1991.
- Coogan, Tim Pat. *The Famine Plot: England's Role in Ireland's Greatest Tragedy*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2012.
- Corporaal, Marguérite. *Relocated Memories: The Great Famine in Irish and Diaspora Fiction, 1846-70*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 2017.
- Corporaal, Marguerite and Christopher Cusack. "Rites of passage: The Coffin Ship as Site of Immigrants' Identity Formation in Irish-American Fiction, 1855-1885." *Atlantic Studies* 8.3 (2011): 343-59.
- Fiamengo, Janice. "Review: The Feminization of Famine: Expressions of the Inexpressible? by Margaret Kelleher." *Victorian Review* 24.1 (1998): 77-79.
- Frawley, Oona. *Irish Pastoral: Nostalgia and Twentieth-century Irish Literature*. Newbridge: Irish Academic Press, 2005.
- Giff, Patricia. *Nory Ryan's Song*. New York: Delcrote Press, 2001.
- Gubar, Marah. "On Not Defining Children's Literature." *PMLA* 126.1 (2011): 209-16.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*. Ed. Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990. 222-37.
- Harris, Ruth-Ann. "Introduction." *The Great Famine and the Irish Diaspora in America*. Ed. Arthur Gribben. Amherst: U of Mass P, 1999. 1-20.
- Hill McNamara, Karen. "It was a Life-Changing Book': Tracing Cecil Woodham-Smith's impact on the Canon of Children's Literature of the Irish Famine." *Hungry Words: Images of Famine in the Irish Canon*. Ed. George Cusack and Sarah Goss. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006. 283-99.
- Huyssen, Andreas. "Diaspora and Nation: Migration into Other Pasts." *New German Critique* 88 (2003): 147-64.

- Innes, C.L. "Virgin Territories and Motherlands: Colonial and Nationalist Representations of Africa and Ireland." *Feminist Review* 47 (1994): 1-14.
- Keenan, Celia. "The Great Irish Famine in Stories for Children in the Closing Decades of the Twentieth Century." *Holodomor and Gorta Mór: Histories, Memories and Representations of Famine in Ukraine and Ireland*. Ed. Christian Noack, Lindsey Janssen and Vincent Comerford. London: Anthem Press, 2012. 189-96.
- Kenny, Kevin. "Diaspora and Comparison: The Global Irish As a Case Study." *Journal of American History* 90.1 (2003): 134-62.
- Kidd, Kenneth. "T Is for Trauma The Children's Literature of Atrocity." *Freud in Oz: At the Intersections of Psychoanalysis and Children's Literature*. University of Minnesota Press, 2011. 181-205.
- Kinealy, Christine. "The Great Irish Famine—A Dangerous Memory." *The Great Famine and the Irish Diaspora in America*. Ed. Arthur Gribben. Amherst: U of Mass P, 1999. 239-54. Print.
- Mark-Fitzgerald, Emily. *Commemorating the Irish Famine*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013.
- McCormack, Colette. *Mary Anne's Famine*. Cork: Attic Press, 1994.
- McGowan, Mark. "Remembering Canada: The Place of Canada in the Memorializing of the Great Irish Famine." *Atlantic Studies: Global Currents* 11.3 (2014): 365-82.
- Miller, Kerby A. *Emigrants and Exiles : Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*. New York, N.Y., etc.: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- . "Revenge for Skibbereen: Irish Emigration and the Meaning of the Great Famine." *The Great Famine and the Irish Diaspora in America*. Ed. Arthur Gribben. Amherst: U of Mass P, 1999. 180-95.
- Moore Quinn, Eileen. "Entextualizing Famine, Reconstructing Self: Testimonial Narratives from Ireland." *Anthropological Quarterly* 74.2 (2001): 72-88.
- Mulcrone, Mick. "The Famine and Collective Memory: The Role of the Irish-American Press in the Early Twentieth Century." *The Great Famine and the Irish Diaspora in America*. Ed. Arthur Gribben. Amherst: U of Mass P, 1999. 219-38.
- Robinson, Mary. "Cherishing the Irish Diaspora: An Address." Irish Parliament and Senate, 29 October 1995.
- . "Inaugural Speech." Dublin Castle, December 3, 1990.
- Safran, William. "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return." *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1.1 (1991): 83-99.

Schultz, Matthew. "Narratives of Dispossession: The Persistence of Famine in Postcolonial Ireland." *Postcolonial Text* 7.2 (2012): 1-19.

Wertsch, James. "The Narrative Organization of Collective Memory." *Ethos* 36.1 (2008): 120-35.