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Trauma in The Great Famine texts:

Trauma, Memory and Migration in *The O'Donnells of Glen Cottage and Grace*

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Abstract

This thesis shall examine the manner in which trauma, memory, and migration in relation to the Great Famine are explored in the novels *The O'Donnells of Glen Cottage* and *Grace*.

These themes shall be analysed through the use of trauma theory, with the analysis revealing that *The O'Donnells* and *Grace* share similarities in their display of trauma through the usage of physical landscapes and migration, albeit in different forms. The texts differ in their depiction of the mental impact of trauma, with *Grace* showing the impact more explicitly, whilst *The O'Donnells* describe it in little detail.

Keywords: Great Famine, Trauma, Trauma Theory, Memory, Migration

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Introduction

The country of Ireland has endured many hardships in its history, such as English colonisation and a civil war, but one of the most devastating and horrific tragedies in Irish history is the Great Famine. Starting in 1845 and ending in 1850, it caused more than a million people leaving the country, seeking better lives in other places such as Canada, the US and Australia, and a further one million people lost their lives due to starvation and disease.¹ The scale of death and terror that the Famine inflicted on the people of Ireland invites a strong demand to commemorate the event. However, as Emily Mark-Fitzgerald notes, ‘for nearly 150 years any sense of a public or collective “memory” of this period has proved elusive [...] the horrors and shame associated with the Famine period relegated its representation to the margins of Irish history and remembrance.’² The general attitude regarding commemoration in relation the Famine changed in the 1990s, however. The 150th anniversary of the Famine caused a sudden increase in monuments not only in Ireland, but across the world, with the overarching idea of attempting ‘to inscribe new socio-cultural values onto a catastrophic history whose deep imprint on Ireland and its diaspora resists simple signification.’³ This implies that the recent renewal of interest in the Great Famine cannot simply create a different attitude towards the Famine, as the impact of the event has been a constant presence in Irish society, even in contemporary Ireland, and is thus difficult to accurately locate and quantify.

¹ Emily Mark-Fitzgerald, *Commemorating the Irish Famine: Memory and the Monument* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 1-2.

Cormac Ó Gráda, “Famine, Trauma and Memory,” *Béaloideas* 69 (2001): 121, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20520760>.

² Mark-Fitzgerald, *Commemorating*, 1.

³ Mark-Fitzgerald, *Commemorating*, 2.

Interestingly, even though Mark-Fitzgerald mentions that broad societal interest about the Famine was limited, there were specific members of Irish society that did interact with the Famine as early as the next few decades after the event itself. These members of Irish society and diaspora were the Irish authors that engaged with the Famine, more specifically certain authors that wrote ‘transatlantic novels and short stories which perform memories of the fateful events of the 1840s’, thus actively remembering and engaging with the trauma that is the Great Famine.⁴ One of these authors is David Power Conyngham, who wrote the novel *Frank O’Donnell*, originally published in 1861 but later republished in 1881 under the name *The O’Donnells of Glen Cottage*.⁵ The text is about Frank O’Donnell, a young Irish lad who leaves Ireland for a couple of years in order to find fortune in the US, after his mother passes away and his family is forcefully expelled from their ancestral home.⁶ Once he has earned the necessary wealth, he returns to Ireland in order to marry his love and regain ownership of his childhood home. Before he travels to the States, however, Frank is confronted by the devastating impact of the Famine, as he witnesses both the deplorable state of the Irish peasantry and the ruination of his own family, which motivates him to gather sufficient wealth abroad.⁷ This is what Marguérite Corporaal calls ‘the migration plot’, a common literary trope in texts written about the Famine around the same time as Conyngham wrote

⁴ Marguérite Corporaal, “A Land of Milk and Honey? The Representation of Migration and Diaspora in Literary Memories of the Great Famine, 1860—1885,” *The Irish Review (Cork)* no. 44 (Summer 2012): 4, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23350172>.

⁵ Bob Lensink, e-mail correspondence with Marguérite Corporaal, 8th of March, 2023.

⁶ David Power Conyngham, *The O’Donnells of Glen Cottage: A Tale of The Famine Years in Ireland* (New York: D. & J. Sadlier & Co., 1881), 424-35, <https://archive.org/details/TheODonnellsOfGlenCottage/page/n6/mode/1up>.

⁷ Conyngham, *The O’Donnells*, 435-6.

Frank O'Donnell, where the main character first leaves Ireland for monetary reasons, and later returns as an affluent person.⁸

His departure is not without consequences, though, as his act of leaving Ireland causes the mental collapse of his uncle, the priest Father O'Donnell. Frank is only later made aware of his uncle's tragic end, causing him to suffer from the effects of his uncle's trauma as if he experienced it himself.⁹ Moreover, there is another group of people besides the O'Donnell family suffering from traumatic experiences, which is the peasant Irish population. They are confronted by the Famine in the form of food shortages and a lack of income due to the ruined harvests, resulting in mass starvation and evictions from their homes. These situations create trauma as well, which is embedded in the memories of ruined fields and run-down houses.

The impact of trauma, migration and memory on the main character is not exclusive to texts written in the nineteenth century, however. A similar narrative but with some differences is presented in *Grace*, written by Paul Lynch and published in 2017. In *Grace*, the titular protagonist Grace is forced to leave her mother and siblings and travel throughout Ireland in order to find employment, as Grace's mother is heavily pregnant and there is nobody else capable of earning an income.¹⁰ Grace does not leave Ireland for America as Frank does, instead travelling through Ireland in search of work. She ends up performing several different kinds of jobs, ranging from protecting cattle and partaking in the construction of a road to plundering carriages as a bandit.¹¹ It is during her travels that she encounters all kinds of horrific situations, from her little brother drowning in a river to

⁸ Corporaal, "A Land of Milk," 5.

⁹ Conyngham, *The O'Donnells*, 493-4.

¹⁰ Paul Lynch, *Grace* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 2017), 18, Adobe ePub.

¹¹ Lynch, *Grace*, 77-80, 113-120, 162-5.

witnessing a woman being shot, resulting in her becoming traumatised. Furthermore, Grace encounters the same kind of desolate landscape as Frank does, filled with ravaged fields incapable of growing any kind of crop to desolate towns filled with empty houses and plenty of beggars, their desperation and hunger palpable.

With the similarities and differences between the two texts and their main characters in mind, this thesis shall answer the following research question: how do *The O'Donnells of Glen Cottage* and *Grace* explore trauma, memory and migration in relation to the Great Famine? The answer to this question shall add to the growing body of academic research on the Great Famine and its literary representation, whilst providing more research on the relationship between trauma, memory, and migration.

The structure of this thesis shall thus be as follows: in chapter 1, the theoretical framework shall be constructed, dealing with the concepts of trauma theory, especially intergenerational trauma, collective and cultural memory, and the element of migration in this theoretical context. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 shall engage with *The O'Donnells of Glen Cottage* and *Grace* through the themes of trauma and memory, and trauma and migration, each chapter dealing with one element at a time, comparing and contrasting both texts whilst supporting the analysis with close reading and the theory mentioned in the theoretical framework.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework: Trauma, Memory and Migration

The Great Famine is intrinsically linked with several subjects, primarily trauma, but also memory and migration, as noted by scholars such as Cormac Ó Gráda and Marguérite Corporaal.¹² The concept of trauma and trauma theory is a recent idea. Before modern trauma theory emerged in the 1990s, the term trauma was ‘[o]riginally used in the seventeenth century to refer to physical injuries’, indicating that the use of trauma to ‘interpret experiences of physical, psychological, or sexual abuse and violence’ is a modern application of the word.¹³ That does not mean that people have not experienced trauma before the existence of trauma theory, but merely that we only now possess the terminology and theory to identify these experiences as trauma.

Several important academic texts on modern trauma theory were published in the 1990s, which have been recognised as vital for modern trauma theory in the Humanities.¹⁴ These texts combined writings, namely traumatic recollections from trauma patients, and several theories, such as psychoanalysis, post-structuralism and deconstruction, to determine the concept of trauma and trauma theory.¹⁵ There are two main characteristics of trauma in trauma theory: the first characteristic is that a traumatic experience is not directly accessible to the traumatised individual, but a subconscious image that is ‘largely inaccessible to conscious recall and control’, meaning that the traumatised person is plagued by their own

¹² Ó Gráda, “Famine, Trauma and Memory,” 121.

Corporaal, “A Land of Milk,” 5.

¹³ Erin Peters and Cynthia Richards, “Reading Historical Trauma: Moving Backward to Move Forward,” in *Early Modern Trauma: Europe and the Atlantic World*, ed. Erin Peters and Cynthia Richards (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2021), 2.

¹⁴ Susannah Radstone, “Trauma Theory: Contexts, Politics, Ethics,” *Paragraph* 30, no. 1 (March 2007): 9, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43152697>.

¹⁵ Radstone, “Trauma Theory: Contexts,” 10-11.

subconsciousness. The second characteristic is that a person's self-image is damaged by trauma.¹⁶ These two main characteristics of trauma have been introduced by Cathy Caruth, an academic scholar who is considered to be one of the founders of modern trauma theory.¹⁷

Caruth notes that patients diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) do not seem to be able to comprehend traumatic memories, even though they are confronted with these same memories through flashbacks, where the persons can describe these events in great detail. That is because the trauma cannot be implemented in 'schemes of prior knowledge', and thus remains not only incomprehensible, but also everlasting; the individual continues to experience the trauma, which means that it cannot be integrated into memory.¹⁸ This paradox, described by Caruth as 'the elision of memory and the precision of recall', creates a catastrophic effect in the traumatised individual: the traumatic event taunts and tortures the person through reoccurring flashbacks. However, because they cannot process these images, the survivor is continuously confronted with these images as well as its traumatic content.¹⁹ A method to convey this trauma is through sharing memories with others through descriptions, thereby creating the opportunity of transmitting the trauma to non-traumatised persons.

However, this definition can be explored in a different manner, as demonstrated by Michelle Balaev, who does not agree entirely with Caruth, and proposes an alternative

¹⁶ Cathy Caruth, "Recapturing the Past: Introduction," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 151.

Michelle Balaev, "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 41, no. 2 (June 2008): 150, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44029500>.

¹⁷ Radstone, "Trauma Theory: Contexts," 9.

¹⁸ Caruth, "Recapturing the Past," 152-3.

Caruth, "Recapturing the Past," 153.

¹⁹ Caruth, "Recapturing the Past," 153.

definition of the term trauma. Balaev's definition of trauma puts more emphasis on the disruption of one's self-image and the emotional response to said disruption, rather than the idea of traumatised individuals being haunted by recurring flashbacks that they cannot comprehend.²⁰ Thus, Balaev explores a different aspect of trauma than Caruth, whilst retaining certain characteristics of Caruth's definition.

In regards to literary trauma theory, it is the aspect of transferring trauma to other individuals or even groups that has been utilised as important support for a phenomenon described as intergenerational or trans-historical trauma, which has been mentioned in academic texts referring to the Famine.²¹ The concept of intergenerational trauma proposes that trauma can be transmitted 'across generational gaps, primarily through verbal or written acts of remembering'. This means that a person of a later generation can undergo the same trauma if they share 'a similar attribute of the historical group [...] due to the timeless, repetitious, and infectious characteristics of traumatic experience and memory.'²² The scope of intergenerational trauma is limited, however. Balaev notes two important elements of intergenerational trauma that can be criticised, namely the element of trauma as a universally accessible experience, which may lessen its value as a result. The second element is that intergenerational trauma 'conflates the distinctions between personal loss actually experienced [...] and a historical absence found in one's ancestral lineage.'²³ This difference

²⁰ Balaev, "Trends," 150.

²¹ Balaev, "Trends," 151.

Ó Gráda, "Famine, Trauma and Memory," 121.

Corporaal, "A Land of Milk," 5.

Mark-Fitzgerald, *Commemorating*, 1.

²² Balaev, "Trends," 152.

²³ Balaev, "Trends," 152.

is crucial, because the manner in which trauma is received varies enormously between persons that directly experienced it, and the persons that vicariously experienced it. The original trauma victims struggled with the trauma in its entirety, whilst the later generations cannot entirely perceive the same intensity and emotion that directly experiencing the traumatic experience can.²⁴

Instead, Balaev proposes an alternative theory to intergenerational trauma, defined as ‘the role of place as a significant formal innovation’, which emphasises the physical surroundings and the literary depiction of a traumatic event, as these descriptions can impart ‘extreme emotional states’ related to trauma.²⁵ This means that literary imagery of landscapes in trauma novels is important in regards to the impact of trauma in individuals, by not only signifying how this trauma creates ‘a reformulation of perception of self and world’, but also displaying how different authors engage with the concept of trauma and traumatic experiences.²⁶ This shows how trauma in literary texts is not bound by a single emotion or author, and how the interpretation of trauma and place can vary greatly, demonstrating both the versatility and the difficulty of analysing trauma in relation to place. Place, in Balaev’s theory, denotes ‘a physical environment inhabited, viewed, or imagined by a person who attaches and derives meaning from it’, and ‘a facet of perception that organizes memories, feelings, and meaning at the level of the physical environment.’²⁷ This combination, Balaev argues, signifies the importance of place in relation to trauma because a place only becomes relevant for a traumatic experience if a person has history with that specific place.²⁸

²⁴ Balaev, “Trends,” 152.

²⁵ Balaev, “Trends,” 159.

²⁶ Balaev, “Trends,” 159.

²⁷ Balaev, “Trends,” 159, 160.

²⁸ Balaev, “Trends,” 160.

Furthermore, the place where a character lives through a traumatic occurrence is related to a cultural history as well, as '[a] place attains its meaningful import based on individual perception and symbolic significance accorded by culture', and a place contains a cultural history as well as a personal one. Therefore, a traumatic experience attributed to a specific place 'indicates that trauma is understood as a culturally specific event, in which its meaning remains contingent on factors such as a historically specific moment, or socially ascribed attributes of identity.'²⁹ In this regard, Balaev's concept of place is quite similar to intergenerational trauma, as both offer methods to transmit trauma beyond the original victims via 'verbal or written acts of remembering', or personal and cultural histories ingrained in physical landscapes.³⁰

Similar to Balaev's theory of place is Pierre Nora's notion of *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, which is where 'memory crystallizes and secretes itself'.³¹ Nora distinguishes between the concepts of memory and history, where '[m]emory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present', indicating that memories of a previous event such as the Famine still persist in our present time through objects such as *The O'Donnells*, as it links the past to the present.³² Moreover, Nora notes that 'there are as many memories as there are groups, that memory is by nature multiple and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual', and that 'memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces.'³³ Nora's

²⁹ Balaev, "Trends," 160.

³⁰ Balaev, "Trends," 152, 160.

³¹ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* no. 26 (Spring 1989): 7, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2928520>.

³² Nora, "Between Memory and History," 8.

³³ Nora, "Between Memory and History," 9.

characteristics of memory can act as support for concepts such as collective memory and intergenerational memory, which could be linked to intergenerational trauma.

Nora proposes the notion that memory is created and actively reproduced by these sites of memory, due to the modern nature of history which does not allow a natural occurrence of creating memory.³⁴ This means that history in modern terms does not create a memory because it has aged and left evidence of the past behind, but because humans themselves have created a memory which might not necessarily be true. This method of sites of memory creating and reproducing memory does contain a significant flaw, which is that the created memories preserved in these sites can be falsified or distorted if there are no original memories available. Bill Schwarz, when analysing Nora's theory on memory and *lieux de mémoire*, phrases the problematic nature that Nora assigns to the formation of modern memory as 'memory [being] in danger of losing any real connection to the past, driven instead exclusively by the concerns of the present.'³⁵ The consequences of this apparent issue, however, can be limited by concepts of memory that Nora himself identifies: collective and intergenerational memory. The collective memory of a group of people, a nation for example, can be a varying and vast patchwork of individual memories that is constructed through these sites of memory, thus increasing the chances of memory not losing their attachment to the past.

Nora identifies three main elements that characterise sites of memory: a material, a functional, and a symbolic element. If one of these three main elements is not present, the site does not belong to this specific category. Moreover, a site of memory must contain 'a will to

³⁴ Nora, "Between Memory and History," 12.

³⁵ Bill Schwarz, "Memory, Temporality, Modernity: Les lieux de mémoire," in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 54.

remember', because otherwise, Nora reasons, 'we would quickly drift into admitting virtually everything as worthy of remembrance.'³⁶

In the case of the Great Famine, sites of memory would include the obvious entities, such as the dozens of commemorative sites dedicated to the Famine, but with Nora's criteria, objects such as novels mentioning the Famine could be included as well, as long as they encompass the aspects that Nora mentions. For example, *The O'Donnells* and *Grace* both adhere to Nora's criteria of being a site of memory: both texts are material objects, contain a functional aspect in the sense that they provide the reader an account of the Famine, albeit of different perspectives in different situations, and are symbolic because the texts create an image of the Famine through their engagement with the subject. Both the functional and symbolic elements also serve as Nora's fourth criterium of containing 'a will to remember', as the two novels would not have been written and published if they would not want to remember the Famine, as that is the primary subject of both texts.

Balaev's theory on the role of place, besides serving as an alternative approach to intergenerational trauma, focuses on an element that was discussed previously as present in both *The O'Donnells* and *Grace*, and that is migration. Migration is intertwined with the Famine, and by extension its trauma, for the simple reason that more than a million people fled Ireland during the Famine. Literature from the decades after the Famine confirms that the Irish also immigrated to the US, Canada, Australia, Scotland, England and Wales, which all have monuments commemorating the Famine.³⁷ The manner in which the new lives that these

³⁶ Nora, "Between Memory and History," 19.

³⁷ Ó Gráda, "Famine, Trauma and Memory," 122.

Corporaal, "A Land of Milk," 5.

Mark-Fitzgerald, *Commemorating*, 2.

immigrants create for themselves abroad constructs an image that depicts two sides of migration: the new opportunities and fortune that can be earned in the new land, which was the reason that the persons left Ireland in the first place, and a sense of longing and desire to return to the country that the migrants left behind.³⁸ It is this desire, Corporaal argues, that can be utilised to separate the traumatic memories of reality in Ireland to reimagine it as ‘an idealised motherland.’³⁹ However, this is only the case for emigration. When considering migration within Ireland itself, it becomes extremely difficult to idealise Ireland. In fact, the core statistics on Irish labour and living conditions reveal the hard truth: Ireland during the Famine was a horrendous place to live. Most of the people were forced to work in various government projects such as constructing public roads. This kind of employment provided little monetary compensation, thus forcing the Irish to rely on soup rations while doing backbreaking work. More importantly, however, is the fact that the poor and unfortunate were impacted far more severely by the Famine than the rich, creating a crucial element of Famine collective memory that Cormac Ó Gráda describes as ‘a hierarchy of suffering.’⁴⁰

It is this discrepancy between the fate of the poor and the rich that produced the vast number of Irish emigrants during the Famine, which is visible in both *Grace* and *The O'Donnells*, as both protagonists leave their homes, either by choice or by force, in order to gain wealth elsewhere. It is because of this demand to acquire riches that the protagonists experience trauma, resulting in suffering and grief.

³⁸ Corporaal, “A Land of Milk,” 6.

³⁹ Corporaal, “A Land of Milk,” 6.

⁴⁰ Ó Gráda, “Famine, Trauma and Memory,” 123.

Chapter 2: Trauma and Memory in *Grace* and *The O'Donnells*

The O'Donnells and *Grace* have several elements in common, and trauma and memory in relation to the Famine is one of the most important themes that both texts explore, albeit in different forms. In *Grace*, trauma and memory are a constant factor that the protagonist Grace has to deal with. This trauma manifests itself in different ways, and the way that is depicted depends on whom experiences the trauma, as not only Grace is a victim of trauma, but the physical landscape of Ireland as well. In *The O'Donnells*, trauma and memory are present throughout the text, with both members of the O'Donnells and plenty of Irish commoners suffering from traumatic experiences, primarily stemming from eviction from their homes.

Grace experiences trauma to various degrees, ranging from slightly bad memories to complete mental breakdowns and figments of her imagination haunting her. The most consistent form of trauma that Grace experiences throughout the novel is her hearing voices of people whom have died because of her, most prominently her little brother Colly. This form of trauma starts when Colly drowns in a river, because he was holding onto a sheep that the siblings wanted to drag out of the water and consume due to a lack of food.⁴¹ After that, Grace seems to have fallen in the river herself, and is eventually rescued by an old man named Charlie. Whilst she is living at Charlie's house, recovering from her injuries and benefiting from Charlie's kindness, she begins to hear Colly's voice, and from that moment onwards he never stops bothering her.⁴² Colly acts the majority of the time as either a conversing partner for Grace, a commenter on Grace's surroundings, a provider of mockery or a beggar for tobacco. It is unclear at first if Colly is actually physically present or merely a figment of Grace's imagination, but at several points throughout the narrative, Grace is

⁴¹ Lynch, *Grace*, 36.

⁴² Lynch, *Grace*, 41.

conversing with Colly or shouting at him, and other people think that she is talking to them, which she then denies.⁴³ One of the most prominent examples of this occurrence is when Grace shouts at Colly to shut up when he is annoying her for tobacco, and the only other person in the vicinity, Darkey, is startled by the comment, and mentions the fact that Grace told him to shut up, even though he did not say anything to her, and Grace deflects Darkey's confusion by feigning ignorance.⁴⁴ This interaction supports for the fact that Grace is traumatised by the death of her little brother, as Colly's voice in Grace's head can be seen as a form of traumatic memory. One of Caruth's characteristics of trauma is a recurring traumatic memory that is subconsciously present in the traumatised person which they cannot process, but very accurately recall.⁴⁵ That is the case here, as Colly's voice is a projection of what he would say based on the personality constructed by Grace's memories, which means that Grace is subconsciously imagining what Colly would think, and representing those subconscious thoughts via Colly's voice. Furthermore, the only reason the reader is aware of Colly is because the text mentions Colly's remarks, which is a common feature of literary trauma. That is because staying silent, according to Marita Nadal and Mónica Calvo, is not 'the appropriate alternative, since it entails repression and absolute forgetting.'⁴⁶ This can indicate that whilst Grace's mind is torturing her with Colly's voice, she is remembering his character at the same time, thus preserving Grace's memories of Colly.

⁴³ Lynch, *Grace*, 69, 116.

⁴⁴ Lynch, *Grace*, 116.

⁴⁵ Caruth, "Recapturing the Past," 153.

⁴⁶ Marita Nadal and Mónica Calvo, "Trauma and Literary Representation: An Introduction," in *Trauma in Contemporary Literature: Narrative and Representation*, ed. Marita Nadal and Mónica Calvo (New York: Routledge, 2014), 7.

A different example of trauma that haunts Grace is a recurring appearance of a woman that died in a bandit attack involving Grace as one of the culprits.⁴⁷ After the event has occurred and the woman has passed away, Grace encounters the same woman two more times, where the woman appears from nothingness and converses with Grace in a manner almost identical to Colly, suggesting that Grace is traumatised by the woman's death, as per Caruth's definition of a traumatic experience.⁴⁸ One significant difference between Grace's interactions with Colly and with this dead woman, who is named Mary Breshner, is that Grace is quite certain that Mary is a ghost, as the text mentions '[Grace] is talking to the dead woman from the coach', and Colly later proclaims that Grace 'must have been dreaming'.⁴⁹ This is ironic because similar to the woman, Colly is merely a traumatic memory created by Grace's brain, and yet Grace does not acknowledge Colly's presence as a dead person haunting her, whilst she does acknowledge the woman as such. This irony is clearly recognisable when Grace wants to inform one of her companions at the time, Bart, that she is haunted by Mary Breshner, not Colly, and she notes the difficulty of convincing Bart that she is haunted: '[B]ut how can you explain such a thing? He would not believe a word. He would say, show me this ghost you are talking about.'⁵⁰ This supports the notion that while both Colly and Mary are traumatic memories tormenting Grace, Colly is a more subconscious trauma, as his presence is not doubted as Mary's presence is.

There is another major entity besides Grace that displays trauma, which is the physical landscape. It has been tormented by the disastrous harvest, creating desolated fields with little to no life, and as a cause of this, farms and towns have been abandoned due to starvation. As

⁴⁷ Lynch, *Grace*, 165.

⁴⁸ Lynch, *Grace*, 168, 176-178, 183.

⁴⁹ Lynch, *Grace*, 168.

⁵⁰ Lynch, *Grace*, 170.

Grace travels throughout the Irish countryside, she passes through many deserted towns and past empty, often crumbling houses, where the original inhabitants have either migrated from their homes to find work elsewhere, or are no longer living in the houses because they starved. One of the earliest instances of Grace witnessing a ruined landscape is in the beginning of the novel, when Grace and Colly are travelling to the nearest town. A ‘ruined stubble field’ is described as ‘but a memory of green’, and that ‘they suck uselessly upon the rain.’⁵¹ This random field that was full of life in the past is not merely a physical location, but a ‘place’, a sign of the trauma caused by the Famine, what is described by Michelle Balaev as a ‘facet of perception that organises memories, feelings, and meaning at the level of the physical environment.’⁵² The feeling of loss and decay, the memory of a healthy and blooming field full of produce, a life before the Famine, that can be what this description, when interpreted as a place, can allude to. Moreover, the imagery created by the text about this field, about the memory of a beautiful scene before it was ravaged by the Famine, can be classified as a site of memory as per Pierre Nora’s theory. That is because the field and the memory of the field described by the novel encompasses a material element, namely the field itself; a functional element, namely an image of the state of the Irish countryside before the Famine; a symbolic element, namely a visual representation of the destruction caused by the Famine; and ‘a will to remember’, as the memory of the field would not have been described in as much detail if the memory was not that impactful or important.⁵³

There are many more instances of places that convey ‘memories, feelings, and meaning’, one of the more important ones being a house where Grace believes a witch

⁵¹ Lynch, *Grace*, 23.

⁵² Balaev, “Trends,” 160.

⁵³ Nora, “Between History and Memory,” 8.

lives.⁵⁴ Grace encounters this house on her travels, and the description of the house and the surrounding area reveal the influence of the Famine firsthand. The image created by the text emphasises the past, which was bright, and the present, which is dark and lonely, because the owner of the house has passed away. This contrast between light and dark is especially clear in the portrayal of the absence of fire, as the novel depicts the inside of the house when light from outside hits it as ‘map[ping] the gloom into quiet, [...] the reek of how many years’ burning is marked into this place—like the echo of all fires and that echoing made stark by fire’s absence—dampness, and how the room receives her with such astonishing loneliness’.⁵⁵ It then describes how the room is full of nature, and that the plants ‘take place-name back into itself’, indicating that the house has been abandoned for some time. This depiction of the interior of the house clearly shows the memories of the landscape: how the house previously was brightly lit and joyful when it was inhabited, but once the owner had passed away, the darkness came and overwhelmed the light, and nature reclaimed some of its territory. Moreover, Grace ends up finding the decaying body of the previous owner, and ends up depositing the corpse in the nearby woods, not actually burying the body, which results in Grace suffering from a nightmare where the old woman is holding Grace firmly and muttering ‘this is a fine place, this is a fine place, but you must bury me first, you must bury me first’.⁵⁶ The fact that Grace is plagued by this dream, that the old woman is commenting that her house is a nice place, further supports the notion of the memories of the place being remembered, which acts as one of the four requirements to label the house as a site of memory as per Pierre Nora’s theory. The other three characteristics that are required, the material, functional, and symbolic features, are present as well, as the house and the corpse

⁵⁴ Lynch, *Grace*, 102-4.

⁵⁵ Lynch, *Grace*, 102.

⁵⁶ Lynch, *Grace*, 104-6.

are the material features, the death of the old woman displays the function of the difficulty surviving in the Famine, and the fact that the house was abandoned and partially reclaimed by its natural surroundings fulfil the symbolic component, as it represents the devastating effects of the Famine on the Irish people. The combination of memories of trauma embedded in the physical landscape and Grace's own experiences which traumatised her therefore demonstrate the impact of the Famine on the Irish people and on Grace specifically.

In contrast to *Grace*, *The O'Donnells* creates a more basic image of trauma and memory regarding the Famine, as the text does not mention the mental impact of trauma in much detail. The Famine itself is present as a recurring topic throughout the text, and the characters do experience plenty of trauma, but the expression of the trauma is far more subtle. The Famine has a prominent impact on the lives of the characters: many lose their lives, either because of starvation directly caused by the Famine, or through evictions authorised by the Scottish landlord, Mr. Ellis, which causes psychological damage. This damage is most prominently visible when Mr. and Mrs. O'Donnell, the parents of the protagonist Frank O'Donnell, are evicted from their ancestral home. Mr. and Mrs. O'Donnell have suffered immensely already, witnessing the death of their youngest child, Bessy, and the eviction is the final straw for Mrs. O'Donnell. Whilst she is carried out of the house in the arms of her son, Frank, she proclaims that '[her] heart is breaking', and not long after, she passes away.⁵⁷ Mr. O'Donnell receives one more chance to speak to his wife, and at this point '[h]is body was bent, and his grey hair was now almost white from the effects of sorrow.'⁵⁸ Mr. O'Donnell suffers mental damage as well, as he loses all reason and reverts to the mental state of a child. He does, however, experience one final moment of coherent thought, and as

⁵⁷ Conyngham, *The O'Donnells*, 427.

⁵⁸ Conyngham, *The O'Donnells*, 426.

he learns of the state of his family, he cries, before his mind returns to a childish state, after which he dies.⁵⁹

These descriptions reveal the impact of the horrific events that Mr. and Mrs. O'Donnell experienced, which can be labelled as traumatic experiences in the sense that their physical and mental states deteriorate due to their trauma. The two defining characteristics of trauma, which are a subconscious image of the traumatic event that cannot be comprehended, and damage to a person's self-image, are not explicitly mentioned in the novel regarding the mental state of Mr. and Mrs. O'Donnell, yet when turned into physical ailments, partially fit. Both O'Donnells suffer from physical decay after it becomes apparent that they shall be evicted, and the death of Bessy worsens their condition even further. This physical decay can be considered as a replacement for damage to a person's self-image, as it is their bodies that receive the damage, instead of their self-image. Furthermore, Mr. O'Donnell's declining mental faculties could be the result of the traumatic experience haunting him, as Father O'Donnell, Frank's uncle, experiences a similar mental collapse, where his mental faculties revert to those of a child.⁶⁰

The way Frank reacts to the tragic death of his father is by putting his hand in his sister's hand and weeping, yet the novel provides no further detail to Frank's inner turmoil beyond that.⁶¹ One can assume, however, that Frank is definitely traumatised by hearing this news. The reason that this is not verbalised in the text, is because it was unusual in those times to describe traumatic experiences. This is similar to what Erin Peters notes in the English Civil War, where the war accounts written by survivors of the war discuss the

⁵⁹ Conyngham, *The O'Donnells*, 493.

⁶⁰ Conyngham, *The O'Donnells*, 493.

⁶¹ Conyngham, *The O'Donnells*, 494.

problematic nature of ‘articulating a traumatic experience in any meaningful and extended way.’⁶² Peter’s observation is further supported by Judith Pollmann, who remarks that authors of accounts of extreme violence ‘only rarely [...] dwell on the emotional impact events had on the author’, and that ‘[t]o revive [violent experiences] means to revive pain, and many people prefer to avoid this.’⁶³ Even though Pollmann’s remarks are about victims of violence, and not people experiencing trauma, the similarities to how authors evade the emotional aspect of either violence or trauma provides a useful insight in why the text does not directly describe Frank’s mental turmoil besides his physical reaction. This lack of description creates a stark contrast between how *The O’Donnells* and *Grace* engage with the mental aspects of trauma, where the inner conflict present in Grace’s mind is explored in more detail than Frank’s, yet it is perfectly clear that Frank is indeed traumatised, as Erin Peters and Cynthia Richards note that ‘psychological trauma as a result of distressing or disturbing experiences is a human response, and [...] can be found across times and cultures that predate our modern world’, even if the means of conveying that trauma is very different.⁶⁴

What *The O’Donnells* does have in common with *Grace* is the fact that both mention sites of memory a lot, with *Grace* being more explicit than *The O’Donnells*. *The O’Donnells* mentions the abominable state of living several times, not only through descriptions of the physical Irish landscape, littered with deserted houses and unstable shacks, but through mentions of the past as well. One example of this mentioned past is when the text describes the state of the Irish peasantry before the Famine, where ‘[p]arents felt no uneasiness about the support of their offspring when food was so easily procured’ and that there was

⁶² Erin Peters, “Trauma Narratives of the English Civil War,” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 16, no. 1 (Winter 2016): 84, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jem.2016.0008>.

⁶³ Judith Pollmann, *Memory in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), chap. 7, Google Books.

⁶⁴ Peters and Richards, “Reading Historical Trauma,” 3.

‘abundance within the reach of the poorest’.⁶⁵ This state of happiness and fulfilment was ruthlessly crushed by the Famine, however, as the potato harvest, the primary source of income of Irish peasants, was completely ruined by a disease destroying the crops. It is these potato fields that can be classified as sites of memory, as the text attributes meaning and memories to a physical environment.⁶⁶ As the ravaged potato fields are the cause for the widespread starvation and evictions amongst the Irish peasantry, these sites of memory are linked to trauma, thus demonstrating how *The O’Donnells* explores trauma and memory in physical landscapes.

Moreover, the author explains in a later chapter how the Irish lower classes are being unfairly penalised by the so-called ‘poor laws’, which ‘have destroyed the happiness and independence of the very poor for whose benefit they were created.’⁶⁷ These poor laws forbid charity, and force the poor to depend on officials that do not care for them. These poor laws, in combination with the terrible hunger and poverty, causes a wave of starvation and eviction, which is a stark contrast with the past. Before the Famine and these poor laws, the Irish lower class were more affluent and satisfied with their lives, which means that the presence of these poor laws can be seen as what Nora calls ‘a bond tying us to the eternal present’, because the appearance of these laws changed the living conditions for the worse, thereby linking the previously sufficient lives of the pre-Famine times to the horrible living conditions during the Famine.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Conyngham, *The O’Donnells*, 186.

⁶⁶ Balaev, “Trends,” 159.

⁶⁷ Conyngham, *The O’Donnells*, 439.

⁶⁸ Nora, “Between Memory and History,” 7.

Chapter 3: Trauma and Migration in *The O'Donnells* and *Grace*

Besides memory, the second major theme that is present in both *The O'Donnells* and *Grace* in relation to trauma is migration: the protagonists emigrate from Ireland and travel within Ireland respectively. It is this difference, however, that creates a distinction between the relation of trauma and migration in both texts, as Grace struggles in Ireland whilst Frank succeeds in America.

In *The O'Donnells*, Frank O'Donnell stays within his living area for the majority of the narrative, only emigrating to the US when he lost his ancestral home and parents. This happens at the end of the novel, with the author barely mentioning the fact that Frank emigrates besides a brief description of the emigrant ship and its passengers, and a conversation between Frank and his lover Alice, where Frank proposes his idea to emigrate in order to build a better life for himself.⁶⁹ When Frank returns to Ireland after gathering a fortune whilst living in America, his journey from the US to Ireland is not even mentioned, and his arrival is only described by the characters that still reside in the village, where Frank suddenly shows up to marry his lover after five years.⁷⁰ The fact that Frank emigrates does create trauma, however. Out of the last two remaining male O'Donnells in Ireland, Frank's father and uncle, his uncle is impacted the most by Frank's departure. The health of Frank's father was already in decline before Frank had left, and it did not improve much afterwards. Mr. O'Donnell's mind was regressing into a childish state, and he only had one final 'lucid interval' before his death, where he grieved for the collapse of his family.⁷¹ Frank's uncle, Father O'Donnell, shares the same fate as Mr. O'Donnell: his mind regresses into a childlike

⁶⁹ Conyngham, *The O'Donnells*, 435, 463-5.

⁷⁰ Conyngham, *The O'Donnells*, 495-6.

⁷¹ Conyngham, *The O'Donnells*, 494.

state, but the author describes an occurrence in detail, namely that Father O'Donnell would 'ask Alice where you were, and when did she see you, and the like.'⁷² This decline in mental faculties is similar to how some English civil war commentators described the physical and mental impact regarding the civil war. It caused 'a concurrent loss of identity', in the same way children generally lack an identity, and a mind regressing to this state can thus indicate that the person with a childlike brain lacks an identity as well.⁷³ This would further support the claim of Mr. O'Donnell and Father O'Donnell being traumatised, as one of the characteristics of a traumatised individual is that trauma 'disrupts previous ideas of an individual's sense of self', which is what occurs when one loses their identity.⁷⁴ The mental collapse of Father O'Donnell can act as evidence for trauma linked to migration, as his childish questions pertaining Frank's location would not be asked if Frank had not emigrated, and it is different from Mr. O'Donnell's trauma as well, as Father O'Donnell was aware of the fact that Frank wanted to emigrate, whilst the text does not mention if Mr. O'Donnell, when hearing about the state of his family, questioned where Frank was.⁷⁵

Besides Frank emigrating, there are a limited amount of mentions of travel in *The O'Donnells*, but these mentions are more indirect and subtle. One of the main other mentions of persons emigrating is William Shea, Frank's friend from college. William, or Willy as he is called, is training to become a doctor, and he is aware of the horrendous state of Ireland and the Irish people. That is why he applies for the position of ship doctor for a vessel heading to the United States, as he shall both earn quite a sizeable sum of money for the work

⁷² Conyngham, *The O'Donnells*, 493.

⁷³ Peters, "Trauma Narratives," 89.

⁷⁴ Balaev, "Trends," 150.

⁷⁵ Conyngham, *The O'Donnells*, 436-7.

and escape Ireland at the same time.⁷⁶ His journey, just like Frank's, is not described in the novel, but it is eventually revealed that he decided to go back to the US after returning to Ireland for a short amount of time in order to marry Kate, Frank's sister.⁷⁷ Willy, in contrast to Frank, does not feel the desire to leave the US for Ireland, which could be related to trauma. That is because Willy has seen the effects of the Famine in the area surrounding the home of the O'Donnell's, where entire families are dying from starvation and poverty.

Moreover, since Kate did not leave Ireland until much later, she has experienced the rapid decay of the remaining O'Donnell family in Ireland, and she shares these tales with both Frank and Willy.⁷⁸ She describes an image to Frank and Willy of the family members left behind in Ireland, such as the delirious Uncle Corny, who 'was always raving about battles and sieges', and died 'exactly six months after [Frank] left'.⁷⁹ The most important person is Father O'Donnell, however. Kate reveals that Father O'Donnell 'sank rapidly' after the death of Mr. O'Donnell, and how Kate and Alice Maher, Frank's love, kept him company for quite some time. They spent this time 'weep[ing] over old times, and breathed many a sigh to Heaven for your safe return.' He is able to perform the marriage ceremony to marry Willy and Kate, and dies about a month after the wedding, 'soon after laid to rest in his own little chapel.'⁸⁰ The tragic death of Father O'Donnell shows how important Frank's departure was to the decline of his mental state, as not even Willy's return could improve his physical and mental condition, and how the poor living conditions in Ireland create and trigger trauma

⁷⁶ Conyngham, *The O'Donnells*, 330-1.

⁷⁷ Conyngham, *The O'Donnells*, 493.

⁷⁸ Conyngham, *The O'Donnells*, 492-4.

⁷⁹ Conyngham, *The O'Donnells*, 493.

⁸⁰ Conyngham, *The O'Donnells*, 493.

which results in even more migration, as Kate's experiences caring for Mr. and Father O'Donnell could have convinced her to move to the US.

A different form of migration in the novel is the displacement of families by Mr. Ellis. Mr. Ellis, as the landlord of the area where the O'Donnells reside, deliberately chose to keep the rent of the properties high, despite the mounting impact of the failed harvests on the income of his tenants, resulting in several families unable to pay rent, and thus being evicted.⁸¹ These former residents, with little personal belongings or income, would be forced to either face the harsh Irish countryside, or migrate to another place in the hope of finding employment. These people would most likely then go to work on either public works or in workhouses, a phenomenon quite common during the Famine, especially for the Irish peasantry, who were plagued by starvation, regularly resulting in death and therefore trauma for survivors.⁸² An example of such a situation is provided in the novel, as Frank and Father O'Donnell are summoned to Jack Tobin's hovel, where he is close to dying, and requires the last rites that only Father O'Donnell, a priest, can give him. Whilst Father O'Donnell is preoccupied with Jack Tobin inside the house, Frank and a Protestant minister, Mr. Smith, engage in conversation with Mrs. Tobin, who shares her account of the collapse of her family. They had found employment at the public works, but after her son fell ill due to 'the dysentery from the exposure to cold and hardship', and Mr. and Mrs. Tobin being unable to work due to disease as well, they starved, eating 'but docks and weeds'.⁸³ Mrs. Tobin, whilst explaining the situation to Frank and Mr. Smith, is in a state of despair: she is described as a 'emaciated skeleton', who is constantly weeping, acting frantically, and repeating different

⁸¹ Conyngham, *The O'Donnells*, 186.

⁸² Ó Gráda, "Famine, Trauma and Memory," 122-3.

⁸³ Conyngham, *The O'Donnells*, 353-4.

exclamations such as '[o]h sir, sir, it is terrible' and '[o]h, oh, God help us!'.⁸⁴ These expressions of Mrs. Tobin are quite similar to how Frank acted when hearing about the state of Mr. and Father O'Donnell before they died, albeit in more detail, which supports the idea that forced migration in search of employment, combined with starvation, causes trauma for the survivors who have to keep on living.

In *Grace*, however, trauma due to the Famine is far more pronounced because of migration. Grace both observes and experiences the trauma caused by the Famine in great detail as she travels throughout Ireland. She passes through abandoned villages, destroyed fields and houses, and desolate towns where beggars are flooding the streets. As she is not leaving Ireland, Grace cannot earn riches as easily as Frank can: where Frank 'obtains wealth without considerable effort', Grace has to exert strenuous effort to gain hers, and in far lesser amounts than Frank's.⁸⁵ That is not the only difference between Frank and Grace in regards to migration, as there are two other important elements that accentuate the relation between migration and trauma, namely the decision to migrate and the depiction of migration in the text.

The degree to which their departure was voluntary differs in *Grace* and *The O'Donnells*. Grace is very suddenly forced by her mother to leave her home, giving her no other choice but to search employment elsewhere, and even if Grace's little brother joins her on her journey to keep her company, this does not reduce the impact of Grace's sudden departure from her home, as her little brother's death becomes a traumatic experience later in the text. This shock of leaving is increased further by Grace's forced physical changes, as her mother, Sarah, shaved her hair in order for her to pose as a boy and dresses her in her father's

⁸⁴ Conyngham, *The O'Donnells*, 354.

⁸⁵ Corporaal, "A Land of Milk," 7.

clothes, thus allowing Grace to do the work a boy would do, which was more profitable in the Famine.⁸⁶ However, this disparity in Grace's true female gender and her new, fabricated male gender may be one of the aspects of Grace's trauma that she experiences, as Grace is still young, and an apparent sudden change in gender, especially one that is forced on her, can cause damage to her mental state and create a traumatic experience. This is supported by Balaev, who states that trauma 'refers to a person's emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts previous ideas of an individual's sense of self', which applies to Grace.⁸⁷ Grace is no longer her own person, which she herself acknowledges when the text mentions how '[Grace] wakes wet with tears knowing she has grieved her own death. [...] And then it comes. Grief for what has changed. Grief for what is.'⁸⁸

Moreover, when woken up in the morning by her mother, the novel notes that Sarah is 'not herself', and 'stands masked to her own daughter', indicating Grace's feelings of doubt about her mother, and how their relationship has changed.⁸⁹ This is supported by the idea that Elizabeth Batista-Pinto Wiese observes in her research on trauma in migrating children. She notes that enormous in a child's interactive system, consisting of the child's family, their family culture, and the outside world, in this case caused by migration, can 'lead to changes in the child's functioning and [their] psychological development.' Grace, after being subjected to this forced migration and the trauma of her little brother's death shortly after, is

⁸⁶ Lynch, *Grace*, 18.

⁸⁷ Balaev, "Trends," 150.

⁸⁸ Lynch, *Grace*, 18.

⁸⁹ Lynch, *Grace*, 18.

thus very susceptible to psychological damage, which becomes visible when she eventually has a mental breakdown.⁹⁰

These three elements, Grace's hurried start of her travels, her being a child, and her involuntary physical changes, are completely absent in Frank's situation and decision to migrate. Frank actually experiences the opposite, in that he not only can choose for himself if he wants to emigrate, but he is in his mid twenties, and does not need to withstand alterations to his being. Frank is not forced by anyone to leave Ireland for greener pastures, he conceives this solution to escape the Famine on his own, and ends up encountering resistance against his proposal. Frank shares his ideas of leaving Ireland for America in order to acquire a fortune with Father O'Donnell, Frank's uncle. Father O'Donnell is adamant that Frank remains in Ireland, however, and because Frank does not adhere to Father's plea and ends up temporarily living in the US, Father O'Donnell suffers from mental damage shortly before his death, asking where Frank is and when he shall return.⁹¹ This shows how the choice of migration, even though Frank and Grace do not possess the same options, can cause trauma, where possessing or not possessing the choice to travel impacts which person becomes traumatised. Grace cannot choose, and she herself experiences trauma because of that, whilst Frank can choose, which inflicts trauma on his family.

An element which is depicted differently in *Grace* and *The O'Donnells* is the act of migration. Grace, as mentioned previously, is forced to travel throughout Ireland to search for work in order to survive. The novel largely approaches Grace's travelling in a very limited manner, where the text often utilises short sentences to describe how Grace has travelled from one town to another. For example, when Grace travels to a village called Ennis, the text

⁹⁰ Elizabeth Batista-Pinto Wiese, "Culture and Migration: Psychological Trauma in Children and Adolescents," *Traumatology* 16, no. 4 (2010): 147, <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1177/1534765610388304>.

⁹¹ Conyngham, *The O'Donnells*, 493-4.

describes that entire journey via the following sentence: '[Grace has] tunneled through dark into this town called Ennis.'⁹² Moreover, the text does not mention the distances or how much Grace has traversed, causing an effect of sudden time and place displacement. The text does, however, describe the surrounding Irish landscape in great detail. When Grace enters the town of Sircog when guarding cattle, the village is described as '[a] bally of mud cabins laid out in no particular fashion and yet the place seems lifeless'. Whilst Grace is stopping in town, an old man approaches her, who expresses the town as 'nothing to be had here but rocks and *cíb* grass'.⁹³ These different styles of illustrating the journey and the landscape create an interesting contrast between the migration itself and the environment that Grace traverses, showing how the journey is not important, but experiencing the impact of the Famine is.

The O'Donnells takes a drastically different approach, as the text itself does not dedicate any attention to Frank's or even Willy's journey across the Atlantic Ocean. Instead, the novel briefly describes how some of the people who assisted Mr. Ellis in his extortion of the limited funds of the Irish peasantry do not survive the boat trip to the New World. Frank's emigration and subsequent new start in the US is left unclear by the author, with no descriptions of any sort available in the text. Thus, it is unknown whether Frank has experienced any problems with his journey like Grace has. The only information regarding the effects of Frank's migration is present in his family, where it heavily impacts the mental state of Father O'Donnell.⁹⁴ This supports the notion that the differences in choice between Grace and Frank has different implications for which persons are possibly affected by traumatic experiences. Therefore, the difference between Frank and Grace in leaving Ireland

⁹² Lynch, *Grace*, 197.

⁹³ Lynch, *Grace*, 65.

⁹⁴ Conyngham, *The O'Donnells*, 492-4.

by choice and traveling through Ireland without choice impacts which characters in the texts gain traumatic experiences from their travels, either the persons themselves or members of their family.

Conclusion

The Great Famine that occurred in Ireland during the nineteenth century is a catastrophe that is still commemorated in the present day due to its enormous scale and societal impact, and it is the focus of novels now as it was in the decades after the Famine. Both *The O'Donnells of Glen Cottage* and *Grace* engage with the topics of migration and trauma, and memory and trauma, and explore these themes in different ways. *Grace* explores the emotional and mental aspects of trauma caused by the Famine through its main character, Grace, as she experiences trauma when travelling through the Irish countryside and observing the Irish people struggling to survive. She is haunted by her own mind in the form of the voice of her dead little brother, who represents the traumatic experience of him drowning in a river. A major contrast to these vivid images is *The O'Donnells*, where the subjects of memory, migration and trauma are more implicit. The novel barely mentions any form of travel, especially migration, but does show the aftermath of the migration that does happen, as Father O'Donnell ends up suffering from trauma because Frank decides to leave Ireland.

Furthermore, the text focuses on the effects of the Famine on the poor Irish people, and how they are exploited by the upper classes, primarily the landlords. The text does engage with memory and trauma, as several characters end up experiencing trauma in the form of regressing mental faculties, where the person is described as reverting to acting like a child. This is because of the Famine directly, as in the case of Mr. O'Donnell, or indirectly, as in the case of Father O'Donnell. However, even if the text notes that these characters have suffered from some sort of psychological trauma, the depth of the trauma is very limited, and the reaction of the person that receives this information, primarily the protagonist Frank O'Donnell, is described in little detail, and the effect of receiving this information on Frank's mental state remains unclear in the text. That is because it was exceptionally rare, at least in previous centuries before the Famine, for authors of traumatic experiences to describe their

mental state after they had experienced trauma, and the limited description of Frank's inner turmoil supports this notion.⁹⁵

Besides the personal trauma, though, there are a lot of descriptions of suffering Irish persons, and how the state of Irish housing and supplies has drastically declined since the start of the Famine. That element is the main similarity in both *The O'Donnells* and *Grace*: they show how the Irish people suffered from the effects of the Famine, as the landscape deteriorated and the peasantry starved due to food shortage. The fact that these two novels do create this same image of the common Irish folk is interesting, as *Grace* was written in the twenty-first century and *The O'Donnells* in the nineteenth century, yet both describe the same kinds of trauma, possibly indicating that the author of *Grace*, Paul Lynch, has experienced the trauma of the Famine vicariously after a hundred years, which is an instance of intergenerational memory.

The scope of the thesis is limited, however, so further research on this topic could include a bigger scope with more theoretical aspects besides trauma, memory and migration, and more texts with different perspectives if they are available. Such theoretical aspects could be the religious situation in Ireland during the Famine, where the English Protestants whom governed Ireland sought to expand their influence, which is what the Reverend Mr. Sly attempts in *The O'Donnells*, as he establishes a religious school where Catholic children can be converted to the Protestant faith in exchange for food.⁹⁶ A slightly different example occurs in *Grace*, as Grace herself recovers from a psychic meltdown in a religious camp where she has guaranteed shelter and nourishment.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Peters, "Trauma Narratives," 84.

⁹⁶ Conyngham, *The O'Donnells*, 304-5.

⁹⁷ Lynch, *Grace*, 213-6.

A different aspect could be the oppression and mismanagement of the Irish lower class by the English gentry that control Ireland, which is far more present in *The O'Donnells* than in *Grace*, as the author of *The O'Donnells* dedicates several chapters to the disgraceful actions and attitude of the English during the Famine, and that the Irish peasantry was treated far more equally in the past than it was in the Famine.⁹⁸ Other possible perspectives on this subject could be narratives which focus on Irish emigrants that refused to return to Ireland and created permanent new lives for themselves abroad, and the similarities and differences between these texts and texts such as *Grace* and *The O'Donnells*.

Regardless of the time period in which a text is written, the trauma of the Great Famine is always represented in one form or another, and the two texts discussed in this thesis show two of the possible portrayals of Famine trauma. This shows the timelessness of not only the Famine, but traumatic events in general, and how it is important to capture the spirit of the survivors of a trauma and represent them in texts to remember them, and treasure them, so that they did not suffer in vain; that future generations know what happened and that they can connect to their ancestors' past in order to create a better future.

⁹⁸ Conyngham, *The O'Donnells*, 274-80.

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