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Signature

To my beloved son and my husband

I would especially like to thank my husband for his continuing support during my whole study and during the progress of this thesis. Without his help I would not have been able to finish my study. Many thanks to my parents for their continuing support in raising my son. I would also like to thank my sisters for looking after my son during my Erasmus semester.

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1. INTRODUCTION

IRISH HISTORY

Island of bitter Memories, thickly sown
From winding Boyne to Limerick's treaty-stone,
Bare Connaught Hills to Dublin Castle wall,
Green Wexford to the glens of Donegal,
Through sad six hundred years of hostile sway,
From Strongbow fierce to cunning Catlereaugh!
These will not melt and vanish in a day.
These can yet sting the patriot thoughts which turn
To Erin's past, and bid them weep and burn.¹

These lines by William Allingham sum briefly up the history of Ireland that is full of pain and sorrow. One of the most memorable tragic events is the Great Famine that hit Ireland in the middle of the nineteenth century, leaving behind about one and a half million dead people – mostly children aged under ten and old people over sixty years² – and forcing another million to emigrate. Ever since there have been numerous stories, books, poems and songs written on this disastrous era between 1845 and 1850,³ of which one is the *Star of the Sea* (2002) by Joseph O'Connor, the concern of the thesis at hand.

My interest in this topic was awakened during my Erasmus semester at the University College Dublin, when I was required to read the novel for a seminar. The incidents arising throughout the story, which excellently mirror the calamitous famine era as well as the real situation on the famine ships, left such a deep impression on me that I decided to write my thesis on this heart-rending topic.

Thus, the first chapter is devoted to the historical background of the novel, in which the reasons behind the famine, the conditions of the famine, the efforts of relief, as well as the aftermath of the famine will be considered. In the following two chapters, the novel will be analysed concerning the way it reflects the Great

¹ Craig, 165.

² O'Grada, 2000, 43.

³ While the beginning of the famine is widely agreed on 1845, scholars differ as to the year the famine ended. The sources differ from 1848 to 1852. According to Kinealy (2002: 58) demands on relief, along with mortality, evictions and emigration rate was still high, if not increased, in the west and south-west of Ireland after 1849.

Famine and the circumstances surrounding emigration and coffin ships. Consequently, in the second chapter the major characters are investigated regarding their character qualities and their relationship to each other, whereas the third chapter deals with major themes such as love, social classes, hunger, evictions and emigration, which were similarly important during this period. The subsequent chapter is concerned with some important aspects of narrative technique, which is the narrative situation, perspective and focalization, subjectivity and objectivity, reality or authenticity as well as time levels. To make the whole analysis easily comprehensible, I will start with a summary of the novel, preceded by a brief introduction to the author.

1.1. The Author⁴

Joseph O'Connor was born in 1963, in Dublin. He got in touch with literature very early, as his parents had an affection for fiction, poetry, theatre and music and their house was full of books. From his childhood on he became a passionate reader, a fact that would awake his fascination for writing in his teenage years. In 1981, O'Connor attended the University College Dublin, where he studied Literature and History. After his graduation in 1986, he spent a year as a postgraduate at Oxford University and worked for the British Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign. He then moved to South-East London, where he lived for the remainder of the 1980s. O'Connor is the brother of the famous pop singer Sinéad O'Connor. He is married to playwright, screenwriter and novelist, Anne-Marie Casey. They have two sons.⁵

In 1989, his first short story 'Last of the Mohicans' was published in Dublin Sunday Tribune's New Irish Writing page. His first novel *Cowboys and Indians* was published in 1991, and was followed by a collection of short stories, *True Believers*, in the same year. During the 1990s he wrote several scripts, for which he won many prizes. His novel *Star of the Sea* was published in 2002. It became the highest selling literary novel in Britain that year and has by now been published in almost forty languages. It sold more than one million copies and won

⁴ <http://www.josephoconnorauthor.com/about-long.html>.

⁵ Hogan, 1996, 938.

prizes and honours around the world. Hogan characterizes O'Connor as a realist writer who "has a sharp eye for the less glamorous side of life" (Hogan 938), which is definitely true in case of *Star of the Sea*. In his subsequent novel, *Redemption Falls*, he develops the multi-voiced narrative approach he had begun with *Star of the Sea*. It tells the story of a number of children of the Star of the Sea generation during the American Civil War and its aftermath.

O'Connor's novel *Ghost Light*, published in 2010, was chosen as Dublin's 'One City One Book' novel for 2011. In December 2011, he received an honorary Doctorate in Literature from University College Dublin. His final collection of short stories *Where Have You Been?*, published in 2012, was highly acclaimed by many critics and was listed by the Sunday Times as one of the best books of that year. In 2012, O'Connor also won the Irish PEN Award for Outstanding Contribution to Irish Literature.

1.2. Synopsis of the *Star of the Sea* (2002)

In this novel O'Connor narrates a story of Irish people from different social classes, which is bound together by the aftermath of the Irish famine in various ways. The main protagonists are David Merridith of Kingscourt, his wife Laura, their maidservant Mary Duane, the Irish emigrant Pius Mulvey, the American journalist Grantley Dixon and the ship's captain Josias Lockwood. During the nearly four-week voyage on board of the 'Star of the Sea' each of them alternately tells his/her part of the story making up a whole, compiled and published by Grantley Dixon two years after their arrival in New York. The action takes place on the ship, past events of the plot are set in Ireland and England.

In the cold November of 1847, which is known as the worst year of the famine, the old famine ship 'Star of the Sea' sets sail to New York with more than four hundred diseased and impoverished Irish emigrants and fifteen first-class passengers on board. While the poor emigrants spend the journey in the steerage, crammed together and under terrible conditions, the class passengers are provided with all possible luxury. Like all other coffin ships, deaths of famine emigrants are daily fare on board of the Star. Similarly, low food rations as well

as bad standards of hygiene prevail on the ship, a fact that applied to any of the coffin ships during the Great Famine.

The preface of the novel, entitled 'The Monster', describes a strange limping steerage passenger from Connemara who strolls about on the ship at night and is therefore, referred to as 'the ghost' by the crew. He sleeps all day and never talks to anybody. Later in the book 'the ghost' is introduced as "the killer Pius Mulvey" (O'Connor 24). Mulvey recalls an occasion in Connemara when he was beaten up by a group of men who instructed him to murder Lord Kingscourt on the ship. They threaten to kill him if he did not do it and tell him that he is going to be watched every minute during the voyage.

Captain Lockwood keeps a logbook, in which he describes the situation of the passengers, counts the deaths and tells some heart-rending stories of the emigrants. Each entry of his diary starts with the names of steerage passengers who died during the day, either of Typhus fever or hunger, and have been committed to the sea. On the fifth day of the journey he refers to unpleasant conditions on the ship, remarking that despite his objection, too many tickets have been sold and that the ship's company did not provide a doctor or a nurse. On the thirteenth day the ship's cook, a good-hearted Chinese man, asks the captain to cook a soup from the leftovers of the first-class dining room to ease the suffering of some steerage passengers. The captain is very impressed by his intention and agrees. One of the saddest events occurs towards the end of the voyage, when some sailors discover the decayed bodies of a very young couple that hid on board because of not being able to pay the passage. One evening the captain meets Pius Mulvey on the deck and gets fascinated by his knowledge and eloquence. Pius lies about his parents and when he reads out from the small bible he stole from the schoolmaster he killed, the captain sees the name 'William Swales' on it and thinks it must be him. After a talk they become friends and Mulvey tells him that he is in desperate need for a job of any kind and asks him to recommend him to Lord Kingscourt.

It is the seventh day of the voyage when Mary Duane recalls certain events of the past few months, during which David Merridith came to her room every night

to watch her undress, to touch and paint her. He declared his perpetual love for Mary and asked for forgiveness for what he did in his adolescence. Although Mary was not very happy with the situation she could not tell it to his wife, as she was scared of being expelled from the house. Then Mary remembers having first met David on her fifth birthday, when her mother took her up to Kingscourt Manor. Mary's parents were tenants on the estate of David's father, the very prosperous Anglo-Irish landlord Lord Merridith of Kingscourt in Connemara. After David's birth his parents separate for six years and his mother leaves him behind in Ireland and goes "to London to live with her people, taking her two daughters but not her son" (O'Connor 50). So, Mary's mother is employed to take care of David. It is not only David's mother who is absent but also his father who is frequently away at wars and, therefore, David has a childhood without his parents. Sometimes Mary's mother brings him to her own house, where he feels and acts like a child and where he finds the parental love and affection that he misses.

In 1819, when David is six, his mother comes back from London. Lady Verity is a very kind person who cares for their tenants and treats them very humanely. During the famine of 1822, she establishes a soup kitchen but unfortunately, catches the fever and dies in the following year. The death of Lady Verity changes the character of Lord Kingscourt fundamentally. Even though he is a very kind person, he becomes a feared landlord who is violent towards his tenants and his son. Once "being scrupulously fair in his judgements" (O'Connor 59), he turns to a dreaded magistrate who treats prisoners very harshly and even sentences a tenant to death for having stolen a lamb. His cruelty makes him a hated landlord and his name becomes a synonym for tyranny.

Soon after David is sent to a boarding school in England where he gets homesick and feels very unhappy. During his teenage years he takes up drawing, tenants, servants and workers being his favourite subject. One summer, when Mary and David are seventeen, they make love during a walk in the woods and discover strong feelings for one another. They have a relationship during the whole summer and when David goes back to College, he writes love letters to Mary who learns to read in order to understand the letters. One day, when David comes back from England he tells Mary that his father has ordered him to end their

relationship, otherwise he would send Mary's family away. Feeling very sad and despaired, David offers her a handful of coins, an action that breaks Mary's heart and makes her hate him forever.

In 1836, during a Christmas break from the navy, David is pushed into an engagement with the daughter of the neighbouring landlord Henry Blake of Tully. Two weeks after their engagement, during a shooting weekend at his friends, he falls in love with Laura, "the only daughter of a Sussex industrialist family" (O'Connor 160). Though afraid of his father's reaction, he tells him that he has fallen in love with another girl and therefore, wants to break off the engagement with Amelia. However, his father gets very angry about David's intentions and commands him to leave the house immediately and never come back. In the following year David and Laura marry. David's sisters Emily and Natasha attend the wedding though risking their father's fury. After having travelled around in many countries during the first two years of their marriage, they move to their house in London. There, Laura organizes regular literary evenings to which she invites well-known writers, publishers and critics to meet and discuss their work. Nevertheless, David gradually feels unhappy and bored with his life as a gentleman and falls back into the sleeplessness and anxiety of his boyhood. His marriage steadily worsens and they begin sleeping in separate rooms and argue frequently. During this time David starts his nightly wanderings along the river Thames, which reminds him of Ireland and Mary. He reckons that he would have married her, if he were a poor man. In February 1841, David begins "to roam the East End of London at night" (O'Connor 235) and visit brothels for the next two years and finally catches Gonorrhoea.

One day of autumn 1844, David receives a threatening mail from a revolutionary group of tenants called "'The Hibernian Defenders' or 'Else-be-Liables'" (O'Connor 246) who threaten to kill his family, if he does not stop his father from raising the rents and evicting tenants. The following year Lord Kingscourt dies. On his deathbed he asks David for forgiveness and to do his best for the tenants. On the day of the funeral David learns that Mary married ten years ago and that her parents died in the Galway workhouse. Shortly after the burial, the lawyer tells him that his father was bankrupt, had mortgaged the Kingscourt estate and

left many unpaid accounts. In order to pay the debts David sells all their property and the house in London and they move to Kingscourt Manor in August 1846. Soon after, they receive a notice of eviction from the insurance company to which they owe the mortgage. His attempt to get a postponement for the refund is rejected by the company. Despaired and disappointed he strolls about the streets of Dublin and finally enters a brothel, where he finds Mary working as a prostitute. He takes Mary to live in their house as the nanny of his sons. After being evicted from Kingscourt in April 1847, they move to the house of his friends in Dublin, where they stay until setting sail to America in November.

Pius Mulvey is the son of a poor smallholder on the neighbouring estate of Commander Blake of Tully. He is more intelligent than his one year older brother Nicholas but less good-looking and less religious. Their mother teaches them reading when they are children. They live a poor but happy life until their father dies from a horse kick when Pius is sixteen. For Pius and Nicholas a life of misery and poverty begins when their mother dies the following year. They work hard on the tiny land of their father's tenancy, but are always hungry and not able to pay the rent. Pius realizes that a gloomy future is expecting him in Connemara and that if he stays there, he will end up like his parents who worked hard all their lives only to fill their stomach. One day a sergeant comes by and tries to persuade Pius and Nicholas to join the army. He tells them that as soldiers they will have a regular wage, enough food and will be able to see the nicest places in the world. However, Nicholas rejects the sergeant's offer and sends him away. Pius cannot stop thinking about the sergeant's remarks, gets increasingly uneasy with Connemara and starts to rove about at night. During these nights he begins to steal and discovers his passion for singing and writing ballads, which turns out to be more lucrative. He recognises that singers and songwriters are admired and respected by every part of the society and thus, writes his own song about the sergeant. The night he sings it in public, he meets Mary Duane and they begin a relationship. His brother Nicholas decides to join the priesthood after he returns from an asylum to which he was sent for a brief mental disturbance. Meanwhile, they get a warning note for eviction that demands them to either pay the rent within the next four months, or to leave. On the same day as Nicholas leaves, Mary tells Pius that she is expecting his child in the following summer. She tells

him that they should marry and live and die on that land, “like his people before him” (O'Connor). Being scared of what Mary told him, Pius decides to leave and never come back.

Walking out of Connemara, he first goes to Belfast where he works at the harbour for a while. Fearing prejudices against his Catholic name, he begins to assume different names. As soon as he finds physical labour too exhausting, he starts singing his ballad in pubs at night adjusting the song to either the Protestant or the Catholic audience. When both sides discover his furtiveness, he is being beaten and expelled from the city. He hides in a boat that takes him to London. Having arrived there, he assumes a name that he hears in a ballad sung on the street. He lives for two years in the East End of London as Frederick Hall, “earning his bread by swindling and robbing” (O'Connor 183), occasionally singing old Galway songs as well as his own ballad in the streets. When one of the competing fiddlers squeals on him to the police, he is put in Newgate prison for seven years. Being treated harshly at first, he soon manages to gain the prison governor's trust and flee, after having killed the brutal guard who raped him twice. He becomes the wanted 'monster of Newgate' who is depicted and reported in newspapers all over the country. When it is found out by a reporter (apparently Grantley Dixon) that Frederick Hall “was in fact a cunning Irishman called Murphy or Malvey” (O'Connor 206), Pius leaves the city abruptly and heads for the north of England.

During the next eighteen months he works in different jobs changing his place regularly. In his last job at a circus a lion bites off his leg and leaves him crippled. As he becomes useless for his previous job at the circus, they abandon him at the next opportunity. One day he meets a man called William Swales, a schoolmaster on his way to the school where he is going to work. Mulvey joins him and they walk northwards, suffering together from cold and hunger. They become good friends, but as Pius is scared of having no chance as a crippled man, he kills Swales to assume his identity. For another eighteen months he works as the schoolmaster William Swales, but being surrounded by children reminds him of his own child he left behind. He feels guilty for what he has done to Mary and his child. When he receives a letter from William Swales' mother he immediately leaves the school, heading for Ireland to Mary and his child. Having

arrived at the village where Mary lived once, he learns that they have been evicted and that Mary and his brother got married twelve years ago.

In April 1847, Mary writes a letter to the captain of the 'Else-be-liable men', denouncing Pius Mulvey for torturing her and her husband on his return from England. She tells that after being left by Pius with the baby in her womb, Nicholas has heard about his brother's betrayal and has decided to leave off being a priest and marry her. When Pius comes back in September 1844, he starts torturing them because of being jealous of Nicholas. He takes half of their land, ruins their potato beds, kills their cow and takes advantage of their destitute situation by forcing Mary to sleep with him in exchange for food for her child. He does not help them when the blight comes and when they are evicted. He has enough food while their child has to suffer from hunger. They live in a scalp for a while and when her husband and child dies, Mary goes to a workhouse and then to Dublin, losing her child on the way. She begs in the streets of Dublin and works as a prostitute. In the end of the letter Mary asks the revolutionary group to punish Mulvey for his evil deeds.

On Christmas Eve 1845, Nicholas writes a letter to Mary in which he describes the events on the day when he went to Commander Blake of Tully to ask him to overturn the eviction. On his way there he witnesses horrible scenes in which people are dying in cabins and along the road from hunger. Having arrived there, a servant opens the door and says that landlord Blake does not want to see him and orders him to leave. Being bitterly disappointed and filled with rage, Nicholas goes back home and finds his child crying from hunger. Mary is away at Kingscourt to ask for help, and so, Nicholas decides to drown his child and kill himself, as this seems to be the only way to stop their suffering.

Grantley Dixon and Laura Merridith have an affair since they have met on one of the literary events in London, the time when David has started to dislike him because of his socialist statements. During the journey, David and Grantley frequently argue about political issues such as the famine, the situation of landlords and tenants. One evening on the ship, while sitting in the ship bar, Grantley remembers the night in a hotel room in Dublin in which Grantley read

aloud to Laura one of his short stories he had written during his tour through Ireland. Laura did not like the stories and accused him of just listing facts instead of creating beauty, the actual task of a writer. Laura's critique hurt Grantley and in order to prove that she is wrong, he tried to publish his book providing a real image of the famine in Ireland. However, all publishers refuse to publish his work and claim that fiction readers do not want stories about the poor. When David comes into the bar that evening, he has a fierce debate with Grantley. They accuse each other for being responsible for the misery in their homeland, Merridith for the hunger in Ireland and Dixon for slavery in America. The following night they argue again because David has found out the relationship of Grantley and his wife and therefore, he threatens to kill him if he comes near to his wife again.

On the seventeenth day of the voyage Captain Lockwood gets informed of a quarrel among the steerage passengers and when he goes to the lower deck, he finds Pius Mulvey being beaten by passengers who blame him for having stolen food. A passenger called Shymus Meadowes recognises his identity and tells that his real name is not William Swales but "Pius Mulvey of Ardnagreevagh" (O'Connor 225), who murdered his brother by taking off his land. The captain locks Mulvey up in the below-deck in order to save him from possible assaults. In the lockup Mulvey remembers the morning when he went into David's cabin to kill him, but somehow could not do so. That night, Seamus Meadowes comes to the lockup and tells him that if David Merridith leaves the ship alive, he will be killed as soon as he sets his foot in New York. Next day, Pius informs David that he observed Shaymus Meadowes the other night revealing to another man "that he belonged to a secret revolutionary society, namely 'The Else-Be-Liable Men' of Galway" and "that he had been placed on board the ship in order to murder Lord Kingscourt and his wife and children" (O'Connor 289). Meadowes gets arrested and David offers Pius an accommodation in the first-class quarters, as he regards the steerage to be not safe for him.

Having moved there, Pius meets Mary and they have a bitter argument. Later on the same day David and his son Jonathan invite Pius to Jonathan's birthday tea. During the dinner, at which Mary feels very uncomfortable of being at the same

table with Mulvey, David collapses in pain but refuses to call Surgeon Mangan. When David's younger son Robert asks Pius whether it was not him who came one morning to his cabin with a knife in his hand, David gets angry and hits his son for being too disrespectful to his guest. On one of the following days, David goes to the surgeon and after a careful inspection he learns that he has syphilis and will die within a year. The surgeon asks him whether he has had sexual intercourse with Mary, whereupon David talks about his relationship with Mary when they were younger and the time he used to go to her room to watch her undress. He continues that he stopped it after he had found out, the day he locked up the Kingcourt manor, that Mary Duane is his half-sister who was born from the relationship of his father and his nanny Margaret Duane.

Two days before their arrival in New York Dixon and Mulvey meet on the deck. Before they start talking, Grantley thinks about Laura's decision to end the affair and stay with her husband. He asks Pius whether they have met before, as his face seems familiar to him. Pius denies it but when he speaks in a London accent, Grantley recognises that he is the 'Monster of Newgate' who murdered a prison warder once and was depicted on newspapers. He takes out an old newspaper with the picture of the murderer and shows it to Pius. Realizing the gravity of his situation, Pius gets angry and asks him what he wants. Grantley asks to tell him everything about his time in London and in prison; otherwise, he threatens to inform the captain.

At their arrival in New York on the twenty-seventh day of the voyage the ship is not allowed to land, a fate they share with other hundred vessels. The weather is very cold, they are running out of water and food, the deaths continue, and there are frequent tumults among passengers who increasingly get impatient. Four days later a group of steerage passengers led by Seamus Meadowes flee with two lifeboats, Mary and Pius being among them. Next day, the captain notes that both lifeboats got lost and probably none of them survived. Simultaneously, it turns out that David has been murdered the previous night, whereupon his corpse, together with others from the steerage, are carried away and committed to the sea. Captain Lockwood declares his resignation and maintains that he will never again go to sea and devote the rest of his life to help the poor.

In the epilogue, written by Grantley Dixon in 1916, we learn that the first-class passengers were allowed to land four days after David's murder and that their tickets were refunded by the shipping company, while the steerage passengers had to remain for another seven weeks on the ship. Dixon writes these details in a collection of books, together with his notes on the tour in Connemara as well as Pius' life in London and in prison, which he first publishes in 1849. In the later editions he adds some important facts about the life of the protagonists after their arrival in New York: he married Laura, Seamus Meadowes was arrested for David's murder but was found not guilty and later became a politician, Pius was murdered a year later, Captain Lockwood took part in relief measures in Connemara and died of fever. For Mary Duane, he does not exactly know what happened to her, as she got lost and he could not find her. At the end of the epilogue Dixon admits having murdered David Merridith, as he wanted to have Laura for himself.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Pre-famine Ireland

When dealing with that topic the question necessarily arises what the living conditions of pre-famine Ireland were like and why it was impossible to prevent a tragedy like the 'Great Irish Famine'. For this reason, in the following section I would like to analyse the economic, social and political situation of Ireland on the eve of the famine, as these seemed to be particularly important to look at. Another similarly crucial aspect is the role of the potato in this calamity, as one may reasonably question how deeply Irish people were dependent on the potato and whether there was nothing else to eat.

2.1.1. Economic, Social and Political Situation

The economic, social and political situation of nineteenth century Ireland can be described as diverse and rather difficult. Since the Act of Union in 1800⁶ Ireland had become a part of the United Kingdom, however, the country had hardly benefited from the prosperity of this powerful empire. The only profiteers from the increase in income of Ireland were the higher social groups, so that the poor third of the population grew more destitute than before. This unevenness between Britain and Ireland was by no means limited to the economy, but also to politics. Even though Ireland made up 40 percent of the population of the United Kingdom, the country was under-represented with only 105 out of 658 MPs who sat in the House of Commons.⁷

The huge discrepancy between social groups was rather one between the Catholic and the Protestant faith. Thus, the majority of the Irish population (80 %), who belonged to the Catholic faith, lived in poverty. At the same time, the small Protestant Ascendancy class of English and Anglo-Irish families owned most of

⁶ "Act of Union, (Jan. 1, 1801), legislative agreement uniting Great Britain (England and Scotland) and Ireland under the name of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland." (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/614673/Act-of-Union>)

⁷ Kinealy, 1994, 6.

the land and had great power over their tenants. This was a result of “a wholesale confiscation of Catholic estates” (Edwards and Williams 91) by the beginning of the 18th century. Many of those Protestant *landowners* or *landlords* lived in England and were called *absentees*. They hired agents or middlemen to administer their property and to collect the rents. Generally, they earned a bad reputation, as they cared little for their tenants and were just interested in spending the money the rents brought in.⁸

The overwhelming majority of the Catholic Irish population lived in rural regions and “over two-thirds of the labour force relied on farming” (O’Grada, 1999: 25). This was confirmed by the census of 1841, which showed that 5,500,000 of the total population of over 8,000,000 depended on agriculture.⁹ The Irish land system, called *conacre*, reflected the unbalanced social system between the upper class British landowners (or landlords) and the lower class Irish tenant farmers. Accordingly, the farmers worked on small portions of land that did not belong to them. They rent it from the landlord, and those who could afford it rent large farms to break them into smaller plots and lease to small farmers called *cottiers*. However, the tenure lacked any security, and rents were high. This implied that tenants could be evicted by the landlord any time, if they were in arrears with the rents, or simply because he decided to raise sheep on the land. The cottiers paid their rents by working for their landlords, and if they needed money for clothes or other things they sold their pigs or other goods “such as butter, bacon, poultry and eggs” (Litton 15). In the summer months, cottiers from the poorer parts of Ireland went to England to work on farms, and earn money.¹⁰ The summer was known as the hungry season, as the potato crop from the previous year finished by the beginning of the summer, and until the digging of the new crop in autumn there was not enough food (potatoes) available.

On the next level there was a large group of agricultural labourers who were more badly off than cottiers. They travelled around the country looking for work, and the livelihood of those who could not find labour was a small patch of land.

⁸ Litton, 9.

⁹ Edwards and Williams, 89.

¹⁰ Litton, 10.

According to a research, in 1835, there were more than two million people “without regular employment of any kind” (Litton 10). Only the upper class employers provided steady employment and money wages, the farmers usually gave food or low wages.

Another significant aspect of the Irish land system was the subdivision of land, a result of the shift from grazing to ‘tillage-farming’ during the 18th century, in order to allow the growing population to acquire land on which they could raise their potatoes.¹¹ Leaseholders of any type, “no matter how small their holdings, tended to subdivide either for profit or to provide for their children” (Edwards and Williams 92). As a substitute for marriage dowry or education, poor farmers and cottiers gave their children a portion of land when they got married. This meant that “the portions of land got ever smaller, and land became poorer as it was overworked” (Litton 12). By 1841, nearly half of the previous holdings under five acres were split into holdings of not more than one acre, on which the potato was the single crop. This was a typical Irish farm, of which in 1845 an estimated 65,000 existed. The rapid increase of subdivision, which was tolerated by the landlords, as this meant higher rent incomes, encouraged the conacre system. Basically, the cottiers were better off than small tenants because their small grounds provided sufficient food, being independent of fluctuations in markets.¹²

One further feature of this highly unequal social order was the housing of the lower class, which was rather miserable as well. Usually, they lived in thatched cottages or small cabins of single rooms occupied by a large family, “all (pigs included) sleeping in the different corners of the room” (Edwards and Williams 97). They were made of stone and turf,¹³ and had no windows but “a hole in the roof for the smoke of the cooking fire to escape” (Litton 12). However, the living conditions of the evicted and unemployed were even worse. They lived in huts made of turf until they got a piece of ground to build a cabin. Quite often these

¹¹ Edwards and Williams, 90 f.

¹² Edwards and Williams, 93 ff.

¹³ Turf played an important role for the Irish poor, since this was the only available and easily accessible material for heating. People cut it from “the bogs that covered the country” (Litton 12). According to Eagleton (29) “one sixth of Ireland consists of bogland” of which most “concentrated in the midlands and the west.”

dwelling had become villages, in which huts were situated next to each other along roads leading through bogs.¹⁴

The British populist political economy of the early 19th century interpreted Ireland as an overpopulated country, peasants as well as landlords being idle because of dependence on the potato. This was not true since many people were dealing with livestock and Ireland was exporting large amounts of corn to Britain, a growing tendency between 1815 and 1845. A number of leading economists linked high birth rate to indolence, and as a further consequence, to poverty. They claimed that the system of poor relief was too generous, and thus, supported poverty. In reality, the Irish birth rates were declining.¹⁵ In this context O'Grada (1999: 25) suggests that "the rate of annual population growth fell from 1.5 percent of more in the early nineteenth century to about 0.5 percent in the pre-famine decade".

The economic unevenness between Ireland and Britain was reflected in the "income per head being about half that in the rest of the United Kingdom" (O'Grada, 2006: 45) in 1845. Numerous censuses and enquiries about the condition of Ireland during the 19th century provided a rather pessimistic view of Ireland. The whole debate on poverty and how it should be relieved was largely shaped leading economists, *Adam Smith* being the most influential one. In his book '*An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*', Smith outlined his doctrines. On the whole, his philosophy stated that "the wealth of a nation could be increased if the market was free from any constraints and government intervention was kept to a minimum" (Kinealy, 1994: 7), indicating the importance of individualism and self-help.¹⁶ This principle of non-interference in the free market (called *laissez faire* – meaning 'let be') that dominated the economic theory of mid-nineteenth century Britain, was based on the doctrine that the government was neither responsible for providing aid for its citizens, nor to interfere with the free market.¹⁷ However, depending on the situation, the

¹⁴ Edwards and Williams, 97.

¹⁵ Kinealy, 1994, 1 f.

¹⁶ Kinealy, 1994, 7 f.

¹⁷ Litton, 22.

government took “whatever suited them from the political economy and rejected whatever did not” (Kinealy, 1994: 8). In case of the famine, the ideas of the political economy were adapted to justify the non-interference in grain trade after the disastrous blight in 1846.

The economic difficulties of Ireland, illuminated by the census of 1841, caused a certain concern among the members of the government. The census reports confirmed the dominance of agriculture in Ireland and showed that unlike Britain, Ireland was undergoing a reverse transition from decreasing industrialisation to increasing agriculture. The reports also demonstrated the heavy dependence of the country on potatoes, the widespread poverty and the fast growing population which had doubled since the Act of Union in 1801 to more than 8,000,000. The problems of the country were explained by the theory of another eminent political economist of the 19th century, *Thomas Malthus*, a disciple of Adam Smith. According to Malthus, “if the population was allowed to grow unchecked, it would increase more rapidly than food supplies”, (Kinealy, 1994: 11) and would eventually lead to famine. This was expected to happen in Ireland, as the fast-increasing population and heavy dependence on the potato was inevitably leading to a catastrophe. Like other political economists, Malthus warned against the dangers of state intervention, particularly in form of poor relief that allegedly promoted the population growth.¹⁸

The key concept of the 19th century economist theory was the relationship between “population” and “capital”. In this context Smith declared that “a fundamental condition for any economic development was an alteration of the population/capital ratio, either through an increase in capital, a reduction in population, or a combination of the two” (Boylan and Foley 141). They all believed that the cottier system in Ireland had to be replaced by the English capitalist leasehold tenancy to achieve a long-term development in Ireland. Taking the pre-famine population growth into account, mass emigration was necessary for the whole economic model to be effective.¹⁹

¹⁸ Kinealy, 1994, 9 ff.

¹⁹ Boylan and Foley in: Morash 141 f.

2.1.2. The Role of the Potato

It is assumed that the potato reached Ireland via Spain around 1590, where during the eighteenth and nineteenth century it played a far greater role than in any other European country. This circumstance gave rise to persevering prejudices against Irish people who were regarded as lazy and fast breeding potato eaters, sometimes depicted as potatoes in nineteenth-century English cartoons.²⁰ The following extract from a poem, written in 1674 to celebrate the wedding of a young couple from Limerick, exemplifies the status of the potato during that epoch:

*Gurab é an bodach
buanna an bhata
bhuaileas dorrann
ar a chaile
faoi na maluinn;
agus póga
le pronócum
nó potáta
mar shalúta
ria na pósadh
(O'Grada, 1999: 14)*

For he a knave
Who wields a stick
And strikes with his fist
His wife
Under her eyebrow
Whereas it was kisses
With formality
Or a potato
that used to salute her
Before their marriage

Originally, the potato was used as a supplementary food by almost all social groups. For the poor, it slowly became the main part of the daily diet. By the 1840's around two-fifths, or 3,000,000, of the Irish population depended on the potato as their primary source of food and almost half of the Irish households ate potatoes even for breakfast. The daily diet of an adult Irish consisted of 4-5 kilos of potatoes while, for instance, in France this was only 165 grams.²¹ However, potatoes were not only eaten by humans, but were also used to feed domestic animals such as pigs and hens. The amount of the acreage used for growing potato reflects its expansion: in 1845 approximately one-third, or 2,516,000 acres, of the entire land tilled was used for this crop.²²

The superior position of this vegetable can be ascribed to its various advantages,

²⁰ O'Grada, 2000, 15; O'Grada, 1999, 13 ff.

²¹ O'Grada, 2007, 43.

²² Kinealy, 1994, 5 f.; Litton, 15; O'Grada, 1999, 18.

compared to other crops. One considerable function was the preparation of “the soil for grain crops, of which oats was the most important” (O’Grada, 2007: 43). The main advantages were that it could easily be cultivated as well as used for cooking, as potatoes could even be grown in poor quality land such as bogs and rocky hillsides. The moist and temperate climate of the island provided further ideal conditions for potato cultivation. Additionally, potatoes were very nutritious and in combination with buttermilk, they supplied all nutrients necessary for a healthy diet. Although a solely potato based diet sounds poor, the size, fertility and longevity of the Irish population proved the opposite. The life expectancy of the Irish male, with about 38, was quite high compared to the rest of Europe, and the average Irish man was two inches taller than the British average. Considering all these facts, the potato was by no means an inferior food, as suggested by the elite.²³

On the other hand, growing potatoes had also a number of disadvantages. The dependence on a single crop meant that during periodic crop failures there was nothing else to draw on. Moreover, the potato could not be stored for a long period and its bulk made the transport expensive and difficult.²⁴ Besides, because of their easy growing and cooking, a number of influential people made potatoes responsible for the “twin evils which permeated the west of Ireland: subdivision and ever-increasing population growth” (Kinealy, 1994: 5).

The potato was mostly cultivated in the west rather than east where corn growing, intended for export to Britain, was widespread (Edwards and Williams 98). Consequently, the potato-eating people, generally the poorest and least literate members of society, were located in the western part of the country. As the potato could grow in poorest conditions with the least necessary labour, a small patch of land was enough to food a large family. The farmers planted the potatoes in late spring and harvested in late August. The crop was stored in pits and consumed until the following May, and therefore, the time between the old and new crop was the hardest for poor families depending on potatoes. For those who could not afford to buy oatmeal, the only way to survive during the summer

²³ O’Grada, 1999, 18; Litton, 15.

²⁴ Kinealy, 1994, 5; Litton, 15.

months was either begging, or migrating to Britain for labour.²⁵

The whole economic structure of the Irish agriculture was based on the potato. Certainly, farmers raised other crops as well, however, these were sold in order to pay the rents. As a consequence of growing population, high rents, fluctuating prices and decrease in industry the cottiers and the farmers became increasingly dependent on the potato. The growing demand for potatoes forced the farmers to grow the best yielding but worst quality type called *lumper* or *horse potatoes*. Initially cultivated to feed animals, this could grow on the poorest land, was very soft and watery, yet less rich in vitamins. Although, it was immune to familiar potato diseases such as *dry rot* or *taint*, it had no resistance to the fungal disease causing the Great Famine.²⁶

2.2. The Coming of the Famine

The Great Hunger of the mid-19th-century Ireland was the result of a successive failure of the potato crop caused by a fungal potato disease called *blight* or *phythophthora infestans*.²⁷ The fungus that caused the disease first “attacked the potato leaves and then spread through the foliage to the actual potato” (Kinealy, 1994: 33) leaving behind a black and rotten plant. Eamonn Mac Dhuírnín, a retired national teacher from County Donegal, portrays the coming of the blight in a questionnaire distributed by the Irish Folklore Commission at the 100th anniversary of the Famine in 1945 as follows:

Early in 1845, to all appearances, there was going to be a fine crop as the potatoes grew well and were far advanced for the time of year. However in the latter days of June a dense fog came in from the sea and lasted three or four days. When the fog cleared away the potato stalks withered away in a couple of nights. The fields became black and, in a week's time, not a stalk remained. (...) (Póirtéir, 1995: 35)

While the 19th century scientists claimed that the disease started in South America, modern scientists have now suggested Mexico as the origin of the

²⁵ Kinealy, 1994, 5; Litton, 15.

²⁶ Eagleton, 77; Edwards and Williams, 121 f.; Litton, 16.

²⁷ Litton, 17.

blight²⁸ which was probably imported to Europe in 1843 together with guano, a fertilizer. The first appearance of the blight in Europe was reported “in the Courtrai area of Belgium towards the end of June 1845” (Bourke 805), which rapidly spread to other countries and caused the death of thousands of people in Belgium, France, Germany, Switzerland, Netherlands, and England, before it reached Ireland in the autumn of the same year. However, in these countries the consequences were less severe than in Ireland, as people were less dependent on the potato and in 1846 a terrible drought had wiped out the blight.²⁹ Ireland with its temperate climate provided excellent conditions for the blight to spread easily and last longer, and the heavy dependence on the potato caused the death of hundreds of thousands of Irish people.

As in Ireland the potato was generally harvested later than in other countries, the extent of the crop failure was not obvious before autumn. In early September of 1845 first sightings of the disease in Ireland were published in the English journal ‘*The Gardeners Chronicle*’, which announced that “the potato Murrain has unequivocally declared itself in Ireland. (...) Where will Ireland be in the event of a universal potato rot?” (Kinealy, 1994: 31-32). The journal quickly became “the recognised authority on the potato disease”, (Kinealy, 1994: 31-32) although not able to find the reason or a remedy for the disease.

Scientists disagreed about the cause and treatment of the disease and the suggestions they made proved to be unsuccessful. While some made the cold weather responsible, others considered insects or “some poisonous ‘miasma’ in the air” as the source of the disease (Litton 17). One school of opinion even believed in a divine punishment as an aftermath of the Catholic Emancipation. In fact, years later scientists discovered a fungus, which infected the potato crops through its spores spread by the wind, as the source of the disease. And it was not until the 1880s that a fungicidal spray was found against this blight.³⁰

As soon as the blight emerged, the government ordered the police to keep

²⁸ Austin Bourke, 808.

²⁹ Litton, 17.

³⁰ Kinealy, 1994, 33; Litton, 17.

records of the spread of the blight. According to these records the worst affected counties in the first year were Waterford, Antrim, Clare and Monaghan.³¹ The following extract from a Constabulary report on the state of the potato crop in 1845 is an example of such a record:

Donegal Carndonagh Nov 12 The disease is increasing fast, particularly in the pits. The farmers are generally trying the suggestions of the Commissioners.

Kildare Kildare Nov 13 Since the fall of rain, the crop is rapidly running to decay. The poorer class of people are beginning to despair.

Tipp S.R. Tipperary Nov 12 The disease has spread extensively in the pits, a large portion of the potatoes pitted as sound 3 or 4 weeks ago being now bad and in some instances *unfit for any use*. On the lowest calculation, one third of the entire crop is diseased: & though the produce of this season is considered to be from 1/6 to 1/7 greater than that of last year, there must be a great deficiency. The people seem very regardless of the advice circulated – more particularly the poorer class whose crops are the most affected.
(Litton 20)

In this report one can recognise the extent of the blight and the desperate situation of poor people who were gradually facing the subsequent disaster of the following years. Since neither the cause, nor a remedy for the disease was discovered, people had to rely on the government's suggestions and to wait for help. In the first year of the blight less than one-third of the crop was lost. Even this was terrible for the people who depended on this single source of food.³² Nevertheless, the worst was yet to come. In the following years of the famine it spread across the country, and affected the poor west more seriously.

2.3. Efforts of Relief

As a first reaction to the obvious spreading of the blight, a number of concerned citizens established the *Mansion House Committee* by the end of October 1845. The Committee required the government to activate employment on public works,

³¹ Litton, 17.

³² Litton, 17.

stop the export of corn and close the distilleries.³³ At this stage the Committee was thinking of short-term aid, as the blight was considered to be a widespread once-off event and the crop to come back to normal amount in the following year, which was usually the case. Nobody had thought that the blight would lead to such an extent of destruction and devastate the country in the following years to come.³⁴

2.3.1. Poor Relief before the Famine³⁵

Before 1838, the poor relief in Ireland was based almost exclusively on private charity. After the Act of Union, Britain increasingly “became involved in the issue of poor relief in Ireland” (Kinealy, 1994: 18). Periodic crop failures and depressions, following the Napoleonic Wars in 1815³⁶, increased the poor rates in both countries. Consequently, the government began to think about reformation of the poor relief following the principles of political economy. An appropriate solution seemed to be provided by the local administrators Thomas Whately and George Nicholls, who advocated the end of outdoor relief and the introduction of indoor relief in workhouses. Basically, the life within workhouses should be made as unattractive as possible to hinder people from seeking relief, while ensuring that only the really destitute should get relief.

The outcome of the poor relief debate was the ‘*Poor Law Act*’ of 1834 in England, which was based on the report of the *Royal Commission on Poor Laws*. It was characterized by the ideas of the political economy, above all the Malthusian theory. After the English Poor Law was introduced in 1834, the government

³³ Distilleries: where grain was distilled to produce alcohol such as Whiskey.

³⁴ Kinealy, 1994, 33; Litton, 21.

³⁵ Kinealy, 1994, 12 ff.

³⁶ “French revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, a series of wars between 1792 and 1815 that ranged France against shifting alliances of other European powers and that produced a brief French hegemony over most of Europe. The revolutionary wars, which may for convenience be held to have been concluded by 1801, were originally undertaken to defend and then to spread the effects of the French Revolution. With Napoleon’s rise to absolute power, France’s aims in war reverted to simple aggrandizement of influence and territory.” (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/219456/French-revolutionary-and-Napoleonic-wars>)

turned its attention to Ireland and its struggle with poverty. The main concern of the British government was the rapid increase of the Irish population, which was believed to have a dangerous impact on Britain. Malthus shared this fear and even suggested that the population of Ireland,

particularly in the poorest part of the agricultural sector, had to be reduced. (...) the land in Ireland is infinitely more peopled than in England; and to give full effect to the natural resources of the country, a great part of the population should be swept from the soil. (qtd. in Kinealy, 1994: 16)

Prior to the whole debate on the poor relief system in Ireland, in 1833, a Royal Commission, with Archbishop Whately as the chairman, was assigned to investigate the condition of the poor class in Ireland. After three years of extensive survey, the Commissioners came to the conclusion that state intervention was important, but they rejected the Poor Law model existing in England. Instead, they recommended the promotion of economic development of the country. The political economists, together with Westminster, were highly sceptical about these recommendations. One of the harshest critics of the Poor Inquiry was the Home Secretary, Lord John Russell, who should replace Peel in 1846 and become the Prime Minister during the famine.

Dissatisfied with the results of the Royal Commission, the government sent George Nicholls, a Commissioner of the English Poor Law, who did not know the country, to Ireland for a new investigation. In his survey he came to the conclusion that the English Poor Law system would be suitable for Ireland. He declared that the workhouse system would solve the problem of poverty, “help Ireland through its ‘transition’ period [and] improve ‘the character, habits and social condition of the people’” likewise (Kinealy, 1994: 21). Subsequently, a Poor Law, based on the recommendations of Nicholls, was introduced in Ireland in 1838 and Nicholls was appointed the first resident Poor Law Commissioner in Ireland. Although corresponding to the English Poor Law of 1834, the Irish Poor Law was stricter than its counterpart. Principally, pauperism had to be treated more harshly than in England: relief was only to be provided within the workhouse and outdoor relief had to be prevented. Another important component of the Act was the introduction of a new local tax known as ‘*poor rates*’, which should be used to

fund the poor relief system. The Poor Law Act, passed in 1843, made landlords “liable to pay poor rates on land valued at under £4 per annum” (Kinealy, 1994: 23). This Act predominantly affected the landlords with fairly subdivided property situated in the west. Instead of considering poor relief as a state duty, the British government believed that landlords owning property in Ireland were after all responsible for their tenants. This was the general tendency of the government concerning poor relief during the famine. And even though some of the landlords indeed looked after their tenants, most of them did not care and were only interested in making profit from the situation, “either by claiming state aid or by clearing their tenants from the land” (Litton 24).

2.3.2. The Scientific Commission³⁷

By mid-October 1845 reports of spread of the blight alarmed the British Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel. He realized the approaching disaster in Ireland and subsequently, appointed a Scientific Commission to search for the cause of the blight and find a remedy for it. The Commission consisted of the Scottish chemist, Dr. Lyon Playfair, the English botanist, Dr. John Lindley, and the Irish scientist Sir Robert Kane. According to the report of the Commission the blight was more extensive than suggested by local constabulary records, so that “one-half of the crop was destroyed, or unfit for use” (Litton 24). However, this was not true, since there was enough left to supply people until the following harvest. Unfortunately, the report of the Commissioners led to the false assumption that the crop would be back to normal the following year.

After extensive investigation the Scientific Commission came to the conclusion that the disease was a kind of “wet rot” caused by the moist weather (Litton 24). They also made numerous suggestions to protect the unaffected part of the crop and argued “that if only part of a potato was diseased, the remainder could still be consumed by humans” (Kinealy, 1994: 35). The recommendations of the Scientific Commission were published and distributed by the government throughout the whole country.

³⁷ Litton, 24 f.; Kinealy, 1994, 34 ff.

2.3.3. The Corn Laws and Indian Corn³⁸

The crop failure and food shortages gave rise to questioning the Corn Laws, which prohibited the import “of corn into the United Kingdom until the price of grain in the home market had reached a fixed price” (Kinealy, 1994: 36). The potato prices had doubled by December 1845 and food prices were increasing gradually. At the same time, grain was still being exported to Britain. In reaction to this, public meetings were held, where prominent citizens demanded the ban on exports, and simultaneously the import of grain. At the same time, this would mean that Corn Laws had to be repealed, and this was something that Britain firmly resisted. British traders would lose profits, if the laws were repealed, since the Corn Laws dictated high taxes on foreign crops exported to Britain, and so, kept the grain prices high. Peel seemed to be the only politician who recognised the looming disaster in Ireland and knew that only large amounts of corn imports could avoid a famine. The rest of his party, the Tories (Conservatives), was strictly opposed to any kind of state intervention with the free market, and thus, in December 1845 Peel had to resign. The opposition party, the Whigs³⁹ (Liberals), under Lord John Russell, was in favour of ending the Corn Laws. Since Russell was not able to form a cabinet because of disagreement within the party, Peel returned to his position as the Prime Minister and finally repealed the Corn Laws in June 1846.

In November 1845, Peel had secretly ordered the purchase of Indian Corn (maize) worth £100,000, from America, with which he hoped to weaken the distress in Ireland. The amount of corn imported by Peel was enough to feed 490,240 people for a period of three months, at the quantity of one pound of grain per head per day, which was generous for the time, and thus, opposed by many

³⁸ Litton, 24 ff.; Kinealy, 1994, 46 ff.

³⁹ “Whig and Tory, members of two opposing political parties or factions in England, particularly during the 18th century. Originally “Whig” and “Tory” were terms of abuse introduced in 1679 during the heated struggle over the bill to exclude James, duke of York (afterward James II), from the succession. Whig—whatever its origin in Scottish Gaelic—was a term applied to horse thieves and, later, to Scottish Presbyterians; it connoted nonconformity and rebellion and was applied to those who claimed the power of excluding the heir from the throne. Tory was an Irish term suggesting a papist outlaw and was applied to those who supported the hereditary right of James despite his Roman Catholic faith.” (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/641802/Whig-and-Tory>)

members of the government. Due to unpleasant weather conditions, the first delivery did not arrive in Ireland before February 1846. The corn was stored in two main depots, in Cork and Limerick, and other small depots in different parts of the country, “especially in the south and west, where the famine was most severe” (Speed 30). The Commissariat Department of the army was responsible for the depots and for the distribution of the corn. They sold it either directly to people, or to the Relief Committees, “who were then allowed to give it away to the destitute, or re-sell to those able to pay”, (Speed 31) at cost price. Later on, the Treasury changed its policy and decided to sell the corn at local market price, justifying their decision that allegedly many people could afford it.

As the British government did not wish to interfere with the free market, the purchase of Indian Corn provided an alternative to other crops imported by private traders. Additionally, Sir Randolph Routh, the Chairman of the temporary Relief Commission, who learned about the availability of the Indian Corn during his residence in America, favoured this corn because of being nutritious. He claimed that “one meal in the morning was sufficient to support a labourer throughout the whole day” and that it also reduced the “likelihood of fever” (Kinealy, 1994: 47). The Indian Corn had also the advantage of being bulky and filling, and because of its cheap and nourishing characteristics, it was assumed to substitute the failure of the potato crop.

Unfortunately, the Indian Corn had also many disadvantages. It was hard to digest, and despite of stomach filling qualities, did not supply the same nutritional value as potatoes. This made the bright yellow food, called ‘Peel’s brimstone’, very unpopular. In some workhouses, even riots broke out “when corn meal was served” (Speed 32). However, as the famine got worse people accepted any kind of food in desperation. Later, it was discovered that it was easier to digest when mixed with one to three parts of oatmeal. In addition, the corn was difficult to mill and since Ireland had only a few mills, subsequent imports consisted of cornmeal rather than grain. Despite the growing destitution, the government was determined to wait until the last possible moment to both preserve the limited supplies and compel Irish people to consume their own resources as long as possible.

2.3.4. The Relief Commission⁴⁰

The Relief Commission, established in November 1845 by Sir Robert Peel, was the first efficient measure taken by the government. Initially, the Relief Commission was intended to be temporary, however, as the blight appeared to last longer, it was reorganized in January 1846, with Sir Randolph Routh as its Chairman. The Commission, which consisted of “representatives of the army, police, Poor Law Commissioners and the Dublin Castle administration” (Litton 29), was responsible for organizing and distributing relief. It also planned to place food depots all over the country, where the stored grain would be sold at cost price to local relief committees, which again would re-sell it to the local people at cost price.

The whole administration of this system was funded by the British Treasury, guided by the *Permanent Secretary Charles Trevelyan*. Trevelyan was enthusiastically involved in the organization of the relief schemes but in fact, he did not favour the idea of providing aid. He believed that “the Famine was a punishment from God for an idle, ungrateful and rebellious country” (Litton 30). Basically, the Treasury gave out the money required by different relief departments, however, its influence soon spread into all administration matters and Trevelyan rapidly became an authority figure in the Irish issue.

The local relief committees, of which 648 existed by August 1846, consisted of voluntary bodies of both Catholic and Protestant “landlords, clergy, merchants and large farmers” (Kinealy, 1994: 41). The relief committees were on the one hand responsible for selling food aid, and on the other hand for raising money locally with which they bought and distributed the food, imported by the government. However, it was not always easy to collect money from the local landowners and ratepayers. If a person did not have money to buy food, a task of work was required in return. Moreover, the relief committees were not allowed to provide relief “in the form of money unless absolutely necessary” (Kinealy, 1994: 45), in other words, when the alternative was starvation.

⁴⁰ Litton, 29 f.; Kinealy, 1994, 41 f.

The Relief Commission was superior to the local relief committees, to which it granted an equal amount of money raised locally. In practice, this sum was often smaller than raised by the local committees. A further precondition for being granted food aid was that it could only be given out, when there was no place in local workhouses. But this rule was very often broken, since only 100,000 workhouse places were available in the whole country. Additionally, the committees even distributed free food in regions with great poverty, though they were not allowed to.

2.3.5. Public Works

As people were increasingly not able to pay for food, some way of earning money seemed necessary for the relief committees. Like relief committees, public works had already been employed as a means of relief in earlier famines and were administered by the Board of Works, established in 1831. Peel and the Irish Executive in Dublin Castle had already discussed the necessity of public works in November 1845, but it was not until March 1846 that the government put the Board in charge of relief measures.

The growing number of destitute people forced the Relief Commission to start discussing the implementation of relief works in developing fisheries and harbours, building roads and drainage schemes, as well as other improvements on estates. If relief schemes were funded by the Board of Works, responsible for “roads, bridges, harbours and fisheries” (Litton 34), only half of the funds had to be paid back by the counties. This was called 'half-grant' scheme. Not surprisingly, road building and repairing were the most preferred fields of public employment. However, the half-grant system was frequently misused by landowners and ratepayers, who saw the chance to raise capital for their counties without immediate cost to them. Hence, many applications that poured into the Board of Works were from places, where help was not urgent.

There were lots of other irregularities in the organisation of the public works. The understaffed Board of Works was overcharged with the huge amount of applications, which caused long delays and made poor people wait in agony. The

disorders continued even when the works started. People not actually deserving were given work, while those in desperate need were neglected. Basically, many works, especially road building, were useless and it was for the most part “just work for the sake of the wages” (Speed 35). Roads were either built in remote and deserted areas where they were not needed at all, or were leading nowhere.

Although it was intended to employ men for these jobs, in practice also female workers were occupied. Besides, the working conditions were miserable and extremely hard.⁴¹ A description of an English visitor of a scene during his trip to Tobercurry summarizes the whole situation:

We here first encountered the public works so called. These consisted in making new roads, and altering old ones, in many cases worse than useless, and obviously undertaken without judgement for the mere sake of employment. Independently, of the moral effects of useless labour, it was melancholy and degrading in the extreme to see the women and girls withdrawn from all that was decent and proper and labouring in mixed gangs on the public roads. Not only in digging with the spade, and with the pick, but in carrying loads of earth and turves on their backs, and wheeling barrows like men, and breaking stones, are they employed. My heart often sank within me at the obviously *deteriorating* effects of such occupations, while the poor neglected children were crouched in groups around bits of lighted turves in the various sheltered corners along the line. (...) (qtd. in Speed 34)

As relief works were paid better than other labour, people saw the chance to earn regular wages, and neglected farm labour and other occupations. Instead of ploughing the fields or sowing crops, which could have helped to ease the distress, people were occupied with building useless roads. When public works were introduced, the wages of 9 to 10 pence a day were sufficient enough for a worker to feed his family. However, food prices increased considerably within the following months, “so that a week’s work brought less and less food” (Daly in: Poirteir 130-131). Additionally, the lack of ready money as well as bad organisation caused long delays in payments so that labourers and their families were starving while waiting for their salary. Occasionally, pay clerks deliberately held back wages and sold the workers food on credit, for which they charged high

⁴¹ Speed, 33.

prices.⁴²

In June 1846, the leader of the Whigs, Lord John Russell, became Prime Minister. The new government was worried “that the Irish were becoming too dependent on government aid” and therefore, decided to end the work of relief committees. Besides, the increasing expenditure on public works was bothering the authorities, so that the Treasury ordered the Board of Works to reduce the wages in order to push people away from public works. The result was riots and protest meetings in different parts of the country. By the end of 1846, the number of people occupied in relief works had increased to 390,000, and in spring 1847 this almost doubled to about 750,000. At this stage, it was work just for work’s sake and there was no choice, but to work or die.⁴³

In July 1846, Trevelyan decided the public works to come to an end. The Board of Works rejected this, as they were convinced that the blight would possibly reoccur. After all, the relief works continued for another year and finally were closed down in July 1847.

2.3.6. Workhouses⁴⁴

Following the Irish Poor Law Act of 1838, which did not allow any kind of outdoor relief, 130 workhouses were built around the country to offer indoor relief instead. Since the Poor Law was created to deal with small numbers, all workhouses could only hold 100,000 inmates altogether. Considering the fact that during the famine years up to 50 % of the population required relief, this seems to be a totally inaccurate way of providing relief.

The philosophy of the Irish Poor Law was to impede all, except the absolutely destitute, from applying for relief in workhouses. For this purpose, the architecture had to be simple, uniform, unattractive and the life inside workhouses unpleasant. Initially, only whole family units were allowed to enter the workhouse, and “once

⁴² Speed, 34.

⁴³ Litton, 39 f.; Daly in: Poirteir, 1995, 131.

⁴⁴ Kinealy, 24 f. & 60 ff.; Litton, 54 f.

inside, the families and sexes were to be strictly segregated” (Kinealy, 1994: 25). However, at the height of the famine paupers from very young to very old age were accepted, no matter if whole families or just singles. Idleness as well as long residence was undesirable and the diet monotonous and inferior to that of the poor outside the workhouses.⁴⁵ The inmates were treated like criminals and the prison-like discipline made the workhouse system unpopular. Besides, the admission to a workhouse did not guarantee survival, as people died of fever caused by overcrowding.⁴⁶

When the blight first occurred in the autumn of 1845, the guardians were permitted to give out food other than potatoes. At the same time, the government ordered the production of “farina, starch, flour etc. from diseased potatoes” (Kinealy, 1994: 66), which was a recommendation of the Scientific Commission. However, this turned out to be rather expensive and impractical and was soon abandoned. During the winter of 1845-6, diseased potatoes were not only eaten in workhouses but also among the poorest, which had fatal consequences for their health. Seán Mac Cuinneagáin, a descendent of famine victims, describes how people made bread of rotten potatoes:

Boxty was made of the rotten potatoes. The potatoes were grated and put in a tub. Water was poured until the tub was overflowing, when the rotten lighter stuff flowed away leaving the more solid stuff to sink. This method of making bread was followed in the later famines too.
(qtd. in Póirtéir, 1995: 57)

By the beginning of 1846, many workhouses were less than half full and some had no inmates at all. A year later, the workhouses all over the country were overflowing, although the famine had not yet reached its climax. Simultaneously, the already low care and hygienic standards broke entirely down and the death rate increased rapidly. Even though the food was often foul and rotten, people were begging in front of the gates of the workhouses to be let in, in the hope of getting food of any kind. By the end of February 1847, 116,000 people were accommodated in workhouses, including 63,000 children, of which most were

⁴⁵ Kinealy, 24 f.

⁴⁶ Edwards and Williams, 250.

orphaned. Parents abandoned their children either because they could not feed them any longer, or saw a better chance of survival inside the workhouses. Similarly, many emigrating families left their children behind “to follow on later, but never left the workhouse alive” (Litton 55).

The workhouses were financed by poor rates paid by local landowners, except for those valued under £4. In this case, the landlord was responsible for the rate. In July 1846 Lord John Russell came to power and ordered to continue the relief operations until the provisions expired. When the blight reappeared in autumn, the new government decided to end all relief measures, and establish soup kitchens financed by local rates, as they believed that otherwise Ireland would depend on English money forever. In July 1849, long after this decision, there were still about 200,000 people inside the workhouses in addition to another 800,000 who were receiving outdoor relief.⁴⁷

2.3.7. Private Charity

Reports on horrifying scenes in Ireland during the winter 1846-7 led religious groups to organize charitable aid.⁴⁸ One of them was the ‘*Central Relief Committee of the Society of Friends*’ (known as Quakers)⁴⁹ founded in November 1846. The Irish Quakers were in close contact with American and English Quakers, who assisted them with arranging food from abroad. They did not want to get involved neither in politics nor interfering in grain trade, and therefore, supplied only rice. Their main goal was to ensure that people were able to help themselves. Thus, they not only provided food and clothing, but also seed to encourage new crops, equipment such as large boilers to make soup and also helped to develop fisheries. They established soup kitchens in areas where help

⁴⁷ Speed, 36; O'Grada, 2000, 39.

⁴⁸ Edwards and Williams, 235.

⁴⁹ “Society of Friends, also called Friends Church, byname Quakers, Christian group that arose in mid-17th-century England, dedicated to living in accordance with the “Inward Light,” or direct inward apprehension of God, without creeds, clergy, or other ecclesiastical forms. As most powerfully expressed by George Fox (1624–91), Friends felt that their “experimental” discovery of God would lead to the purification of all of Christendom. It did not; but Friends founded one American colony and were dominant for a time in several others, and though their numbers are now comparatively small, they continue to make disproportionate contributions to science, industry, and especially to the Christian effort for social reform.” (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/220221/Society-of-Friends>)

was acute. Another important organization was the '*British Association for the Relief of the Extreme Distress in the Remote Parishes of Ireland and Scotland*', which had raised £470,000, and "worked through local relief committees, storing and distributing food supplies" (Litton 57). Another aspect to be pointed out is the active role of the Catholic Church in raising and distributing relief, although not having any relief organization.⁵⁰ It should also be highlighted that the aid provided by the Catholic Church "continued beyond 1847, when many other forms of private relief had dried up" (Kinealy, 2002: 83).

Except for religious organisations, there were also other charity groups. A group of leading elite founded an association, which collected about half a million pounds. Additionally, there were small organisations like ladies' associations, which sold their knitting or sewing on bazaars and plays. But sometimes also private individuals and clergymen acted on their own and brought food and clothing to people in need. The lay Catholic organisation *The Society of St Vincent de Paul*, which is still active in Ireland, was founded to involve local people in relief measures.⁵¹ However, help came from all over the world, the United States, Africa, Mexico, St Petersburg, Constantinople and many parts of the British Empire among them Australia, Canada, India, Jamaica, British Guiana, and Barbados. The great distress of the Irish people had even affected the Native Americans emotionally, among them Cherokee or Choctaw Indians, which collected large sums to help the starving people in Ireland.⁵²

One phenomenon of private charity worth mentioning, called 'souperism', is that Protestant missionaries used the hunger to convert Catholics.⁵³ This meant that people only got food, if they went to a Protestant church, school or Bible class. Sometimes Protestants acted against the Catholic faith and served, for instance, meat soup on Fridays, when Catholics were allowed to eat fish only. "Hunger compelled some people to do these things, but as a result they hated the people who gave them soup and most went back to Catholicism after the famine" (Speed 42). Apart from this, most of the charity organisations worked well.

⁵⁰ Kinealy, 2002, 83.

⁵¹ Speed, 39 f.; Litton, 57.

⁵² Kinealy, 2002, 74 ff.

⁵³ Whelan in: Poirteir, 1995, 135.

2.3.8. Soup Kitchens

By the beginning of 1847, the number of employees in public works increased to more than 500,000, while another 400,000 was still searching for work. Meanwhile, the Board of Works was running out of money and work. The government recognised that relief works did not make sense any longer and that it would be cheaper to give out free food instead of work in exchange with relief. They finally accepted that only by distributing food people could be saved from starving, and in this respect, the soup kitchens of the Quakers seemed to offer a proper substitute.⁵⁴ Subsequently, in February 1847 a Temporary Relief Act, or the Soup Kitchen Act, was passed to establish soup kitchens instead of relief works. It was hoped to mitigate the situation until the harvest of 1847, and until the amendment of the Irish Poor Law had started outdoor relief.⁵⁵

Moreover, the new Temporary Relief Act should be widely financed from the poor rates raised locally. By doing so, the government intended to shift relief costs on local landowners. However, the new relief act had also a positive effect on the existing relief policies, as now relief and work were separated.⁵⁶ At the beginning of February, a new Relief Commission was established to administer the soup kitchens. It was chaired by Major-General Sir John Burgoyne, along with the previous chairman Sir Randolph Routh, “the representatives of Dublin castle, the police and the Poor Law Commissioners” (Litton 60). The commission was responsible for giving instructions to the local committees and for supervising “the provision of funds for the local bodies”, which came from “local poor rates, subscriptions and government donations” (Edwards and Williams 237).

Unfortunately, the organisation of the relief committees and the opening of soup kitchens were not keeping up with closing down of public works, so that in many regions public works had to be prolonged. In May 1847, about one million people were getting supplies from soup kitchens while another 2.3 million discharged

⁵⁴ Litton, 56; Speed, 36.

⁵⁵ Litton, 59; Edwards and Williams, 237.

⁵⁶ Kinealy, 1994, 86.

labourers did not receive aid of any kind.⁵⁷ It was not until the summer of 1847 that relief committees were established in all except three 130 Poor Law Union districts.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the free distribution of food was still not to be found everywhere, when by the end of June 96 % of relief workers were set free. This suggested that around 3,165,000 people required relief, but only 2,730,000 received it, which further meant that 209,000 or almost 15 % were not reached by the soup kitchens.⁵⁹

Initially, food was given out uncooked and this caused many problems. People did not know how to cook Indian meal properly, as they were used to cooking potatoes only. This led to stomach complaints and diarrhoea, and additionally, some people sold the uncooked food to buy tobacco, tea, or even alcohol instead of bringing it to their families. As this could not be done with cooked food, later the rations were given cooked.⁶⁰ Besides, cooked food was cheaper and fewer people claimed it because people considered it as degrading. They preferred to starve instead of standing in line in front of soup kitchens.

The food being issued was not soup at all, but a “thick porridge called ‘stirabout’, made either from oatmeal or from Indian corn meal” (Speed 36). The daily ration was one pound, but Trevelyan claimed that if they added boiling water, it would swell up to three pounds. In order to save costs many soup kitchens provided soup with poor nutrition; others supplied extremely thin soup, which caused diarrhoea and scurvy, resulting from vitamin deficiency. In addition, people who were strong enough had to walk miles to the next soup kitchen to find themselves in long queues, where tragic scenes occurred. Weakened from hunger people “dropped dead where they stood” and very often fought “to get near the head of the line, the stronger snatched food from the weaker” (Litton 66).

The soup kitchen system was indeed frequently abused. While in some areas the amount of food provided was insufficient, in other areas this was far too large, as

⁵⁷ O'Donnell, 74.

⁵⁸ Edwards and Williams, 239.

⁵⁹ Litton, 61.

⁶⁰ Litton, 62; Speed, 36.

more people were put on lists than actually lived there. Some farmers set their labourers free, only to engage them after they had got on the lists. In other cases “Committee members and even poor law guardians put themselves on the lists” (Edwards and Williams 240), although food aid was intended to go exclusively to impoverished people. Sometimes, the rations even “went rather to the landlords’ livestock, than to the starving population, while the men in charge of the boilers kept food to sell” (Speed 37).

Overall, the soup kitchen aid worked well. By the middle of August around three million people received food at soup kitchens every day. Its success was mainly the result of the charity of individuals. The risk of catching the fever was the major challenge for those who worked in food aid. Particularly, the Quakers were working hard in organizing the soup kitchens, yet gradually feeling overwhelmed. Large quantities of wheat, barley and Indian corn, being imported from February onwards, supported the success of the soup kitchens. In the meantime, “oats, wheatmeal and barley were still being exported from Ireland”⁶¹ (Litton 67), though in small scale, as Russell wanted to avoid food shortages in England.

Although the need for free food was not over yet, in September 1847, the Relief Commission decided to close down the soup kitchens and start outdoor relief, which was embedded in a new Poor Law Act declaring that

the non-able-bodied poor could be given relief either in the workhouse or outside, (...) The Boards of Guardians would decide who would qualify. The able-bodied poor, (...) could also be relieved if they were unemployed and destitute, but only inside the workhouse. If the workhouse was full, or was infected with fever, the able-bodied could be granted relief outside for just two months, if they agreed to hard labour. (Litton 71-72)

The harshest component of the Act was the ‘quarter-acre clause’, also called Gregory Clause⁶², which excluded tenants working on more than a quarter-acre of land from Poor Law aid. Accordingly, destitute people who needed help gave up their land, and this, again helped the landlords to evict the tenants from their

⁶¹ Litton, 66 f.; Edwards and Williams, 241 ff.

⁶² Gregory Clause: named for William H. Gregory, M.P. for Dublin city, 1842-47.

estates in exchange for food and ship money.⁶³

The British government was getting “increasingly impatient with the endless famine and the constant financial drain” (Litton 72). Unlike soup kitchens, outdoor relief should entirely be financed from Irish resources. However, in some counties where farmers were too destitute, it was impossible to collect enough rates. Many Unions became even bankrupt, and outdoor relief turned out to be more expensive than workhouses, so that lists were kept small and names were crossed off for the simplest reasons.

2.4. Famine Diseases

During the famine people did not only die in consequence of hunger but mostly due to famine diseases. Speed suggests that probably “ten times as many people died from disease as from hunger alone” (42). The most widespread and dangerous diseases were ‘typhus’ and ‘relapsing fever’, called the ‘famine fever’ by the Irish people, as “people thought it was the direct result of hunger” (Speed 43). Both typhus as well as relapsing fever was transmitted by lice, a fact, discovered only sixty years later. Among both, typhus was the most serious disease, as the chance of survival was very low. Typical symptoms were high temperature and delirium, accompanied by rash, vomiting, dreadful sores and sometimes also gangrene. It was also called the “black fever” (Litton 82), as the patient’s face swelled up and “the blood vessels under the skin burst, turning it almost black” (Speed 44). Besides, the typhus patient stank to an almost unbearable extent.⁶⁴ Relapsing fever did not necessarily lead to death. High temperature, vomiting, pains and nose bleeding were general symptoms. It was often accompanied by jaundice and was also referred to as the “yellow fever” (Litton 82). The fever ended after five or six days but the patient relapsed about a week later and there would be many relapses before the disease died away.⁶⁵

Even though the fever was the disease of the poor class, via contamination it

⁶³ Litton, 72 ff.

⁶⁴ Litton, 82.

⁶⁵ Geary in: Póirtéir, 1995, 75 f.

spread to superior classes, among whom it proved much more harmful. The number of deaths from typhus was much higher among middle-aged and elderly upper class doctors, magistrates, authority members or clergy because of the enormous strain on the heart. In comparison, mortality among the poor was lower because children and adolescents had milder attacks and possibly adults had developed some immunity from infections in their childhood. Relapsing fever, by comparison, was almost unknown among the upper classes, even though no age group was spared from catching it. Another aspect is that unlike the poor, the fever did not run through the whole family in upper social classes⁶⁶

Except for typhus and relapsing fever, there were other diseases spreading around at that time. Dysentery, or the 'bloody flux', affected the bowels, causing painful diarrhoea, ulcers and gangrene. It occurred under unhygienic conditions and pollution of water. Another widespread illness coming up in the last stages of starvation, was the non-infectious 'famine dropsy', also known as hunger oedema. This was solely the result of extreme hunger and caused the swelling of the body and limbs, which finally burst.⁶⁷ One further severe famine disease was scurvy, a result of lack of Vitamin C, causing the teeth to drop out, the joints to swell and the blood vessels to burst with serious haemorrhaging. Scurvy was not known in Ireland before, as potatoes were rich in Vitamin C. Other famine illnesses included "tuberculosis, bronchitis and measles" (O'Donnell 83), together with the eye infection 'ophthalmia', causing total or partial loss of sight, mainly affecting children.⁶⁸

The appearance and spread of famine diseases were largely a consequence of low sanitary standards. People who struggled with hunger were reasonably less able to care about their cleanness, as they had neither the energy nor the possibility for that. The famine also forced people to sell their "clothing and bedding to buy food, so that they stayed in the same dirty rags, day and night, week in and week out" (Speed 43). They crowded together in cabins where a fire was burning, or some food was to be found. The situation was the same in soup

⁶⁶ Edwards and Williams, 278 ff.

⁶⁷ Speed, 42.

⁶⁸ Litton, 83.

kitchens and workhouses which soon people charged in any hope of relief. In such conditions lice could multiply and spread easily and rapidly. Despaired people left their homes and carried the disease with them wherever they went, spreading around the whole country.⁶⁹

When the fever epidemic broke out early in 1847, there were only 28 hospitals and 500 dispensaries in Ireland. Since they could not cope with the rapidly increasing number of fever patients, the Central Board of Health established temporary fever hospitals throughout the country. Similarly, the workhouse hospitals were far too small and poorly equipped to deal with vast numbers of impoverished sick, so that temporary wooden “fever sheds” had to be built in some workhouses.⁷⁰

In fact, admission to a workhouse often meant the exchange of death from hunger for death by disease. In order to get food and shelter, destitute people pretended having the fever to enter hospitals, or committed minor crimes to be sent to prison, whereby they either got contaminated with the fever, or infected others. In April 1847, the government finally accepted that it was an epidemic and passed the Irish Fever Act, which shifted the responsibility for healthcare from the “overburdened and debt-ridden Boards of Guardians” (Litton 87) to the Relief committees. From 1850 on the diseases gradually dwindled as a result of decrease in crop failure. Thousands of people died in their cabins and “others were found dead along the roads, in ditches, in fields and deserted houses” (Edwards and Williams 309). In her study *Lights and Shades of Ireland* Asenath Nicholson describes such a terrible scene encountered inside a cabin:

... A cabin was seen closed one day a little out of the town, when a man had the curiosity to open it, and in a dark corner he found a family of the father, mother, and two children, lying in close compact. The father was considerably decomposed; the mother, it appeared, had died last, and probably fastened the door, which was always the custom when all hope was extinguished, to get into the darkest corner and die, where passers-by could not see them. Such *family* scenes were quite common, and the cabin was generally pulled down upon them for a grave. (qtd. in Litton, 40)

⁶⁹ Speed, 43 f.; Edwards and Williams, 271 f.

⁷⁰ Litton, 86 ff.

At that time deaths were not recorded officially and for the relief committees it was impossible to estimate their numbers. Although the census of 1851 provides some figures, the exact number of fever caused deaths will never be known.⁷¹

2.5. Evictions

The Poor Law amendment of 1843 had made landlords responsible to pay poor rates for each tenant who paid less than £4 in yearly rent. Since most tenants were working on small pieces of land and were neither able to pay their rents, nor the rates, the landlords were liable instead. These, however, were increasingly getting uncomfortable with the situation, which they feared to make bankrupt. The only way to save money was to evict the wretched tenants from their holdings and to re-rent the land in bigger parcels to prosperous people. Additionally, the 'quarter-acre clause' of 1847 demanded that tenants holding more than a quarter-acre of land could not obtain both indoor and outdoor relief. For the landlords, this was a welcome opportunity to get rid of their tenants, as people in desperate need voluntarily gave up their holdings to get relief, though some evictions were assisted by the landlords who offered their tenants money in exchange for their land.⁷²

The police started to keep records of evictions not earlier than 1849, and thus, the number of former evictions is not known. According to the official register 250,000 people were evicted between 1849 and 1854. However, considering the harshness and inhumanity of some landlords, the actual number of evictions is estimated to surpass half a million people, which corresponds to the number of about 49,000 families. Although there had been some evictions in 1846, the actual clearances, reinforced by the Gregory clause, began in 1847 and reached a peak between 1849 and 1850. In the following four years the eviction rates decreased, with the exception of county Mayo, where it remained high for another three years. From 1849 to 1854, most clearances took place in the west counties Clare, Mayo, Galway and Kerry, where people were poverty-stricken anyway.⁷³

⁷¹ Edwards and Williams, 295 ff.; Litton, 87.

⁷² Litton, 94.

⁷³ Donnelly in: Poirteir, 155 f.; Litton, 94 f.

In most cases, families were forced to give up their patch of land, the cabins being destroyed immediately. Woodham-Smith describes a heart-breaking and well-known case in *Ballinlass*, County Galway, in 1846, where 300 tenants were evicted with the support of police and troops because the landowner Mrs Gerrard, intended to turn the village into a grazing farm:

(...) the people were officially called on to give up possession, and the houses were then demolished – roof torn off, walls thrown down. The scene was frightful; women running wailing with pieces of their property and clinging to door-posts from which they had to be forcibly torn; men cursing, children screaming with fright. That night the people slept in the ruins; next day they were driven out, the foundations of the houses were torn up and razed, and no neighbour was allowed to take them in. (Woodham-Smith 71-72)

As mentioned previously, there were also thousands of tenants who surrendered their plots 'voluntarily' and "began to beg, usually heading for the nearest town" (Litton 95). There was obviously little voluntariness in their actions, as the landlords sometimes gave them a small sum of money and assured that they would be accepted in the workhouse, which was not always the case. As if hunger and destitution was not enough, people were now facing the misery of homelessness. The evicted families would dwell in ditches called a 'scalp', a two to three feet deep hole in the earth, covered with sticks and turf. "Slightly superior was a 'scalpeen', a rather larger hole often made within the ruins" (Woodham-Smith 72). People resided there until they were either hunted out from there too, or bad weather forced them to head to the workhouse.⁷⁴

From all the landlords, the Earl of Lucan was probably the worst. He expelled around 2,000 persons, destroyed 300 cabins in Ballinrobe, County Mayo, from 1846 to 1849. Next to him was the Marquis of Sligo who "cleared about one-quarter of his tenants altogether", allegedly for being "idle and dishonest" (Litton 98). Yet, it did not take long until victims of evictions took revenge on landlords. In 1847 twelve of them were murdered, apart from ten land occupiers, even though they had no tenants. Considering the fact that 9,500 destitute families had been evicted between 1846 and 1847, this seems to be rather a moderate

⁷⁴ Litton, 95 ff.; Woodham-Smith, 72.

proportion.⁷⁵

2.6. Emigration and Coffin Ships

Large-scale Irish emigration during the early 19th century was not a phenomenon caused by the famine. Poor economic conditions caused by the Napoleonic War forced people to emigrate after 1815 and cheap voyages were encouraging this. People were leaving Ireland in the hope of a better life, or friends and relatives asked them to follow. From 1815 to the beginning of the famine around 1,5 million people, mainly the young and strong, left Ireland for Britain, the United States, Canada and Australia. Massive emigration from the onset of the famine largely included people of any age group,⁷⁶ who were now leaving Ireland in order to escape from hunger and death.

For the landlords emigration provided a good opportunity to banish the tenants from their land, for whom they willingly paid the voyage. In other cases, people sold all their possessions to buy a ticket for the passage, were either helped by charities, or family members living overseas. Nevertheless, the number of emigrants assisted by landlords was far smaller than those who managed to pay the passage themselves, or were supported otherwise. Out of 250,000 people who emigrated in 1847, only 5,000, and of overall emigrants between 3 to 4 % were landlord-assisted. Famine emigration was not only encouraged by the landlords but also by Newspaper advertisements, placards, passenger companies as well as Poor Law Guardians, who expected a reduction in relief costs. An additional factor was the letters from previous emigrants who praised the new life and encouraged their family members to follow.⁷⁷

Most of the emigrants first sailed to Liverpool port, from where they set their voyage to America and Canada. Although the Irish intended to immigrate to the United States, the main destination for them was Canada, as the fares were cheaper. This was also an important reason for the landlords who either paid the

⁷⁵ Litton, 95 ff.; Donnelly in: Póirtéir, 159; O'Donnell, 99.

⁷⁶ Litton, 100; Speed, 63.

⁷⁷ Litton, 99 & 104; Speed, 65.

passage or even arranged ships to transport their tenants. Compared to British ships, the American vessels were in a far better condition. This also applied to the treatment of steerage passengers, their accommodation and food rations. The main harbours of America receiving Irish emigrants were New York, New Orleans and Philadelphia, while Quebec was the only port in Canada. Once landed there, the Irish headed for the United States simply because “Canada was cold, sparsely inhabited, and many of its people spoke only French” (Laxton 26). Apart from bad job opportunities, probably the main argument was that they did not want to live under the British rule any more.⁷⁸

The journey from Liverpool to Quebec was a torture for the half-starved, poorly clothed and often diseased people. They spent the long voyage of 40 days to three months in cramped, poorly built and unseaworthy ships – mostly British – called 'coffin ships'.⁷⁹ The steerage quarters were quite primitive and one berth had to be shared by four persons, who were not always members of one family but also male and female strangers. In addition, the lack of ventilation holes made the stench of too many bodies cramped together in a small space almost unbearable. The poor sanitary facilities lacking any opportunity for privacy deteriorated the situation.⁸⁰ While cabin passengers received all food and services “the emigrants in the steerage had to cook and fend for themselves” (Hollett 121). The Passenger Act assured one pound⁸¹ of food per day, which was quite a moderate amount because it was supposed that steerage passengers would bring food themselves. However, “at the height of the famine they had nothing to bring” (Speed 69) and thus, they depended on what the captain issued. Usually, this was oatmeal which had to be cooked on a few fire places on the open deck, apart from sea biscuits. Although 'passengers contract ticket' assured a daily ration of food and water, this was often reduced or withheld and frequently raw, unpalatable, mouldy and filthy.⁸² One of those coffin ships was the 83 year old 'Elizabeth and Sarah' which sailed off in July 1846 from County Mayo, with 276 passengers on board instead of 155, which were the

⁷⁸ Laxton, 26 ff.; Rees, 76.

⁷⁹ <http://www.historyplace.com/worldhistory/famine/coffin.htm> (THP).

⁸⁰ Rees, 73 ff.

⁸¹ Pound = 0,45 kilograms.

⁸² Speed, 69; Hollett, 145.

standard capacity of the ship.⁸³ It can be imagined how the condition on board was like: there was not enough water for all passengers and food was not supplied by the crew, even though

each passenger was entitled to be given 7 lbs of provisions each week (...). The 276 passengers shared 32 berths, and there was no sanitary facility of any kind. The voyage took eight weeks, because the captain took wrong course, and by the time the ship broke down and was towed into the St Lawrence River in September, 42 people had died. (Litton 107)

The overall conditions of the steerage provided an ideal setting for diseases to spread out. Outbreak of cholera, typhus and dysentery caused countless deaths amongst the emigrants. 1847 was the worst year of the famine, the year of the coffin ships with the highest mortality rate.

Although the intended destination of the emigrants was the United States, Canada had the biggest emigrant influx in 1847. Americans, who were predominantly Protestants, were concerned about the great inflow of Roman Catholic Irish and thus, increased the passenger fares, which “in 1847 were up to three times higher than fares to Canada” (THP). First ships containing emigrants did not land in Quebec before May 1847, after the St. Lawrence River finally melted and ship after ship arrived with hundreds of fevered passengers on board. The winter of 1846-47 had been hard so that many vessels got stuck in ice for weeks. An example was the *Albion* which sailed from Scotland on March 25, 1847 and did not arrive in Quebec until the following June 4.⁸⁴ Once landed, the ships were first sent to the quarantine station on Grosse Isle, but the limited medical inspection facilities with only 150 beds were soon overflowed. “By June, 40 vessels containing 14,000 Irish immigrants waited in a line extending two miles down the St. Lawrence”, and “by the summer, the line of ships had grown to several miles long” (THP). Due to insufficient number of medical staff, the passengers had to wait many days to see a doctor, meanwhile being infected by typhus. Hundreds of people died on the ships while waiting for the inspection, and the bodies were simply dumped into the river. Unable to deal with the huge

⁸³ Laxton, 39.

⁸⁴ <http://www.theshipslist.com/1847/index.htm>.

masses of sick people, the quarantine efforts were soon given up and the emigrants were allowed to enter the country without any medical inspection or treatment. About half of the Irish that survived the journey to Canada walked across the border to America. The rest was sent to Canadian cities such as Kingston, Toronto, and above all, Montreal.⁸⁵ The unskilled Irish emigrants were not very welcomed in either country because of carrying fever and poverty with them, which also made them unfit for work.⁸⁶

In 1847, around 100,000 Irish sailed to Canada and of those, “an estimated one out of five died from disease and malnutrition, including [the official number of] over five thousand at Gross Isle” (THP). However, it is assumed that the number of deaths on Gross Isle was considerably higher than the official count and considering the horrifying situation on Gross Isle, 15,000 would be closer to reality.⁸⁷ According to another source, the number of typhus fevered patients counted 30,000, of whom 20,000 died, “over 5,000 at sea, and 8,000 in Quebec and 7,000 in Montreal” (Laxton 38).

During the famine years of 1846 to 1850, over one million people left Ireland. Another four million followed between 1851 and 1910, as people were afraid that hunger might return. One-fifth of these late emigrants fled to Britain, Liverpool being the main destination. The flood of thousands into Liverpool caused serious problems of overcrowding and outbreak of typhus, at which the Parliament reacted with a Bill that allowed turning the ships back to Ireland. The sudden influx of impoverished, hungry and sickened emigrants had also frightened America. Following the British model, the American authorities too enforced a Passenger Act that did not allow the ships to land but forced them to sail to Canada.

⁸⁵ <http://www.historyplace.com/wordlhistory/famine/coffin.htm>.

⁸⁶ Litton, 108.

⁸⁷ Keegan, 127.

3. MAJOR CHARACTERS

3.1. David Merridith

David Merridith is the protagonist of the story, a good-hearted man with the appearance and kindness of his mother.⁸⁸ He has an unhappy and lonesome childhood as his mother abandons him “for the first six years of his life and return[s] to London to live with her people”, taking her two daughters but not her son” (O’Connor 50). Later on the ship, during the conversation with Surgeon Mangan on his sexual life, David reveals some details about his mother’s return to London. He tells that his “parents’ marriage was made unhappy by an infidelity of [his] father’s at one point [and] they separated for some years when [he] was quite a young child” (O’Connor 340). However, it is not known why David’s mother took both her daughters but left David behind. It is not only his mother who is absent but also his father leaves him alone and goes to wars. Therefore, David spends his early childhood lonesome without parental love and care. His sadness and loneliness is also reflected in Mary’s memories. She remembers having met David first at the age of five, when his father “pointed to a sad-looking boy” (O’Connor 52) at her age.

Occasionally, Mary’s mother brings him to her house, where he finds the parents and family he misses and becomes a happy and lively child. He loves to eat potatoes and to go out fishing with Mary’s father and brothers. Any time he leaves Mary’s house, he weeps that he wants to stay there “for ever and ever” (O’Connor 53). One stormy night a hammering on the door awakens Mary and her family and when they open it, they find David crying bitterly “*Please let me in. Don’t send me away*” (O’Connor 54). She pities him and thinks

her mother was cruel. Other children were sometimes allowed to stay, even though they had mothers of their own at home. Poor David Merridith had no mother to mind him. Really he had no father either, because his father was always at the war. He was all on his own in that big dark house, except for his drunken moustachioed aunt and the rooks. (O’Connor 53-54)

⁸⁸ O’Connor, 64.

His mother's return from London makes him joyful and well again, as he enjoys maternal love for the first time in his life. Nevertheless, his happiness does not last too long, as four years later his mother dies of fever and his father sends him to a boarding school in England, where he stays during his boyhood. His loneliness and the lack of paternal love goes beyond his time at the college when he is sent to the navy. Having been deprived of parental love he is not capable of loving his sons either. At one point he admits that "he loved his boy but he could not love him that much" and that even "often, in shameful fact, he found fatherhood a millstone" (O'Connor 231).

David's relationship with his father is not a father-son relationship, but rather one resembling that of a commander and a petty officer. Lord Kingscourt is very strict in his parenting and sets great value upon certain aristocratic manners: "Stand to attention and say good day, won't you, David. Where's your manners, for heaven's sake?" (O'Connor 52). He is the only parent of David when his mother leaves, but instead of giving his son the love of a father, he abuses David to behave as is expected from a child of gentle birth and even hits him because of his stammering. One morning on the ship David wakes up of one of his nightmares in which his father threatens to beat him if he does not answer his question without stammering: "Stammer again and I shall whip you again. The choice is entirely your own to make." Being scared of his father the child answers: "Please Papa. I'm afraid, Papa" (O'Connor 141). Lord Kingscourt's way of treating his son gets even worse when his wife dies. He cannot bear the loss of his wife and becomes a more dreadful father than he was before. Mary remembers that "strange rumours about him began to go around the estate: that he beat his son until the boy screamed for him to stop" (O'Connor 59). Therefore, it is rather a blessing for the little boy to be sent to the boarding school soon after.

On the second day of the passage, he remembers once having envied the relationship between a poor tenant and his son who he often saw on the streets of Clifden because "the father was clearly so proud of his son. There was a tenderness between them, an embarrassed affection, even though they were never done goading each other" (O'Connor 10). Another day, when he sees both playing football together, he feels very sad because "in all his childhood Lord

David Merridith had never kicked a football with his own father” (O’Connor 10). It is quite obvious that David never enjoyed a real father-son relationship, which he rather wished to have, instead of all the titles and the luxury he was provided with as the son of a Lord.

It is partly his father’s strictness and brutality and partly his lonesome childhood in the big house, which leaves marks on his emotional state. During his whole life he is stricken by nightmares, anxiety and insomnia. This gets worse two years after his marriage when they return to London from Italy:

A clawing unease crept into his day; the restlessness and anxiety he had known as child. (...) He began to feel dissatisfied, was prone to depressions. People gradually noticed he was losing weight. The sleeplessness that had plagued him since boyhood worsened.” (O’Connor 230)

Another reason for his unrest and dissatisfaction is the boredom that he feels in his aristocratic life. He is quite uneasy with his position because “the life of a gentleman of leisure did not suit him, it made him feel useless and vaguely ungrateful (...), his days were entirely empty of anything important” (O’Connor 230). He steadily feels enchained in his marriage which he regards as a play in which they are actors. Laura and David start arguing quite often and sleep in separate rooms. He starts wandering the streets of London and soon discovers brothels that seem to be an asylum. However, it is not only brothels but also laudanum and opium, prescribed for his sleeplessness, to which he escapes in desperation and soon becomes addicted. In brothels he also finds the love he lost in Ireland. Usually, he simply watches the prostitutes undressing, but one night when he meets an Irish prostitute, he has sex with her. Obviously, she remembers him of the girl he once loved in Ireland: “Somewhere, in the labyrinth was waiting what he needed. The Irish girl.” (O’Connor 238) After that he starts having sex with prostitutes regularly for the next two years and finally catches Gonorrhoea.

David’s uneasiness is not merely to be ascribed to boredom but also to his longing for Ireland “the place of his boyhood: perhaps his only home” (O’Connor 232). Probably, he is not conscious that he is unhappy because he does not feel

at home in London. At night, he stands on the bank of the Thames and watches “the water, and the moorhens” that remind him of Ireland (O’Connor 232). His affection for Ireland and the Irish language can be recognised in Mary’s recollections of his boyhood:

Often he came back from Hampshire sickly and pale. He would take off his neatly pressed worsted trousers, his Winchester College blazer and schoolboy’s cap, and don the rough clothes he wore at home in Connemara: peasant’s canvas britches, the bawneen ‘bratt’ or smock. (...) he would trudge every rocky field and quaking bog, (...) speaking the Irish he had learned from his father’s servants. (...) He loved to speak in the Irish language. (O’Connor 63)

Besides, the river reminds David of Mary. They loved each other when they were quite young, but when David’s father learned about their liaison he threatened to evict Mary’s family, if they continued seeing each other. Being scared of his father he broke off his relationship with Mary. In order to take revenge on his father he marries Laura when he gets older because he “would pay any price to prove his manhood. Marriage, for Merridith, had been a feat of vengeance (...)” (O’Connor 234). Now he recognises that his marriage with Laura, which he enforced despite of his father’s disapproval, has become an even worse imprisonment “for being self-imposed” (O’Connor 234). As can be noticed from his report, David confesses that he did not marry Laura because he loved her but rather because he used her as a weapon against his father, to break free and to prove that he is not the coward he used to be. Nevertheless, confronting his father with his intentions is not as simple as he imagines. The conversation between him and his father affirms that David cannot hide his anxiousness even when he enters the library to speak to him. When his father asks to “come closer”, David trembles “as he move[s] towards his father”, and later when he asks: “Are you afraid, David? Answer me honestly”, David answers: “A little sir.” (O’Connor 163). This shows that the fear David has always felt of his father was not easy to overcome and even lasted until his adulthood.

Even though David is a more sensitive and caring father, and shows paternal emotions, he is sometimes equally strict in his parenting. One morning on the ship when his eight-year-old son Jonathan comes into his cabin, asking to get

into his bed, he lets him in and they have a pleasant father-son conversation. Though, occasionally David reprimands his son in a rather sharp tone, he also caresses him, answers his questions, tells him the story about his dead brother and even kisses “his son’s grubby hand” (O’Connor 146). At Jonathan’s birthday dinner his younger son Robert remarks that the man who came into his cabin one morning was a cripple like Mulvey, whereupon David gets very angry and slaps him so that “the boy’s head whip[s] back” (O’Connor 313). Considering the fact that David’s father treated him badly as a child, it is not a surprise that he frequently loses his temper and insults his sons as well his wife. Apparently, he has unconsciously adopted patterns of behaviour of his father and his way of parenting him. Still, what distinguishes David’s manner from his father is that unlike his father who never felt guilty of treating his son brutally, David is aware of the fact that his frequent outbursts are not a fair act towards his children and his wife.⁸⁹

3.2. Mary Duane

Mary is the tragic heroine and at the same time the most pitiful character of the story that, with her thirty-five years, survives many blows of fate. First, she is abandoned by David, then by Pius when she is pregnant. She has a stillbirth, loses her husband and her child and finally, has a miscarriage. She suffers from hunger, has to go to the workhouse, has to beg in the streets and work as a prostitute. Being the illegitimate daughter of the landlord Kingscourt, she does not have any rights on the property. While she lives the life of a poor tenant and suffers from poverty and hunger, her half-brother and half-sisters live in luxury. What we learn about her life and her character is either told by her own, or by David’s recollections.

Standing on the banks of the Thames one night, David recalls that Mary was a meek person who found “beauty in ordinary things, [such as] the chart made by one of his ancestors (...)” (O’Connor 233) that Mary loved and David gave her in the end. According to his descriptions, she was quite a joyful and good girl who

⁸⁹ O’Connor, 143.

laughed quite a lot and whom “he had never once seen (...) do an act of deliberate cruelty” (O’Connor 233). However, this changes later on and she loses her happiness and radiance after having experienced one disappointment after the other.

David is the first man whom Mary adores as a young girl and for whom she even learns to read in order to understand his love letters. However, on the day David tells her that they cannot see each other again and hands her a hand of coins, her love for David turns to hatred. Filled with rage Mary starts slapping him “maybe the only time she had ever struck anyone” (O’Connor 77). Probably, because David offended her pride and honour and probably because she did not expect such a behaviour from a man who she loved deeply, she never forgives him. During his visits to her room in order to watch her undressing and to draw her, she barely talks to him but simply lets him touch her without showing any reactions. Unlike David, who still has intense feelings for her, she seems to feel nothing else but rage because whenever he caresses her, she closes her eyes and imagines “being somewhere else. It helped quell her desire to weep or vomit” (O’Connor 48). While David addresses her with her name, Mary calls him “My Lord” and thus, keeps a distance between him and herself. When David finds out about her biological father, he offers his help. Since she has not been told the truth by David, though it is not stated why, she does not understand his sudden change and denies his offer: “I need no help from anyone” (O’Connor 49). David asks her to stay with them when they arrive in New York, whereupon she answers in a cold and determined manner, “I will leave your family’s employment the moment we arrive at New York” (O’Connor 50).

As far as her relationship to Pius is concerned, it is not sure whether and how much she loved him and what kind of relationship they had, as we do not learn much about them. The day she tells Pius that she is pregnant with his child, Pius remembers that “she was crying with what he thought must be happiness” and that “she loved him after all, and he had often told her that he loved her too” (O’Connor 107), though it is not sure if she was indeed crying of happiness or of sorrow. As if it is not enough to be abandoned in an expecting condition, Pius starts torturing her and Nicholas after he comes back from England. In her letter

addressed to the revolutionary group, Mary tells her heart-breaking story and makes Pius responsible for her misery. Out of shame, her father throws her out of the house, whereon she lives on the road for a while. Fortunately, Nicholas decides to marry her, but shortly after she has a stillbirth. For a while, Mary and her husband have quite a peaceful and merry life, but this changes when Pius turns up again and starts tormenting them. The blight compounds the situation and they have to suffer from hunger. Out of desperation her husband kills their child and himself. Mary is forced to go to the workhouse and when she learns that she is pregnant she leaves it. However, her agonies do not end because on the way to Dublin she has an abortion. For almost two years she begs on the streets of Dublin and works as a prostitute until one day David meets her in a brothel and takes her with him.

Because of his unforgivable deeds she repeatedly expresses her loathing for Pius and calls him justifiably a “coaxing liar and false deceiver he always was before with a coying tongue but a black heart” (O’Connor 273). When she meets her destroyer on the ship, she curses him that he “may never sleep a night again in [his] life. That [he] may die in agonies” (O’Connor 298). Despite the fact that she hates him, interestingly, when in the end of the story she is asked whether Pius is related to her, she confirms that he is indeed “the brother of her late husband; her only living relation in three thousand miles” (O’Connor 374) and, thereby, helps him to be let into the lifeboat. When she gets the opportunity to take revenge on him, she relinquishes it though it is not clear why she does so. Probably, she is too charitable to take revenge on someone and, therefore, forgives him, or probably she thinks that there has been enough suffering that she does not wish to add one more.

Once being a merry and fun-loving girl with sparkling eyes and charisma, all calamities that she experiences throughout her life make her become a strong but woeful woman. Her sadness becomes noticeable in her clothing when once Surgeon Mangan remarks: “Pretty little thing if she didn’t wear so much black” (O’Connor 7). David explains that “she was bereaved of her husband not too long ago (...)” (O’Connor 7) and thereby, confirms her enduring mourning after her husband’s and children’s death and possibly also after her own fate.

3.3. Pius Mulvey

Pius is the anti-hero of the story and out of all characters the only one that changes considerably, from a likeable to a despicable person in the end. At the beginning of the novel, before his parents die and he is left alone with his brother, he is a likeable, intelligent and prudent person who even takes care of his brother Nicholas. However, this changes when they begin to suffer from extreme poverty and hunger after their parents' decease. Even though they work hard on their father's tiny land, they are not able to fill their stomach, let alone to pay the rent. Pius begins to consider their destitute situation and that they may die in the bed in which "they had been conceived and born, suckled as babies, soothed as toddlers, worried for as children, prayed for as young men, and in which their father and mother had died" (O'Connor 89). When they are "laughed at by girls, to Midnight Mass on a Christmas Eve" (O'Connor 89) because of their destitute appearance and smell "of isolation [and] of stale piss" (O'Connor 89), he realizes that they will never have the chance to find a girl to marry and have children. Unlike his deeply religious brother, who does not complain about their poverty, contemplates it rather as ordained by God and speaks "often of the mysteries of God" (O'Connor 90), Pius is a rationally minded character who is not satisfied with their situation and believes that it is not God-given but one that can be changed.

During his nightly wanderings in Connemara, Pius discovers that stealing as well as singing is easier and more lucrative than working hard from sunrise to sunset, without having even satisfied their hunger. It is the first step he makes to become a devious, immoral, fearful, selfish and distrustful person who steals, cheats and even kills. Roving about "the country at night, trudging out to shebeens⁹⁰ or crossroads dances (...)" (O'Connor 93), he forgets his poverty and feels happy for the first time after his parents' death. When he starts singing at night, he is surrounded and adored by girls for the first time in his life. This makes him become self-confident. Once he learns that singers are highly respected by any Irish people because "in a place where reading was almost unknown they carried

⁹⁰ shebeen: an illegal pub.

the local memory like walking books" (O'Connor 98), he writes his own ballads to be respected likewise.

One important marker in Pius's life is his brother's decision to become a priest and thereby, to abandon Pius to his fate. When Nicholas tells him that he wants to join the priesthood, Pius expresses his fear of solitude: "Don't leave me here, Nicholas. I can't stick it here alone." (O'Connor 106). Even though he felt dissatisfied in Connemara for a while, he seems not to intend to leave his home and offers his brother to divide up the land they have. However, his brother claims that the land is not big enough to be divided between them and even when Pius tells him that they are going to be evicted soon, he insists on his decision to leave. The day Nicholas leaves home, Mary confronts Mulvey with the fact that she is expecting his child soon. She also tells him that they need to get married and live and die "on his people's land (...) like his people before him" (O'Connor 107), though they would not have much. Mary's speech scares him, and he decides to leave and never come back again. Obviously, it is an act of black despair, as he possibly thinks that if he stays there with Mary he is forced to live in poverty forever.

The most significant turning points in Pius's life are his time in Belfast and, later, in London, where he learns to steal, to lie, to cheat and to assume fake identities. First, he goes to Belfast where he earns his money by working and later by singing his own ballads in pubs, frequently changing his identity. There, he cheats for the first time by adjusting his ballad according to his audience, on one occasion insulting the Catholics, on another, the Protestants. During his time in the East End of London, he earns "his bread by swindling and robbing" (O'Connor 183), like many others in that area, as this is easier and more lucrative than singing. Stealing becomes a profession for Pius, which he loves and which makes him happy. Still, he is not greedy because he only steals what he needs.

Except for his ability to steal, sing and cheat, Mulvey has also a great power of imagination and an excellent command of language, which enables him to become a good liar and actor, who can persuade anybody. One evening, after he had sung his ballad in a London pub, he encounters Charles Dickens who

questions him about the song. Pius's ability to invent stories that he tells Dickens even astonishes himself. Another time on the ship, he observes two seasick brothers who call themselves "the fishermen that never went to sea" (O'Connor 25). Later during the journey, when Pius encounters Captain Lockwood one evening, he lies to him by telling exactly the same thing that the brothers said, namely that his father was a fisherman, "known in the locality as 'the fisherman who never went to sea'" (O'Connor 80). He even tells the captain lies about his previous jobs and that he sold all he owned to support his parents and "various little orphaned nephews and nieces" (O'Connor 84). At another instant, when the steerage passengers beat him for having stolen food, he denies being Mulvey and having pushed his brother into death, though we later learn from Mary's letter that this was true.

Even though Pius had been put on the ship to murder David Merridith, he accuses Shaymus Meadows of being the killer. After Meadows gets arrested, David thanks Mulvey for having uncovered the plan and in order to endear himself to David, he claims that his parents had known his mother well, that a picture of her "hung to this day in their humble cottage (...) and that one of his own sisters had been christened 'Verity' in veneration of the memory of Lord Kingscourt's mother" (O'Connor 290). Later at Jonathan's birthday dinner, when Robert asks him if it was him who came one morning to his cabin with a knife in his hand, Pius disclaims the allegation.

Mulvey is also a selfish and dastard man who only thinks of his own advantage. In the letter Mary has written to the 'Else-be-liable-Men', it is revealed that after his return from England, Pius became a disgusting man doing terrible things to her and Nicholas. Though it is him who abandoned Mary, he gets jealous of his brother and starts torturing them by taking off half of their land, killing their cow, ruining their potato field and forcing Mary to sleep with him in exchange for food for their child. He does not help them during the blight, has enough food while his niece is suffering from hunger, does not help them when they are evicted but rather finds joy in their misfortune. One day on the ship, when Mary confronts him with what he did to her and his brother, he is not ashamed of expecting forgiveness for his deeds. He is even impertinent enough to expect that she may

pity him for what the 'Else-be-liable-Men" did to him: "Look, then! Look what they are after doing to me. Do you like that? (...) Did I deserve that, Mary? (...)" (O'Connor 298).

His furtiveness is not confined to his actions against Mary and Nicholas but also concerns the schoolmaster whom he killed to assume his identity. In a way, he is an unpredictable person who steals, lies, cheats, swindles, betrays and if it is necessary, also kills in order to survive. Although they spend "nineteen days together walking the road towards the north and nineteen cold nights in barns or byres" and finally become friends, Pius kills the schoolmaster William Swales to occupy his position, as he thinks he has "no other choice" (O'Connor 209) for he is a crippled man. When he carves the wooden cross that he erects on Swales' grave, he writes "Pius Mulvey, Galwayman and thief" and thereby, proclaims what he thinks of himself and confirms the previous description about his character.

Moreover, Pius is a fearful but also a disreputable and cunning person. When, for instance, he is accused of deception and put into prison, he tries everything possible to curry favour with the prison governor and the prison guard to escape punishment and gain their trust. The first time he is being whipped by a warder, who raped him once, he walks to him and holds out "his hand in a gesture of thanks" (O'Connor 196). After that he is never again whipped or punished but "given small privileges" instead (O'Connor 196). He reaches the peak of his furtiveness when he begins to snitch on prisoners and report on attacks against him that have never happened. However, his attitudes take a turning point when he kills the warder and escapes from prison.

Taking into account the preceding portrayal, Pius Mulvey's personality appears to be of an ambivalent nature. His character qualities represent the evil and the good side of human beings. Sometimes he is a kind person who shows remorse and pities people; next time he becomes a dislikeable and distrustful man who does terrible things and thus degenerates into a monster. During his time at school, disguised as the schoolmaster, he starts to feel guilty for having abandoned Mary and his child. For the first time, he shows his human side and feels remorse for what he did. As the schoolchildren remind him of his own child,

he treats them very kindly and never once uses “the cane that □hangs□ on the schoolhouse wall” intended for punishment (O’Connor 216). Later on the ship, he even pities the hungry women who probably remind him of Mary. He also feels remorse for being responsible for his brother’s death. However, it is not sure whether his feelings are real, since he is not an honest and trustful person who always tells lies, betrays and does everything that is to his own advantage. Considering his biography, it can be claimed that his personality is the outcome of the political system, which forced poor people to either die of hunger, or commit acts of crime in order to survive. In this sense, if he had been born at another time and lived under different conditions, he might not have become the depraved person that he is in the end. Captain Lockwood puts it in a nutshell by stating that “there never was a man so entirely bad that life had boiled all the goodness out of him” (O’Connor 266).

3.4. Laura Merridith

Laura is an aristocratic woman with aristocratic manners. At the beginning, she has a rather hostile attitude towards tenants, however, in the end of the story she becomes a kind person, dedicating her life to help the poor and weak. She occasionally criticizes the tenants for being idle and earns critique from her husband. During a discussion on the situation of the workhouses, David talks about the difficulties of “the conditions for admission”, whereupon Laura sharply responds that “the conditions should be a great deal stricter, if anything. (...) Otherwise we merely encourage that same idleness and dependency which have only led to their present misfortune” (O’Connor 15). By saying this, she gives utterance to the public opinion of the British, namely that Irish people are responsible for their calamity and that providing aid for them makes them idle and dependent. This notion became law in the Poor Law Amendment of 1847, which “embodied the principle popular in Britain that Irish property must support Irish poverty” (Donnelly in: Morash 60). At another point, Laura contends with David when he asks for her permission to invite Mulvey to the first-class quarters. To David’s question “Will you never understand that we have a responsibility to these people?”, Laura coldly remarks “I have done nothing to ‘these people’, David. And they have done rather a lot to me” (O’Connor 291) and accuses him of caring

“more for individuals he does not know than he does for his own wife and family” (O’Connor 292). She is apparently too egoistic to see people’s suffering and to have mercy on their destitute situation.

Considering her comments about Mary, it is not sure whether she suspects David’s affection for Mary and thus, is jealous of her, or if she criticizes her because of her position as a servant. One day Laura insults Mary by asking her to wash her hands “before touching the children” and her “armpits too (...) [because] it’s really most unhygienic” (O’Connor 46). Another time, David comes late into the “Dining Saloon” and apologizes for being late because “there are two little chaps I know who insist on being told bedtime stories”. Laura “roll[s] her eyes like a doll” and remarks: “Our girls Mary is ill again” (O’Connor 7) in a manner of accusation. With respect to her statements, it may be argued that probably because of both reasons Laura seems to dislike Mary.

Her relationship with David becomes difficult and fragile after David catches syphilis and they do not get intimate for six years. During these years, she starts an affair with Grantley, undoubtedly because of feeling unhappy and lonesome. The first time she expresses her discontent with their celibate marriage on the ship, she tells David that she wants a divorce. She reminds him of the fact that they are married, “not brother and sister” (O’Connor 147). She suspects that something is wrong with him but as she does not know about David’s infection, she suspects him of not loving her anymore and having an affair. Nevertheless, David manages to convince her to “give him one last chance” as he promises to leave everything behind them and to try a fresh start in America. Still, her decision to stay with her husband does not eliminate her doubts about David’s feelings, as can be noticed later in the story. When David one day explains, “the only love I have ever wanted is yours. Yours and that of the boys. If I have that, I have everything”, Laura replies in a way as if what he just said was absurd: “You must think me even blinder than I am. Do you?” (O’Connor 293). Towards the end of the voyage we learn that she is expecting a baby, which certainly must be from Grantley. It is not sure if she has just learned from the surgeon, or if she had already known it before she broke off with Grantley. In any case, she does not reconsider her intention to stay with David, doubtless because she still loves him

and desires their marriage will improve in America.

3.5. Captain Josias Lockwood

The captain is a very sympathetic and scrupulous person and Quaker by faith. He is rather dissatisfied with the situation of the steerage passengers, however, because of being “bound by a set of regulations” (O’Connor xvii), as well as limited possibilities due to overcrowding, he is not capable of improving their situation. Already when they embark in Queenstown, he writes a letter to the ship’s company, in which he reports on the overcrowding of the ship and accuses them of having disregarded his endless requests to improve the condition on the ship and sold, “despite [his] unending protestations, too many steerage tickets (...) for this voyage (...)” (O’Connor 35). Because of feeling remorse, he even threatens to resign, if no improvement is done at their arrival in New York, as he does not wish to have “more innocence blood on [his] hands, nor either on [his] conscience” (O’Connor 36).

Regardless of the limited supplies on the ship, the captain offers some steerage passengers work, which means for them more food or even survival.⁹¹ He seemingly shows understanding for the thieves who during the journey steal a “piglet (...) from the cages”, as he remarks “no doubt the First-Class passengers shall somehow survive the deprivation of his flesh” (O’Connor 79). One day the ship’s cook Henry Li, apparently a Chinese man, comes to him with a suggestion to “relieve the sufferings of some in the steerage without incurring expense to the company” by making a soup out the first-class passengers’ leftovers, “rather than to throw these (...) away, or to make of them pigswill (...)” (O’Connor 152). The captain is very impressed by the cook’s suggestion and indicates that “it ought make any Christian man feel rueful that a pagan displays more fellowship than many of the saved” (O’Connor 153).

He empathises with the poor emigrants and feels terribly sorry for their death, which he expresses on the eighth day of the voyage: “The deaths of any are hard

91 O’Connor, xvii – xviii.

to bear, but the deaths of the young, the little children especially, seem almost to ridicule of our lives” (O’Connor 80). Another evidence of his benevolence is an event towards the end of the voyage, when he feels extremely distressed at the sight of the decayed bodies of a young couple and confesses “there are bitter tears in my eyes, even as I set down these words” (O’Connor 278). At their burial, he is filled with emotion that he can barely speak and “has to be helped by the men” (O’Connor 278). Seemingly, the corpses remind him of his family that he wishes to be with now. He expresses his sadness once again, when at the end of his entry he notes, “I can write no more. There is no more to be written. I am sorry I was ever born to see this day” (O’Connor 279) and thus, reflects the melancholic atmosphere on the ship.

Captain Lockwood is not only a character who pities the poor but also a fair person who treats and respects all passengers equally. This is noticeable in one passage when he remarks that

instructions have been issued for the men to desist from referring to the steerage passengers as ‘steeries’, ‘steeragers’, ‘raggers’, ‘shawlies’ & cetera [because] every man, woman and child on this vessel will be addressed with respect, the common run of person as well as the better. (O’Connor 34)

Apart from being kind and rational, he is also a man who does not tolerate immoral actions on the ship. In one case, he punishes a man for making disgraceful suggestions to women in exchange for food. Even though he dislikes to punish anybody, he emphasizes that “they know I will not have decent girls ruined on my ship” (O’Connor 154).

Another striking aspect is that Captain Lockwood repeatedly comments on some socio-cultural characteristics of the Irish and their impoverished situation. Obviously, he is not a person who ignores the famine in Ireland and therefore, sympathizes with the destitute Irish people. He seems to know a lot about the condition of the Irish poor, since in a passage he points out important facts about those being affected by the famine.⁹² Furthermore, he also refers to Irish customs

⁹² O’Connor, 279.

such as keening at burials or the unacceptability of taking advantage of another's poor state.⁹³ In other instances, he shows interest in the Irish language and makes positive statements on it. One day, he asks Mulvey to teach him some phrases like “good morning, sir’, ‘I bid you good day, madam” (O'Connor 80) in Gaelic, so that he can show his respect to the steerage passengers. Another day, he refers to Irish as a “strange but not entirely unpleasant language” (O'Connor 175). At the beginning of the voyage, the captain seems to have the general belief of that time to consider Irish people as the Iberian race who are “in their mode of thinking (...) as remote from [the] English race as the Hottentot, Watutsi, Mohammedan or Chinees [sic!]" (O'Connor 83). However, his opinion about the Irish changes later on and he regards their mentality as friendly, helpful and generous.⁹⁴ Being overwhelmed by what he sees and witnesses on the ship, he finally decides to resign and dedicate the rest of his life to assisting the poor. He indeed accomplishes his intention in Ireland but, unfortunately, soon after catches the fever and dies.⁹⁵

3.6. Grantley Dixon

Grantley Dixon is an enthusiastic journalist and writer with a socialist notion. He is the antagonist of the story and the rival of David, as he loves David's wife. What is remarkable about him is that although he frequently criticizes the upper class for ignoring the situation in Ireland, he loves an aristocratic woman who has the same negative attitudes to the poor Irish tenants.⁹⁶ Throughout the voyage, he repeatedly attacks David for being one of these landlords who do not care for their tenants and makes him co-responsible for the misery in Ireland. During a discussion at the onset of the journey, he confronts David with this fact by addressing him as a representative of them. First, he states: “I don't know how a member of your class can sleep at night” and then he accuses him of being one of these landlords who “break their backs with work to pay for [their] position, then put them off the land with no compensation when it suits [them]" (O'Connor 13-14). In his article in “The New York Tribune”, which is also a response to David's

⁹³ O'Connor, 33 & 224.

⁹⁴ O'Connor, 279.

⁹⁵ O'Connor, 380 & 396-397.

⁹⁶ O'Connor, 15 & 291-292.

letter printed in the same newspaper, Dixon presents the socialist view on the famine in Ireland, while simultaneously criticizing David. (O'Connor 18-22). However, considering all disputes between Grantley and David, it is not sure whether Grantley attacks David because of his position, or because he is jealous of him to be the husband of his beloved Laura.

Regarding his relationship with Laura, what can be said for sure is that he loves her to such an extent that he even kills David to have her for himself, as he admits at the end of the story.⁹⁷ He is also jealous of David because of his ability to draw well and therefore, be regarded by Laura as an artist. As he is aware of the fact that "she would never love a man who wasn't an artist" (O'Connor 121), he wants to prove his artistic quality by publishing his book about the poverty he encountered during his tour through Ireland. However, his book is refused by all publishers for being not artistic enough, meaning "too serious" and inappropriate for readers of fiction who "like escapism" (O'Connor 123) but not reading about the poor.

As we learn later, Grantley was raised by his grandfather, "a Jew, a hater of slavery" (O'Connor 327) and a plantation owner who sells his harvest to buy the slaves free. All his life, Grantley has been supported by his grandfather who recognised his talent for writing and therefore, told him never to give up writing. He admits that he is still being supported by his grandfather since "journalism paid little, almost always late" (O'Connor 329). His affection for writing becomes obvious when in the end he blackmails Mulvey in order to get his story, possibly because he wants to justify his talent and become a well-known writer, or because he wants to prove to Laura that he is after all an artist. During his talk with Mulvey, it turns out that in the past he investigated the murder in Newgate prison. Having recognised the murderer on the ship, he joins Pius on the deck and requests him to tell his story: "I'm a reporter, Mr Mulvey. What I want is the story" (O'Connor 334). He threatens to report to the Captain, if he does not tell the truth about his life in London and everything about the murder in Newgate. Finally, he gets his story in exchange for his promise to pronounce Pius dead.

⁹⁷ O'Connor, 404-405.

In the light of the previous analysis, it can be concluded that all character types are round, since they all have individual and complex character qualities. Similarly, they are all dynamic characters that undergo minor as well as major emotional and personal development in the course of the story. An example for a radical character development is Mulvey, who is good at the beginning but becomes bad in the end. In contrast, the Captain undergoes only a minor development during the story and therefore is, in the end the same kind person he was at the beginning.

4. MAJOR THEMES

4.1. Love

Love is a central theme in the novel. But there are other, equally important themes like hunger, eviction as well as emigration and coffin ships which shape the historical context of the story. Although it is primarily revolved around the romance between David and Mary, the text contains other romantic affairs such as between Mary and Pius, Mary and Nicholas, David and Laura, Laura and Grantley, as well as the father-son relationship of David and his father.

The love affair between Mary and David can be described as an unfulfilled and impossible one due to their different social class backgrounds and because they are half siblings. David is the son of a landlord, whereas Mary is the daughter of their tenant and, as David learns many years later, also the illegitimate daughter of his father. Grown up together, they fall in love during their adolescence. Mary admits her feelings for David when she remembers that to her “his companion of childhood, (...) had the heartbreaking beauty of an angel in a prayer book; the strange loveliness of something becoming extinct” (O’Connor 64). They admit their feelings for each other during a walk when David comes back from the boarding school for the summer holiday. He tells Mary that some of the boys at school have “sweethearts” (O’Connor 65) to whom they write letters and poems, whereupon Mary asks whether he has a sweetheart too. David declares his love by saying, “there’s a girl I like a lot. I don’t know if she knows it. (...) She’s the prettiest girl from here to Dublin” (O’Connor 65). Mary replies, as if she had not understood who he meant: “You’d be as well to tell her how you feel then, wouldn’t you, mister?” (O’Connor 65). Moments later, they end up holding hands and kissing, then having sex for the first time. Mary cannot stop thinking and dreaming about David after he goes back to college. One day, when she tells her dreams that reflect her sexual desire to the priest in confession, he describes them as being evil and recommends Mary to forget David. Mary tries to do so but fails and admits to the boy she dated that “her own heart belong[s] to another” (O’Connor 73).

Soon afterwards, David suddenly tells Mary that his father instructed him to end their relationship, otherwise he will put Mary's family off. Burst into tears, he offers her a handful of coins and, thereby, breaks Mary's heart, pride and honour. Remembering this incident years later, he admits that "he murdered her trust for no other reason than obedience" because he was too young and too afraid to "break out of his prison" (O'Connor 234). While David's action makes Mary forget and hate him forever, David never stops loving her. This becomes apparent many years afterwards, when at one of those nights, he visits Mary in her quarter to watch her undress, he declares his eternal love and asks for forgiveness: "Mary, I love you. I have always loved you. Have mercy on me, Mary; forgive me what I did" (O'Connor 48). Even after he learns that Mary is his half-sister, his feelings do not change and he admits to Surgeon Mangan: "I have very strong feelings. The feelings I have always had. I have not been in a position to live by those feelings" (O'Connor 339), though he knows that they can never become a couple.

The liaison between Mary and Pius is rather short and less passionate than the relationship between Mary and David. Obviously, they fall in love the night they meet each other at the fair, as Pius remembers that "he felt something of what his brother talked about when he talked of the mysteries of God" (O'Connor 103). He also recalls that Mary "told him she loved him" (O'Connor 103), though there are no details about the intensity of their love and about the time when they were a couple. Nonetheless, Pius leaves Mary in her expecting condition and later he admits that "so many times he wanted to turn back", but his selfishness and fear of poverty kept him back. What is different in the relationship between Mary and Nicholas is that they do not marry because of love but because Mary is pregnant with his brother's child. Mary reveals that Nicholas was "an honest and sober man but we did not live as man and wife for many years" (O'Connor 273). However, their relationship turns into a love attachment when they start to live like husband and wife and soon develop feelings for each other.

The first time David meets Laura at a dinner, he is attracted by her "carefree laughter" that presumably reminds him of Mary and makes him to fall in love with her, as can be noticed in his memory: "There was a confidence about her that was almost brazen; it reminded him of someone he rarely thought about now"

(O'Connor 158). Later in the story David admits that he did not simply marry Laura out of love but "mainly because he could not be stopped from marrying her" (O'Connor 234). His feelings for Laura fade away, when he soon realizes that she has a negative attitude towards the famine and the poor and, therefore, criticizes her frequently. When their marriage gradually worsens and they do not get intimate for a while, Laura starts an affair with Grantley, as she feels alone and desire for love. Unlike David, who was never sure about his real feelings for Laura, Grantley adores her and gives her the love she missed from her husband.

One final aspect is the parental love that David never enjoys fully. Grown up without mother until the age of six, he does not even get his father's love. Apart from being frequently absent, Lord Kingscourt has quite an aristocratic and harsh way of parenting, showing no emotions towards his son, rather expecting him to behave like an aristocrat. It is only the time after his mother's return from England when David feels happy because of enjoying maternal love. Even after his mother's decease the relationship between David and his father does not improve. On the contrary, Lord Kingscourt ignores that his son now needs more attention and love, but treats him more strictly. Similarly, David is not able to love his sons either and admits that "he loved his boy but he could not love him that much. Often, in shameful fact, he found fatherhood a millstone" (O'Connor 231), obviously, because he was deprived of parental love too.

4.2. Violence

Another prominent theme in the novel is violence, which can be encountered in terms of murder as well as physical assaults against both adults and children. The most extreme form of violence in the novel is the murder that happens during the journey as well as back in Ireland. The first action takes place in prison when Mulvey kills the prison warder, who tortured and raped the prisoners, before he escapes. However, Mulvey's brutal murder of the schoolmaster is a rather desperate, egoistic action motivated by fear and selfishness. Moreover, David is the victim of a murder on the ship, of which the reader is persuaded that Mulvey is the murderer, though in the end we learn that it was Dixon.

One violent action worth mentioning is that of Lord Kingscourt against his son David. He is a father with rather harsh parenting methods, as he occasionally punishes his son for his stammering and thus, making him a mentally and emotionally injured person. His anxiety and weak emotions, being the result of his father's treatment, become apparent in his frequent nightmares, of which he suffers even in his adulthood. In one of those dreams, David sees his father threatening to whip him if he stammers again, whereupon he anxiously implores, "Please Papa. I'm afraid, Papa" (O'Connor 141). Lord Kingscourt's violent actions against his son take on a new dimension after Lady Verity's death, when he starts to beat David brutally "until the boy scream[s] for him to stop" (O'Connor 59). However, his cruelty is not only directed at his son but also at his tenants, animals as well as at the prisoners because of his position as magistrate. Having experienced the brutality of his father, David treats his sons equally severely, though not in the same intensity. During a conversation with his older son Jonathan, he admits that "lately he'd been snapping at the boy and at Laura. The strain, he supposed. But it wasn't fair" (O'Connor 143). Another case showing his strictness and harmful actions against his children is the birthday dinner, when he punches his son for having compared Mulvey's walk to a cripple. The slap must be hard, since it makes "the boy's head whip back". Even though Robert cries bitterly, David yells at him to apologize to Mulvey and Jonathan and assaults him verbally: "Use his name you ridiculous fool", "You make me sick to the stomach" (O'Connor 313).

Another character that should be mentioned in this context is Pius who frequently falls victim to violent actions, but also acts brutally by killing two people. The first time he faces violence, he is being beaten and kicked out of Belfast by Catholic as well as Protestant pub customers who become aware of his deception. Still, this is not the last time he suffers physical attacks, since later in prison he experiences violence in a more extreme and brutal form, which is isolation, humiliation, rape and torture.⁹⁸ Mulvey experiences another serious physical assault when he is beaten by The Else-Be-Liable-Men for having rejected to kill David Merridith. They do not only beat him but even carve an 'H' on his chest,

⁹⁸ O'Connor, 194-196.

which Pius reveals during an argument with Mary later on the ship.⁹⁹ Finally, during the voyage, he once again becomes a victim of an attack. This time he is being beaten by the steerage passengers who suspect him of having stolen food. The captain describes this dreadful scene on the lower deck as follows: “His clothes were pulled apart and he was shaking in fear, his face a pulp of blood and unspeakable filth and ordure” (O’Connor 223).

4.3. Gender

All major characters, with the exception of Mary and Laura, are male. In addition, there are several male and female minor characters, such as David’s father and mother as well as Mary’s husband and mother. However, female as well as male characters play an equally important role in the story. The interaction between both genders is best reflected in the relationship between David and Laura and, in Mary’s affiliation with David, Pius and Nicholas. Besides, there is an unbalanced involvement of both sexes in political debates, which can be ascribed to the historical fact that politics of the eighteenth century was a solely upper-class male preserve.

The relationship between David and Laura is determined by clearly defined gender roles in private and public. While in private contexts Laura can claim her position and oppose her husband, in the public sphere she is rather subordinated to David. During one of their arguments about the literary events, for instance, Laura reacts strongly against her husband, who insists on ending the events, and emphasizes that “she [is] not some lifeless chattel to decorate his existence. She had married a husband and would not have a master” (O’Connor 232). She continues that she will spend her own money and her own time how and whenever she wants it. In another instance, David offers Mulvey to stay with them in the first-class quarters, but adds that he has to discuss it with his wife beforehand. This leads to the suggestion that Laura has the last word, as the captain remarks that “her Ladyship, it appears, is the wearer of the britches” (O’Connor 291), even though the opposite is the case.

⁹⁹ O’Connor, 28 & 298.

On the other hand, David frequently abuses Laura in public and blames her for disrespecting him in community. One evening, when they are all sitting together at Jonathan's birthday dinner, David insults Laura by saying, "Your mama's a silly old mare sometimes, ain't she?", or "Oh do shut up, can't you, woman. (...)" (O'Connor 311). Later in the evening, when David gets annoyed about Robert's remark on Mulvey and asks him to apologize, Laura implores "David, for pity's sake – ", whereupon David exclaims: "Do not dare to interrupt me, Laura, when I am speaking to my son. Do you understand me, woman? (...) Must you flaunt your disrespect and contempt for me on every possible occasion?" (O'Connor 313). Another day, during a political discussion in the Dining Saloon of the ship, Laura explains that the conditions in workhouses "should be a great deal stricter, if anything", whereupon David justifiably screams: "I'll be damned if I'll be given lectures on idleness by your good self, Laura. Damned, I say. Do you hear me now?" (O'Connor 15).

One further aspect in this context is the non-participation of women in political discussions, which, again, can be observed in the previously mentioned situation. After a heated discussion between Grantley and David, the captain states that they probably should "postpone the political discussion until later in the evening when the ladies have retired" and thereby, stresses the common political notion of the time, namely that women should be kept away from political debates. Laura is indeed such a kind of woman who is not at all interested in political affairs, but in art and literature. At Jonathan's birthday dinner, she emphasises her disinterest in politics by pointing out her boredom at the political talk between David and Grantley, suggesting that perhaps they should "talk about something a little less dull" (O'Connor 307). Likewise, at the night in a hotel room with Grantley, she expresses her aversion against his book. According to her, it is not artistic enough, but full of facts about the Irish poor and the Irish issue and thus, not worth reading.

Mary, on the other hand, is a woeful woman who has been betrayed and abandoned by men, first by her noble beloved David, then by her tenant lover Pius. Despite being female, Mary has more courage than both men. David, whom she loved and trusted and to whom she lost her virginity, leaves her in

consequence of fear and obedience to his father. While David has not the mettle to contradict his father, Mary seems to be bold enough to fight for her relationship and remembers him of his promise: "You said it was what you and I wanted that mattered. (...) You've changed your mind? You didn't mean what you said?" (O'Connor 77). An equally timid man is Pius who leaves Mary after having heard that she is expecting his child. He fears to have a similarly poor life as his parents and to suffer from hunger, whereas Mary is hopeful and tells him that "they wouldn't have much but they would always be here" (O'Connor 107). As a man, Pius does not have to be frightened of the consequences of his action. In contrast, Mary is being turned adrift by her father for having disgraced the family. Being hurt by two men and having lost the only trustful and honest man in her life, namely her husband, she becomes a mournful, though independent woman in the end. This can be noticed at the end of the story when Surgeon Mangan remarks that "she might meet a handsome groom or butler or suchlike (...)", whereupon she replies that "she does not intend to marry again" (O'Connor 345).

4.4. Religion

Religion is another theme addressed in different contexts throughout the novel. One salient element is the clash between Catholicism and Protestantism, which reflects the inferiority of Ireland to Britain as well as the imbalance between social classes. The novel represents this conflict through the characters who belong to different confessions. David is the son of a Protestant Anglo-Irish landlord, whereas Mulvey and Mary are Irish-Catholic lower class tenants. The depiction of the relationship between these characters reflects the historical reality, since all Anglo-Irish landowners were Protestants who oppressed their Irish-Catholic tenants. The famine gave the Irish Protestants also the opportunity to exploit the misery of the Irish peasants to "protestantise" (Dunlop in: Morash 164) them, by offering them food in exchange for conversion to Protestantism.

There are two passages in the novel that refer to this phenomenon during the famine. This is first to be noticed at the beginning of the story when the captain admits that "no Catholic priest was among us on the Star of the Sea, but sometimes in the afternoon the Methodist minister would recite a few

uncontroversial words on the quarterdeck or read aloud from the scriptures” (O’Connor xviii), even though all steerage passengers are Catholic. At another passage Mulvey performs in the streets, together with his pickpocket friend, the act of converting Irish Pagans to Christianity, which is definitely an allusion to the Protestant attempt to convert Catholics.

Additionally, there is Captain Lockwood who is one of those Quakers who had an important role in private charity during the famine. Unlike the government that forced poor people to work in exchange for food, the Quakers offered direct aid through soup kitchens, even in areas that were neglected by the government. At the end of the story, the captain declares that he will devote the rest of his life to help the poor. Besides, there is also the Jewish Grantley Dixon who is a socialist, despite his upper class background. He frequently criticizes both the government and the landlords, of which one is David, for their famine politics that allows the poor Irish to starve.

Another religion-related conflict is that between Pius and his brother Nicholas. Compared to his older brother Nicholas, who is a quite religious person and often speaks “of the mysteries of God [and] how God could never do anything wrong” (O’Connor 90), Pius is a rationally-minded person who questions everything, even the existence of God and His inaction to ease their poverty. Furthermore, he occasionally expresses his disinterest in religion and God, as the following statement shows: “Mulvey had as little interest in finding Jesus as he hoped Jesus had in finding Mulvey” (O’Connor 181). When Nicholas decides to join the priesthood, Pius leaves home heading for Belfast. There, he begins to assume names at the recommendation of a Protestant friend who tells him that Roman Catholics have “to be careful now. Certain territories of the city were not to be walked by the bearer of a name as richly suggestive as Pius” (O’Connor 181), as Protestants gradually become rampant in Belfast. However, during his imprisonment at Newgate, his opinion about religion changes slightly after having read the bible as well as “all twelve volumes of *Paradise Lost*” (O’Connor 197). Another evidence for his transition is the little bible he had stolen from the schoolmaster and obviously, always carries with him, as one night he suggests the captain to read it together.

4.5. Social Classes

The story is principally concerned with the discrepancy between landlords and their tenants, which is mainly reflected in the relationship between Mary and David and in the circumstances under which the steerage passengers and first-class passengers have to spend the journey.

What makes the love affair between Mary and David impossible is the fact that David is the son of a landlord, while Mary is the daughter of a tenant. They spend their childhood together and unexpectedly, fall in love, unaware of the fact that their ancestry sets up a barrier between them. One night, when Mary's father brings David back to Kingscourt manor, he weeps that he wants to "stay where he [is]" (O'Connor 53). When he asks Mary's mother why he cannot stay there, she simply answers that "it wouldn't be right for him to sleep down here" (O'Connor 53), as the child would not have understood the reason anyway. Mary does not grasp her mother's statement either and thinks "her mother was cruel. Other children were sometimes allowed to stay (...)" (O'Connor 53).

Mary's bewilderment about the reality continues until the day David tells her that his father does not want them to be seen together again because he maintains that "it's a question of duty". At that Mary asks in a naïve manner: "What duty is it would interfere with our friendship?" (O'Connor 76). David, on the other hand, seems to have been enlightened of the fact that they can never be a couple, though he has difficulty to accept it: "I just think, Mary – when one looks at the whole picture" (O'Connor 77). Only years later David realizes that "born a poorer man, he might have married [Mary] himself [because] all he had owned had come to disown him" (O'Connor 234). He also admits that "he had not had the mettle to break out of his prison [because] he was too young to do it, and too afraid" (O'Connor 234). Apparently, David finally recognised that his position as the son of an aristocrat was a barrier for their relationship that they were not able to transcend.

The class difference is also evident in the conditions of the steerage and first-class passengers. The first-class passengers are accommodated in comfortable

and separate “quarters or staterooms” (O’Connor 3), have their own Dining Saloon and even Smoking Saloon, and are provided with any possible luxury, whereas poor emigrants are forced to spend the whole voyage, jammed together in the steerage under terrible conditions: the healthy and sick sleeping side by side in stuffy, filthy and stinking cubicles, provided with poor sanitary conditions consisting of only two closets and two broken lavatories. In contrast, the first-class quarters are comfortable and hygienic. This can be observed in David’s description of their accommodation in his letter to his sisters. Though he maintains that they have four nicely furnished rooms with separate bathrooms, he still expresses his dissatisfaction with the accommodation by describing it as “not so stylish” (O’Connor 114). Additionally, they even have their own dining room that looks like “a restaurant in Paris” with “the crystal chandeliers, the sheened, teak pillars” (O’Connor 306). Another evidence for the high standards in the first-class quarters is a conversation between Laura and Mary, during which Laura asks Mary to change the bedclothes of her sons after breakfast and thereby implies that their bedding is changed daily.¹⁰⁰ Her sons sleep in clean and comfortable beds, have separate rooms with separate bathrooms, whereas the steerage passengers are provided with only two closets and two damaged lavatories¹⁰¹ and have insufficient blankets to protect themselves from cold. Surgeon Mangan refers to this fact during his visit to the steerage: “Very poor supply of clean blankets. No safe, clean place to store or cook whatever food they have taken on themselves. No safe, clean place for personal cleanliness and necessary matters” (O’Connor 343).

Towards the end of the voyage the first mate reports to the captain that “some steerage passengers have been breaking planks off the inner cladding and removing portions from bunks and deck boards in the stowage section, in order to use them as fuel for their fires” (O’Connor 351). Having gathered all steerage passengers on the quarterdeck, the captain reminds them “of the regulations regarding fires, candles and other naked flames below decks” (O’Connor 351) and that they should expect serious consequences, if they continue to destroy the ship. Dixon gets annoyed about the captain’s comments and asks sharply:

¹⁰⁰ O’Connor, 46.

¹⁰¹ O’Connor, xiv-xv.

“What the H*** would you do yourself in their situation?” (O’Connor 351). In order to demonstrate his concern and solidarity, he brings his own blanket and at Laura’s request, hers as well.

An additional issue, displaying the differences between the social classes on the ship, is food. While the first-class passengers have enormous rations of food and apparently, “a quantity oftentimes remains uneaten on the plates” (O’Connor 152), the steerage passengers have to content themselves with “half a pound of hardtack and a quart of water for each adult, half that banquet for every child” (O’Connor xv-xvi). Due to the poor daily rations on the ship, the poverty from which the emigrants escaped, continues. This is also pointed out by Surgeon Mangan, who witnesses the pitiful condition of the steerage during his inspection: “Everyone I saw showing symptoms of gross malnutrition and badly underweight, some dangerously so. Diet of biscuit and water completely inadequate” (O’Connor 343). In order to survive, the steerage passengers steal food from the “galley” and the ship’s store.¹⁰² Another shocking fact, which makes the whole picture even more embarrassing is that the first-class passenger eat “pastries and coffee under the shelter of the silken awnings”, while the half-starved steerage passengers watch them “through the cast-iron double-locked gates” and wonder “how the cream was kept fresh for the rich” (O’Connor xvi).

4.6. Hunger

Throughout the whole novel one can witness hunger in several varieties, both on land and on the ship. The most striking portrayal of hunger, resulting from the famine, is provided by Nicholas, who in his farewell letter to Mary describes some terrible accounts he has encountered on his way to landlord Blake. Referring to the situation of workhouses he writes that “hundreds of people were all about the town and they trying to get a docket to get into the Workhouse, but all were turned away by the Relieving Officer, it being too full, and the constables beating the people back from the gates” (O’Connor 38). This description mirrors reality, since the Poor Relief System of 1838 provided only one workhouse per 62,000

¹⁰² O’Connor, 34 f. & 79.

persons, which was totally inadequate even in good times, not to mention in a famine of such a dimension.¹⁰³ This is once more proved in *The Times* which states in its edition of 15 March 1847 that “the workhouses are full and only hold 100,000 while 4,000,000 are starving” (Donnelly in: Morash 64). Nicholas reports on some harrowing scenes he comes across and in which children, adults as well as old people die in agony, in consequence of hunger:

Worse again to see those for whom even weeping was too much effort, and they sitting down on the icy ground to bow their heads and die (...). But to witness the sufferings of the tiny children; to hear the sounds they made in their agonies. I cannot write it. It can never be written, Mary. People would not believe such things could have been permitted to happen. (...) In one house at Glankeen the entire of family had died: the parents, all of their children and four old people. (...) Where some of the poor people had died, dogs and rats were about. (O’Connor 39)

Being hungry himself, Nicholas walks “three days and nights” to meet Commander Blake at Delphi Lodge, to ask him to annul the eviction. However, the landlord refuses to see him and he is sent away hungry with nothing else than “a cup of water” (O’Connor 42). Coming back home, he finds his starving child crying pitifully. In order to put an end to their agonies, he kills the child and then himself, as he does not see any alternative: “I am so cold and afraid. She will not suffer, Mary, I will do it quickly and be not long after her” (O’Connor 43). The contemporary witnesses Thomas O’Flynn and John Melody from Attymass, Ballina, County Mayo recollect the following accounts:

Conditions were terrible as few had any money. In one case a man drowned himself rather than suffer the hunger pains any longer. It is related of one family that someone called on them to find the children dead and the parents dead and the parents lying on the floor nibbling grain from a sheaf of oats which lay between them and both unable to rise when the visitor entered. (qtd. in Póirtéir *Famine Echoes* 92)

At another passage, Nicholas and Pius suffer from hunger after their parents die and they have to look after themselves. Even though they work hard on the tiny “stony patch of their father’s tenancy” (O’Connor 89), they often go without food, as the money they earn is used to pay the rents. It is also hunger that makes Pius

¹⁰³ <http://multitext.ucc.ie/d/Famine#FamineinIreland>.

begin stealing, when one night he encounters a drunken farmer who had fallen down “in the jakes of a public house, and Mulvey, light-headed with the hunger of several days, (...) relieve[s] him of his boots and hat” (O’Connor 94) and sells them to buy food. For Pius, stealing becomes the best possible way to survive for the next years of his life. Nevertheless, his peaceful life becomes again miserable after his imprisonment and, especially, after the accident with the circus lion that bites off his leg and makes him a useless limping man. When the circus leaves him behind, he is again faced with hunger. He tries begging for a while but his poverty and handicap leave the country people unimpressed because “lameness was nothing in the winter of ’42. Half-beggared themselves, they had nothing to steal” (O’Connor 208) either. His poverty becomes even extreme during the nineteen cold days Mulvey and the schoolmaster walk together towards the north, when they are constantly faced with hunger.

Hunger does not merely prevail on land but also on the ship. For the poor, having managed to get on board does not mean they have escaped poverty. On the contrary, their impoverished condition continues during the passage. The food rations that emigrants get is simply enough to keep them alive, which is also indicated by the surgeon during his medical round in the steerage: “Everyone I saw showing symptoms of gross malnutrition and badly underweight, some dangerously so. Diet of biscuit and water completely inadequate” (O’Connor 343). During the whole voyage the captain counts the dead, however, it is not mentioned whether and how many died in consequence of starvation. There is only one case in which the death of two passengers can implicitly be ascribed to hunger, namely, the young couple who are found dead in their hiding place.

Pius is the only one of the major characters who, like all the other steerage passengers, suffers from hunger. Since poverty has become his constant companion, he knows much about “its deceptions and strategies: its trick of letting you think you weren’t hungry and then suddenly hammering into you like a wild-eyed, shrieking robber”, as he experienced hunger his entire life, “in Connemara, on the roads of England [and] now (...) limping the decks alongside him” (O’Connor 26). Being in a terrible hungry condition, he thinks that he has “to be careful now. This was how hunger worked its spell. It wasn’t when you felt hungry

that you were in the greatest danger. It was when you stopped. That was when you died.” (O’Connor 26). At Jonathan’s birthday dinner Mulvey gets the opportunity to fill his stomach for the first time in a long time. The way he eats at the dinner reflects best the state of hungry people:

His hands rose and sank like those of a puppet drummerboy, from plate to mouth, from mouth to plate, and he swallowed while they sank, so that his mouth would be empty at the instant when his fork rose to astonish it once more. He chewed quickly, mechanically: taste was not the issue. Taste was not something that had mattered for years. (O’Connor 310)

To watch him eating shocks all the other people around him, especially Laura, who has never before “witnessed a starving man eat” (O’Connor 310).

4.7. Evictions

Like all other famine related themes, eviction is an ever-present issue in the novel. In the course of the story Pius, Mary and David are confronted in one way or another with all famine subjects, eviction not being an exception. While Mary and Pius are victims of eviction because of being tenants, David gets evicted because he is bankrupt. In fact, the onset of evictions of tenants was the result of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1847 containing “the notorious Gregory or quarter-acre clause”, which “radically shifted the burden of providing relief away from the British treasury, placing it instead squarely on the shoulders of Irish landlords and tenants” (Donnelly in: Morash 60) by compelling them to pay the poor rates “of every tenant who paid less than £4 in yearly rent” (Litton 94). The landowners, however, were not quite satisfied with this law, as they did not want to pay the poor rates of their tenants. Thus, the best solution was to get rid of their tenants by evicting them. It is estimated that between 1849 and 1854 over half a million people had to leave their holdings and around 200,000 holdings were virtually wiped out.¹⁰⁴ In 1867, the contemporary witness Mrs Hanniffe from Cillceascín, Cairbre, County Kildare remembers: “Fifty families were evicted from this district of Kilkeaskin by a local landlord. The thatch of the roofs were torn off even before the poor people had time to leave” (Póirtéir, *Famine Echoes* 239).

¹⁰⁴ Póirtéir, *Famine Echoes* 229.

The first eviction case in the *Star of the Sea* is that of Pius and his brother Nicholas. One day, sitting outside and thinking about his brother's health, Pius discovers a note with the opening lines "Final Warning of Eviction" (O'Connor 104), according to which they have a time limit of four months to pay the rent, otherwise they will be forced to leave. Being concerned about his brother's mental condition, Mulvey withholds this information from him, until one day Nicholas informs him about his decision to join the priesthood. Pius, gets alarmed about Nicholas' news and tries to change his mind by telling him the truth about the upcoming eviction: "We're in a hames of shite. They're going to put us out" (O'Connor 106). Being rather untouched by his brother's information, Nicholas leaves on the following day. Pius realizes that he will never be able to pay the rent to overturn the eviction and thus, leaves as well.

Mary and her family are further victims of eviction. In her letter she describes how they were put out by a driver-man with the help of the constabulary, while Pius was watching them. For a while, they live "in a scalp (...) in the woods" (O'Connor 275), until her husband and her child dies and she is forced to go to the workhouse. Similarly, when Pius comes back from England to the village of Carna to meet Mary and his child, he finds that Mary's family had been evicted long ago as "the door of the cabin had been sawn in two. He knew what it meant. The eviction gang" (O'Connor 219). Later in the story, David learns that "they died in Galway workhouse" after having been evicted (O'Connor 251). This mirrors reality, since for the majority of paupers "eviction was a virtual death sentence. They were left without housing or means of subsistence other than charity or meagre Government relief"¹⁰⁵, and thus, had no other choice than going to the workhouse where most of them were infected by the fever and died.

The fact that David is a landowner does not spare him from being evicted, as he is not able to pay the huge debts that his father left behind. All his efforts to prevent the eviction fail and they are forced to leave the Kingscourt Estate and live in their friend's house in Dublin, until they set sail to America. His father, on the contrary, evicts tenants before his decease, though once being a fair landlord.

¹⁰⁵ <http://multitext.ucc.ie/d/Famine#FamineinIreland>.

He learns about his father's deed from a threatening letter he receives from a group of tenants "calling itself 'The Hibernian Defenders' or 'Else-be Liabes'" (O'Connor 246), who demand to stop his father from rising rents and evicting tenants and threaten to kill him otherwise.

Another ruthless landlord who evicts lots of tenants is Henry Blake of Tully. Being in a financial dilemma, Lord Kingscourt sells a part of his estate to Commander Blake who immediately evicts "seven hundred families for non-payment of arrears" (O'Connor 246). After his father's death David comes back to Kingscourt, where he finds "a forest of tepees in the Lower Lock meadow, where Blake's evicted tenants had come to camps" (O'Connor 258). Apparently, this is based on a historical incident where indeed "cruel ejectments on the Blake estate in County Galway" (Donnelly in: Morash 70) took place. Meanwhile, the number of tents at Kingscourt grow incredibly, soon reaching "the size of a small town", accommodating three thousand people. The police pushes David to clear the land from tents, however, David rejects this and writes a letter to London to ask for more help instead. At one passage, Laura reveals that they had to pay the fares of seven thousand tenants beside the cost of evicting them, though it remains unknown whether they were Kingscourt's or Blake's tenants.¹⁰⁶

4.8. Emigration and Coffin Ships

Emigration and coffin ships are two central themes with which the story is primarily concerned. The 'Star of the Sea' is one of those notorious 'coffin ships' that carried Irish emigrants to America and Canada under terrible conditions. It sets sail to New York in the hard winter of 1847, which "lives in the memory as the worst year of the Famine, the year of the coffin ships" (Laxton 36). Like all famine ships of that time, the *Star* is quite an old cargo ship and, therefore, not appropriate for the transportation of humans. This fact is also confirmed by Mackay who states that only a "few emigrant ships had been built to carry passengers. Most were aging cargo vessels, three-masted barks and two-masted brigs (...)" (198). Besides, the *Star* is overcrowded, food and sanitary conditions

¹⁰⁶ O'Connor, 148.

are quite insufficient. Having managed to get on the ship does not necessarily mean that people have already left the famine behind, as many of them died during the passage due to typhus fever, cholera or malnutrition. Captain Lockwood records the names of people who die each day, at the beginning of each entry.

Like the steerage passengers of all other ships, the emigrants on the *Star* are “mainly evicted farmers (...) and beggared spalpeens” (O’Connor 25) who have “sold all they owned to gather the fare across Liverpool” (O’Connor xvi). However, the term ‘refugee’ seems to be more appropriate for these people, since it was the famine, diseases and in some cases evictions that forced them to emigrate.¹⁰⁷ The cost of emigration was not always borne by the emigrants themselves but also by landlords who often paid the passage of their tenants to get rid of them.¹⁰⁸ This is confirmed by Laura who recalls that they paid the “fares to Quebec of seven thousand tenants” in addition to “the cost of evicting them: the driver-men’s fees” (O’Connor 148).

Since it was cheaper to “depart from Liverpool than to take a ship from Cork City or Dublin” (Mackay 200), many emigrants accepted the risks and discomfort to cross the Irish Sea by steamer. “The poor Irish emigrant invariably arrived in the Clarence Dock, Liverpool, cold half-starved, sick and exceptionally low on funds” (Hollett 66). Their wretched conditions did not prevent thieves and swindlers from adopting any possible tricks to deprive the emigrants from their hard-earned savings. Certainly, this happens to the passengers of the *Star* too who get robbed and “swindled into parting with their few possessions” (O’Connor xvi). In this context, Rees points out that “tricking, robbing, and brutalising the transient mass of refugees was something all classes indulged in profitably” (63), from the shipping companies to boarding house keepers. The latter were quite unscrupulous to overcharge the accommodation fees and to apply every tactic to keep the poor emigrants off from continuing their journeys. In the meantime, they hired “runners, otherwise known as crimps and touts but most descriptively referred to as ‘man-catchers’” (Rees 63-64) who tried to separate the poor

¹⁰⁷ Neal, 51.

¹⁰⁸ Litton, 99.

emigrants from their small savings as soon as possible. Moreover, the continuous arrivals from Ireland deteriorated the situation of poor housings “in cellars, courts and lodging-houses” (Neal 127), for which emigrants paid high rents and which had become a nest for the fever because of being overcrowded and filthy. This is supported by Hollett who maintains that

the lodging-houses were little more than filthy overcrowded slums, into which as many as a hundred emigrants would be crammed (...) Men, women, and children would be bedded down together, and often on a cold stone floor, without any blankets. Here the emigrants would be robbed, cheated, overcharged, and run the very considerable risk of contracting a variety of contagious diseases. (69)

Equally outrageous was the embarkation of the passengers “which was not just a simple matter of walking up a gang plank” (Hollett 124), but a totally chaotic rush at the very last minute, as the captains wanted the cargo to be loaded before the passengers flooded the ship. Consequently, within a few minutes, people desperately tried to get on board by climbing “over the sides of the ship, with a fair percentage of those involved falling into the dock, and occasionally drowning” (Hollett 124). Their misery continued on the timber ships called ‘coffin ships’ which were equipped “with a basic minimum of necessities (...) taking on board a paying ballast” (O’Gallagher 81). The following portrayal of the condition on the *Star* provides an insight into the general situation on all coffin ships:

(...) the sick and the healthy sleeping side by side, the tormented moans and fearful invocations mingling with the buzzing of the innumerable flies. The line for the only two water closets in steerage formed directly past the coffin lid of squalid floor (...). One lavatory was cracked, the other clogged and overflowing; the cubicles infested with legions of hissing rats. (...) The stink had an almost corporeal presence; (...) Rotten food, rotten flesh, rotten fruit of rotting bowels, you smelt it on your clothes, your hair, your hands; on the glass you drank from and the bread you ate. Tobacco smoke, vomit, stale perspiration, mildewed clothes, filthy blankets and rotgut whiskey. The portholes intended to ventilate steerage would be thrown open in an attempt to quell the astounding putrescent reek. But if anything, the breeze seemed only to make it worse (...). (O’Connor xiv-xv)

This is confirmed by Edwards and Williams who state that the situation on famine ships was quite the same: overcrowded steerage, airless quarters and endless

passage that led to dullness and in further consequence, to illness among passengers, as they disregarded “the simplest precautions against infection” (364). Mackay also points out the miserable conditions of the emigrants who had to spend the voyage of one and a half to sometimes three months, depending on the wind, in crowds of hundreds of men, women and children huddled together in the airless and dark steerage that resembled a dungeon. He continues that

even in fine weather with the hatches off there was little light or ventilation, but in rough weather with the hatches battened the steerage was like a dungeon lit with smoky rotting scraps of food, and the vomit of seasick humanity. All around lay luggage, bags, sacks and boxes. No effort was made to segregate unmarried women from men until the 1850s. (Mackay 199)

Another source that indicates the wretched condition of below deck is the article on the “The History Place” website, which affirms that “hundreds of men, women and children [were] huddled together in the dark on bare wooden floors with no ventilation, breathing a stench of vomit and the effects of diarrhea (sic!) amid no sanitary facilities”.¹⁰⁹ It continues that there were berths with no mattresses and that many sick persons were laid on their filthy bare wooden bunks the whole journey, as they were too sick to get up. The overall misery portrayed previously is confirmed by Keegan who describes the situation of the steerage by his own experience, as he was a passenger on the famine ship ‘Naparima’:

About half of the passengers had no place to bed down for the night. They tried to rest on bundles and chests on the floor of the steerage quarters. (...) The holds are dark, cavernous dungeons fitted with narrow movable bunks for the emigrants. There are no lights, no portholes, and no ventilation except for what fresh air enters from the two hatchways. (...) By noon hour today the air was already foul and if fever breaks out I fear for the worst. It is an ideal place for disease to spread. (66)

Equally dreadful were the sanitary conditions. According to Rees, the lack of sanitary facilities was particularly embarrassing for female passengers, as there was no opportunity for privacy when using the chamber pots. The few toilet closets on deck were usually very filthy and had mere a capacity for “a [standard] ship-load of passengers. In any case, in rough weather passengers were not

¹⁰⁹ <http://www.historyplace.com/worldhistory/famine/coffin.htm>.

allowed on deck to use these toilets or for any other reason" (Rees 75).

Daly points to another important issue, namely diseases spread on board, of which typhus and cholera were the most serious, boosted by low hygienic standards and overcrowding on "ships where water and washing facilities were scarce" (1986: 108). Out of both infections, typhus (also called ship fever) was the most serious, causing most deaths. The majority of emigrants were already infected when they got on board.¹¹⁰ They caught typhus while waiting for their journey in overcrowded lodging-houses in Cork or Liverpool.¹¹¹ This is equally the case on the *Star*, as many famine-stricken emigrants are already sick when they embark the ship and thus, too weak to survive the four-week voyage. Throughout the whole book, the captain notes in his logbook the number and names of passengers who have died. Though not mentioned explicitly, his remark on the fifth day, "Five are in the hold this night, suspected of Typhus" (O'Connor 33) as well as on the eighth day, "Eight suspected of Typhus in the hold this night. One suspected of Cholera" (O'Connor 79), prove that most deaths are caused by typhus. Robert Whyte, another contemporary witness and passenger of a famine ship, writes in his diary about this cruel and malicious disease that manifests itself unexpectedly, and leads to the patient's agonizing death:

This morning there was a further accession to the names upon the sick roll. It was awful how suddenly some were stricken. A little child who was playing with its companions, suddenly fell down and for some time was sunk in a death-like torpor from which, when she awoke, she commenced to scream violently and writhed in convulsive agony. (...) Some of those who the other day appeared to bid defiance to the fever, were seized in its relentless grasp and a few who were on the recovery, relapsed. It seemed miraculous to me that such subjects could struggle with so violent a disease without any effective aid. (33-34)

In addition to the whole misery, there was rarely a doctor available on board and thus, sick people were abandoned to their fate. This is also the case on the *Star*, since Captain Lockwood complains that "it is only a blessing of providence that we have Surgeon Mangan among us now; and if his efforts are tireless and his charity unstinting, he is not a young man and is already being overwhelmed"

¹¹⁰ Daly, 1986, 108.

¹¹¹ Edwards and Williams, 367.

(O'Connor 36). In this context, Mackay refers to the Passengers Act of 1842 that "was the legislation in force during the chaotic years of the Great Famine when 20,000 died during the voyage or soon after" (215). Though the Act made some improvements in the conditions of steerage passengers such as the abolition of "the cramming of unmarried young women and men into the same space" (Mackay 215), it did not lay down any obligation to have a doctor on board.

Another important issue is the terrible news of a shipwreck that causes "the loss of all 239½ emigrants on board and all but three of the crew", (O'Connor 3) and of which the captain gets reported on the day of their leave-taking. This incident is again based on historical fact, since indeed crossing the Atlantic Ocean on old, non-seaworthy ships through fog and ice and "without radar, wireless, or any form of mechanical propulsion was particularly dangerous" (Hollett 148). One further lethal danger was the icebergs that, in 1849, caused four ships to sink and a vast number of emigrants to die.¹¹² However, it was not before 1842 that the Passenger Act required ships to carry lifeboats for steerage passengers too.¹¹³

Nonetheless, the misery of the emigrants was not restricted to the condition on the ship, but continued after they arrived at the port, where the ships were first put in quarantine. On the day of their arrival in New York, Captain Lockwood describes the desperate situation at the harbour, where around hundred vessels lie at anchor, and are not permitted "to tie up at the dock" (O'Connor 355). Even though there are many ill people on board who need to be taken into a fever hospital, they are ordered to wait until further instructions are given. Meanwhile, they are getting out of water and provisions and more people are dying. However, the corpses have to be "placed in the hold, since burials within the harbour are strictly forbidden" (O'Connor 358). The situation illustrated by the captain corresponds to the situation on Grosse Isle (also Grosse Island), the biggest quarantine station for Irish emigrants sailing to Canada. Having arrived in the St. Lawrence River, Quebec, the ships were ordered to wait to be inspected for diseases, before passengers could disembark. Unfortunately, healthy passengers got infected while waiting for their medical examination on the ships,

¹¹² Laxton, 126.

¹¹³ Mackay, 215.

or on Grosse Isle. The situation on Grosse Isle was anything but human: medical facility, lodgings for ill patients as well as for healthy patients were insufficient and hygienic conditions terribly bad.¹¹⁴ The dismal situation is also reflected in Keegan's entry:

There is an endless line of ships out in the harbour today. The quarantine station is already woefully understaffed and overcrowded with patients and I wonder what will become of all the sick and dying out on those ships. Today they began to put up tents to take some of the overflow. It is incredible that the Canadian government is not taking emergency measures. But as I see it there is no Canadian government as such. Canada is ruled by the Home Office and we can expect no better treatment here than what we had in Ireland. (110)

At the end of the novel, the captain reveals that "the total who died on the voyage is ninety-five" (O'Connor 380), which corresponds to a quarter of all steerage passengers who embarked the ship in Liverpool and in Queenstown. It is estimated that in 1847, out of 100,000 who immigrated to Canada on coffin ships, "one-sixth died on board ship or soon after landing" (Litton 105), in addition to the 15,000 who died on Grosse Isle.¹¹⁵ Rees claims that the total number of people who got infected and died from ship fever during the passage to America and Canada, will never be known (77).

¹¹⁴ <http://www.historyplace.com/worldhistory/famine/coffin.htm>.

¹¹⁵ Keegan, 127.

5. NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

Before analysing the narrative technique of the story, it seems vital to undertake a brief survey on the term 'narratology'. Basically, narratology is the "theory of narrative [that] studies the nature, form, and functioning of narrative (...) and tries to characterize narrative competence" (Prince, 1988: 65). In a wider sense, it provides the reader tools with which he/she can describe narrative texts like novels, novellas, short stories, fairy tales, and newspaper articles, to make them accessible to others.¹¹⁶ It was developed by the 1970s famous structuralist theorists as Franz K. Stanzel, Gérard Genette, Mieke Bal, Gerald Prince,¹¹⁷ whose theories will serve as primary sources of the analysis to be provided in this chapter. Their concepts, particularly "Stanzel's narrative situations were and still are standard teaching material at universities" (Fludernik, 2009: 11), though many researchers in this field regard them as obsolete. The poststructuralist theorists of the 1980s transferred the structural model into poststructuralist narratology, which was a transition from "discovery to invention, from coherence to complexity, and from poetics to politics" (Currie, 1998: 2). Thus, instead of considering "narratives (...) as solid objects in the world (...), the active role of the reader in the construction of meaning" (Currie, 1998: 3) became foregrounded.

In the light of this fact, the following chapter is dedicated to the analysis of some important narrative techniques that are helpful for the reader's understanding, interpretation and judgement of the novel. Since the complexity of the narrative techniques used in the story make an extensive analysis impossible, there will only be a discussion of some selected aspects like narrative situation, perspective and focalization, subjectivity and objectivity, reality/authenticity and time, provided in this study.

5.1. Narrator and Narrative Situation

Genette determines a narrator as the 'voice' of the narrative discourse that is concerned with the question "who speaks?" (1980: 186). However, the narrator

¹¹⁶ Bal, 3 f.

¹¹⁷ Onega, 1.

should not be confused with the author, as in fact, it is “an instrument, a construction, or a device wielded by the author” (Abbott 63). In this context, Booth distinguishes between the *real author* and the *implied author*, that is, “the real author’s literary version of him/herself” (in Onega 145). Moreover, two types of a ‘voice’ or ‘person’ in a narration can be distinguished: *first-person* (I was there) and *third-person* (she was there).¹¹⁸ Finally, a narrative may contain a single narrator or multiple narrators. The latter is the case in the *Star of the Sea*.

An important aspect related to the narrator is the narrative situation, which will be analysed in the course of this section. Stanzel defines three constitutive elements of the *narrative situation*, namely *person*, *perspective* and *mode*. The first aspect, *person*, related to the question *who is narrating?*, is concerned with the relationship between the narrator and the fictional characters of the story.¹¹⁹ Accordingly, Stanzel distinguishes between three narrative situations: *authorial narrative situation*, *first-person narrative situation* and *figural narrative situation*. While in the figural narrative situation the story is reflected through the consciousness of the reflector figure, the story of the authorial and first-person narrative situations is mediated by the narrator. The narrator can be either outside (authorial narrative situation), or inside (first-person narrative situation) the fictional world.¹²⁰ This is also the case in the *Star of the Sea*, though at first sight the reader gets the impression of an authorial narrative situation.

What makes the story of the *Star of the Sea* quite complicated is that it contains four different first-person narrative situations, of which one is Dixon who acts both as peripheral¹²¹ and protagonist first-person narrator. In contrast to “the autobiographical first-person narrator, who is at one and the same time the main character, standing at the centre of action (...)”, the peripheral first-person narrator stands at the periphery of the events acting as an “eyewitness at the scene of the events, as observer, as the contemporary of the main character, his biographer, etc.” (Stanzel, 1984: 205). Furthermore, the peripheral first-person narrator frequently appears as “the paternal friend, the close personal friend or

¹¹⁸ Abbott, 64.

¹¹⁹ Stanzel, 1984, 5.

¹²⁰ Stanzel, *Typische Formen des Romans*, 16 f.

¹²¹ A term coined by Stanzel (1971, 65).

admirer of the main character" (Stanzel, 1984: 206). All these features confirm Dixon's appearance as the peripheral first-person narrator of the novel, as will be observed in the following. Another first-person narrator is Captain Lockwood, apart from two other fictional first-person narrators Mary and Nicholas. While Captain Lockwood's entries evidently identify him as a first-person narrator, there are only a few hints that unveil Dixon as the first-person narrator. One of them is his remarks on the bottom of the page, written in first-person pronoun and signed by him: "In my memory the sails on that ship were black, but when I consult my notes I see I am mistaken. – G. G. Dixon" (O'Connor xv). Another one is the epilogue in which he confesses his identity as the first person narrator: "As the only professional reporter on the ship where Lord Kingscourt was murdered, my articles were in demand all over the world" (O'Connor 389). In case of Mary and Nicholas, there are only two letters that confirm their presence as fictional first-person narrators, which will be considered later on.

A significant feature which should be examined in this context is the *reliability* of the narrator and, in particular, the first-person narrator. For Booth, a narrator is reliable "when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the works (which is to say, the implied author's norms), unreliable when he does not" (in Onega 152). However, a distinction can also be made between a more reliable or less reliable narrator, which means that "(parts of) his account may be more or less worthy of trust in terms of the narrative itself" (Prince 12). Regarding the first-person narrators, Stanzel claims that they are less reliable than the authorial narrators because of being "more likely to exhibit a certain bias in the rendering of their story than are authorial narrators" (1984: 150). Fludernik reduces this to the peripheral first-person narrators that may be unreliable because they "frequently recount what happens from a naïve and uninformed perspective" (2009: 90). The following quotation from the epilogue, written by Dixon decades later, justifies the concepts of both theorists, since the narrator admits

(...) where my own recollections, still bright as they seem to myself, must inevitably be questioned so long after the event. (...) And of course I have selected what has been seen of the Captain's words in order to frame and tell the story. A different author would have made a different selection. Everything is in the way the material is composed. From papers found, from documents discovered, from certain investigations and

recollections and interviews; from enquiries made among others who sailed that ship, from questions asked on many return visits to (...) 'The British Isles' (...). (O'Connor 397)

Unlike the traditional form, the largest part of the novel is narrated in the third person, except for captain's logbook, the letters and the epilogue, which are rendered through different first-person narrators using the first-person pronoun "I". This makes it difficult for the reader to recognise Dixon as the first-person narrator, since narration in the third-person is mainly associated with the authorial narrative situation. The confusion that arises from Stanzel's model is cleared up by Genette who uses the terms homodiegetic for first-person narrative and heterodiegetic for third-person narrative.¹²² Like in Stanzel's model "in a homodiegetic narrative, the story is told by a (homodiegetic) narrator who is present as a character in the story. (...) In a heterodiegetic narrative, the story is told by a (heterodiegetic) narrator who is not present as a character in the story" (Jahn N3.1.5.). Additionally, homodiegetic narration has "a special case [called] autodiegetic narration, in which the narrator is the protagonist of his/her story" (Jahn N3.1.5.). This is different in the *Star of the Sea*, since Dixon is the first-person narrator but not the protagonist of the story.

Dixon's narrative situation indicates one important aspect of the first-person narrative situation, namely that the first-person narrator can also play the role of the authorial narrator, "as long as he reports the story of this hero – which is also his own story – in the third person" (Stanzel, 1971: 60). In such cases the narrator stays outside the fictional world and plays the role of an observer, a witness or a distanced correspondent¹²³. Grantley Dixon is one of those narrators who disguises as a reporter and renders the story from a distance. The author acts in quite a subtle manner because Dixon refers to himself in the third person and thereby, makes it even more difficult for the reader to identify the first-person narrative situation. This can be perceived in the prologue which exposes his identity as the reporter of the New York Times as well as by the title of the chapter *The Story-Teller*, in which the first-person narrator is addressed by his name: "Grantley Dixon paused by the door to the Smoking Saloon" (O'Connor 119). The

¹²² Genette, 50 f.

¹²³ Stanzel, *Typische Formen des Romans*, 26 f.

subheading confirms that the chapter is going to describe “two encounters between the author and his adversary” (O’Connor 119).

Another major component of the first-person narrative situation is the difference between the *experiencing self* and the *narrating self*. If the actions take place at the time or just before the narration, then the focus is on the experiencing self. On the other hand, the narrating self provides retrospective reflections on past events and frequently evaluates, draws conclusions or shows regret.¹²⁴ Dixon refers to this fact in the epilogue when he says “why not say it now, since an old man must confess all his shames” (O’Connor 396). As in the case of Dixon, “usually, the narrating I is older and wiser than the experiencing I. The temporal and psychological distance between the narrating I and the experiencing I” (Jahn N3.3.2.) is called narrative distance, to be considered in the time analysis. Additionally, Stanzel points out that “reportlike narration” is a distinguishing feature of the narrating self, while “scenic presentation concentrates the reader’s interest on the action thus on the experiencing self” (1971: 67). He adds that

the shift of the center of orientation in the first-person novel is facilitated by the fact that the narrating self and the experiencing self are only different aspects of the same personality. The shift from the now-and-here of the narrating self to the now-and-here of the experiencing self can thus take place within the same person. Recollection of the past, which is usually the starting point of the narrative process in the first-person novel, will advance all the more easily to a vividly ‘present’ portrayal of the self’s earlier experiences. (1971: 69)

Following Stanzel’s statement, it can be deduced that for most part of his narration Dixon reports on past events. It is the narrating self that “recollects his past”, since in the end the reader learns that Dixon compiled together all the information from the characters and published it in 1849 in his “collection *An American Abroad*” containing the “series on the Monster of Newgate” (O’Connor 389). One obvious example of presentation through the experiencing self is the epilogue in which Dixon explains that “he is an old man now with very little left to him” (O’Connor 405). In this quotation, the verb ‘now’ implies that the narrative distance between the narrating I and the experiencing I is short, and this is

¹²⁴ Fludernik, 2009, 90; Stanzel, 1971, 65.

another evidence for mediation through the experiencing self. However, the report on past situations also raises the question of reliability, as the narrator may forget the details and consciously, or unconsciously, misinterpreted facts. This is confirmed by Dixon who in the epilogue confesses that “[his] own recollections, still bright as they seem to [himself], must inevitably be questioned so long after the event. (...)” (O’Connor 397).

On the other hand, the narrating self becomes obvious in passages that Dixon renders as a peripheral first-person narrator many years later. At the very beginning of the voyage he remembers their crossing of the Irish Sea and the embarking of emigrants in Queenstown as follows:

We had chopped across a filthy-tempered Irish Sea and docked at Kingstown to take on provisions; then crept down the jagged south-east coast, making for Queenstown in the county of Cork. (...) Seeing Wicklow glide past, or Wexford or Waterford, seemed to many a bitter taunt, a poultice being ripped from a putrefying wound. (...) At Queenstown a hundred more passengers came on, their condition so dreadful that it made the others seem as royalty. I saw one elderly woman, little more than an agglomeration of rags, barely gain the gangplank only to die on the foredeck. Her children beseeched the Captain to take her to America anyway (...). (O’Connor xvi-xvii)

In the previous passage the narrating I makes itself particularly visible through the use of past perfect tense like in ‘had chopped’, as well as the frequent use of past tense such as ‘docked’, ‘seemed’, or ‘I saw’ to recall on the events.

Concerning the captain, it is fairly obvious that for most part of his logbook the experiencing I is narrating the story, as he writes down the incidents that affect him during the day shortly after they happened:

This evening I was walking near the fo’c’sle at dusk, oppressed by a heavy mood of melancholy. The deaths of any are hard to bear, but the deaths of the young, the little children especially, seem almost to ridicule of our lives. I confess it is difficult at such painful moments to believe that Evil does not govern the world. (O’Connor 80)

However, there are of course other instances that are mediated through the narrating self, and where a transition from experiencing self to narrating self

occurs:

I was attempting my prayers in contemplative silence, as in my preferred custom of years, when I came upon one of the steerage passengers, on his hands and knees by the First-Class gates, and most violently ill from the sea. This is a curious and noteworthy character, his behaviour oftentimes odd. Though badly afflicted with a deformed foot, he is fond of walking the ship by night, and is known among the men by the sobriquet of 'The Ghost'. (O'Connor 80).

As can be realised in this paragraph, the narrator first takes the position of the experiencing I in the first sentence, but then switches to the viewpoint of the narrating I in the next sentence. Thus, the captain's mediation of his encounter with Mulvey through the experiencing self gets visible in the phrases 'I was attempting', and 'when I came upon'. Whereas, in the second sentence the narrator describes and comments on the appearance and behaviour of Mulvey from the angle of the narrating self.

The experiencing self can similarly be observed at the beginning of Nicholas' letter when he explains that "pen could scarcely put down what I feel now. All is lost, my sweetest Mary and can never return" (O'Connor 38), but especially in his last sentences, "I am so cold and afraid. She will not suffer, Mary, I will do it quickly and be not long after her" (O'Connor 43). Here, the experiencing self can be discerned in the description of Nicholas' feelings as well as his intention that he renders in the last two sentences. At another point of the letter, the narrating I is perceivable in his recollection of some past events:

Do you remember, my gentle Mary, how we used to go out walking together when we were young? The simple happiness of the days together and the sweetness and friendship of our nights. What a life we thought we should have, a life of buttermilk and bees, you once said. Even though I knew I was not your first choice for a companion of life, there was no happier man in all of Ireland than myself at that time (...). (O'Connor 43)

Mediation through both the experiencing I as well as the narrating I are equally apparent in Mary's letter. The most obvious fact indicating the presence of the narrating self is that the letter was written in April 1847, however, refers to occurrences in her youth up to the time when David found her the previous year, as the following quotation displays:

When I was nineteen yrs I was promised to one p**s M***** of A'nagcraomha, only brother of N***** M***** that was once priest. And as I live, no man ever knew me before that time. The same p*** M***** put me in a certain way and then jaunted off with himself to my great distress. (...) In 1843 I learnd that I was expecting an event and our child was born in janary 1844. (...) In september of 1844 his brother p**s M***** came back from wherever he was and began into torturing us. (...) We were evicted b cmdr blakes agent in october 1845 for not paying the rent. (O'Connor 272-274)

The experiencing I, on the other hand, reflects Mary's present condition and her intention to leave Ireland, both at the beginning and towards the end of her letter. As illustrated in the following quotation, the use of present continuous supports the narration of the experiencing I:

I am handing this to a certain man who I know will have knowledge of who to give it to. (...) I am going to America shortly and will never come home again so I want to say what follows and hope ye and yeer men act on it. (...) I am working as a nanny for the family of Lord and Lady *****. I will never come back to galway again an I live to a hundred. There is no use in galway for a decent woman. (O'Connor 275)

In this context Stanzel points to another characteristic of the first-person narrative situation, namely its ability to "approach the authorial narrative situation by shifting the presentational center of gravity from the experiencing self to the narrating self" (1971: 62). Indeed, this is to be found in the *Star of the Sea*, since for the most part of the story the first-person narrator Dixon is rendering the story through the narrating self, as mentioned above. Furthermore, in first-person novels the narration can be performed either through presentation, or without explicit mentioning of the narrative process. When the narration is presented and "the narrating and the experiencing selves are separated by a recognizable narrative distance – the first-person novel approaches the narrative situation of the authorial novel" (Stanzel, 1971: 68-69). This is true of the narrative process of the *Star of the Sea*, since the story is mostly presented through detailed descriptions of the first-person narrators Dixon and Captain Lockwood, either by the third or the first-person narrator.

On the other hand, if "the narrative process, narrative distance, and narrating self are not portrayed in the text – the first-person novel approaches the narrative

situation of the figural novel” (Stanzel, 1971: 68-69). This can occur if the scenic presentation is eliminated to a great extent so that the narrative process is rendered through dialogues and stream of consciousness in form of an interior monologue. Accordingly, an illusion of immediacy is created, as “no one ‘narrates’ any longer; the action is ‘rendered’ with no visible narrative mediation” (Stanzel, 1971: 67). The stream of consciousness technique is particularly vivid at the beginning of the passage covering Mary’s recollections of her past:

Spears, maybe. Muskets? Maybe. Grey as Dog’s Bay in the early morning. And the bullets must have been big to pierce his hide. And what did they use to hack him to pieces? A hatchet, maybe. A crosscut-saw. Trumpeting blaring bellying down. Trees all around as they went to work on his tusks. A scurf of blood flowing over the slick leaves. Black men, brown men with blood on their feet. Red men watching the black men cut. (O’Connor 45)

As can be recognised in this quotation, the method used to present the events gives the impression of an incoherent and incomprehensible speech. Consequently, it seems difficult for the reader to follow the lines and to make sense of what is being narrated. The forms of the reflector mode and of internal perspective such as “interior monologue, free indirect style and figural narrative situation” leads to “the illusion of direct insight into the character’s thoughts” (Stanzel, 1984: 127), called ‘immediacy’. The reason behind this narrative technique, namely presenting consciousness and character’s direct thoughts, is to manipulate the reader’s sympathy in favour of the character. This argument sounds quite reasonable since “the more a reader learns about the innermost motives for the behaviour of a character, the more inclined he tends to feel understanding, forbearance, tolerance, and so on, in respect to the conduct of this character” (Stanzel, 1984: 128).

One further aspect to be mentioned in this respect is the distinction between overt and covert narrator. If the narrator “refers to him/herself in the first person pronoun (‘I’, ‘we’ etc.)” (Jahn N3.1.4.), then there is the case of an overt narrator. However, this does not necessarily postulate that an overt narrator solely emerges in the first-person narrative situation. The covert narrator, by contrast, is unobtrusive and does not “present him/herself as the articulator of the story or

does so almost imperceptibly” (Fludernik, 2009: 22). A distinguishing characteristic of covert narration is that it is usually reflected through a reflector/focal character which creates “the illusion of immediacy in the reader” (Stanzel, 1984: 141), a situation also to be found in stream of consciousness narration, as mentioned previously. Nevertheless, mediation through the reflector character provokes the question of the reliability of the covert narrator.

Applying the previous description to the narrative situation of Dixon and Captain Lockwood, it becomes evident that Dixon is a covert and Captain is an overt narrator. As was pointed out earlier, Dixon does not mediate the story openly using the first-person pronoun ‘I’ but rather takes the position of an authorial narrator, even in the passages in which he describes himself. This necessarily implies that for the entire part of his narration, Dixon hides his identity as the narrator and is therefore, to be categorized as a covert narrator. Nevertheless, there are a few instances in which he becomes noticeable as an overt narrator, namely in the footnotes and the epilogue. In the footnotes he refers to himself as the author by signing each annotation, while in the epilogue he openly narrates using the first person pronoun. As regards the captain’s narrative process, it is rather obvious that he is an overt narrator, since he constantly uses the first-person pronoun in his entries, and thereby, indicates his presence as the first-person narrator.

5.2. Perspective and Focalization

The next constitutive element of the narrative situation that will be analysed in the following is *perspective* or focalization. Genette uses the term *mood*, dealing with the question: “*who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?*”, or simply “*who sees?*” (1980: 186). In addition, Bal claims that events or stories are always presented from a certain point of view or perspective, which he calls ‘vision’, and that perception is a “psychological process, strongly dependent on the position of the perceiving body” striving for objectivity (100). According to Stanzel perspective refers to the “way in which [the reader] perceives the fictional reality” (1984: 49). There are two different types of perspectives which Stanzel divides into “internal” and “external”, as described

below:

Internal perspective prevails when the point of view from which the narrated world is perceived or represented is located in the main character or in the centre of events. (...) *External perspective* prevails when the point of view from which the narrated world is perceived or represented is located outside the main character or at the periphery of events. (1984: 111 f.)

Subsequently, internal perspective can be found in “quasi-autobiographical form of first-person narration, in the epistolary novel,¹²⁵ in autonomous interior monologue and where the figural narrative situation predominates in a narrative” (Stanzel, 1984: 112). On the other hand, external perspective exists in narrative texts either with an authorial narrative situation or with a peripheral first-person narrator, of which one example is the *Star of the Sea*.

As mentioned previously, everything perceived by the reader is rendered either through the experiencing self or the narrating self. Consequently, an investigation of the perspective of both first-person narrators in the novel only makes sense in regard to these two elements. It has already been stated that the difference between the experiencing self and the narrating self arises from the narrative distance between the incidences in the story and their actual narration, which is short with the experiencing self and long with the narrating self. It has also been pointed out that in the *Star of the Sea* the story is mostly rendered through the narrating self of the homodiegetic narrator Dixon many years later after it happened. On the contrary, the events presented by another important homodiegetic narrator, the Captain, are mainly rendered by the experiencing self. On the basis of these facts, it becomes obvious that the story is told from both perspectives, that of the narrating self and of the experiencing self.

Genette uses the more abstract term *focalization* to denote the point of view or perspective of a character. Jahn extends Genette's description by suggesting that “functionally, focalization is a means of selecting and restricting narrative information, of seeing events and states of affairs from somebody's point of view”

¹²⁵ “A novel in the form of letters. It was a particularly popular form in the 18th century.” (Cuddon 239)

(N3.2.2.). Like the distinction between internal and external perspective, focalization is also separated into internal and external. An additional type generated by Genette is the nonfocalized narrative, also called *zero focalization*.¹²⁶ If the events are presented from the point of view of a character, then the focalization is *internal*. However, if the character, whose perspective is presented, is outside the story, there will be a case of *external focalization*.¹²⁷ The agent whose thoughts and perceptions direct the narration is called *focalizer*, or *focal character*.¹²⁸ Stanzel provides an elaborated description of the focalizer, which he calls *reflector character* and which, together with its opposition, *teller character*, construct the third constitutive element of the narrative situation, *mode*. Accordingly, the *reflector character* “mirrors the outer world in his consciousness, perceives, feels, registers [but] does not verbalize his perceptions, thoughts and feelings in an attempt to communicate them” (1984: 144). A *teller character*, by contrast, “narrates, records, informs, writes letters, includes documents, cites reliable informants, refers to his own narration, addresses the reader, comments on that which has been narrated, and so on” (Stanzel, 1984: 144). The teller characters can be found in all kinds of authorial narrative as well as first-person narrative situations where the narrating self is palpable. On the other hand, first-person narrators who render the events through the experiencing self, reflect covertly on the experiences from the perspective of a reflector character.¹²⁹ The former is the case in Dixon’s narration, where he reflects on the events from the perspective of the reflector character as the following quotation shows:

Pius Mulvey began to think he might die in it, too. It frightened him even more than having become what he was; that figure unimaginable to the young: an orphan. More than poverty and hunger it began to claw at him: the picture of himself and his heartbreakingly courageous brother growing old and then dying in that mountainside cabin. (O’Connor 89)

Even though this paragraph is narrated by Dixon, the reader perceives the picture from Mulvey’s reflections on his experiences. It gives the impression as if it is Mulvey and not Dixon, who renders the story. In another passage the focalizer becomes noticeable, e.g. in David’s reflections, while sitting on deck:

¹²⁶ Genette, 189.

¹²⁷ Jahn, N3.2.1; Bal, 105.

¹²⁸ Jahn, N3.2.2.

¹²⁹ Stanzel, 1984, 145.

The music of the ship was howling around him. The low whistlings; the tortured rumbles; the wheezy sputters of breeze flowing through it. The clatter of loose wainscoting. The clank of chains. The groaning of boards. The blare of wind. Never before had he felt rain quite like it. He watched the wave rise up from a quarter of a mile away. Rolling. Foaming. Rushing. Surging (...). (O'Connor 126)

As can be noticed in this paragraph, the reflection of the sounds by which the narrator is surrounded indicates that it is the reflector character or the experiencing self who conveys the actions. At another passage, Captain Lockwood can be noticed as a focalizer by reporting on a scene he encounters in the lower deck where "the unfortunate crippled man, William Swales, was cowering on the floor near the water closets. His appearance was most pitiful" (O'Connor 223). Obviously, the focalizer is reflecting on the appearance and condition of Mulvey who has been assaulted by some steerage passengers. Since the story is presented from the point of view of both first-person narrators, Dixon and Captain, one may also speak of internal focalization.

In the previous chapter, it has already been mentioned that mediation through a reflector character is always associated with the illusion of immediacy. Moreover, focalization is subdivided into four main domains: fixed variable, multiple and collective focalization. In *fixed focalization* the actions are constantly presented from the point of view of one focalizer, whereas in *variable focalization* distinctive events are mediated through the eyes of various focalizers. Slightly different is *multiple focalization* where one single episode is presented repeatedly, "each time seen through the eyes of a different (internal) focalizer." Finally, *collective focalization* describes "focalization through either plural narrators ('we narrative') or a group of characters ('collective reflectors') (Jahn N3.2.4.). The fact that the story of the *Star of the Sea* is mediated by several first-person narrators confirms the use of variable focalization. Though most parts of the story are rendered through the reflection of the first-person narrator Dixon, we also perceive the story through the eyes of other focalizers such as the Captain, Mary or Nicholas.

In addition, there are two further aspects of focalization which Genette labels as

paralepsis and *paralipsis*¹³⁰ and that apparently emerge from the violation of standard patterns. Jahn gives a detailed description of these two main types of deviations, or in Genette's terms, alterations:

Paralepsis [is] an infraction caused by saying too much; a narrator assuming a competence he/she does not properly have; typically, a first-person narrator (or a historiographer) narrating what somebody else thought. (...) [The opposite is] paralipsis, an infraction caused by omitting crucial information; saying too little; typically, an authorial narrator pretending "not to know" what happened in her/his characters' minds, or what went on at the same time in another place, or distortively censoring a character's thought, or generally pretending to be restricted to ordinary human limitations. (Jahn N3.3.15.)

Taking these characteristics of both terms into account, it becomes obvious that in the *Star of the Sea* *paralepsis* prevails, since indeed the protagonist first-person narrator Dixon frequently renders other character's thoughts. One of these passages can easily be recognised at the beginning of the novel, when all first-class passengers are sitting together in the Dining Saloon and David Merridith gets lost in thought. Accordingly, Dixon provides a portrayal of what he assumes that David might have been thinking at this moment:

In all his childhood Lord David Merridith had never kicked a football with his own father. He wasn't sure his father would have *recognised* a football. He remembered saying as much to his sister when he met her off the Bianconi that morning, weighed down with Christmas parcels and boxes of candied fruits; brimming with news and gossip from London. The way she had laughed and agreed with his remark. Probably, Emily said, if Papa had ever seen a football, he would have rammed it into a cannon and tried to shoot it at a Frenchman. (O'Connor 11)

At another occasion we are presented Mary's very intimate thoughts about David, when he is at college and they are separated for a while:

At night she lay in the bed she shared with two of her sisters, waiting for them to stop whispering and finally fall asleep, so her fingertips could begin their delicious imitation of David Merridith's caresses. She wondered if he ever did the same. Boys often did, she had sometimes heard it whispered. She imagined her hands were David Merridith's hands. And she sent the thought towards him that his own hands were

¹³⁰ Genette, 195.

hers. (O'Connor 72)

Though in the end of the story Dixon indicates that he received the information on Mary's earlier life many years after their voyage from "a third-person account (though clearly autobiographical) of the life of a woman who had worked as 'a night-girl' in the heartless Dublin of 'the hungry forties'" (O'Connor 399), it is not sure whether this autobiography contained details like those in the quotation above. In general, the reader learns more than what Dixon gathered of information about the characters, provided in the story. Additionally, the portrayal of David's imagination in several passages are obviously fictional, since in the end David gets murdered and thus, the narrator was unable to learn about his thoughts or his real actions. This, again, poses the question of the reliability of the focalizer, since it has already been pointed out at the beginning of the previous chapter that all first-person narrators, to which also the focalizer belongs, are rather unreliable than authorial narrators.

5.3. Objectivity and Subjectivity

One further point I would like to analyse is the objectivity and subjectivity of the narrator, with regard to Dixon's and Captain Lockwood's narration. In this respect, Stanzel basically points out that creating objectivity in novels is, in fact, "illusory" (1971: 29). He maintains that in contrast to the figural narrative situation that strives for objectivity, first-person narrative situation contains an unsolvable mixing of objective, tangible outer and subjective, immaterial inner world.¹³¹ In the light of these arguments, it is obvious that the narration of all characters in the novel, especially that of Dixon, is quite subjective due to multiple first-person narrative situations. In other words, since the story is rendered from the point of view of different first-person narrators, an objective representation of the events seems unrealistic. Thus, the question of objectivity and subjectivity is correlated with the perspective, from which the story is presented to the reader.

Furthermore, in reference to the peripheral first-person narrator, Stanzel states that the most important function of such a narrator "is the mediation or

¹³¹ Stanzel, *Typische Formen des Romans*, 30-39.

subjectivizing of the narrated events” (1984: 205). This is even pointed out by Dixon himself who in the epilogue admits

I would like to think I am objective in what I have put down, but of course that is not so and could never have been. I was there. I was involved. I knew some of the people. One I loved; another I despised. (...) And of course I have selected what has been seen of the Captain’s words in order to frame and tell the story. A different author would have made a different selection (...). (O’Connor 397)

The statements in this quotation obviously support his subjective attitude towards the content of the whole story, which can particularly be observed in the following description of the appearance of Mulvey:

The Ghost was not ugly but his face was unusual. Pale as milk and slightly elongated, its features might have been stolen from several different men. His nose was bent and a little too long. His ears protruded slightly like those of a harlequin. His hair, as a hideously overgrown black dandelion, might once have belonged to a pantomime ghoul. (...) (O’Connor xix)

However, there are also some passages which prove his objectivity. In one of them, Dixon tells about some incidents that occur when he tries to publish his book containing facts about the situation in Ireland. Considering the information that he wants to convey through the book, it becomes obvious that he wants to mediate a true picture of the famine in Ireland, which is free of any subjective statements. This can be discerned in one passage, in which he describes the impressions he got during a visit to a workhouse by which he was horrified:

Through the mist of pestilence and disinfectant, the darkened rooms where people were brought to die. The men died in one ward, the women in another. To allow them to die together was a breach of the rules. There was no ward as such for the children to die in, so they died in an outhouse near the bank of the river. Babies were allowed to die with their mothers, and then they were taken away to be dumped. And when their mothers died, if it could possibly be managed, they were dumped in the same pit as their newborn babies. (...) And Dixon remembered no being able to speak himself, and thinking: *this has never happened before; many things have happened but never this* (...). (O’Connor 129).

After the discussion with Laura, who accuses him “of being blinded by the desire

to record facts [though] art [is] about the creation of beauty”, and with the publisher Newby, who tells him the same, he tries to revise his book on the ship. Nevertheless, soon he realizes that this is impossible because “the Famine could not be turned into a simile. The best word for death was death” (O’Connor 129). This again, proves his effort to be objective and name the things as they are, instead of distorting the facts and beautifying them. Thus, the previous citations demonstrate that Dixon tries to mediate the historical reality both through his subjective and his objective descriptions.

Similarly, the narration of Captain Lockwood can be classified as rather objective, since in his logbook he mainly reports on occurrences on the ship. However, his objectivity is reduced by the fact that, like Dixon, he also perceives and narrates selectively and just records what seems important to him. Moreover, he does not solely list facts but sometimes also comments on occurrences, as will be illustrated by the following extract from his entry on the thirteenth day of the journey. Though the whole entry is full of descriptions like

last night nine of our brothers and sisters were gathered, and this morning were committed to rest in the deep. (...) A great ‘growler’ iceberg was sighted this afternoon at a distance of approximately half a mile; (...) There is a very strange and horrible smell about the ship tonight. (...) The cook, Herny Li, has come to me with a scheme by which we might relieve the sufferings of some in steerage without incurring expense to the company (...). (O’Connor 152-153)

there are also some passages in which the Captain’s subjective remarks on certain events and people become visible:

Indeed, it ought make any Christian man feel rueful that a pagan displays more fellowship than man of the saved. (...) I do not mean the usual odour emanating from steerage where the poor people must contend as well as they can; (...) He is a very agreeable man usually, (...) That aristocratic gentleman, seems to be the voodoo-men’s devil; but he wears a top hat to conceal his horns, like half the House of Commons. (O’Connor 153)

On the other hand, Mary’s accounts on Mulvey’s deeds in her letter are told from her point of view and are therefore, subjective, even though she swears that “the child of [her] womb be in hell this day if [she is] after telling word of a lie”

(O'Connor 275). This is also true of other first-person characters like Nicholas who mediate events from their own perspective. An important aspect to be mentioned in this respect is that by providing objective and subjective descriptions the author tries to create a synthesis of historical reality, as has been demonstrated by the previous analysis.

5.4. Reality / Authenticity

After having discussed the binary opposition subjectivity and objectivity, I would like to continue with another essential aspect, which is the reality or authenticity created in a novel. To begin with, Fludernik provides an explanation for the emergence of the term *realism*, first used by Ian Watt in his study *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) "in connection with the matters of style and narrative technique to refer to characteristic features of the novel when it emerged as a genre in the early eighteenth century" (2009: 53). Unlike the romantic idealism of the seventeenth century, the novels of the 18th century were dealing with real life, while simultaneously giving priority to financial, economic and social matters. In this sense, Watt defined the novel as a device that creates a colourful world in which the real life of the readers is replicated. Gregory Currie calls this phenomenon "make believe", namely that the author of fiction wants the reader to believe "that the story uttered is true" (1990: 18).

On the other hand, Fludernik indicates that "detailed descriptions of places, objects and clothing as well as people (...) conjures up a totality, a real world, thus creating the illusion that the novel is depicting reality" (2009: 54). She adds that this notion is also confirmed by Barthes who claimed that details also increase the illusion of reality of a scene. On the whole, she argues that "realism in the novel is largely based on *illusion*, [that is], the attempt to make the world of the novel seem like part of the real world [by referring] to aspects of reality which are already familiar to readers" (2009: 55). According to Wolf, realism is connected with what he calls *aesthetic illusion*, which is the "mental state that emerges during the reception of many representational texts, artifacts or performances" (144) that may be fictional or factual. Consequently, aesthetic illusion, or simply illusion, involves the feeling of "being imaginatively and

emotionally immersed in a represented world and of experiencing this world in a way similar (but not identical) to real life” (Wolf 144).

Moreover, Currie compares fiction with “a patchwork of truth and falsity, reliability and unreliability, fiction-making and assertion” (1990: 49). He claims that in order to be fictional a work must both be a result of fictive purpose and accidentally true. An additional aspect to which he refers is the truth in fiction which, according to him, is the belief of the teller who is a fictional construct but not the real author of the work.¹³² In this respect, McHale points out that socially-constructed reality is complex, containing “world-views of different social classes, castes, religious sects, occupations, etc.” (37-39) and therefore, the reality that the postmodernist fiction mirrors is multiple.

Investigating the *Star of the Sea* in terms of the previous concepts on realism in fiction, it becomes evident that some of the above-mentioned devices are also used here to make the story as close to reality as possible. These include pseudo-historical reports, real extracts from newspapers and emigrant letters, famine pictures, ballads and songs, allusions to real persons or organizations, footnotes, quotations, and title pages of pseudo-books. Moreover, the detailed descriptions of people, places and events, increase the illusion of authenticity, as suggested by Fludernik. In the following, I would like provide a close examination of some of these elements.

Following the above-mentioned assertion by Currie, it becomes palpable that *the Star of the Sea* is such a ‘patchwork of truth and falsity’ that makes the border between the real and the fictional world become blurred. While trying to make the reader believe in the events, the reader is left with the uncertainty about the authenticity of the items included. One of the genuine details is the letters from or to emigrants, inserted at the end of each chapter. The use of the vernacular and colloquial idioms suggest that they are most probably authentic, as the following example suggests:

patt, for the honour of our lord Jasus Christ and his Blessed Mother hurry

¹³² Gregory Currie, 1990, 49 & 75.

and take us out of this ... [Your infant brother] longs and Sighs Both Night and morning until he Sees his two little Neises and Nephews And ... the poor child Says 'I would not Be hungary if I was Near them.' Letter of Kilkenny woman to her son in America, pleading for help to emigrate. (O'Connor 44)

Additionally, the historic documents provided as a postscript of each chapter do not only portray the famine but some of them also illustrate, in combination with historical facts, the viewpoint of the colonizer. The following extract from the '*Comparative Anthropology*' by Daniel Macintosh, published in January 1866 in *The Anthropological Review*, describes how the Irish were seen from the English perspective:

Gaelic Mental Characteristics. – Quick in perception, but deficient in depth of reasoning power; headstrong and excitable; tendency to oppose; strong in love and hate; at one time lively, soon after sad; vivid in imagination; extremely social, with a propensity for crowding together; forward and self-confident; deficient in application to deep study, but possessed of great concentration in monotonous or purely mechanical occupations, such as hop-picking, reaping, weaving, etc.; want of prudence and foresight; antipathy to seafaring pursuits. (O'Connor 173)

Further aspects that mirror the real conditions of the famine include authentic as well as pseudo-historical reports and references to famous newspapers such as the *Times* and *Punch*. During one of the literary events the narrator refers to a cartoon which "was published in *Punch* magazine of two writerly gentlemen in turbans and smoking jackets stabbing each other with bloodstained pens" (O'Connor 230). This can be seen as an allusion to the portrayal of the famine which could be found quite often in both above-mentioned newspapers. Referring to this matter, Melissa Fegan writes that "from 1846 to 1849, virtually every day produced a leading article and an 'Ireland' column in *The Times* examining the distress and violence which followed in the wake of the blight" (35). She continues that while in 1845 most of the English newspapers showed sympathy for Ireland, this changed in the following years and they began to see the Irish as a burden for the 'hard-working' English, which was depicted by *Punch* in February 1849.¹³³ Similarly, at another occasion, it is pointed out that David Merridith made a speech on "the Poor Law Amendment Act (1834)" in the House of Lords which

¹³³ Fegan, 36 & 56.

was then “reported in *The Times* the following morning under the headline New Calls for Decorum in the House” (O’Connor 256). Another example that refers to historical newspaper reports on the famine, is the quasi-newspaper article written by Dixon in *The New York Tribune* under the title *Why is there a famine in Ireland?*, in which he gives a political statement about the whole issue around the famine. Moreover, there are also some pseudo-newspaper notes by David Merridith in which he comments on different political issues and which likewise link the real and fictional world:

How the prisoner and the immigrant are treated by the government, how the poor are treated and those without influence: this is secretly how the government would like to treat all of us.

David Merridith

From notes for a pamphlet on penal reform. 1840. Unfinished. (O’Connor 221)

The footnotes written by Dixon mainly consist of information on events and persons occurring in the story. Though the content is mostly fictional, it also provides some, obviously real, facts. This can be recognised in the following two paragraphs, of which the first encloses fictional information on David’s sisters and the second real facts:

Following a very long courtship which was often ‘broken-off’, Lady Emily did indeed marry Sir John Millington, ninth Marquess of Hull, but the marriage was dissolved after four years. There were no children. Professor Merridith did not marry. Her many publications include *Essays on the Rights of Women* (1863), *The Cause of Learning* (1871), *Education and the Poor* (1872) and several volumes of writings on pure mathematics. She co-edited *The Higher Education of Women* by Emily Davies (1866) of whom she was a close friend. – GGD. (O’Connor 110)

Lord Kingscourt’s mention of ‘Yahoos’ and ‘Houyhnhnms’ is an allusion to *Gulliver’s Travels* by Jonathan Swift. The Yahoos are an ape-like race of degraded savages found on a rural island which is a colony of Houyhnhnm Land. The Houyhnhnms are rational horse-like beings who have enslaved the Yahoos as beasts of burden. Interestingly, Gulliver remarks: ‘the *Houyhnhnms* have no Word in their Language to express any thing [sic!] that is Evil, except what they borrow from the Deformities or ill Qualities of the *Yahoos*’ (IV: 9; II). – GGD. (O’Connor 115)

In order to enhance the authenticity of the story, the author adds authentic

quotations, ballads and songs throughout the whole novel. At the beginning of the story Mulvey refers to the existing phrase “Mary’s Violet Eyes Make John Sit Up” which he apparently learned in his childhood “to remember the positions of the planets in relation to the sun” (O’Connor 26). Another prominent example is the ballad written by Mulvey that apparently alludes to other real ballads on the famine such as the ‘Revenge for Skibbereen’, also included in the story, though slightly differing from the original. One further striking aspect is the front page of Dixon’s book with the title “An American Abroad: Notes of London and Ireland in 1847”, added to the prologue to reinforce the impression that the story is true. Similarly, the epilogue has the function of providing a confession and thus a denouement, since it contains Dixon’s confession of the murder. The detailed descriptions of people, events, and of places, increase the illusion of reality in the story, as can be traced in the following description of the East End of London:

Everything in the East End was deferrable, for a price. Boredom; poverty; thirst; hunger; disappointment; lust; loneliness; loss, even death itself and death’s finality. (...) Here in the alleyways of Cheapside and Whitechapel were the fancy houses of late-night whispers at his club. (...) Soon even Whitechapel was not enough for him. Spitalfields. Shoreditch. Mile End Road. He drifted down to Stepney where the entertainments were darker; eastward into Limehouse where children carried weapons; down towards the riverfront, around Shadwell and Wapping, where even the police were afraid to venture at night. (O’Connor 236 & 239)

Finally, there are references to real people or even appearances of historical figures such as Charles Dickens and Ellis Bell (Emily Brontë).¹³⁴ Once, Mulvey reports of his encounter with a man, “one evening in Limehouse. (...) His name was Dickens, the gentleman explained, but he preferred his friends to call him either Charlie or Chaz” (O’Connor 189). Ellis Bell, on the other hand, is referred to by Dixon in combination with her book *Wuthering Heights*, which was published in the same year as the voyage is set in. Apparently, Ellis Bell serves as a model writer for Dixon, as he frequently mentions her work and thus, affirms his

¹³⁴ Emily Brontë, in full Emily Jane Brontë, pseudonym Ellis Bell (born July 30, 1818, Thornton, Yorkshire, England—died December 19, 1848, Haworth, Yorkshire), English novelist and poet who produced but one novel, *Wuthering Heights* (1847), a highly imaginative novel of passion and hate set on the Yorkshire moors. Emily was perhaps the greatest of the three Brontë sisters, but the record of her life is extremely meagre, for she was silent and reserved and left no correspondence of interest, and her single novel darkens rather than solves the mystery of her spiritual existence.” (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/80966/Emily-Bronte>)

admiration. Additionally, the imaginary organization called the Else-Be-Liables or the Hibernian Defenders, who sends a threatening letter to David and forces Mulvey to kill him, can be regarded as an allusion to a real organisation acting against unscrupulous landlords during the famine.¹³⁵ Considering the whole analysis on realism, it can be concluded that the novel undeniably tries to offer a picture of the famine that is historical fact. Thus, the story indeed provides real and familiar aspects in order “to make the world of the novel seem like part of the real world” (Fludernik, 2009: 55).

5.5. Time Analysis

The final aspect that needs to be investigated in terms of narratology is *time* which is “concerned with three questions: When? How long? and How often?” (Jahn N5.2.). Genette analyses these questions in terms of order, duration and frequency.¹³⁶ In the revised edition of *Narrative Discourse*, the term *duration* is substituted by *speed*.¹³⁷ While *order* comprises the discussion on chronology of the story, *duration* refers to the relationship between ‘story time’ (erzählte Zeit) and ‘discourse time’ (Erzählzeit). *Frequency*, on the other hand, “refers to possible ways of presenting single or repetitive action units” (Jahn N5.2.). In the following, I would like to examine the first two questions, since they seem to be of particular importance in the narratological analysis of the *Star of the Sea*.

The analysis of order involves the question as to whether the story is presented in *chronological order*, that is, natural sequence of events, or deviates from it. If the latter is the case, the mediation will be in a form of *anachrony*. Considering the first aspect, Bal refers to double linearity that can be found in narrative texts, namely the series of sentences in the text and series of events in the “fabula” (or narrative text). She further points out that reconstructing the chronological sequence is not always possible and that many experimental modern novels intentionally mix up the chronological order which often still prove to be

¹³⁵ This is also mentioned by Litton who quotes an anonymous threatening letter to James Flanagan, a landlord in County Kildare, on 6 January 1848 (98 ff.).

¹³⁶ Genette, 1980, 33-85, 86-112, 113-160.

¹³⁷ Genette, 1988, 33.

meaningful.¹³⁸ Regarding anachrony, Bal states that this is usual in a conventional structure of a novel that begins “in *medias res* [and] immerses the reader in the middle of the fabula. From this point s/he is referred back to the past, and from then on the story carries on more or less chronologically through to the end” (53). Indeed, the structure of the *Star of the Sea* applies to this description, since the story starts when the ship has already set sail and the events, which will then follow, have taken place prior to the starting point of the narration. The first chapters, including the preface *The Monster* and the second chapter *The Victim*, introduce both the potential killer and the victim and thereby, suggest a murder on the ship. However, the murder is not the climax of the story, since the actual story starts with Mary Duane’s recollections of her childhood and adolescence in chapter seven. Generally, the action is narrated in a chronological order except for one interruption in chapter six, containing Nicholas’s letter.

Moreover, there are two main types of anachrony, namely *flashback* (also called retrospection or analepsis) and *flashforward* (also called anticipation or prolepsis). Genette prefers the terms analepsis and prolepsis, as for him the definitions retrospection and anticipation have a subjective connotation.¹³⁹ Analepsis or flashback occurs when past events are narrated as something that the hero or heroine remembers at the moment of the current story, frequently discernible by a switch to the past perfect tense. Herman refers to the unreliability of retrospective narration that possibly arises from the narrator’s lack of knowledge or uncertainty “of some crucial past events” (147). Concurrent narration, on the other hand, is more reliable as it describes events which are “usually still in progress at writing time” (Herman 150). The reverse form of analepsis is prolepsis or flashforward (also *foreshadowing*), presenting future events before its proper time.¹⁴⁰ This is more frequent in the nineteenth century novel, however, rare in current novels. It does not occur in the *Star of the Sea* either. Herman calls it *prospective narration* that presents a future “prediction, prognosis, scenario, projection, conjecture, wish, plan, and the like” (153) at speech time. Therefore, the presentation is not based on actual facts but rather

¹³⁸ Bal, 1985, 51 f.

¹³⁹ Genette, 1980, 40.

¹⁴⁰ Fludernik, 2009, 34.; Jahn, N5.2.1.

on “uncertain, potential or hypothetical” (Herman 154) assumptions.

The story of the *Star of the Sea* is mediated through numerous flashbacks containing the characters’ recollections of their earlier life. Nearly the entire story is presented through reflections of the main characters, except for Captain Lockwood who is a concurrent narrator. The events which take place on the ship, combined with the characters’ memories of their past, provide the subject matter of the novel. Some chapters merely consist of flashbacks, presenting the recollections of Mary, David and Mulvey, whereas others include both the events on board and the flashbacks. Thus, the chapters consisting of the memories of the main characters are the most important parts of the novel.

As mentioned at the beginning, the analysis of *duration* (or speed), basically distinguishes between *story time* and *discourse time*. Discourse time refers to the time “an average reader [needs] to read a passage, or (...) the whole text”; the story time, on the contrary, is “the fictional time taken up by an action episode, or (...) by the whole action” (Jahn N5.2.2.). The *speed or tempo* of a narrative passage is measured by the comparison of discourse time and story time. One important type defined by this relationship is *ellipsis*, “a stretch of story time which is not textually represented” (Jahn N5.2.3). There are three formal types of ellipsis: *external ellipsis*, *internal ellipsis* and *hypothetical ellipsis*. In external ellipsis the omitted time is explicitly announced (three years later, some years passed), whereas in an internal or real ellipsis the omission can only be inferred from given information. The most implicit form of ellipsis is hypothetical ellipsis which is impossible to localize or to place in any particular scene and is only revealed by an analepsis.¹⁴¹

As the story of the *Star of the Sea* comprises a time span of twenty eight years, from 1819 to 1847, it is impossible to provide a detailed description of the time frame of the plot. Therefore, the narrator leaves out the facts that he does not regard as significant. Compared to hypothetical ellipsis, which hardly occurs in the novel, internal and, particularly, external ellipsis, can be discerned more

¹⁴¹ Genette, 1980, 106 ff.; Bal, 1985, 71.

frequently. Since internal ellipsis is not made explicit, the reader has to infer them from the information provided, as in the following quotation: “Since the last of the servants had resigned from his father’s employment, the manor had gone to rack and ruin” (O’Connor 246). The second part of this sentence indicates that there must be a long omission between the servants’ departure and the point of the narration, which is emphasized by the words ‘ruin’ and ‘rack’. One further example of internal ellipsis is the reference: “once, in the summer of her seventeenth birthday (...)” (O’Connor 65), which refers to the period lapsed between David’s first college years in England up to the day Mary turned seventeen. By contrast, external ellipsis appears more often and can more easily be recognised, as mostly they are indicated by a year: “On Easter Sunday morning, 1819” (54), “it was the fifth of January, 1832” (107), “in February 1841” (234), “On the first of September, 1844” (217). The following instance that concerns the stretch between the end of Mary’s and David’s relationship to the engagement of David after his return from the navy, which is a prominent example of external ellipsis:

At home for Christmas furlough, 1836, respite from which he was never to return to the navy, David Merridith had been pushed into an engagement with the only daughter of Henry Blake, the neighbouring landlord of Tully and Tully Cross. (O’Connor 157)

Other uses of external ellipsis are presented by the indication of the time omitted like ‘for eighteen months’, ‘for a month’, ‘nineteen days’. This is illustrated in the following quotation: “For two years Frederick Hall lived in the East End of the city, earning his bread by swindling and robbing” (O’Connor 183). The exclusion of the textual representation of these two years implies that probably nothing of significance happened during that time, except for “swindling and robbing”.

6. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the devastating episode in Irish history known as the Great Irish Famine, has revealed the mournful portrayal of the Irish past, referred to by Allingham's poem at the beginning of this thesis. Thus, the famine was the consequence of several failures of the potato crop caused by a fungal potato disease called *phythophthora infestans*, since the majority of the Irish people were entirely dependent on the potato. However, the death of hundreds of thousands of people, due to extreme poverty, was in part caused also by the political dogma of the nineteenth century Britain called *laissez faire* under Lord John Russell, postulating that the government was neither responsible for providing aid for its citizens, nor required to interfere with the free market. The leading political economists of the period, among them Adam Smith and Thomas Malthus, declared that "the Famine was an act of Providence, a 'fortunate fall' which would deliver the Irish from evils of their own making" (Hayden 259). This is confirmed by the following dreadful statement of the permanent secretary of the British Treasury Sir Charles Trevelyan that, simultaneously, illustrates the prevailing attitude of British society towards the famine and, in further consequence, towards the Irish people:

... the judgment of God on an indolent and unself-reliant people, and as God had sent the calamity to teach the Irish a lesson, that calamity must not be too much mitigated: the selfish and indolent must learn their lesson so that a new and improved state of affairs must arise. (qtd. in Dunlop 166)

The subsequent analysis of different aspects such as major characters, major themes and narrative technique, has shown the complexity but also the brilliance of the novel. Consequently, all major characters are round and dynamic, since they all have multiple character qualities and undergo an emotional and personal development throughout the story. For instance, Mulvey changes from an initially likeable to a detestable person in the end. The opposite is true of Laura who at the beginning blames the Irish poor for the famine but then in the end devotes her life to support the poor. The relationship between David, Mary, Mulvey, Laura and Dixon is characterized by a rather complicated love affair, affected by social class differences and the famine. What can similarly be concluded is that the

portrayal of the characters mirrors real character types and their relationships.

Another illuminating aspect was the study of the major themes. Evidently, though the most vital element is the unfulfilled and forbidden love between the Anglo-Irish landlord David and the Irish tenant Mary, the novel comprises several other, similarly crucial themes that are related to the famine and to emigration. One of them is the conflict between different social classes, which gets obvious in the relationship between David and Mary, but more explicit in the condition of the first-class passengers compared to that of the steerage passengers. The terrible conditions under which emigrants had to spend the whole voyage in notorious 'coffin ships' to America or Canada, as well as the diseases and malnutrition on board that caused the deaths of tens of thousands of emigrants, are authentically reflected on board of the *Star*. Other famine related aspects such as the religious struggle between English Protestant landlords and Irish Catholic tenants, poverty, as well as evictions are likewise well represented in the novel. Two more themes that come up in the novel are violence and gender. Violence is best reflected in several cases of murder, among them the murder of David, as well as the violence against Mulvey and David as a child. The dominance of men during this period is illustrated by the underrepresentation of female characters and their subordination to male characters, like in the relationship between Laura and her husband David.

The following chapter was concerned with the investigation of some prominent aspects of the narrative technique in the novel. The story contains multiple first-person narrators of whom Dixon and Captain Lockwood are the major ones. Dixon acts both as the peripheral first-person narrator and protagonist who does not present himself as the narrator and is thus, a covert narrator. By contrast, the captain is an overt narrator because of his obvious function as the writer of the logbook. Moreover, Dixon's reflections on past events reveal that it is primarily the narrating self that is rendering the story. By contrast, in Captain Lockwood's account of current events the experiencing self prevails. It has also been demonstrated that in contrast to the authorial narrative situation, first-person narrative situation is less reliable and subjective, because of being narrated from the point of view of the characters and because of possible prejudices in their

narration. Regarding the objectivity in narration, Stanzel correctly points out that objectivity is rather “illusory”. This is indeed the case in the presentation of the *Star of the Sea*, as is confirmed by Dixon in the epilogue. The analysis of the third constitutive element of narrative situation, namely perspective and focalization pointed out the difference between internal and external perspective, as well as internal and external focalization. Accordingly, Dixon is a reflector or focal character (also focalizer), since his perceptions and thoughts are reflected in the story. Because of being both a character in the story and a peripheral first-person narrator, Dixon is characterized as an internal focalizer, rendering from an external perspective. Considering the aspect realism, evidently the author tries to provide a real picture of the world by including footnotes, quotations, extracts from newspapers and letters by emigrants, pseudo-historical reports, pictures, ballads and songs as well as allusions to real persons and organizations,.

Finally, the analysis of time has shown that the story follows a chronological order, only interrupted by Nicholas’s letter, which refers to past events. Additionally, the novel contains many flashbacks, which reveal the characters’ recollections of the past. One final aspect is ellipsis that refers to a time span without any textual representation. Thus, the novel contains many external ellipses, made explicit by indications like ‘two years later’, ‘some years passed’. The internal ellipses provided in the novel are not explicitly indicated and, therefore, have to be inferred by the reader from given information.

7. GERMAN ABSTRACT

Die Große Hungersnot ist eines der bedeutendsten und zugleich tragischsten Ereignisse in der Geschichte Irlands, das zwischen 1845 und 1850 den Tod von ein bis anderthalb Million Menschen forderte und eine weitere Million zur Emigration nach Nordamerika, Kanada und England zwang und somit einen Wendepunkt darstellt. Die Rezeption dieser Episode findet sich in vielen Werken der modernen und post-modernen Literatur, zu denen auch Joseph O'Connors bedeutendster Roman *Star of the Sea* gehört. Für sein Werk, das bereits in vierzig Sprachen übersetzt wurde, erntete O'Connor weltweit positive Kritik und bekam viele Auszeichnungen und Preise. Im Jahr der Publikation wurde *Star of the Sea* in Großbritannien sogar zum Roman des Jahres (2002) gekürt. In der vorliegenden Diplomarbeit wird dieses Werk des irischen Schriftstellers hinsichtlich seiner Darstellung der Hungersnot, vor allem aber der Emigration, mit der sich der Roman hauptsächlich auseinandersetzt, analysiert.

Folglich wird im ersten Kapitel der geschichtliche Hintergrund in Bezug auf die verschiedenen Aspekte, die für die Hungersnot und die anschließende Massenflucht aus Irland verantwortlich waren, beleuchtet. Demnach war die Hungersnot die Folge mehrerer Kartoffelmissernten, verursacht durch eine damals neuartige Kartoffelfäule, wodurch das Hauptnahrungsmittel der armen Bevölkerung vernichtet wurde. Die Folgen der extremen Hungersnot wurden durch die im 19. Jahrhundert vorherrschende Ideologie des Laissez-Faire, zu deren Verfechter führende Ökonomen wie Adam Smith und Thomas Malthus gehörten, intensiviert, da diese den Staat aufforderte, nicht im freien Markt zu intervenieren und dem Volk auch nicht in der Not zu helfen. Die Britische Mittel- und Oberschicht und die Ökonomen verschlimmerten im Grunde die Hungersnot, weil sie diese als göttliche Fügung betrachteten und als Strafe Gottes für die angebliche Faulheit des Irischen Volkes und ihre rasante Vermehrung.

Das zweite und dritte Kapitel befasst sich mit der Analyse des Romans im Hinblick auf die Reflexion der Hungersnot und der Situation der Emigranten auf den sogenannten Sargschiffen. Im zweiten Kapitel werden die Hauptcharaktere bezüglich ihrer Charaktereigenschaften und ihrer Beziehung zueinander

untersucht. Demzufolge weisen alle Charaktere unterschiedliche Merkmale auf und entwickeln emotionale und persönliche Eigenschaften im Laufe des Romans. Mulvey entwickelt sich von einer anfangs sympathischen zu einer am Ende abscheulichen Person. Dies ist umgekehrt bei der Laura, die zu Beginn eine nahezu Iren-feindliche Haltung hat, jedoch zum Schluss sich für die Armen und Hungernden einsetzt. Das Verhältnis zwischen David, Mary, Mulvey, Laura und Dixon ist grundsätzlich durch eine komplexe Liebesbeziehung gekennzeichnet, die zudem von der Hungersnot überschattet wird.

Das anschließende Kapitel beleuchtet die Hauptmotive des Romans wie beispielsweise Liebe, Gesellschaftsschichten, Hunger, Vertreibungen, Emigration, Gewalt und Gender. Das vordergründige Thema in dieser Geschichte ist die unerfüllte und verbotene Liebe zwischen dem Englischen Land Lord David und der Irischen Bauerstochter Mary. Der Unterschied zwischen den sozialen Klassen macht sich nicht nur in der Liebe zwischen Mary und David bemerkbar, sondern auch in den Reisebedingungen der Passagiere der ersten Klasse und den Emigranten. Während die Emigranten die vier bis sechs wöchige Reise zusammengepfercht im Zwischendeck unter fürchterlichsten Bedingungen verbringen müssen, reisen die Passagiere der ersten Klasse in komfortablen Kabinen mit bestmöglicher Verpflegung. Weitere Themen wie Hunger, religiöser Konflikt zwischen Katholiken und Protestanten, sowie Vertreibungen, reflektieren ebenfalls die Realität während der Hungersnot.

Im letzten Kapitel werden schließlich wichtige Aspekte der Erzähltechnik analysiert. Die Erzählsituation des Romans ist charakterisiert durch mehrere Ich-Erzähler, von denen Dixon und Captain Lockwood die wichtigsten sind. Da die Geschichte aus der Perspektive der Charaktere erzählt wird, ist von einer subjektiven Darstellung der Ereignisse auszugehen. Des Weiteren wird durch den Einbau von historischen und pseudo-historischen Berichten, Auszügen aus Zeitungsartikeln, Bildern, Fußnoten, Zitate, Balladen und Anspielungen auf reale Personen und Organisationen, die reale Welt reflektiert. Die Ereignisse werden durch viele Rückblenden chronologisch dargestellt, wobei viele, anscheinend unwichtige, Details ausgelassen und nur die wichtigsten Ereignisse geschildert werden.

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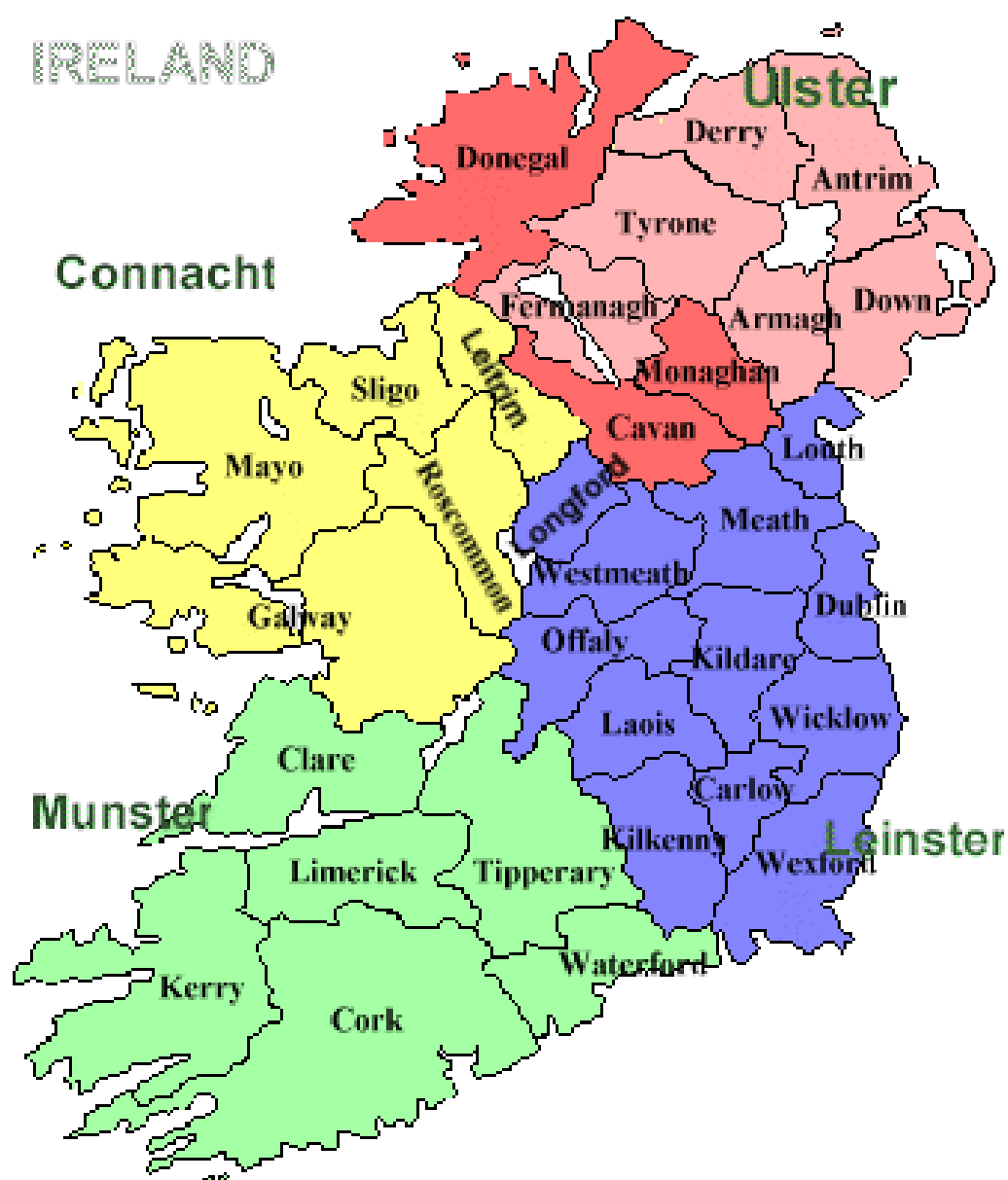
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9. APPENDIX

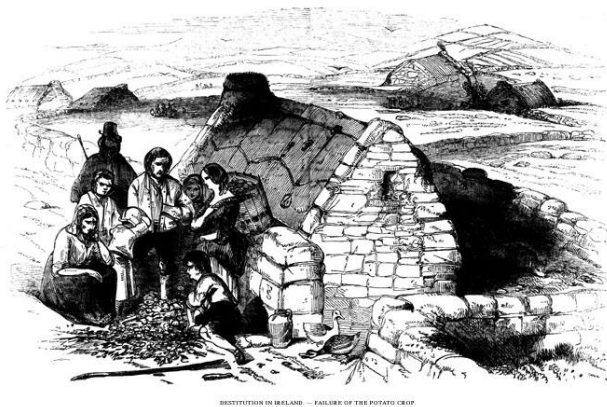




Two children searching the ground for potatoes



A beggared woman with her two children



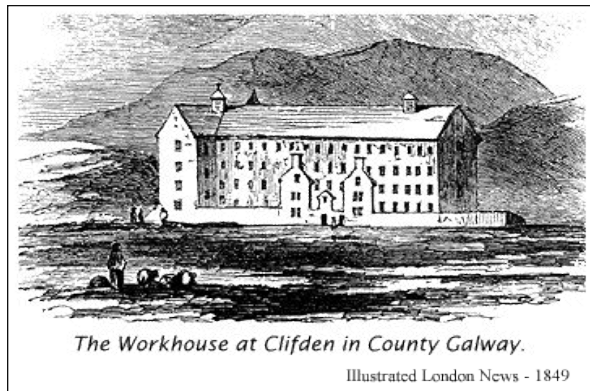
A cabin



Inside a wretched cabin - a destitute mother is praying for her dying child



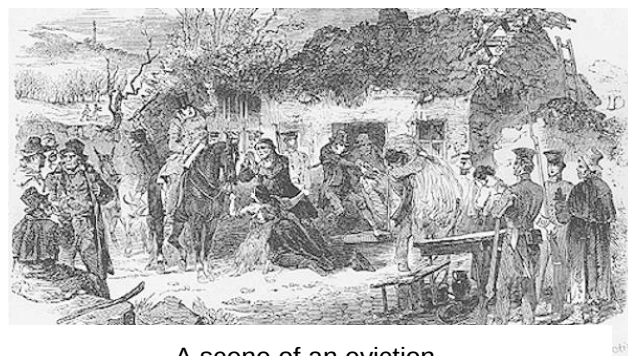
A scalp



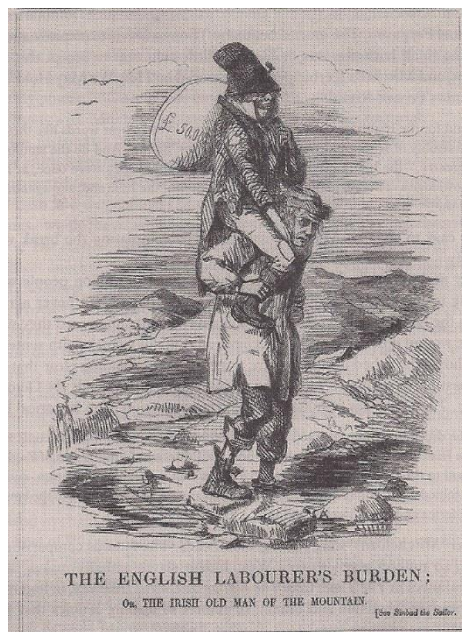
A gathering at the gate of a workhouse



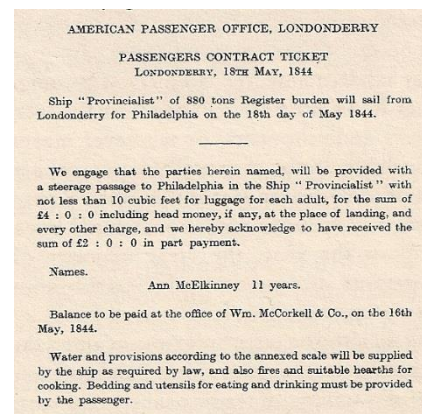
Soup kitchens



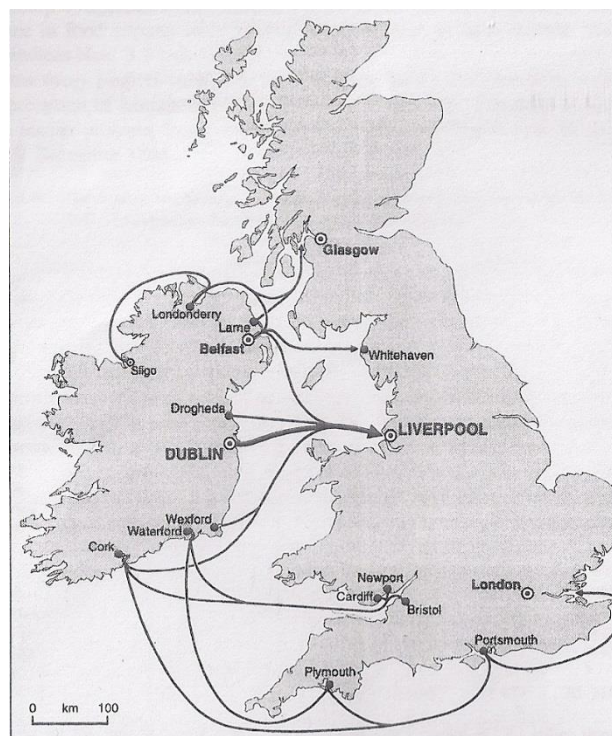
A scene of an eviction



'The English Labourer's Burden' – How the Irish were seen by the British, depicted in Punch in February 1849
(Source: Fegan, 2002, 57)



A Passenger's Contract Ticket from Londonderry to Philadelphia
(Source: Laxton, 1996, 28)



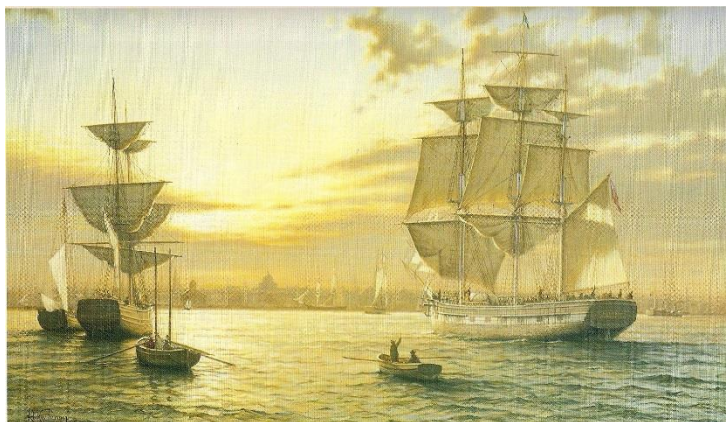
Principal shipping routes between Ireland and Britain in 1847 (Source: Neal, 1998, 52)



From the Illustrated London News, July 6, 1850.
"The Embarkation, Waterloo Docks, Liverpool."



The steerage of a 'coffin ship' (Source: Laxton, 1996)



Famine ships arriving in Boston (Source: Laxton, 1996)

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