Neo-Victorian Re-Imaginations of the Famine:
Negotiating Bare Life through Transnational Memory

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Abstract:
Taking its cue from transcultural memory studies and the notion of travelling memory, this article analyses neo-Victorian famine novels, film and music with regard to these texts' orientations towards the hungry body. The Great Famine in Ireland caused mass migration and resulted in both geographical and cultural re-orientations across a range of intertextual and intermedial products published in Ireland and in the diaspora, including Joseph O'Connor's *Star of the Sea* (2002), which looks back to Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), and Paul Lynch's *Grace* (2017), which obliquely evokes Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848). It is certainly no surprise that the literature of the Hungry Forties serves as a major reference point for neo-Victorian famine literature, but these references also indicate re-orientations of memory that simultaneously renegotiate the historiography of the famine in the present. Lance Daly's 2018 film *Black 47*, for instance, appropriates the Western genre to tackle the history of the famine, thus overlaying Irish and American cultural trajectories. Finally, Sinéad O'Connor's song 'Famine' (*Universal Mother*, 1994) cites a quatrain from the Beatles' 'Eleanor Rigby' (*Revolver*, 1966), interweaving her plea for a re-orientation of Irish history with England's musical legacy, but also indicating future possible orientations of memory work. I argue that the geographical paths of migration and the embodied situatedness of hunger find cultural representation in criss-crossing lines of memory work running through hybridised forms of literature and other aesthetic media.

Keywords: *Black 47*, Lance Daly, 'Famine', *Grace*, the Great Famine, Paul Lynch, Joseph O'Connor, Sinéad O'Connor, *Star of the Sea*, transnational memory studies.

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O f the roughly 8 million inhabitants of Ireland in the 1840s, about one million died of starvation and over one million emigrated due to the Great Famine, decimating Ireland's population by at least a quarter (FitzGerald 2017: 10-11, 21). The geographical paths of migration caused by the famine led to the emergence of a transnational and transcultural web of memories that has come to be represented by hybridised cultural forms in products published around the sesquicentennial of the famine and particularly after

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the millennium. However, the memory of the famine is divisively uneven, as was the suffering it caused:

> poverty and death were closely correlated, both at local level and in cross-section. In some areas, particularly along the east coast, mortality was low and mainly confined to the first half of 'Black 47'; in others the famine removed one-quarter or one-third of the entire population and normality had still not been restored by 1851. In considering collective memory of the Irish famine a crucial aspect is that, like all famines, it produced a hierarchy of suffering. (Ó Gráda 2001: 123)

This "hierarchy of suffering" is largely correlated to intersecting categories of difference such as class and age, as Ó Gráda shows, but it also relates to gender. Hence neo-Victorian famine texts recalling the 1840s often tend to depict women and children as the primary victims, and men as survivors or avengers of the dead.

In current cultural products, the memory of the famine is already (pre-)defined by a palimpsest of memory cultures, particularly by two anniversaries, the centennial and the sesquicentennial of the famine. Any political and cultural act of remembering contributes to shaping the past, to calibrating the way one remembers:

> In speeches to the *Oireachtas* (the Irish Houses of Parliament), at Grosse Ile in Québec (where thousands of famine emigrants died in 1847), at the opening of the Irish famine museum at Strokestown (county Roscommon), and elsewhere, President Mary Robinson led the way, arguing that the Famine had defined Irish people's "will to survive" and their "sense of vulnerability". (Ó Gráda 2001: 121)

What becomes poignantly clear in such political or politicised speeches – and Ó Gráda quotes many more in the same vein – is the construction of a *collective* memory, raising the difficult historiographic question of *who* actually remembers and who *determines the discourse* on memory. These two aspects diverge crucially, with first-hand sufferers rarely articulating their memories – a veritable Lyotardian *differend* in the sense that those

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suffering are silenced and cannot be represented in the dominant discourse (Lyotard 2011: 9).[1] In contrast, the ancestors of those who determine the memorial discourses frequently did not share the worst of the suffering, but provided vicarious evidence, while their descendants pursue political interests through memory work, as do members of the Irish diaspora to a large degree (Ó Gráda 2001: 133, 140).

The ethical conundrum that is implied in representations of the famine is hence frequently the question of who can 'speak for' the victims of the famine if they are unable to speak for themselves. The actual and metaphorical silencing through hunger is a crucial ethical issue that I would like to tackle with Giorgio Agamben's discussion of bare life. He offers an account of how modern states establish sovereignty by excluding bare life from their very constitution, thus, however, constructing a tie to bare life by way of an inclusive exclusion (see Agamben 1998: 18). Building on Michel Foucault, Agamben argues that "the entry of *zoē* into the sphere of the *polis* – the politicization of bare life as such – constitutes the decisive event of modernity and signals a radical transformation of the political-philosophical categories of classical thought" (Agamben 1998: 5). This coincides with the discussion of whether the Great Famine can be understood as a trigger for 'modernisation' (see O'Malley 2015: 140). Bare life, in the guise of the hungry body, thus becomes a central political category that far exceeds any individual 'fate' and the Great Famine can be understood as a central historical example of how bare life is politicised.

In the historiography of the Great Famine, issues of debate are frequently directed at the politics of liberal *laissez-faire* economics and the lack of state intervention in the famine (see Kinealy 1997) – with liberalism, if Foucault is to be believed, being the central locus for biopolitics in the sense of a form of power that tackles 'life' (see Lemke 2007: 48). After the Union of 1800 that inaugurated the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (1801), the famine came to be tackled by the new state, and hence, questions of sovereignty were part and parcel of the political reaction to the famine (see Nally 2008: 718). The post-Union state, while largely desisting from economic regulations, spawned a plethora of social and biopolitical interventions in Ireland. Indeed, "the famine situation contributed to a singular extension of the material power and the physical, statistical, and ideological infrastructure of the colonial state" (Nally 2008: 718). There is, consequently, a strange tension between a lack of economic and a surplus of

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social intervention that reveals the Great Famine to be a central biopolitical concern (see Nally 2008: 733). Consequently, the notion of bare life suggests itself as a crucial node for the politics characterising the Great Famine:

> Politics therefore appears as the truly fundamental structure of Western metaphysics insofar as it occupies the threshold on which the relation between the living being and the *logos* is realized. In the "politicization" of bare life – the metaphysical task *par excellence* – the humanity of living man is decided. […] There is politics because man is the living being who, in language, separates and opposes himself to his own bare life and, at the same time, maintains himself in relation to that bare life in an inclusive exclusion. (Agamben 1998: 9)

The hungry body, one can therefore argue, serves as a central figure where humanity is constituted in several senses. It is the place where political sovereignty is founded and where either humane intervention or total destruction becomes possible (see Nally 2008: 234). In the words of Foucault: "For the first time in history, the possibilities of the social sciences are made known, and at once it becomes possible both to protect life and to authorize a holocaust" (Foucault qtd. in Agamben 1998: 4). To some degree, the line between different forms of the human – the citizen represented by the law and the hungry pauper administered by the law – is drawn in Irish Poor Law, as David Nally shows:

> What is being captured and established (that is, institutionalized and legalized) is neither the pauper nor the poor but the "line" that distinguishes the two […]. Such iterations of inclusion and exclusion were to take on a profound role in Ireland, where famine conditions and government ideology encouraged a deeper and more disturbing reliance on human distinction and disaster triage.[2] (Nally 2008: 722)

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The Great Famine and its administration thus reveal the ways in which bare life is politicised in the mid-nineteenth century. What I am interested in here is the cultural representation of bare life or the hungry body, the discursive networks in which the hungry body is enmeshed in these representations and the politics by which it is remembered.

Collective memory as a politicised form of memory (see Assmann 2006: 59) constructs communities united in a 'we', which glosses over the stark intracultural differences during the Great Famine that are erased in the construction of a unified imagined community. Cultural memory, in turn, is one step further removed from the actual events in that it externalises memory into cultural products and archives. Explorations of the cultural memory of the famine thus require careful analysis of the discourse as do the traumatised subjects thereby constructed: who remembers, from which perspective, with which authority and with which interests? Taking my cue from the collective memory work surrounding the sesquicentennial, I engage with the memory culture related to the Great Famine; that is, I assume that each act of remembering must situate itself in the memory work already established and frequently sheds as much or more light on the moment of remembering than on the moment remembered.

The memory culture of the famine is defined by some interesting historical co-incidences. Certainly, the main trigger for the erection of a large number of famine memorials was the sesquicentennial of the Great Famine in 1997. Coincidentally this was also the year when the term 'neo-Victorianism' was introduced to an audience of scholars of literary and cultural studies by Dana Shiller, generally credited with the coinage of the term, even though it was already employed as early as 1972.[3] Furthermore, this year falls into the Celtic Tiger years from the mid-1990s to the late 2000s, which triggered a reconsideration and re-orientation of Irish memory politics, as Ireland became a fairly wealthy country of immigration rather than of emigration (Moynihan 2008: 42), asserting its role on the world stage as a central powerhouse rather than peripheral player in global markets. A similar shift to self-assertion is evident in Irish fiction of the late 1990s. At that time, as Eve Patten argues, "Irish historical fiction was beginning to exhibit a discernible self-consciousness with regard to narrative realism and adopting a post-modern irreverence to traditional meta-narratives", which also entailed that "several novelists of the period strategically review the key events of the century from ironic or marginal

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positions'" (Patten 2006: 263), tying in with Linda Hutcheon's concept of postmodernist historiographical metafiction that is so decisive for neo-Victorian fiction. Clíona Ó Gallchoir notes a new type of

> subversive historical fictions [which] have all appeared within the period now notoriously known as the Celtic Tiger, suggesting that the rapidly changing economic, social, political and cultural landscape of Ireland from the mid-1990s onwards provided the necessary conditions for the kind of opening up of history to which Hutcheon refers. (Ó Gallchoir 2013: 344)

Ireland's changed cultural and political situation can hence be said to impact on the memory politics related to the famine. Joseph O'Connor's *Star of the Sea* (2002) and Paul Lynch's *Grace* (2017), the two neo-Victorian novels under consideration here along with Lance Daly's film *Black 47* (2018) and Sinéad O'Connor's song 'Famine' (1994) can be read in this context. The "opening up of history" is reflected in the embedding of cultural products in a wider network of cultural references. In the following analyses, I demonstrate that the geographical paths of migration caused by the famine lead to the emergence of a transnational and transcultural web of memories represented by hybridised cultural forms, which are, however, not without their counter-discourses. I advocate neo-Victorian transnational memory studies as an apt approach to capture such cultural practices.

1.   Neo-Victorian Transnational Memory Studies

Self-reflexivity has been frequently highlighted as a defining feature of neo-Victorian cultural products. Cora Kaplan, for instance, argues that such products entail the "self-conscious rewriting of historical narratives to highlight the suppressed histories of gender and sexuality, race and empire, as well as challenges to the conventional understandings of the historical itself" (Kaplan 2007, 3), and self-reflexivity is the *conditio sine qua non* of neo-Victorianism for Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn (see Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 4). While this focus is sometimes contested with regard to neo-Victorian canon formation – a sole focus on self-reflexive texts risks excluding phenomena relying on nostalgic or immersive practices of remembering as well as consuming (Kohlke 2014: 25-26) – it remains

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central in the further development of the field. This emphasis on self-reflexivity is particularly strong in the expanding and diverse field of postcolonial neo-Victorianism. One of the current trends in this field is towards a more global understanding of neo-Victorianism, as can be seen in Elizabeth Ho's 2012 monograph *Neo-Victorianism and the Memory of Empire* or the 2015 special issue of this journal, guest edited by Antonija Primorac and Monika Pietrzak-Franger, on *Neo-Victorianism and Globalisation: Transnational Dissemination of Nineteenth-Century Cultural Texts*. In their joint introduction, Primorac and Pietrzak-Franger refer to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's notion of Empire as an important backdrop for tackling the British empire's "ghostly presence in present-day neo-imperialist relations – not only between Britain and the past and present members of the Commonwealth, but also between both Western and non-Western nations" – as well as the "linguistic effects" of imperialism in the present (Primorac and Pietrzak-Franger 2015: 10). Similarly, Heilmann and Llewellyn warn against the possible neo-imperialism implied in a widening of the neo-*Victorian* to a global scale:

> the replacement – or displacement – of the term 'neo-Victorianism' into international and global contexts is not without its own perils, suggesting as it does an overarching narrative that erases the specificities of cultural memory and inculcates a homogenisation of heritage. (Llewellyn and Heilmann 2013: 26)

Moreover, this extension could be taken to imply some form of relation to the reign of Queen Victoria, symbolically envisaging the Empire on an all-encompassing global scale, thus threatening not only a homogenisation of culture but also a global political domination by proxy. Nonetheless Primorac and Pietrzak-Franger are convinced that the

> 'neo-Victorian' *can* go global to reference new contexts and geographies of Victorian texts' and contexts' engagement with local, inter- and transnational nineteenth-century pasts without necessarily being reductionist or immediately risking a homogenising, imperialist perspective. (Primorac and Pietrzak-Franger 2015: 7, original emphasis)

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While I too consider the term 'global' problematic, one cannot deny that the memory work required for the Victorian age is *of necessity transnational*.

Building on these critics' work, I propose that, since the famine caused incisive demographic changes resulting in a large diaspora, the famine in particular cannot be remembered *except* in terms of transnational memory.

> The catastrophe that struck Ireland in the 1840s unleashed a wave of emigration on an unprecedented scale. Between 1846 and 1855 (when emigration rates returned to pre-famine levels), more than a million Irish people died of starvation and famine-related diseases and another 2.1 million people left the country – more than in the previous two and a half centuries combined. About 1.5 million went to the United States, more than 300,000 to Canada, (many of whom later moved southward), another 315,000 to Great Britain, and tens of thousands to Australia and New Zealand. (Kenny 2017: 409-410)

In the face of such an unprecedented rate of emigration that remains unequalled throughout Europe, I argue that neo-Victorian transnational and transcultural memory studies provides the most constructive approach to contemporary famine literature.

The migrant itineraries triggered by the famine certainly construct ties that criss-cross national borders and extend the range of interests negotiated in the different memory politics in Ireland and the diaspora. The literary constructions of traditions by way of intertextual references mirror these transnational ties, thus complicating the fashioning of a collective, particularly a 'uniquely' national Irish memory. As Astrid Errl has shown, "memory studies has begun to turn away from its prevailing methodological nationalism and become interested in forms of remembering *across* nations and cultures", thus tying in with the trend towards transnationalism (Errl 2011: 2). Errl also points to the "increased interest in global media cultures, transcultural writing, world literature", accompanied by "negotiations of colonialism and decolonization, migration, cultural globalization, and cosmopolitanism in literature and other media" (Errl 2011: 2). Analogously, Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad claim that

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> [m]emories are carried across national borders and they enter
> a global arena through all available channels, starting with
> human carriers. Memories migrate from one continent to
> another with individuals. Wars and genocide, natural
> disasters, famine, financial crises, and economic decline
> weigh heavily on individuals and break up communities,
> disrupting and dislocating their cultural traditions and
> personal memories. As migrants carry their heritage,
> memories and traumas with them, these are transferred and
> brought into new social constellations and political contexts.
> (Assmann and Conrad 2010: 2)

In other words, local and national memories become liable to 'legitimate' appropriation by members of other nations also. Historically and culturally this process is crucial, because it challenges the notion of "a homogeneous Irish diasporic experience" (Delaney 2014: 131), belonging solely to 'the' Irish and those of Irish descent. Moreover, "to discover patterns and connections" requires "a dynamic transnational perspective" (Kenny 2017: 420-421), which can offer, as it were, a 'bird's eye' global overview of cultural memory's travels, transmigrations and transformations.

The following textual case studies reflect, in their storytelling, how memory constructions tend to change in their respective new settings – the remembrance of the famine is different in Ireland and in the diaspora. Among these memory texts' various strategies of transcultural memory construction, I focus primarily on intertextuality, discursive polyphony, and a strong reflection on the narrative point of view. The famine novels under consideration create a palimpsest of intertextual references and construct their characters through multiple affiliations that intersect and interfere with one another. Thus the protagonists evade any easy definition of historical victims or perpetrators, but reveal the transnational scope of collective and cultural memory (and accountability). However, the resulting dense web appears to be a decidedly literary phenomenon, while audio-visual culture seems geared towards a different audience. While audio-visual representations of the famine also employ manifold intermedial references to complicate memory processes, they nevertheless seem to convey more strongly nationalised views on the famine. After a short commentary on the changing memory culture with regard to famine memorials, I analyse Sinéad

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O'Connor's pre-sesquicentennial song and music video 'Famine' from the album *Universal Mother* (1994), which employs some central tropes that are taken up in later instances of famine culture. I then move on to the interpretation of Joseph O'Connor's and Paul Lynch's neo-Victorian famine novels, before I close by reflecting on a more recent audio-visual example, Lance Daly's *Black 47* (2018), a film that counter-balances neo-Victorianism's typical self-reflexivity with nationalist discourses and a phantasma of empowerment through revenge and vigilantism.

2.   Famine Memorials

The famine monument in Dublin was commissioned by Norma Smurfit, designed by the Dubliner Rowan Gillespie and presented to the city of Dublin in 1997. Situated at Custom House Quay, a group of statues memorialises the people who left Dublin for New York on St. Patrick's Day 1846 on a ship that was aptly called *Perseverance* (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_memorials_to_the_Great_Famine#/media/File:Famine_memorial_dublin.jpg). Luckily, they all arrived there alive, while many other emigration ships turned into so-called coffin ships, scattering bodies and bones of famine victims in the (Green) Atlantic.[4] Movement is ingrained in these desolate statues, as the represented emaciated, barely living bodies clearly cannot stay where they are. The statues reach towards the other (both in the past and future) in search for help, relief, acknowledgement, and new living spaces. The movement that the statues convey is symptomatic of the creation of transnational connections.

Thomas Faist defines transnationality as based on "sets of ties reaching beyond and across the borders of sovereign states" (Faist 2004: 3). As if responding to such interconnections, Gillespie supplemented his Dublin monument with another series of statues situated in Toronto, thus connecting them as Departure and Arrival (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ireland_Park#/media/File:Cloudy_(3400255343).jpg). In 2007, the memorial was unveiled by President Mary McAleese on the quayside of the city's Ireland Park in order to commemorate the fate of the many famine refugees in Canada. As Gillespie comments:

> It was always my intention to compliment [sic] my famine
> sculpture in Dublin, that there should be a sculpture of a

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> group of figures arriving on the other side of the Atlantic.
> When Toronto was suggested as a possible location, I was
> particularly interested because my family (on my mother's
> side) had emigrated in famine times and made their home in
> Canada. […] I became fascinated by the fact that so many
> women became pregnant during the long months at sea. This
> concept of the new life in a new land became the initial
> inspiration for the Arrival series; a pregnant woman.
> (Gillespie in Kearns 2019: n.p.)

Curiously, the complementary monument does not depict the arrival of the passengers on the *Perseverance* in New York, but the arrival of emigrants to Toronto, who made their journey on what came to be called coffin ships. Thus, this set of memorials implies a slippage or dislocation of memory, constructing ties where none existed – the interconnected memorials weave a transnational web of memories, interlacing the memory culture of the famine across several national borders. Interestingly, one of the five statues in Toronto represents Pius Mulvey (see Kearns 2019: n.p.) – a complex and problematic character from Joseph O'Connor's novel *Star of the Sea* (2002) who is, in fact, bound for New York – so that fiction comes to inspire sculpture, supplementing transnational memory with intermedial connections that blur the lines between fact and fiction as the actual event of the Great Famine and its local history recedes. Transnational memory culture creates a heterotopia of the famine as it stages memory in 'other places'. The reference to O'Connor's novel is particularly telling because, as Sinéad Moynihan argues, it "represents contemporary Ireland, displaced in both time (back to the mid-nineteenth century) and to 'the everywhere and nowhere' space of the ship" (Moynihan 2008: 44). 'Ireland', one may infer, becomes dispersed into a transnational network through emigration, and the process of remembering becomes equally disseminated; it requires a 're-*member*ing' in the diaspora (Mitchell 2010: 7, original emphasis).

　　While the 1990s were still very much influenced by memorial practices focusing on *lieux de mémoire* (see Nora 1984-1992), the millennium is defined by a trend to practices or *doing* famine memory. While the practice as such dates back to the late 1980s, new routes for memory walks were introduced in 2017. Intended to reiterate the steps of the famine generation, memory walks enact and embody memory in that

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they let people living today appropriate the past as a consumable experience. Such practices tie in with what Kate Mitchell has called "memory texts", fictions that

> are less concerned with *making sense* of the Victorian past, than with offering it as a cultural memory, to be re-membered, and imaginatively re-created, not revised or understood. They remember the period not only in the usual sense, of recollecting it, but also in the sense that they re-embody, that is, re-member, or reconstruct it. (Mitchell 2010: 7)

In memory walks, I argue, practices of embodiment create ethical conundrums related to the imitation of suffering. The fee for one such experience, for instance, amounts to 180€, appropriately not including food or accommodation – perhaps an ironic gesture to the scarcity that defined the historical situation of the famine.[5] What is nevertheless striking about the practice is the fact that the memory of the famine is tied to embodiment and movement, which seeks to 'presentify' the physical experience of hunger and the necessity to escape from scarcity. The strong emphasis on movement in the memory culture of the famine gestures towards transnational connections established through (forced) migration, a feature that can be found in many artefacts and media dealing with the famine. Before I analyse Joseph O'Connor's *Star of the Sea* more closely, I will first consider Sinéad O'Connor's song 'Famine', as it introduces central tropes that remain definitive of the memory culture of the events of 1845-49. Apart from the emphasis on movement, the style of both the song as such and the music video in particular is characterised by transnational and intermedial references. Moreover, these artefacts analogise the situation of the Irish with an African-American history of slavery, a connection that is further strengthened by Joseph O'Connor's novel (Moynihan 2008: 45).

3.   Sinéad O'Connor's 'Famine' (1994)

Sinéad O'Connor's famine song is made up of a network of several sources that make different kinds of 'troubles' intersect. The song opens with the sound of a lone howling wolf, evoking Thomas Hobbes's notion of the natural state of human interaction, *homo homini lupus*, continues with a

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motif from 'The Fiddler on the Roof' (O'Connor et al. 1994), and ends with samples of the film *The Fiddler on the Roof* (1971) and parts of a speech by Jack Lynch. Thus, the song includes interpretations of the function of 'tradition' from different sources, which also makes the central politics of the song as a whole difficult to ascertain, producing a web of criss-crossing references so that its politics shuttle to and fro. The song itself becomes a balancing act between the conservation of tradition and the maintenance of a stable identity in diasporic situations: the fiddler on the roof, or the immigrant into a new socio-political context, finds his balance through tradition – "And because of our tradition, everyone knows who he is and what God expects him to do" (O'Connor et al. 1994) – while also emphasising the necessity of allowing for a hybridisation of traditions. Jack Lynch argues that "[a]ll Irish traditions are intertwined: let us cherish them all" (qtd. in Keogh 2008: 266). Through the sampling of Lynch's speech, the song in effect situates the Troubles as a historical consequence of the Great Famine. Lynch gave the speech on the eve of Unionist Parades on Saturday, 11 July 1970, in order to stave off violence. At that time, he

> was leader of Fianna Fáil and Taoiseach at the outbreak of the Troubles. While calling for reform and expressing concerns for the nationalist population in Northern Ireland, Lynch was publicly critical of IRA violence and stressed that the Irish government "have no intention of using force to realise this desire [re-unification]". (O'Donnell 2011: 34)

Lynch is an advocate of peace with an argument for unity in diversity. In O'Connor's 'Famine', his featured words make this same argument:

> In this Ireland, there is no solution to be found to our disagreements by shooting each other. There is no real invader here. We're all Irish in all our different kinds of ways. We must not now or ever in the future show anything to each other except tolerance, forbearance and neighbourly love. (Lynch qtd. in O'Connor et al. 1994)

This view supports the song lyrics that aim at understanding the past in a transcultural context. Nevertheless, the song also retains more nationalist

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strains that blame the famine on the English, and here, the lyrics suggest that acknowledgement of wrong-doing and forgiveness are required in order to enable peaceful relations in the first place (O'Connor et al. 1994).

O'Connor's reference to The Beatles' 'Eleanor Rigby' from their 1966 album *Revolver* is telling in that context, because it is legible on different levels. Reflecting on the after-effects of the famine in Ireland in the twentieth century, O'Connor interestingly interweaves the nationalist discourse on the famine – the argument that "There was no famine" in the sense of an unavoidable natural disaster but rather, that the event was the direct result of English mismanagement and colonial exploitation (O'Connor et al. 1994) – with the musical legacy of the coloniser, apparently creating transnational ties through intermedial references. The Beatles were founded in Liverpool, a city that received many Irish migrants, particularly during the Great Famine. As an iconic English band, this reference serves to confer their cultural authority over O'Connor. However, one might also argue that, by quoting the Beatles, O'Connor simultaneously and obliquely throws into relief the Irish origins of England's cultural achievements, as John Lennon (see Harry 2000: 504), John McCartney and George Harrison (see Miles 2001: 6) are all of Irish descent.

In terms of content, the reference evokes Eleanor Rigby's lonely death and the fact that nobody is there to mourn her, a situation which, by association, is transferred to the many people who died anonymously due to the famine. The lines "All the lonely people,/ where do they all come from?/ All the lonely people,/ where do they all belong?" (The Beatles 1966) further illustrate the aftereffects of the Great Famine: loneliness and rootlessness caused by separation from family, kin, and community. O'Connor also alludes to the loss of history and tradition through the English intervention in the Irish education system in the lines "They gave us money not to teach our children Irish/ And so we lost our history", claiming that "what finally broke us was not starvation/ BUT ITS USE IN THE CONTROLLING OF OUR EDUCATION (O'Connor et al. 1994: l. 11-12, l. 36-37, original capitals). Likewise the singer decries the resulting history mongering, based on wilful forgetting: "And this is what is wrong with us/ Our history books the PARENT FIGURES lied to us" (O'Connor et al. 1994: l. 55-56, original capitals). For as O'Connor reminds her audience, "if there ever is gonna be healing/ there has to be remembering/ And then grieving/ So that there then can be forgiving/ There has to be knowledge and

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understanding" (O'Connor et al. 1994: l. 60-64). Implicitly, such true "understanding" demands both the commemoration of victims' suffering – their reduction to bare life or succumbing to death – and the acknowledgement of perpetrators' historical responsibility. O'Connor's song thus advocates for realignment of memory on the part of both Irish *and* British (as well as diasporic) audiences.

The topics of trauma, language, memory, and education are central both in the song lyrics and in the cinematography of the music video that relies on a choreography of movement and re-orientation (see Delaney and Whitebloom 1995, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZIB6MslCAo). In its wide-angle shots, it captures people out of focus who are passing by the singer and vanishing in the distance. Implicitly, this motif recalls the passage of famine emigrants, some of whom, of course, never reached their destination, dying in transit or shipwrecked close to their journey's end. This is further underlined by a visual foreground of raindrops that keep falling; each of them contains a small baby, thus illustrating the many lives that are 'dropped' because of the negative influence of the past. As well as sung, the lyrics are conveyed in sign language and captions in order that the political message of the song gets across to a diverse audience.

The general style harks back to the influential video for 'Nothing compares 2U' from O'Connor's album *I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got* (1990), which featured the solitary singer facing the camera directly, then articulating her personal suffering. In 'Famine', the suffering is not personal, but national. The singer stands between two black persons who translate O'Connor's song into sign language. By this metonymical relationship, the history of colonial suppression in the guise of slavery is reclaimed for the Irish. Stylistically, this is further reflected by O'Connor's appropriation of rap for the song. In the video, this strategy fulfils a double function: on the one hand, it articulates the wish for communication for and representation of those who do not have a voice. Simultaneously, the sign language passes on the singer's message to the hard of hearing, in more senses than one. The black-and-white video performs a strange slippage between whiteness and blackness, inscribing Ireland into a discourse that positions the Irish as colonial victims, exonerating the Irish of any racial discrimination by racialising themselves.

Problematically, however, O'Connor both claims and rejects a colonial status for the Irish, so that the video lends itself to deconstruction.

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On the one hand, as already noted, O'Connor implicitly blames the famine on the English. However, she also uses colonial discourse that she actually would have to reject to render the argument consistent. "I see the Irish/ as a race like a child" (Delaney and Whitebloom 1995: 0:03:07-10), the lyric persona argues, thus employing a staple colonial trope of a paternalistic familial relationship between coloniser and colonised. Here the colonising power is defined and institutionalised as the educational system, especially the history books altered by English intervention. Memory is presented as the healing force invoked by the song: a re-orientation to and reconnection with the past may serve as panacea. While the song ends on a seemingly positive note, campaigning for the possibility of coping with national trauma – the lyrical 'I' indicates the chain of remembering, grieving, forgiving, knowledge and understanding, emphasising forgiveness at the end – it masks its much more nationalist agenda of blaming the famine on 'the' English and exonerating 'the' Irish in two opposed, homogenised, imagined communities. Pertinently, Cormac Ó Gráda has shown that O'Connor partakes of a discourse that unifies the Irish, then and now, as sufferers of the famine:

> historian Christine Kinealy has referred approvingly to ongoing work on the "healing process" and "post-colonial traumatic stress" by Irish-Californian psychotherapist, Dr Garrett O'Connor. Sinéad O'Connor's rap poem offers an extreme case of this approach to collective famine memory. For O'Connor, "all the old men in the pubs" and "all our young people on drugs" were the product of the famine and the resultant post-traumatic stress disorder. (Ó Gráda 2001: 137)

Yet, historiographically, such a generalisation proves problematic. Firstly, historians refute the general and generalising argument "made by the Young Ireland leader, John Mitchel, that this was an artificial famine, with food exports far outstripping imports"; however, they affirm that "preventing grain exports, in the autumn of 1846, before the arrival of mass imports of grain, could potentially have saved lives, as could a ban on brewing and distilling, as Daniel O'Connell demanded" (Daly 2017: 42). With her claim that "there was no famine" (O'Connor 1994), O'Connor seems to tap into

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Mitchel's nationalist argument that the famine was fabricated by the British. While song lyrics certainly follow a set of entirely different genre conventions than historiographical treatises, it nevertheless becomes clear that the version of the famine constructed in O'Connor's song partakes of nationalist discourses. Secondly, O'Connor's song elides absentee English and Irish landowners' contribution to the Great Famine:

> As landlords were responsible for paying the poor rate on holdings valued less than £4, removing smallholdings would reduce their rates bill, while the Gregory Clause left smallholders facing a choice between starvation and abandoning their land. (Daly 2017: 44)

Evictions exacerbated the situation of the poor gravely, depriving them of the possibility of growing any food as well as of shelter, another of the necessities of bare subsistence living. Thirdly, O'Connor's generalisation of the psychological effects of the famine disconnects post-traumatic stress disorder from any temporal relationship between cause and effect, as if stretching Marianne Hirsch's notion of 'postmemory' to the point of evacuating it of any significance. Postmemory refers to "the legacies of the past, transmitted powerfully from parent to child within the family" (Hirsch and Miller 2011: 4). Such transferals of personal memory to later generations "are always already inflected by broader public and generational stories, images, artifacts, and understandings that together shape identity and identification"; thus, they draw attention to "the radical difference that separates the past from the present and the risks of projection, appropriation, and overidentification occasioned by second- and third-generation desires and needs" (Hirsch and Miller 2011: 4-5). In O'Connor's 'Famine', complex social problems become explicable by a foundation myth of the Irish rooted in the trauma of the Great Famine, appropriating the events of 1845-49 as the 'origin' of various later (psycho-)social problems.

4.   Joseph O'Connor's *Star of the Sea* (2002)
Joseph O'Connor's *Star of the Sea* represents a more intricate negotiation of the famine in that it reveals conflicting discourses in the processes of remembrance. Like his sister's song, O'Connor's novel is defined by intertextual references and a metonymic relationship between Irish and

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Afro-American histories. In exemplary neo-Victorian fashion, the novel reflects on the discursive regimes and personal interests shaping memory. In other words, *Star of the Sea* demonstrates how memory is appropriated in different ways due to different contexts, and it does not exempt its own strategies of meaning making in the process. Revealing how different interests intersect, the novel highlights the fluid complexities of 'remembering' the famine.

Fittingly, most of the novel's action takes place at sea. Ho has introduced the concept of "the-neo-Victorian-at-sea", arguing that "the return to the sea narrative responds to a need to make sense of global consumption, trade and labour, and the mass movement of people via a previous moment of globalisation made possible by imperialism" (Ho 2014: 168). Eckart Voigts specifically identifies *Star of the Sea* as part of this neo-Victorian subgenre (Voigts 2012: 205), a categorisation with which I concur. The novel's title, *Star of the Sea*, is the name of an emigrant ship, taking famine refugees from Dublin to New York, with a complex history, since it was previously used as a slaver (O'Connor 2002: 119). Hence, the Black and the Green Atlantic overlap, as does the racial profiling on the title page that sports "THE IRISH-IBERIAN", "THE ANGLO-TEUTONIC" and "THE NEGRO", which "draw[s] explicit parallels between the institution of American slavery and the Great Famine" (Moynihan 2008: 45). The novel's setting thus conflates several different histories of trauma and oppression and makes them intersect aboard the ship. For transnational memory studies, the central interest here lies in

> the ways in which memories that have migrated to different cultural communities develop when they interact with the cultural legacies of other communities. What patterns emerge during the encounter between different mnemoscapes; for example, when the cultural memories of migrants interact with the memory cultures of communities in the country of settlement? (Corporaal 2017: 49)

Marguérite Corporaal shows that, in the US, the experience of the Middle Passage offered a parallel to the Irish experience of emigration during and after the Great Famine. In *Star of the Sea*, the ship becomes a contact zone for different sets of cultural memories, by an Anglo-Irish landlord and an

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American journalist with a Black heritage respectively. Since the novel is received by a transnational audience, these different contexts open the history of the famine to readings in different keys, modulated by different historical heritages. The ship is thus a symptomatic setting for the novel and many critics have argued that it serves as a Foucauldian heterotopia (see, e.g., Moynihan 2008: 43). Foucault defines a heterotopia as "a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault 1986: 24). The ship, Foucault claims, is the "heterotopia *par excellence*", a "floating piece of space, a place without a place" (Foucault 1986: 27). In *Star of the Sea*, the paradigmatic heterotopia of the ship reflects the transnational enmeshments between Ireland, Britain and the US.

Unsurprisingly, the literature of the Hungry Forties serves as a major reference point for current famine literature and its intertextual references, including in O'Connor's text. As the fictional author and editor of the novel, Grantley Dixon, comments: "What happened took place in 1847, an important anniversary in the history of fictions; when stories appeared in which people were starving, in which wives were jailed in attics and masters married servants" (O'Connor 2002: 388). In *Star of the Sea*, Irish and British literatures create a transnational palimpsest. Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) plays a crucial role for the plot. This text is of course a fitting choice not only due to its publication year, but also due to the critical discourse on the novel, particularly Terry Eagleton's *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* (1995), that lays the foundations for reading Brontëan Yorkshire as a shorthand for Connemara (Ó Gallchoir 2013: 349). The ship's captain is called Josias Lockwood and serves as a witness narrator whenever Dixon retreats from the position of narrator. Moreover, Dixon's antagonist David Merridith Lord Kingscourt, who voices Eagleton's stance on *Wuthering Heights*, assumes that Brontë's novel may have been written by Dixon (O'Connor 2002: 138-139).

Authorship and setting become displaced in the novel, with rearrangement and new composition the seeming motto for *Star of the Sea*. Such displacement also extends to the oblique reference to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), whose main character kills her child in order to save it from slavery (Moynihan 2008: 48). Pius Mulvey's brother commits another such desperate act to protect his child from starvation. Here again, the novel's

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palimpsestuousness creates frictions through the interaction of such references and the problematic appropriation of the history of slavery for the Irish (Moynihan 2008: 44-45), not least, since historians such as Nini Rodgers have documented the existence of Irish slaveholders in the New World (Rodgers 2016: 493, 500).

Through flashbacks, *Star of the Sea* portrays the history preceding the characters' actual journey to New York, and in the case of Pius Mulvey, we learn that he gave Charles Dickens the idea for his hunger novel *Oliver Twist* (1837):

> As they ate and drank, Mulvey spoke to him about the song. He had learnt it from an aged pickpocket who lived in Holborn, he lied, a Jew who ran a school for young thieves and runaways. […] 'And his name?', asked Dickens, 'the name of the Jew?' […] 'Fagan,' he said. (O'Connor 2002: 190-191)

While offering an amusing and popular nationalist myth that England's creative output has its roots in Ireland – as, albeit more obliquely, does Sinéad O'Connor in 'Famine' – such intertextual networks also show that the famine novels after the millennium portray a rather complex history to reveal the many similarities, co-dependencies and intersections of the histories of Ireland and England, at least on the terrain of literature. However, this representation of interdependencies may also entail a silencing of Irish literary history, thus reiterating the suppression of the Irish in the field of literature. As Cliona Ó Gallchoir argues, the Irish literary heritage of the nineteenth century is hardly represented in *Star of the Sea*. Instead, the novel appropriates the English tradition of the realist novel: "In place of this 'failure' and 'inadequacy'" of the nineteenth-century Irish novel "we are offered a reappropriation of the classic texts by Irish characters", with the novel relying on the "imaginative ownership of the classic texts of the English canon – an ownership that is confident and creative rather than reverential" (Ó Gallchoir 2013: 349-350). Thus, however, the Irish literary heritage is silenced.

The complex intertextual references as well as silences are mirrored in the character construction. Dixon, the main narrator, draws attention to the suffering of the Irish, but his stance of moral superiority is compromised

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by his having profited from money earned for his family by slaves. In a conversation with Merridith Lord Kingscourt, Dixon tries to defend himself by asserting that "MY grandfather was an opponent of slavery all his life. *Do you hear me*?" (O'Connor 2002: 134, original emphasis). In response, his opponent sarcastically enquires, "*Did he rid himself of the lands which slavery purchased for his ancestors?* Give back his inheritance to the children of those who made it?" (O'Connor 2002: 134, original emphasis). For both characters, dispossessions in the past form the basis of their current (relative) wealth. Arguably, Merridith's critique of Dixon's selective memory of his family history resonates with Britain's equivocal cultural memory, as reflected in most UK school curricula, which do not cover the famine. It also evokes the cultural capital that the country continues to derive from its colonial legacies, for instance in the case of museum holdings and archives or National Trust properties built on the profits of slavery.

As another turn of the screw, Dixon himself is of Native American descent and belongs to the tribe of the Choctaw that was evicted from their territory around the Mississippi river; nevertheless, they donated money for famine relief in Ireland. This is a legacy Dixon keeps hidden from Merridith. *Star of the Sea* thus turns the conflict between these two men into a fraught ethical conundrum in the face of intersecting legacies and reveals that most characters are cultural hybrids defined by multiple and sometimes conflicting affiliations. The hate speech of the two opponents threatens to occlude exactly this complexity. Finally, seventy years after the actual events, Dixon – in his role as first person narrator – provides his own subjective retrospective and recounts, or rather confesses, the vicissitudes of his personal life to the reader, for instance the impossibility of adopting a child:

> though the colour of my body is the same as President Wilson's, the colour of my soul is legally not. My father being quarter-Choctaw weighed heavily against us. When the papers came back from the Office of Minors, the place headed REASONS FOR UNSUITABILITY had been stamped with the single word 'negritude'. (O'Connor 2002: 403)

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In an interesting slippage, American administrative discourse substitutes 'negritude' for Dixon's Choctaw descent, and thus the novel exposes such ascriptions as a racist means of social exclusion. Native American is absorbed by 'Black', thus levelling differences that require a much more circumspect representation of different historical legacies. Dixon's commentary reveals this epistemological violence only in passing, but the novel as a whole works hard to expose how such mechanisms work.

Such multiple affiliations and intersections of differences illustrate that a simple history of the famine cannot be written. As the construct of multidirectional memory spanning borders and peoples, the famine poses a complex historiographical task. O'Connor's *Star of the Sea* shows that the memory work of the famine is a transnational undertaking, including, at the very least, the Irish, the British, and the different ethnicities of Americans.

5.   Paul Lynch's *Grace* (2017)

A generic hybrid, Paul Lynch's *Grace* mingles the famine novel with the coming-of-age story and the road novel, adding gothic tropes into the mix. The title character and main protagonist, Grace Coyle, does not emigrate but is sent on a journey through Ireland in search of a better life. Interfigurally, the novel evokes Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) by naming a central character after Mary Barton's father, John Barton. John Bart accompanies Grace for a good part of her journey. The oblique reference to Gaskell's social novel set in Manchester establishes an implicit symbolic link between English and Irish suffering in the Hungry Forties, so that O'Connor's novel suggests reading the history of the rapid industrialisation of Manchester and the hardships for the working class that Gaskell's novel captures so vividly side by side with the hardships in the Irish poor in rural Ireland. In a sense, the nineteenth-century decimation of England's rural population on account of mass migration from the country to urban centres foreshadows the mass emigration caused by the Great Famine, while the punitive effects of the anti-free trade Corn Laws ironically contrast the British government's policy of non-intervention in the Irish food trade, which prevented significant grain imports until as late as 1847 (see Kinealy 1997). Laissez-faire capitalism serves as *tertium comparationis* for both countries, since the cause for the hardships suffered can be traced to a capitalist logic and the concomitant social ideologies fuelled by Malthusian theory. In their respective representational strategies, there are further

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similarities between the two novels. As Michael Parrish Lee has argued, "[h]unger in *Mary Barton* stands at the threshold of politics, artistic representation, and novelistic form as excess, impossibility, and driving force" (Lee 2019: 520). Gaskell's industrial novel and Lynch's famine novel share this complex cultural placement with regard to the representation of hunger. Like Gaskell, Lynch is faced with the task to "take account of people and bring their experiences to light while asserting that hunger marks and exceeds the threshold of such bearing witness as an untellable experience lived by an uncountable number of people" (Lee 2019: 519). Stylistically, the answers the different novels provide diverge widely, with Lynch employing all options of stream of consciousness that was not as yet at Gaskell's disposal.

Another, more implicit reference connects Lynch's *Grace* with Anne Enright's *The Gathering*, a Booker-Prize-winning novel of 2007, that describes a family gathering after the protagonist's brother's death during the Celtic Tiger years. Apart from plot features – a character mourning a brother's loss and trying to remember a traumatic event with a hopeful ending through pregnancy – *Grace* is also indebted to the style of Enright's novel, in particular with regard to the employment of the present tense for narration:

> I need to bear witness to an uncertain event. I feel it roaring inside me – this thing that may not have taken place. […] I think you might call it a crime of the flesh, but the flesh is long fallen away and I am not sure what hurt may linger in the bones. […] I stay downstairs while the family breathes above me and I write it down, I lay them out in nice sentences, all my clean, white bones. (Enright 2007: 1)

In Enright's novel, bones serve as a possible location of trauma, as reminders for memory and as the language in which the past can be remembered. History is the ghost in the bones. The intertextual references to both Gaskell's and Enright's novels thus situate *Grace* in a network of Victorian and contemporary references to continue the memory work of these novels in both a historical and cultural context.

While Lynch's novel favours individual experience over national memory, it also opts for a memory politics characterised by a

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multiperspectivity and polyphony of discourses. In addition, it presents the famine from a gendered perspective, which is forcefully introduced when the adolescent Grace is shaven by her mother to pass as a boy in order to be able to fend for herself in desperate times. Her brother Colly tutors her in passing as masculine:

> He tries to teach her how to walk like a boy. Yer doing it all wrong. Like this. Hold the pipe in your mouth. Let it hang like so. Aye, that's it. […] You've got to stop sounding considerate. Your voice needs to sound like yer always telling somebody to do something even if yer not. Like there's a dog listening, waiting on your command. That's the way men talk, so they do. (Lynch 2017: 20)

Rendering visible the general gender performance, this reads like a commentary on Judith Butler's notion of performativity, thrown into relief through a drag performance. After the traumatic event of being shorn and cast out, Grace has to let go of several identity markers. Her old identity becomes encrypted, and Colly turns into a 'phantom' (see Abraham 1975: 171). Thus, from early on, Grace's journey becomes one of haunting and spectrality, terms crucial to neo-Victorian engagements with the nineteenth-century past (see Arias and Pulham 2009).

Grace loses her brother in the early stages of their journey, but he remains a companion all along, an advisor and mental voice that seems to speak of its own accord. All the deaths that affect Grace – her brother's, her mother's and those of her other siblings, as well as a woman's who dies in a failed attempt at robbery and, finally, John Bart's – produce ghosts that live on as spectral presences in Grace's mind. Jacques Derrida's notion of the spectre is helpful here in conceiving of an otherwise silenced past that remains with us to be heard:

> Could one *address oneself in general* if already some ghost did not come back? If he loves justice at least, the "scholar" of the future, the "intellectual" of tomorrow should learn it and from the ghost. He should learn to live by learning not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her, how to let them speak or how to give

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> them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the
> other in oneself: they are always *there,* spectres, even if they
> do not exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not
> yet. (Derrida 1994: 176, original emphases)

Derrida emphasises the ethics of such talk, the openness to that which
ghosts have to say in order that they are not silenced. In Lynch's *Grace*,
ghosts become part of the memory work. They continue to speak in Grace's
mind, they uphold their presence, are there to support her, to guide her, and
to challenge her. Finally, however, she needs to let them go, to let them rest.
When the ghost of her mother reappears to the now married Grace in order
to be taken care for – an inverted reference to Morrison's *Beloved*, perhaps –
Grace can preserve this ghost only for some time. The narrative voice
describes, as always in the present tense, the very procedure of letting go:
"she lifts her mother up and walks her into the river, watches the water
travel around her mother's body, lets her mother go" (Lynch 2017: 354).[6]
That this is a symbolic form of letting go becomes apparent when Grace's
husband comes to retrieve her from the river, believing she is about to
commit suicide, because, of course, he cannot see the mother who is only
'visible' as a ghost in Grace's mind. The ghosts of the past have many
voices and the novel portrays this not only by letting them speak, but also by
letting the characters utter a polyphony of discourses in order to explain the
reasons for the famine.

    The multiplicity of discourses becomes apparent in two key scenes
in the novel. In one, the characters' debate on the causes for the famine:

> McNutt is pointing an accusatory finger at nobody in
> particular. He says, I'll tell you what people are saying. That
> this *is God's scourge* upon us. That God sent down this to
> punish the people for their sins. Because people do not pray
> enough. […] Bart stares at the ground shaking his head. He
> says, that is utter nonsense. I have read plenty about this in
> the papers. It has to do with the warm air coming in from the
> Continent. There are men who say *it is a scientific matter.*
> [...] Bart says, let me tell you what is going to happen. Soon
> there won't be a living animal left on this land. The cost of a
> hundred-weight of oats is already at a pound and it will climb

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> higher. The merchants will hold on to what they've got. […]
> *The prices will go up and up so that the rich can protect
> themselves* and that is always the way of it. The Crown will
> have to do something. (Lynch 2017: 232-233, added
> emphasis)

With Bart as the more established, rounder character in the novel, the reader may be inclined to believe in his scientific and economic explanation more readily, but religious, scientific, political and economic discourses stand side by side as attempts at explaining the causes for the famine. All of these 'reasons' were actually made at the time, and all of them partake of wider discursive networks, which can be illustrated by analysing religious discourses in the novel in further detail (see below).

A second central instance of multiperspectivity occurs after the near death and rescue of the main character from starvation. Having travelled south from Urris Hills to Limerick, Grace decides to return homewards. On the way, she collapses at the Paupers' Graveyard – now St. Brigid's cemetery – the site of a mass grave of famine victims in Killeely. The novel represents this experience in a stream of consciousness, and then literally fades to black, inserting four blackened pages. As Grace's language disintegrates, her resistance against death becomes increasingly impossible and, in the extract quoted below, moves from the imperative "Don't" to "no matter" (Lynch 2017: 295). In this passage, it seems as if bodies do not matter, but of course – at least ethically speaking – they do. Where death is pervasive, Grace tries to make others see that she is not yet to be buried:

> Don't – daghhgh – Wriggle show them you can wriggle –
> show them – show them – daghhgh – sleepy-sleep – sleepy –
> listen – listen up muc you can do this – you can sleep –
> trywriggle – trywriggle – try try try try try try try – look at
> me – listen trywriggle – Look at me! Look look look look –
> gwahhhuh no matter now no matter – no – no matter – .
> (Lynch 2017: 295)

In this near-death experience, Grace comes away with her bare life, and the novel is on the brink of losing its central focaliser to the Great Famine.

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Miraculously, Grace is saved from dying by the leader of a religious sect called Father. After that, the novel begins its slow path to a more hopeful outlook on the future in a chapter entitled 'Light'. Initially, however, this part of the novel must do with a silenced and dumb Grace. The narrative voice resumes with its free indirect discourse – that comes close to interior monologue – to stand in for Grace's lost voice and mediates Grace's consciousness: "She knows this angel from dreaming and tries to smile at the hovering face, the angel's voice a sweetened milk that brings her back to Sarah. The voice says, quiet now, daughter. She thinks so this is dead" (Lynch 2017: 303). For Grace, dreaming and waking are not distinguishable after her return to life, and her frame of interpretation leads her to mistake sister Mary Eeshal for her mother, because she is addressed as "daughter", albeit a daughter who is now part of a social system that merely mimics family ties to exploit them. While there is a 'Father' as the patriarchal leader, along with 'sisters', and 'daughters', it soon becomes clear that these terms do not indicate a true family but gloss over the sexual harassment and abuse the sisters are made to suffer.

On one hand, Grace's voicelessness illustrates the silencing of the victims of the famine. On the other, the novel reveals that this silencing victimises people once more through the appropriation of their stories by others and their stories' transposition into a different discourse. This form of *differend* or dispossession is further revealed by the polysemy of 'Grace', which is, of course, the character's name but also evokes several other meanings. One such is 'to say grace', a prayer spoken before or after meals, which thus provides a scathing commentary on Grace's situation during the famine. Her name might also refer to God's (or whose?) grace in general or, in its legal meaning, it might imply the deferral of punishment. After her quasi-resurrection, Grace is used as a miracle to justify the religious authority of a sexist, transgressive and abusive 'Father', a figure that also invites an allegorical contemporary reading, criticising twentieth- and twenty-first-century cases of abuse in Ireland's patriarchal Catholic church.

> He says aloud, you are the sign He has promised. You are a
> sign of His mercy. The power of life that has been given back
> to you is the power of God. You have been risen. Now you
> are a daughter among us, the sign of His miracle, the sign of
> His Grace. She hears her name spoken and startles, cannot

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> understand how he knows her name. She tries to push past
> the silence in her throat but cannot. This power he has over
> her, this power that pulls her towards him with his forgiving
> words and promise of a better life and no more pain and
> suffering, and perhaps you can learn to live with these
> people. […] Everyone in the room speaking her name. His
> Grace. His Grace. His Grace. (Lynch 2017: 310)

'Grace' is appropriated by 'Father' to represent God's grace, an
interpretation of Grace's life that only serves 'Father' himself. Thus the
novel illustrates the fact that bare life or (dehumanised) mere existence –
here in the sense of *zoē*, or, as Giorgio Agamben defines it, "the simple fact
of living common to all living beings" (Agamben 1998: 1) – becomes the
object of manifold discourses that cannot easily be shaken when one is
forced to fend for survival. For Grace, *zoē* is displaced by a coercive *bios* or
"the form or way of living proper to an individual or a group" (Agamben
1998: 1), as existence becomes dependent on self-silencing conformity to
others' expectations. In *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler relies on a related
idea and focuses on discourses "producing what will and will not count as a
viable speaking subject" (Butler 2004: xix). In Lynch's novel, Grace as a
famine victim loses any kind of viable subject position; her plight is
unsayable, she becomes unrepresentable, but the novel retains her as a
central consciousness in order not to lose Grace's (hi)story and, finally, to
find an idiom for her suffering. When she finds her voice again, her words
end the novel with "This life is light" (Lynch 2017: 354).

While it powerfully tells Grace's individual story, Lynch's novel
also sheds light on the multiform appropriations of bare life in historically
specific discourses. Hence it provides an interesting reflection on the
various uses of the history of the famine, not least to feed present-day
trauma culture and the Irish foundation myth of trauma and its overcoming.
Crucially, however, the Father's 'scam' and instrumentalisation of Grace's
suffering to promote his own agenda portrays that overcoming not as heroic,
but providential and thus coincidental, simultaneously undermining the
myth. It is the promise of a better life that induces Grace to consider
submitting to the sect leader. The novel renders explicit that life and life-
stories of the famine are shaped by the options available, and that life is

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most malleable in utmost extremity, when first and foremost survival has to be secured.

Finally, Grace returns to her home, but this return proves impossible; she cannot return to her home as it was, since her family is gone and their house destroyed. The novel then leads to a different conclusion with a hopeful ending, achieved, quite typically, by the hope for a new generation. The pregnant Grace – an iconic figure recalling Gillespie's Toronto memorial featuring a pregnant woman – is finally able to mourn the ones she has lost without melancholically hallucinating and introjecting them. This impossible return reveals that home is no longer the same place, that the pre-Famine Ireland is written over and ghosted by post-Famine Ireland and that survival requires new visions for the future, as represented in the previously quoted last sentence of the novel, "This life is light" (Lynch 2017: 354), which simultaneously suggests a bringing to light of Irish trauma and that trauma's transfiguration. As such, the novel deals less with transnational but rather with intranational journeys, but it is journeys that write history. The novel weaves close ties between space and time, Ireland and history. It is Grace's journey from County Donegal to Limerick and back that inscribes the country with meaning for her. At the outset of her journey, she is convinced that "there is no memory in this place" (Lynch 2017: 19). Yet at its end, she feels that

> [t]oo many places now hold memory against her. It is, she thinks, as if memory were hidden not in thought but deep within the psychical arrangement of things. How the cornering road gives up sudden movement that is the dancing of ghosts she tries to outwit by looking somewhere else. She passes her own ghost walking with her mother. Some unremembered conversation and a feeling of long and endless summer, a future of infinite space. (Lynch 2017: 348)

Ireland seems peopled with her memories, and people as memory ghosts always seem to be on the road or walking. This, to some degree, answers Colly's ghostly question whether "the soul has a memory box – like, when you die, where do your memories go?" (Lynch 2017: 257). They are not stored in the mind but in the "physical arrangement of things", in the curve

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of a road, in the people passing by, utterly connected to the spaces they used to inhabit.

Whereas Gillespie's memorials reveal transnational ties through the embodiment of movement, the orientation towards the other and the trans-Atlantic connection between the statues in Dublin and Toronto, whereas Joseph O'Connor's novel interweaves the fate of Irish Famine emigrants, African American slaves and Native Americans, and whereas Sinéad O'Connor mixes musical styles and visual legacies, Lynch makes memory emerge as an after-effect of the journey, as a function of walking, re-orienting and moving. Remembering the Great Famine comes with its own peripatetic philosophy, which, in turn, evokes the cultural practice of Famine Walks. As a sequel to *Red Sky in Morning* (2013), however, *Grace* represents the Irish concomitant to the journey of Coll Coyle, Grace's father, to America in Lynch's debut novel. Thus, two journeys – Coll's to America and Grace's through Ireland – correlate and weave trans-Atlantic ties between prequel and sequel. In her review of *Red Sky in Morning*, Anne Haverty muses that the novel's appropriation of the Western tradition does not come as a surprise given Lynch's career "as a film critic" (Haverty 2013: n.p.). This is a tradition that Lance Daly brings to full fruition in his famine film *Black 47*.

6.   Lance Daly, *Black 47* (2018)

Daly's film stages a crucial intervention in cultural memory work on the Great Famine. As Eoin Murphy argues, *Black 47* "is the first major cinematic project to shine a light on a cataclysmic event that decimated our population and sent the Irish diaspora across the Atlantic in a bid to survive" (Murphy 2018: 24). Hence, the film was eagerly expected and proved immensely successful, "join[ing] *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*, *Michael Collins*, and *Brooklyn* on an elite list of Irish films that topped the million Euro mark in ticket sales in the home market" (Gray 2018: 51). Apart from a BBC1/RTÉ One mini-series for television from 1995, *The Hanging Gale* (dir. Diarmuid Lawrence, wr. Allan Cubitt), and a silent movie from 1918, *Knocknagow* (dir. Fred O'Donovan, wr. Charles Kickham), there is hardly a tradition of famine films to hark back to (Mark-FitzGerald 2018: 51). The topic remains "an unhealed wound and a taboo subject for many Irish people to this day", one that seemed "too mordant and too tragic for mass audience consumption" (Gray 2018: 50; 51).

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　　　　Perhaps to make the topic more accessible and digestible, *Black 47*
appropriates the Western genre to tackle the history of the famine (Mark-
FitzGerald 2018: 50), and thus overlays Irish and American histories and
cultural trajectories. Another tradition that places the famine in our current
culture is the revenge genre, which, in turn, can be seen as "the backbone of
the western, and the several of that genre's most memorable treatments of
the theme", including John Ford's *The Searchers* from 1956, to which
Daly's film pays homage (Ma 2015: 48). Aptly, the protagonist of *Black 47*
is named after Hollywood legend John Ford's original name, John Martin
Feeney. This reference establishes a link to both Ford's legacy in the
Western genre in general and to an unfinished project of his in particular –
turning Liam O'Flaherty's *Famine* (1938) into a film (Gray 2018: 51). In its
generic logic, *Black 47* also resembles *Django Unchained* (wr. and dir.
Quentin Tarrantino, 2012), in that both these revenge films tend to
interpellate viewers in such a fashion as to make them affirm the view of the
– frequently victimised – hero, despite moral, ethical or political qualms one
might have regarding their excessively violent action(s). Daly's film unifies
viewers regardless of their ethnic or national heritage, and places them on
the side of the victimised and 'heroic' Irish. As Emily Mark-FitzGerald has
noted in her perceptive review of the film,

> [i]n delivering imagined forms of justice for Famine
> atrocities, *Black '47* inserts heroism into a period when this
> was in short supply, suggesting unfulfilled desires for
> redemptive narratives. Undoubtedly it will play particularly
> well among the diaspora. (Mark-Fitzgerald 2018: 51)

Perhaps, revenge provides the only possibility of retaining – or regaining –
some agency for the characters, playing their part in a history of
dispossession and powerlessness. While Lynch's *Grace* goes so far as to
describe the near-death of its protagonist, the film largely refrains from
showing emaciated characters and rather focuses on what can be done to
avenge the sufferers and the dead. Furthermore, the generic structure of
revenge tends to reify the initial act of violence that triggers revenge.
Indeed, violence begets more violence "according to a strictly
predetermined logic as a reaction to and reinscription of an initial cause,
every turn of events [functioning as] a return to a founding event of

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violence" (Ma 2015: 48). These "founding event[s]" in the film are the evictions ordered by absentee landlords and the grain exports continuing even in the face of starvation in Ireland. Thus, the multiplicity of causes for the famine is reduced to a selection of triggers suffered by an individual character, which, in their singular atrocity, justify his vengeful (re-)action, but also adopt a 'tunnel' view that constructs a unilinear and monocausal chain of events. Empowerment, agency and action come at the price of a limited perspective.

The central character, Martin Feeney, is a Connaught Ranger, who returns to his home in Connemara after his service in the British army only to find that many of his closest relatives have died of starvation. After a cruel military intervention to evict his remaining family, he takes revenge. Finally, he teams up with his former brother-in-arms, the British ex-soldier Hannah, who fought side by side with him in Afghanistan, and together they fight against the British authorities' inhumane way of dealing with the famine, which reduces human beings to bare animal-like existents. Despite this clearly nationalist view of victims and perpetrators underlined by Feeney's vigilantism, the film depicts male alliances across nations and stereotypically employs femininity as a mere backdrop for revenge, its explanation and justification. One of the most moving and visually enticing scenes is when Feeney's sister-in-law and his niece die of exposure after the roof of their dwelling, which they illegally inhabit, is destroyed by the British (Lynch 2018: 0:22:59-0:23:07). Without any shelter left to them, they freeze to death, and Feeney, detained by the British, comes too late to help them. Mother and daughter appear enshrined in a highly aestheticised scene with a white and grey colour-code that turns their death into a sublime sacrifice, recalling the configuration of the pietà (Kelleher 1997: 151). In the face of such innocent suffering, revenge seems justified as a means to achieve justice. This is the climax that triggers the revenge plot, and in the scenes that follow, Feeney hunts down and kills all the people responsible for his family's demise. His final victim is the British absentee landlord Kilmichael, who puts personal gain over the well-being of his tenants and has large amounts of grain exported from his estate. Kilmichael is played by Jim Broadbent, who is frequently cast in rather more benign roles – as Bridget Jones's benevolent father or Iris Murdoch's loving husband, for instance. In contrast, in *Black 47*, he serves as the mouthpiece of sexist, racist and misanthropic opinions. Feeney's fight, however, cannot be won,

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and eventually he is shot and dies. With his last breath, Feeney advises Hannah not to fight the British but to leave for America, a piece of advice his friend most probably will heed. Nevertheless, the rather clear binary of revenge, in tow with the film's archaic urge to take sides, depicts a rather simplistic version of the conflict that many historians would challenge today.

While the famine novels considered here strive for a circumspect polyphony in their memory politics, *Black 47* offers a belated satisfying retribution for the suffering endured in the Great Famine, albeit at the price of reducing the findings of history to a black-and-white version. Yet the possible appeal to the diaspora and the generic hybridity reveal once more that the memory of the famine is a transnational and transcultural phenomenon.

7.   Conclusion: Travelling Memories of the Great Famine

Intertextuality and polyphony complicate the memory politics of the famine and turn it into a transnational and transcultural phenomenon. Such representations of cultural enmeshments, palimpsests, interdependencies, and intersections aptly respond to globalisation through the construction of a far-flung web of memories of the nineteenth century that traverse (and sometimes collapse) national frontiers and cultural boundaries. Any neo-Victorian revisitation of the phenomenon, then, is fundamentally transnational, as the famine issued "sets of ties reaching beyond and across the borders of sovereign states" through the unprecedented emigration from Ireland during the Great Famine (Faist 2004: 3). Transnational memory studies help to capture the complex interconnections that are part of this nineteenth-century legacy in today's memory culture. While the novels discussed here showcase transnational and transcultural interconnections, mainly by way of intertextual references, the audio-visual examples analysed further mediate a highly politicised, though often simplified, national memory. Nevertheless, intermedial references and generic hybridities in O'Connor's video and Daly's film respectively also indicate an implicit challenge to any kind of blunt nationalism. In current memory politics, the transnational phenomenon of the Great Famine looks set to continue to breach its own frames, pushing against the limits of global audiences' expectations.

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Notes

1. Lyotard defines the differend (coined in his 1983 study *Le Différend*), as "the case where the plaintiff is divested of the means to argue and becomes for that reason a victim. If the addressor, the addressee, and the sense of the testimony are neutralized, everything takes place as if there were no damages (no. 9). A case of differend between two parties takes place when the 'regulation' of the conflict that opposes them is done in the idiom of one of the parties while the wrong suffered by the other is not signified in that idiom" (Lyotard 2011: 9). To resolve differends, new phrases need to be found in which the victimisation stops. Along these lines, Lyotard argues that "[t]o give the differend its due is to institute new addresses, new addressors, new significations, and new referents in order for the wrong to find an expression and for the plaintiff to cease being a victim. This requires new rules for the formation and linking of phrases" (Lyotard 2011: 13). Within literary texts, rules can be instituted that either reflect current injustices or provide an imaginary space for possible new concatenations. Ethically, this implies a circumspect notion of the production of discourse, because, on the one hand, it implies the ethically problematic process of *speaking for* the other, while it also implies that no new idiom would equal the acquiescence with the process of *silencing* the other.
2. Nally draws on Gertrude Himmelfarb's argument here as put forward in *The Idea of Poverty* (1985).
3. Eckart Voigts has drawn attention to the fact that the term pre-dates Shiller's usage), having been first introduced in 1972 by Hugh Tinker, the Director of the Institute of Race Relations in London (see Voigts 2012: 206).
4. Quite recently, scientists could affirm that bones that were washed ashore in Québec in 2010 and 2016 are the bodily remains of famine victims of a shipwreck in 1847 (see https://www.irishcentral.com/roots/human-remains-on-canadian-beach-are-irish-famine-victims-say-scientists). In line with Elizabeth Ho's theorisation of the "neo-Victorian-at-sea" (Ho 2014: 166), the Green Atlantic serves as a transnational archive of the past and of a history that has long been lost. Ho draws on Derek Walcott's concept of the sea as history and describes the Atlantic as "at once watery archive, graveyard, and theatre of memory that tosses up detritus as the monuments and submerged histories of colonial atrocities" (Ho 2014: 166). Comparably, for the history of the Great Famine, the sea serves as an archive of the untold histories of the lives of those who died in the famine itself or while seeking to escape it.
5. See Irish Heritage Trust 2018 for an itinerary of the famine walk.

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6.   Also note the importance of water imagery, rivers and memory in Toni
       Morrison's *Beloved*, which is another intertextual connection between the two
       novels. On the relevance of water in *Beloved*, see for example Wardi 2011:
       65-77.

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